Developing White Teachers' Sociocultural Consciousness Through African American Children’s Literature: A Case Study of Three Elementary Educators

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Abstract

Changing the existing framework for how schools operate and the “deficit frame of reference” for students of color begins with teacher awareness of differing social and cultural norms and values that privilege some and oppress others (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). These normalized cultural values are exacerbated by the fact that they are generally “invisible” to the white teacher majority. Quaye (2012) and Zúñiga et al. (2002) use the term “consciousness-raising” to describe the process of developing an awareness of these norms and values. Using a Critical Race Theory lens, this study aimed to capture the process of “consciousness-raising” in a white teacher book club examining ten different African American children’s picture books. The study design was supported by an Intergroup Dialogue model, developed by Zúñiga et al. (2002) and adapted for white facilitators by Quaye (2012). Data Analysis was guided by a continuum of white racial identity developed by Helms (1990) and modified by Lawrence and Tatum (1998). Transcripts of participant narratives were analyzed for signs of status change along the continuum and each teacher demonstrated varying degrees of socio-cultural awareness. The researcher journal was analyzed to capture reflections on the Intergroup Dialogue Model for facilitation. Principal findings of the study include the replication of themes found in the existing whiteness literature as well as the value and limitations of the continuum of white racial identity as a tool for analysis.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the many students I had who deserved a teacher with an autonomy status and never found one in me. I apologize for my silences, my failure to see my own racially privileged place in this world and as a result, the many times I made you feel like a problem. I hope this dissertation is one small right on a path of many wrongs. You deserved and continue to deserve better.
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Finally, I’d like to thank my beautiful son, Elliot, who gave up countless hours with me so that I could reach this milestone in my career. I love you, Elliot, and I want you to grow up in a world where women never have to choose between being a great mom and having a fulfilling career.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Students of color make up more than 40% of the nation’s schools. Disproportionately, teachers of color make up a mere 17% of the teaching force (Boser, 2011, Gentry et al., 2012). This means that most students of color have primarily white teachers throughout their entire school experience. Keeping these striking statistics in mind, white students consistently “outperform” their African American peers. African Americans are less likely to graduate high school, attend college and in turn, secure “high status” employment (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). A surface level, yet deeply ingrained, hegemonic analysis of this data would lead us to believe that African American students are less “talented” and put forth less “effort” – a standard meritocratic ideology (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Indeed, it is difficult to accept that the current system of education is not “the great equalizer” and does not “level the playing field” for all children (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Instead, it is necessary to consider the socio-cultural dynamics that are at play in American schooling. School sites are endorsed with dominant cultural values that favor white, middle class students (Delpit, 1995). These cultural values are exacerbated by the fact that they are generally “invisible” to the white teacher majority. As opposed to seeing the potential for diverse students bringing diverse values, skills and ways of learning to the table, the dominant school values are seen as “normal,” and applicable to everyone. The large white teaching force, in turn, attributes the sharp contrast in performance between white and Black students to a “deficit” issue (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Black students are now “a problem.” Villegas and Lucas (2002) report that this “deficit frame of reference” increases the potential for lowered
expectations for students of color and in a cyclical fashion, students meet those expectations with low performance (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Wolfram, 1999).

Changing the existing framework for how schools operate and the “deficit frame of reference,” begins with teacher awareness of differing social and cultural norms and values (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Quaye (2012) and Zúñiga et al. (2002) use the term “consciousness-raising” to describe the process of developing this awareness. They define consciousness-raising as “a process that encourages participants to recognize, question, broaden, and challenge individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and behaviors that perpetuate estranged and oppressive relations between groups” (Zúñiga et al., 2002). Brand (2014) would call this process “sociocultural consciousness” (Brand, 2014) and Freire (1972) refers to it as conscientização or the ability to recognize social and political contradictions in order to work against oppression (Friere, 1972). No matter what the exact term, all of the above scholars recognize consciousness-raising as a process, as opposed to something you either do or do not embody.

Well-meaning teacher preparation programs are responding to the shifting demographics and need for “consciousness-raising” by adding one or two courses in “multicultural education” or “diversity” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). These courses are largely ineffective, as they fail to demonstrate that culturally responsive pedagogy needs to exist throughout the curriculum and not in one isolated area of the day (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In contrast, but still equally ineffective, teacher educators eliminate courses that specifically target culturally relevant pedagogy and instead attempt to add it in fits and spurts to existing courses, hoping to demonstrate its general applicability. In actuality, this method makes the content appear “peripheral” and unimportant (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Most white teachers leave their
certification programs without confronting their own racial biases and unearned privilege (Sleeter, 2001). Without having examined racial privilege, marginalization and culturally endorsed norms and values, teachers are unlikely to adopt a culturally conscious frame of reference in their teaching.

Scholars agree that pre-service teachers leave their certification programs unprepared, but this is where the research appears to stop. What happens when they enter the classroom? Are they no longer teachable? Little literature exists on the continued professional development of in-service teachers in regards to race, class and culture. This study aimed to fill that void. I believed that in-service teachers are still capable of achieving socio-cultural awareness with a carefully designed professional development experience. Helping in-service teachers work towards such socio-cultural awareness is all the more urgent, considering the powerful role they play in their current classrooms.

The Research Questions and Study Design

This study aimed to be a vehicle for “consciousness-raising” for white, in-service elementary school teachers. The study was designed using the following research questions as a guide:

1. How does participation in an Intergroup Dialogue book club, supported by African American children’s literature, influence white, in-service elementary school teachers’ socio-cultural awareness?

2. What are the experiences of the facilitator in engaging teachers in Intergroup Dialogue?
The research questions and in turn, the design for professional development, came from examining the current literature on “consciousness-raising” with pre-service and in-service teachers. I selected a book club setting with the addition of Zúñiga et al.’s (2002) Intergroup Dialogue model due to the intimate and controversial nature of the subject matter and the complex role that I played at each group meeting as facilitator. A review of literature and description of the Intergroup Dialogue model can be found in chapter two.

During weekly meetings, teachers examined both the text and images in ten African American children’s books, searching for stereotypes, power, privilege and societal uplift. I expected through text and image analysis as well as focused conversations with their colleagues, teachers would confront their biases and acknowledge the role their whiteness plays in the classroom. Each teacher entered the book club with varying statuses on a white racial identity continuum developed by Helms’ (1990) and modified by Lawrence and Tatum (1998), based on their current understanding of race, norms, values and inequality. The book club aimed to reach each teacher based on their unique experiences and move them forward with Zúñiga et al.’s (2002) Intergroup Dialogue model as a guide.

**African American Children’s Literature as a Tool for “Consciousness-Raising”**

Research on “consciousness-raising” with in-service and pre-service teachers reports utilizing a wide-variety of texts for support, including scholarly articles on privilege and the autobiographies of people of color. I decided to use African American children’s literature (AACL), and more specifically, picture books, as foundational texts for this study for several reasons. First and foremost, AACL beautifully and uniquely captures both historical and contemporary hardships faced by African Americans as well as celebrates African American
culture in various forms. It also provides a “non-threatening” approach to teacher dialogue. In contrast to scholarly articles, or autobiographies, picture books are generally beloved by elementary school teachers. They are a joy to read and collect for classroom libraries. AA CL also reminds teachers of the innocence of children and the great responsibility teachers have for their education. For all of these reasons, I believed AA CL would open doors to meaningful discussion where teachers could begin to explore controversial topics like power and privilege.

Why African American Children’s Literature and not “Multicultural” Children’s Literature?

One criticism of racial inequality research is that it is too “Black and white.” Botelho and Rudman, authors of Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children's Literature (2009) argue that all marginalized groups need advocates and that even African American children’s literature is ripe with other issues, such as gender inequality and ageism and that these issues deserve attention (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). I agree with Botelho and Rudman whole-heartedly and believe that despite using texts that represent African Americans, teachers’ reflections on privilege will inevitably serve all students of color. I see the complexity of racism for all people of color and the potential for marginalization of certain groups by presenting a “linear story of the Black struggle for civil rights” (Perea, 1997, p.1213). We must appreciate the intertwined experiences and historical context for racism towards all people of color. Simultaneously, we must “recognize the centrality of slavery and White racism against Blacks at the core of American history and society” (Perea, 1997, p.1213).

In designing this book club, I considered past experiences listening to teachers avoid discussions of targeted racism and white privilege by suggesting a “multicultural problem.” Indeed, this argument carries weight, but the intent of the argument stems from a place of
meritocracy and fear. By refusing to name race or ethnicity explicitly and instead focus on “all races” or “all cultures”, white teachers avoid blame and maintain a “culture of politeness.” The decision to focus on solely African American children’s literature as opposed to multicultural children’s literature, works against this pattern of avoidance. For me, African American children’s literature was simply one focused entry-point to multicultural consciousness-raising, and was not intended to exclude other marginalized groups. During the ten-week book club, participant narratives reflected far more than a Black-white binary.

Theoretical Framework

I utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Whiteness Studies as a theoretical framework for this research. Whiteness studies falls under the umbrella of CRT and maintains CRT goals. I consider Whiteness inextricably linked to any research viewed through a “critical” lens. Additionally, I included Critical Literacy, considering the type of analysis expected of teachers during book club meetings.

Critical Race Theory

The foundational scholars who have guided work in CRT in education include Delgado, Matsuda, Crenshaw, Ladson-Billings, Tate and Cole (Cole, 2009). Each of these scholars have used CRT as a means to examine the marginalization of people of color and much of their scholarship has focused on groups of African American and Hispanic students.

The heart of CRT troubles the stories of race in dominant society that have been considered “normal” for generations and gives voice to the “other,” specifically people of color (Cole, 2009; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). CRT scholars argue the necessity of exploring both contemporary and historical context when examining these “stories of the majority.” In following their example, the social and historical context of CRT and how it has evolved and
crossed the boundaries of a variety of disciplines is essential to the discussion in this review. In the introduction to *Critical Race Theory in Education*, Dixson and Rousseau use Bell’s (1995) essay on the similarities between CRT and African American spirituals. Bell describes how the lyrics of the songs carry multiple meanings and “trouble” the stories of white supremacy that dominated the period of slavery in U.S. history (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). In these rich songs, experiences of devastation and determination were captured simultaneously, and in this way it is the aim of the CRT scholar to always carefully balance a feeling of struggle with a sense of hope in their evocative writings (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

In order to frame the origins of CRT, it is necessary to first look at legal studies. In the early 1970’s, Critical Legal Studies (CLS) developed to examine the ways in which laws serve to “legitimize an oppressive social order” (Cole, 2009, p. 9). CLS scholars explored economic structure and class in a typical Marxist paradigm (Cole, 2009). In the mid 1980’s, and in reaction to CLS, CRT was created in efforts to move away from the Marxist structure of social stratification and instead examine race as a foundation for social inequality (Cole, 2009). CRT spread throughout multiple disciplines based on its applicability to a wide variety of social justice research.

Ladson-Billings and Tate were the first scholars to present CRT as a foundational tool for the field of education. At the 1994 American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference, Ladson-Billings and Tate presented six characteristics of CRT that aligned with goals of educational researchers. “(1) CRT recognizes that racism is a pervasive and permanent part of American society; (2) CRT challenges the dominant claims of objectivity, neutrality, colorblindness, and merit; (3) CRT challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law; (4) CRT insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of
Whiteness Studies

Whiteness is situated in Critical Race Theory as the institutional, “civilizational,” and societal assumptions that give privilege to white people (Pennington, 2007). These assumptions are legitimated and have become reality in many countries including the United States. Whiteness goes far beyond skin color to the discursive practices that privilege and sustain white people (Aveling, 2006).

Whiteness has a complex history and has morphed with each reproduction through the years, though each reproduction stems from the origins of the conquest and extermination of Native Americans through colonialism (Lipsitz, 2005). After the enslavement of Africans in North America, white settlers worked to maintain whiteness through the separation of African Americans and Native Americans. Fearful of an alliance, freed slaves were prohibited from traveling to “Indian Country” (Lipsitz, 2005, p.3). African Americans were also asked to join “colonial militias” to fight against Native Americans. In this way whiteness was more than protecting privileges among white people, but required pitting other races against each other (Lipsitz, 2005). Over the decades, different races attempted to access whiteness and many worked to secure advantages by working with whites against Native Americans (Lipsitz, 2005).

Today, whiteness takes the form of a “normalized privilege, where through talk, symbol systems, and nonverbal gestures a white participant can position themselves as normal (Leander, 2002; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). White people have unearned benefits such as finding a bandage
that closely matches their skin color at the drugstore, seeing their race represented in a positive way in curriculum, books and television, employment credibility and the confidence that if they needed to move, they would find a place to live in an affordable neighborhood (McIntosh, 1998; Polite & Saenger, 2003). Whiteness is explained in media, politics, and academics as a race that is invisible and neutral because it is assumed normal. It is because of this invisibility, that whiteness is seldom named or explored (de Freitas & McAuley, 2008). “White racial identities have socialized whites to conceptualize their world in ways that favor their positions in it…positions of power and authority” (Solomon et al., 2005). Whiteness is a constructed category that includes significant capital (Pennington, 2007; Picower, 2009; Solomon, 2005). To be white is to have an immunity by birthright (Marx, 2004). Whiteness is invisible to white people who do not suffer institutional oppression based on their race (Picower, 2009). White people continuously and often “disconsiously” benefit from the unearned privilege of being white.

I believe that becoming socially and culturally conscious depends on examining white privilege. I hypothesized that themes related to the invisibility of privilege as well as confronting white privilege would appear in the study data.

Critical Literacy

Teachers loosely enacted critical literacy as they read and discussed the selected African American children’s texts. And, although not the primary focus of the study, understanding the goals of critical literacy played an important role in my decision to use African American children’s literature. Critical literacy can be defined as the ways in which we interrogate texts “that have had global appeal among subjugated populations as theoretical and pedagogical tools
of liberation” (Rogers et al., 2009, p. 46). With this framework, activism and social justice are placed at the forefront of analysis, requiring teachers to question or support the normalized discourse that runs through texts (Rogers et al., 2009). Rogers et al. (2009) offer several dimensions of the critical literacy framework, including building a sustainable community, taking a critical stance to inquire and analyze, and of course taking action to advocate for social change (Rogers et al., 2009, p. 13). These dimensions are strongly bonded to the six foundational elements of CRT.

The Ultimate Goal of the Study

In this study I continuously worked to hold supported and empowered students as the ultimate goal of teachers’ participation in the book club, recognizing that in order for teachers to become culturally responsive they must first become racially and culturally literate themselves. The process of “consciousness-raising” works towards enlightened educators and in turn, classroom environments based on social justice and advocacy.
Chapter Two
Review of Literature

This chapter examines the four bodies of literature that most informed the research question: “how does participation in an Intergroup Dialogue book club, supported by African American children’s literature, influence white, in-service elementary school teachers’ socio-cultural awareness?” The four areas of literature included in the review are (1) teacher books clubs, (2) Intergroup Dialogue, (3) whiteness and pre-service teachers, and (4) the analysis of African American children’s literature. When I first began the research process, I reviewed the teacher professional development literature. This helped me to see a “gap” in the current research that this study fills. Unlike asking teachers to adopt a new instructional strategy in math or science, common in the professional development literature, talking about race requires a more intimate setting, away from the school environment in which teachers can take time to establish trust and reflect with their colleagues. Traditional professional development was not the best model for this study. This realization brought me to the literature on teacher books clubs. After examining the five studies in which teachers used multicultural children’s literature to talk about race and culture in a book club setting, I determined that although this is a strong structure, it required the support of a facilitator. The model for facilitating Intergroup Dialogue developed by Z’uniga et al. (2002) provided that necessary support, offering a week-by-week schedule for engaging with controversial topics. Stemming from my theoretical framework, the whiteness studies with pre-service teachers literature is crucial to understanding how racism privileges white people while marginalizing people of color. I hypothesized that confronting white privilege would be a major part of the consciousness-raising process for participants. The whiteness literature not only demonstrated the necessity of the study, it provided themes for data analysis as well. Ideally, this literature would examine in-service teachers, as this research
targeted teachers who were currently in the classroom full-time. However, whiteness in-service literature was not available. There are several potential explanations for this. First and most logically, teacher educators believe that the process of consciousness-raising needs to occur before teachers enter the classroom, as part of their training. Second, researchers have better access to the pre-service teachers in their programs, making them an ideal sample. Either way, I anticipated that similar themes would emerge from in-service teachers, justifying the inclusion of the pre-service literature. The last body of literature, the analysis of African American children’s books, looks at the ways in which AAACL scholars examine these culturally significant texts. This literature was fundamental to my own text analysis and subsequent text selections.

**Teacher Book Clubs**

Book clubs have been primarily used pedagogically as a way to engage students in literary conversation through a more intimate, social setting and have been under-utilized for teacher professional development. Florio-Ruane (2001) discusses the importance of teachers engaging in “conversation-based learning,” suggesting that book clubs have the unique potential for collaboration that moves away from the traditional workshop model for professional development (Florio-Ruane, 2001). The goal of a teacher book club is to use literature as a springboard for rich dialogue that enhances a professional community (Mensah, 2009). Flood et al. (1994) describes the dialogue that comes from teacher book clubs as “complex, interactive, and ever changing” (Flood et al., 1994, p.723).

For this review, I included all peer-reviewed studies of teacher (or pre-service teacher) book clubs, teacher literature circles or “teachers-as-readers” clubs where racial inequality was a focus. Five studies emerged from the last twenty years. All of the book clubs in the five studies
met for at least a period of several months, one study for a period of several years. All five studies utilized carefully selected literature in the hopes that it would spur conversations about race and culture. In all five studies the researcher considered themselves a “participant observer.” Due to the small number of studies that discuss race in teacher book clubs, I explore each one with some degree of depth below.

Flood et al. (1994) was the first study to utilize the book club model as a means of dialoguing about race and ethnicity. Flood et al. (1994) liked the way that book clubs created a more casual environment and hoped that this would translate to educators feeling comfortable talking about “hot topics.” Other than being the first published study of its kind, Flood et al. (1994) was also unique because the book clubs were comprised of administrators as well as teachers. The four other studies in this review were teacher only book clubs. The researchers brought teachers and administrators together with the joint goal of becoming more aware of how race and culture plays out in the classroom (Flood et al., 1994). The researchers chose multicultural children’s fiction as the foundational texts for each group meeting. Yet another striking element to this study in contrast to the others is that Flood et al. (1994) describe a tension free environment in which everyone became more “culturally aware” without the discomfort. I would speculate that more probably, power dynamics within the room may have stopped highly emotional comments, or perhaps more simply, the researchers did not feel the need to discuss the tension that was present (Flood et al., 1994).

In Mensah (2009) a book club was used as a strategy to help pre-service science teachers make connections between “diverse learners” and the teaching of science in a science methods course. More specifically, Mensah (2009) hoped that the pre-service teachers would recognize their own biases and assumptions about teaching science to diverse students. The researcher and
course instructor chose the book club as a model because they hoped it would provide an informal, peer-directed outlet for discussing controversial issues. Recognizing that in traditional book clubs, participants choose the reading materials, Mensah (2009) makes the point of noting a different approach. The researcher purposefully selected the assigned readings, including Heath’s (1983) foundational study *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. Several themes emerged from the pre-service teacher discourse. The first was that participants had a difficult time making connections between “diversity” and science, assuming that science existed in a vacuum and would be taught the same way to everyone. Later on, the researcher noted that participants started to reveal some of their biases, and used the term “assumption” to describe their previously held positions. Tension and emotionally packed narratives were also reported. The researcher also noticed a great deal of reflection from the pre-service teachers after they spent several weeks in the book club with peers (Mensah, 2009).

In a third study, Flurio-Ruane (2001) held a book club with in-service teachers enrolled in a masters program to examine the use of “ethnic autobiography” as a tool for educating teachers about different cultures. The researcher set out to answer the following question: “How does participation influence their [teachers’] understandings of literacy–its cultural foundations as well as the process of learning from literature?” (Florio-Ruane, 2001 p. 3). The study collected data over the course of two years and the book club met approximately once a month. This is in contrast to the other studies in this review, which met more frequently for shorter periods of time. The ten participants in the study were all white females who only spoke English. Florio-Ruane (2001) describes that in this way, they were “representative of the national teaching force.” Unlike Mensah (2009) who used scholarly articles as foundational texts, Florio-Ruane (2001) selected “ethnic autobiographies.” Also, Florio-Ruane (2001) only chose the first six
books the club would use, allowing teachers to pick the additional texts. Angelou’s, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) and Conway’s *The Road from Coorain* (1990) were both selections. The researcher reported that teachers responded to the autobiographies by sharing personal narratives. This allowed the researcher a view into how teachers saw their own lives in comparison to the authors’. Similar to Mensah (2009), Florio-Ruane (2001) reports that teachers were reflexive and surprised at their own lack of cultural knowledge prior to reading the autobiographies (Florio-Ruane, 2001). That being said, some teachers also demonstrated a sense of kinship with the experiences of an author, regardless of racial differences. This sense of kinship evoked empathy among participants, but was also potentially harmful when white teachers assumed they could relate to racial oppression (Florio-Ruane, 2001). The researcher ends the discussion of findings with suggestions for sustaining conversation-based teacher learning past the time limits of the study.

Harlin et al. (2007) followed two teacher book clubs in two different parts of the country. Both groups were enrolled in an elementary education masters program at the time of the study. The first group, from Florida, was ethnically and racially diverse. Harlin et al. (2007) describes participants as bilingual immigrants from Cuba, different parts of the Caribbean as well as Central and South America. The second book club, from New York, was homogenously white. Both groups worked with racially and ethnically diverse students in their urban elementary schools. The researchers purposefully selected “multicultural” realistic fiction with a young adult audience. Teachers in both groups were asked about their general impressions of the texts as well as what they perceived as embedded cultural values. Each text chosen was meant to showcase a unique cultural experience. Creech’s *Walk Two Moons* (1994) and Curtis’ *The Watsons go to Birmingham -1963* (1995) were both selected texts. The researchers found themes of empathy,
critical thinking, beliefs and racism that came from the data analysis. Similar to Florio-Ruane (2001), Harlin et al. (2007) offered that the selected texts helped teachers make connections between their experiences and the experiences of characters. As time went on, the researchers reported a shift in dialogue from an “open conversation” to a “critical discourse” (Harlin et al., 2007).

In Smith et al. (2001) the researchers followed a group of twelve teachers in a “teachers-as-readers” book club. The group was racially and ethnically diverse. There were four African American women, one African American man, three European American women and three European American men (their terms). All of the teachers worked in one of two K-8 public schools in New Jersey at the time of the study. The book club met for several months. The researchers set out to answer the following two research questions: (1) “What conceptions of multicultural literature were enacted in the study group, and (2) what conceptions of discussion were enacted in the study group?” (Smith et al., 2001 p.140). The first research question posed is very similar to those posed by the researchers in the four other studies, but the second question is unique. The ways in which the dialogue occurred were also important to Smith et al. (2001). The researcher pulled texts from a list of multicultural children’s literature compiled and analyzed by Harris, a leading scholar in the field. Two examples of these texts include *My Name is Maria Isabel* (1995) by Ada and *Smoky Night* (1994) by Bunting. The researchers report, similar to the other studies, that participants made connections between their own lives and the lives of characters. Usually the text serves as springboards for teachers to share stories about their personal experiences with race and culture. Many of the African American teachers related to the racism experienced by characters in the children’s books. Smith et al. (2001) suggest that the conversation was driven by weighty, important topics as opposed to “gentle inquisitions” (Smith
et al., 2001 p.160).

Although several of these studies are guided by similar research questions to my own, I noticed a general lack of discussion around white privilege. This was especially surprising in book clubs of predominantly white teachers. The hardships of the “other” were discussed at length. It appears easier to discuss the ways that people are marginalized and oppressed as a result of racist practices, then to discuss the ways that people benefit from them. Additionally, I felt these studies lacked structural support to assist a facilitator in the complex decision making process that may move participants forward in their thinking. The inclusion of the Intergroup Dialogue model developed by Zúñiga et al. (2002), reviewed in the next section, provided this necessary structural support.

**Intergroup Dialogue**

The “how” of engaging teachers in consciousness-raising alludes many and I was unable to find any literature in which a model or framework was recommended for working with teachers specifically. Alternatively, Zúñiga et al. (2002) offered a model for Intergroup Dialogue that Quaye (2012) used to study consciousness-raising in college courses, specifically conversations facilitated by white faculty. The goals of Intergroup Dialogue aligned well with my own understanding of consciousness-raising and the delicate role of the facilitator. Zúñiga et al. (2002) designed their model for Intergroup Dialogue around the theory of “social groups.” Specifically, the importance of having face-to-face encounters that foster honest, thoughtful and significant conversations about social group boundaries. The researchers offer several examples of social groups including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion. They make the important point that being a member of a social group is different from one’s individual identity. Everyone experiences the world differently, but membership in a social group means being
imbedded in systemic power and privilege that ties an individual to others (Z´u˜niga et al., 2002).

The goals of Intergroup Dialogue as outlined by Z´u˜niga et al. (2002) are as follows:

1. to develop self-awareness of one’s membership in a social group in the context of systems and privilege;
2. to explore similarities and differences across and within social group membership;
3. to examine the causes and effects of group differences and their impacts at the personal, interpersonal, community, institutional, and societal levels;
4. to practice dialogue skills and constructive methods of addressing social justice and conflicts between groups;
5. to foster alliances and other strategies of collaboration across differences’
6. to identify actions that actively contribute to developing more inclusive, equal, and socially just relations between social groups (Z´u˜niga et al., 2002, p.8).

Based on these goals Z´u˜niga et al. (2002) developed a framework for Intergroup Dialogue that utilizes story telling and the sharing of experiences. The sharing of narrative comes from participants, the facilitator as well as readings or video that stimulate reflection (Quaye, 2012; Z´u˜niga et al., 2002).

Z´u˜niga et al. (2002) stress that Intergroup Dialogue and consciousness-raising require sustained communication that occurs over a series of weeks or months. The researchers offer that this amount of time is necessary for “participants to reflect on their presuppositions and potential changes in attitude” (Z´u˜niga et al., 2002 p.8).

The table below outlines the four stages of Intergroup Dialogue as presented by the researchers. In their original article, *Intergroup Dialogues: An Educational Model for*
Cultivating Engagement Across Differences, they present the stages in paragraph form with several guiding questions. I adapted those stages into a table to better see how they might inform my work with teachers. The information is synthesized.

Table 1: Stages of Intergroup Dialogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Essential Questions</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Forming Relationships – A Beginning</td>
<td>“Who am I? Who are you? And, how are we going to dialogue together?” (Recommended two sessions)</td>
<td>The goal of these early sessions is to establish a welcoming environment in which participants feel comfortable speaking openly and honestly. This will require a large amount of modeling from the facilitator. The validity of everyone’s opinion is stressed as well as the necessity of avoiding a “right vs. wrong” scenario. The ways in which the group would like to converse is also discussed. What are the community expectations for engaging in dialogue?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Exploring Differences and Commonalities in Experience</td>
<td>“What does it mean for me to be a member of my social identity group? What are the advantages and disadvantages people in my group face in society? What roles do I play in systems of power and privilege? (Recommended 3-4 Sessions)</td>
<td>Increased opportunities for talking and listening in order to discuss the impact of stereotyping and prejudice on oppressed groups. Participants share early memories of race. Everyone should feel valued and a part of the discussion. Participants feel connected to others in their social identity group. Facilitators support student’s present level of awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Exploring and Dialoguing about Hot Topics</td>
<td>“What are the cultural factors that cause tension between social identity groups?” “What are the historical factors that cause tension between social identity groups?” “What are the institutional factors that cause tension between social identity groups?” (Recommended 3-5</td>
<td>This stage may be emotionally charged and difficult for some as it is geared towards issues that typically stimulate controversy. Facilitator challenges the group with hot topic content and affirms handling disagreements in constructive ways. Each session ends with participants reflecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions</td>
<td>On what they can do to learn more about a particular issue discussed that day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 4: Active planning and Alliance Building</td>
<td>“Where do we go from here?” (Recommended 1-3 sessions)</td>
<td>Participants discuss next steps and create “action plans” that outline what students who are “like them” need from them as educators and what students who are not “like them” need. Participants engage in summative reflection on the four-stage process and issues that surfaced as most important to them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Zúñiga et al. (2002)

**The Role of the Facilitator**

Zúñiga et al. (2002) and Quaye (2012) place a great deal of emphasis on the complicated and important role of the facilitator. The facilitator of racial dialogue serves multiple purposes. He or she models being honest and vulnerable, sharing potentially uncomfortable or unflattering thoughts and experiences. He or she also carefully responds to the stories shared by participants and makes decisions about whether or not to challenge or applaud thinking. Yet another facilitator role is to operate on a more “meta” level, asking participants to notice how they “dialogue about the dialogue” (Zúñiga et al., 2002 p.9). The facilitator notes the words that are being used and how they are delivered.

Quaye (2012) suggests that “de-centering” the facilitator is crucial to the success of Intergroup Dialogue, allowing “learners to be knowers” (Quaye, 2012 p.113). Quaye (2012) describes a faculty member who does this well by asking probing questions and then only asking follow-up questions when the group needs to be refocused. Lecture is almost never used as a tool for Intergroup Dialogue as it can be alienating and heavy handed (Quaye, 2012).
Both Quaye (2012) and Zúñiga et al. (2002) state that successful Intergroup Dialogue relies on embracing emotion. “Emotion may be one of the best ways to clarify underlying sources of tension and allow participants to reflect on their own fears, insecurities and vulnerability” (Quaye, 2012 p.113). For example, if a facilitator offers that a participant had a particularly emotional response to literature, or a point of discussion, it might also be revealed that this subject matter is more meaningful to that person then they may have previously realized. Building off of this, the community can discuss why that may be (Quaye, 2012). First person narratives are often emotional and create lasting learning experiences for the teller and listener (Quaye, 2012; Zúñiga et al., 2002).

The Role of the White Facilitator

Quaye (2012) makes a point of highlighting the significance of facilitating consciousness-raising as a white person. The above suggestions are of course still relevant, but Quaye’s (2012) study makes specific recommendations to white facilitators. One of the points Quaye (2012) makes is that white facilitators have a unique opportunity as members of a dominant group to demonstrate their own journey with racial identity, including the ways in which race has been invisible to them. White facilitators also have the ability to model that consciousness-raising is everyone’s responsibility, especially those who benefit from continued racism. And, perhaps most importantly, a white faculty participant in Quaye’s (2012) study discussed the fear of doing damage while facilitating racial dialogue. “I worry about making it worse instead of better. I worry about the injury that I might do” (Quaye, 2012 p. 110). This is an important fear for white facilitators to maintain because it drives continued learning and reflection. If there is a false sense of understanding or expertise then that injury is much more possible (Quaye, 2012).
Marrying a book club model with the structure of Intergroup Dialogue provided an ideal environment for discussing race, class and culture with white teachers. Zúñiga et al. (2002) and Quaye (2012) place the unique and powerful position of the white facilitator at the forefront of their model and emphasize the potential harm that facilitators can do. I took these suggestions and warnings seriously, reflecting and shifting focus as necessary in the design, implementation and analysis of the research study.

The Racially Positioning Discourse of White Pre-service Teachers

As previously mentioned, this research study targeted in-service teachers, not pre-service teachers, but peer-reviewed studies that focus on white privilege and in-service teachers are unavailable. This literature is, however, abundant with pre-service teachers. Due to the importance of exploring whiteness and the field of teaching, as well as the assumption that whiteness themes would be similar with in-service teachers, I decided to include the pre-service literature to discuss the ways that white teachers may position themselves in relation to their students of color. I anticipated several of these themes emerging in the data analysis process.

The current demographic divide among the diverse student population and their future teachers is of great concern to the educational community. White Pre-service teachers indicate that they are unprepared to confront issues of race and racism in their potential classrooms (Cole, 2009). Teacher education is primarily responsible for preparing these qualified teacher candidates for the classroom (Cochran-Smith, 2002). For many, teacher education will be their first “meaningful” encounter with persons of color (Mazzei, 2008).

The classroom can be seen as a smaller version of the world where forms of talk can reproduce human relation inequalities (Leander, 2002). White teachers today have a limited understanding of their own racial identity (Picower, 2009). The lack of position on whiteness is
significant considering how powerful classroom discourse can be in the reproduction of power and privilege.

The review of this literature offered insights into how a white teacher candidate’s lack of awareness of racial positioning can impact the diverse students he/she teaches, and how teacher education programs are engaging pre-service teachers in discussions of whiteness and white privilege. In synthesizing these studies, several themes consistently appeared. Through the exploration of racial discourse, the denial of white capital was very common. In all studies, participants constructed and maintained their positions of privilege through the false assumptions, “saving,” and “conquering,” “disconscious racism,” and powerful classroom silence. Both negative and positive examples of whiteness exploration were drawn on to better understand the current state of teacher education as it relates to these issues.

Denying White Capital

Maintaining a dominant “positional identity” entails that participants both affiliate and distance themselves from social-relational structures that may implicate them (Leander, 2002). Many researchers found that their white, pre-service participants demonstrated a denial of racism in order to maintain their position of power. Research suggests that white, pre-service teachers enter teacher preparation programs believing that everyone struggles and everyone is subject to discrimination regardless of race (Aveling, 2006; Marx, 2004). Researchers have come to articulate this set of beliefs as “denying white capital” (Marx, 2004; Mazzei, 2008).

Despite the significant evidence for white privilege, large numbers of teacher candidates continue to perpetuate the individualistic view of education. This belief suggests, with no regard for social conditions, that if a person works hard enough, they will overcome obstacles (Bonilla-
Silva, 2000; Solomon et al., 2007). Picower (2009) had several participants state that the current system of white power was “deserved” because of how hard white students are working in school (Picower, 2009). To accompany this notion, Mazzei (2007) found several teacher candidates who “didn’t understand why race was an issue” at all (Mazzei, 2007). Aveling (2006) confirms this, by suggesting that most white pre-service teachers enter their programs insisting that they had experienced hardship and discrimination themselves and that there is little difference between “them” and the racial “other” (Aveling, 2006). This demonstrates Leander’s understanding of racial positioning through the careful balancing of affiliating and distancing (Leander, 2002). The belief that everyone feels oppression is extremely problematic in that it gives white teachers a false sense that they can relate to the experiences of their Black students.

Most frequently, white, pre-service teachers will proudly acknowledge that they do not see people in terms of race and therefore could never be racist, believing that this makes them ideal candidates for urban teaching (Aveling, 2006). Marx (2004) explains that in denying racism whites can maintain positive relationships with other whites (Marx, 2004). Bonilla-Silva (2000) offers that Whites will frequently use phrases such as “I am not a racist, but…” in attempts to avoid racial discourse. What most assuredly follows is a negative race-related comment (Bonilla-Silva, 2000).

Some white people deny white racism by creating a definition for racism that leaves them out entirely. Many participants describe racism as violent, hate-filled acts that are committed by evildoers such as the Ku Klux Klan or Aryan Nation. Aveling encountered many students who believed that they should not be blamed for the “bad and ugly” behavior of their colonial ancestors (Aveling, 2006). “The good white is able to distance themselves from extreme racism” (Green & Sonn, 2006). None of Marx’s participants would identify themselves as racist in any
way. They did not notice the race related assumptions they were continually making about the students they tutored (Marx, 2004).

**Disconscious Racism and Invisible Assumptions**

Named by Pennington, “disconscious racism” is racism that is perpetuated without the perpetrators awareness (Pennington 2007). Often called “white racism”, comments and actions that maintain white privilege usually go unnoticed by white people and are therefore assumed to be harmless (Marx, 2004). Leander describes that positions of privilege can be conveyed through the narrating of social “scenes” (Leander, 2002). This can be seen in participant utterances documented below by Marx (2004) and Picower (2009).

Disconscious racism can occur when teachers see their comments through the lens of “honesty.” Marx’s (2004) study involved participants who laughed as they “honestly” described their student teaching neighborhood as “dirty,” “poor,” and “trashy” (Marx, 2004). Society has developed a new “racetalk” in which racist comments are acceptable and appropriate, so long as they are not considered overt (Bonilla-Silva, 2000). Similarly, Picower (2009) found that when participants were interrogated about racist implications in their remarks, they would frequently argue the “reality” of their statements, unaware of how their response helped to maintain white privilege (Picower, 2009). Mazzei (2007) suggests that pre-service teachers have not interrogated their biases and in turn, do not hear the subtext of their comments (Mazzei, 2007). Disconscious racism can easily occur in classrooms where white teachers maintain a definition of racism that is “truthful,” “real,” or excludes them entirely.

Research suggests that teacher assumptions about their students greatly influence how they are treated and how they perform in the classroom. How a teacher responds to a student who is expected to perform well, versus a student who is expected to perform poorly can have a
powerful effect on self-esteem. An unreflexive teacher may not recognize their assumptions as discriminatory (Solomon et al., 2005).

Racism is particularly damaging in the classroom because it undermines self-efficacy and leads to underachievement (Siraj-Blatchford, 1991). In addition, racial/ethnic minority students are frequently placed in lower tracked classes than their white peers (Cone, 2009), and white teachers interact with white children more frequently in their multi-ethnic classrooms than with the students of color (Leander, 2002). Siraj-Blatchford (1991) believed that the Black students in a participant’s classroom underachieved because they did not have a strong rapport with the white teachers (Siraj-Blatchford, 1991).

Foster (2001) found that teachers had a very powerful role in questioning, and clarifying during narrative story telling. White teachers would frequently frustrate their Black students by misunderstanding the purpose of their stories and attempting to direct narratives to an irrelevant point (Foster, 2001). For example in Heath’s (1984) famous ten-year study *Ways with Words*, the researcher uncovered the cultural differences in how language was used and valued in three different communities. In particular, Heath highlighted an African American kindergartener who told stories in his classroom, valuing the joy of the story-telling process, regardless of plot. His teacher would constantly try to focus his stories, deeming them “good” when they were logical and sequential (Heath, 1984). It is extremely important for white teachers to challenge stereotypical constructions of Black students, and false assumptions of shared cultural practices (Foster, 2001; Picower, 2009; Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

**“Saving” and “Conquering”**

Although teachers tend to avoid using the word “save,” teaching in a school attended by students of color is often seen through the eyes of white privilege as noble or heroic. This
gesture of saving can also be viewed as falsely empathetic and condescending (Pennington 2007). Poussaint (1966) refers to this phenomenon as the White African Queen Syndrome, in the description of the intentions of white women during the Civil Rights Movement (Poussaint, 1966). Picower (2009) found participants saying “I just want to help them,” glorifying Hollywood films like Dangerous Minds and Freedom Writers (Picower, 2009). Because participants first experiences with persons of color were from a hierarchical perspective, they continued to view racial minorities as “poor” and “needy” (Picower, 2009). White Pre-service teachers viewed themselves as “good people” because they were being charitable to Black students (Picower, 2009). When dissecting this further, participants were viewing their work with minority students as “saving” them (Pennington, 2007). Looking at “saving” through the lens of white privilege shows that this is an effort to save children from their own lives, implying that these lives are missing critical elements that “we” as a white race can make up. Through this lens, teachers are “conquering” children by pulling them away from their own culture and bringing them into a culture of whiteness (Pennington, 2007). It is important that teachers stop telling “victory stories with our (dominant) selves at the center” (Schick, 2000). If pre-service teachers can recognize their own privilege and its’ relative position to students’ cultural experiences, then they may see their work with urban students as separate from a Hollywood film.

**Remaining Silent in the Classroom**

Although silence would appear to be the absence of discourse, it is important to begin this section with the understanding that there are silencing processes in turn-taking that can limit a group’s participation in classroom dialogue, or stop it all together (Leander, 2002). The silences that shape the participation in interaction are often examples of power negotiations (Leander,
This is particularly important considering Roger’s and Mosley’s (2006) study in which second grade students were all ready at the point in development where ideas about privilege and antiracism could be challenged or affirmed (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). White pre-service teachers participating in Mazzei’s (2007) study admitted that they were taught by their parents and teachers that talking about race is impolite and more importantly, racist. Instead of encouraging discussions about race and difference, white children are implicitly taught to pretend not to notice skin color (Mazzei, 2007). White women have a tendency to increase silence in classrooms to insure “hyperpoliteness” and a “culture of niceness” (McIntyre, 2002; Pennington, 2007; Solomon et al., 2005). When conversations surrounding race are deemed “inappropriate,” then students are silenced (Leander, 2002). Haviland (2008) describes a beginning teacher who didn’t talk about diversity in the classroom because she was afraid of offending students and other teachers in the building (Haviland, 2008). One participant in Schick’s (2000) study admits that “I don’t bring it up not because I don’t think to…I need to know what language is appropriate or inappropriate to use” (Schick, 2000). Similarly, a participant of Marx’s (2004) study admitted that she would only talk about race in the classroom if she felt confident it was done the correct way (Marx, 2004). In trying to further understand why white teachers were continuously remaining silent when issues of racial identity were brought up in the classroom, Mazzei (2007) had participants complete the sentence Sometimes I am silent because... on a notecard. Responses included,

1. I am afraid what I say may be wrong.

2. Many of the ideas I may think to share are not common answers shared by others.

3. I don’t always say what I am thinking because I feel that I am incorrect.
4. I feel that my opinion or thought will be contested and I may not be confident enough (Mazzei, 2007).

Pre-service teachers are afraid of the discomfort that their contributions to discussion may cause. However, the pain of not addressing racism is far worse when teachers are responsible for influencing “minoritized youth” (Schick, 2000). Mazzei (2007) suggests that inhabited silence is even more noticeable when pre-service teachers are asked to discuss their own whiteness as opposed to solely focusing on the racial “other” (Mazzei, 2007).

Teachers who fail to discuss issues of race and power in the classroom are actually maintaining their place in dominant culture without realizing it. Leander (2002) describes that silent interactional behavior such as gestures and eye gaze can claim speaking rights and construct privilege (Leander, 2002). This is just another example of how disconscious racism is completely invisible to those with white privilege.

**Breaking the Silence in Teacher Education**

Creating an environment for dialogue with pre-service teachers about whiteness, white privilege, and how discourse affects the teaching experience may be the most powerful yet simple approach to dissecting issues of race and identity. Silence is used as a means for protection and invisibility and teacher educators must help their students unlearn it (Mazzei, 2007). The discursive perspective offers that we are a wholly racialized society and there is no easy escape from the racially inflected language we use daily (Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

However, Cochran-Smith (2002) impresses that extended conversation on the topic of social justice broke down barriers that were keeping faculty from engaging students in similar discussions (Cochran-Smith, 2002).
The themes explored in this section of the review demonstrate the potential harm white teachers can do in their classrooms both consciously and unconsciously. The themes also demonstrated the need for this study, moving past capturing the problems in teacher race talk, but working towards socio-cultural awareness and an understanding of privilege. Many of these themes were replicated in the study data and will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation.

The Analysis of African American Children’s Literature

Over the past several years I have read hundreds of children’s books that depict African Americans. The literature in this review focused my reading substantially and allowed me a window into both the successes and pitfalls of contemporary African American children’s book authors. The themes that appear in AACL may or may not be conscious decisions by authors and illustrators. I point out several of these themes in my own analysis of contemporary AACL. Please see the appendix. The below review was instrumental to my selection of books for this study.

How African American Children’s Literature Captures Socio-cultural Reproduction

Children’s literature, like all literature, serves many purposes. It can inform, persuade, entertain, and socialize readers. It can also serve as a means to reinforce the status quo and legitimize the current and historical power of dominant groups (Harris, 1990).

Books are wonderful tools…and have the ability to intensify children’s perceptions of reality and stimulate their imagination in a creative way. They can also teach racism and reinforce self-hatred and stereotypes. The best illustrated books can stretch a child’s mind
and strengthen a child’s spirit, preparing the child to face reality and reject the shallow and slick – Tom Feelings (Feelings as cited in Osa, 1995, p. 47).

Tom Feelings, illustrator and activist, communicates this power in his description of children’s literature in the above epigraph. Children’s books, like any other tool, can both help and harm depending on their use and the person using them.

Bishop (1990) explains that children’s books have an amazing ability to capture young audiences and offer them “windows” or “mirrors” into their own lives and the lives of others. A mirror offers children a reflection of themselves, where they can see their own experiences validated. Children recognize that the author found their world significant enough to write about, reminding them that their place in society holds importance. On the other hand, some books serve as a window for children, a view into the life of another. Windows offer new possibilities for children and shed light on experiences different from their own. Children need both the mirror and the window to grow into their best self, a person who feels good about who they are and what they have the potential to be, all while empathizing with the worldviews of others (Bishop, 1990).

**Recognizing African American Omission – A First Step**

The lack of books that represent the lives of African Americans impacts children everywhere and reinforces the current hegemonic power structure in our society. Children must see themselves in text in order build a positive self-identity (Bishop, 1990; Hurley, 2005; Mitchell, 2004; Segura-Mora, 2003; Seniors, 2011; Yeoman, 1999). The current lack of African American children’s literature creates a significant mirror/window imbalance for children. As the bookstore and classroom shelves continue to overflow with texts and pictures highlighting the lives of white children, African American children seldom experience the mirror that they so
desperately need (Bishop, 1990; Hurley, 2005; Mitchell, 2004; Segura-Mora, 2003; Seniors, 2011; Yeoman, 1999). Their white counterparts, however, almost never experience the window and often fail to empathize with their classmates of color.

The Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (2012) reports that children’s literature published by and about African Americans remains at an all-time low. Out of the 3,600 trade books received by the CCBC, only 119 of those books had a plot surrounding African Americans or African American culture, and only sixty-eight of those books had African American authors. Looking at a ten-year period, The CCBC shows a “spike” in African American children’s literature published in 2008, at 172 books out of the 3,000 received (CCBC, 2012).

Moving Past Omission – African American Representation

Unfortunately, simply increasing the number of children’s texts that feature African Americans does not fix “the mirror” for African American children. Indeed, in the ideal world, the number of African American children’s texts increases and provides a bare bones beginning to finding a solution. But, the real meat of the problem falls within the pages of these texts and not simply their availability. African American representation matters a great deal and continues to lack authenticity (Harris, 1990; Lechner, 1995; Pilgrim, 2000; Seniors, 2011; Sims, 1982). We find African Americans battling the problem of representation and stereotyping outside of texts in all kinds of historical contexts. For example in the early twentieth century, Black reformers started a mass movement to create and sell products especially for African Americans. Among them, a man named Henry McNeal Turner, who believed that the world needed “millions of colored dolls” to counteract the Mammy, Topsy and servant rag dolls frequently found in the hands of white children (Mitchell, 2004 p. 179). Beginning in the 1920’s, “Garveyites” adopted
Black dolls as an essential element of their racial pride ideology, hoping that young girls would learn to love themselves in a white-washed world, and eventually promote Black consciousness (Mitchell, 2004). Future research on dolls and concept of the racialized self for preschoolers surged after the publication of the famous Clark and Clark (1940) study. Clark and Clark laid out four dolls (two white and two Black) on a table and asked Black and white preschoolers, one at a time, to select dolls based on several prompts, including: 1) Give me the doll that you want to play with, 2) Give me the doll that is a nice doll, 3) Give me the doll that looks bad, and 4) Give me the doll that is a nice color (Clark & Clark, 1940; Hraba & Grant, 1970). The researchers found that Black and white children were both more likely to prefer white dolls and associate white dolls with positive traits and Black dolls with negative traits. Clark and Clark used these results to later testify in Brown vs. the Board of Education. The researchers argued that segregation was leading to Black children’s sense of inferiority and low self-esteem (Guinier, 2004). Over the next several decades, the Clark and Clark (1940) study has been replicated with mixed results. Hraba and Grant (1970) published complete opposite findings in Black is Beautiful: A Reexamination of Racial Preference and Identification. They attribute their findings to the increase of Black pride and Black community organizations popping up across the country at the time (Hraba & Grant, 1970). Eighteen years later, Powell-Hopson and Hopson (1988) replicated the doll study and confirmed Clark and Clark’s (1940) results (Powell-Hopson & Hopson, 1988). It is important to consider here the many variables at play in an effort to replicate a study, as well as the controversial and potentially unethical nature of the Clark an Clark (1940) study to begin with. However, the questions the famous study raises about the potential power that omission and stereotyping has on self-concept is quite chilling. What happens to a child’s sense of self worth when people who look like them are conspicuously missing from toy shelves
and texts? And worse, what happens when those that are represented are completely inauthentic and ridden with stereotypes?

Now, more than half a century after the Clark and Clark (1940) study, the authenticity of the overwhelming majority of African American Children’s texts continues to disappoint modern day scholars like McNair, Simms, Johnson and Lechner as they analyze books in search of African American characters that defy stereotypes and disrupt the status quo. And, sadly, their conclusions of authenticity mirror the conclusions of decades of scholars that precede them. We see Du Bois’ (1927) frustration over the lack of publications by African Americans in the earlier part of the twentieth century as well as his disappointment in the published texts. He describes an issue of The Crisis, where African American authors reported that publishers rejected the authentic views of African American life they presented in their writing and persisted in printing more offensive depictions. Texts in which African Americans were portrayed as clowns, or even despairing over life circumstances, appeared more readily. (Du Bois, 1927; Mitchell, 2004). Du Bois goes on to explain that publishers at the time argued that more authentic representations of African American experience would not be published because of their striking resemblance to white American experience, unnecessarily “duplicating” material. This argument clearly persisted as a means to maintain the superior position of whites and sell the books that white Americans wanted to purchase, those containing Black stereotypes (Du Bois, 1927).

The publication of children’s texts that reinforce the status quo persists, but recent publications that find their way into the realm of African American Children’s Literature damage children with more subtlety than the outright racism of a book like Little Black Sambo. Current themes that serve a hegemonic function include, “the absent father,” “lack of white villain,” “white heroism,” “racially ambiguous illustrations,” “assimilation” and “compulsory happy
endings” to name a few (Martin, 2004; Sims, 1982).

**Defining African American Children’s Literature**

A book that works to end stereotypes and oppression, or a book that simply depicts African Americans? Researchers of African American children’s literature (AAACL) agree that in order to be considered, a book needs to attempt to disrupt the status quo. I use the word “attempt” purposefully here because there is no such thing as the perfect African American children’s book, and the strategies for disruption have shifted drastically over the course of the twentieth century. What might have been considered disruption in the 1950’s would now be considered assimilation and so on and so forth. Even African American authors with the best of intentions may find themselves perpetuating stereotypes in subtle ways due to decades of oppressive “norms” (Martin, 2004). Books with such subtle oppressive representations are not discredited entirely and usually contain impressive disruptive qualities as well. Overall, researchers agree, the contemporary definition is complex but can be held to a high ideal.

Sims (1982) outlines this high ideal in the following definition; Excellent African American children’s literature “sustains” children by “ (1) Giving them a love of the arts, (2) encouraging them to hold positive attitudes towards themselves, (3) presenting them with alternative methods for coping with negative aspects of their lives, (4) Giving them an appreciation for the contributions of their elders, (5) Providing TRUE knowledge of Black (African and American) heritage, (6) allowing them to fall in love with black heroes, (7) reflecting and reinforcing positive aspects of their lives and (8) sharing her own love of words.” (Sims, 1982, p.83). Sims (1982) definition is both specific to the positive benefits for Black
children while simultaneously open ended enough to leave room for a huge variance in approach and content.

Lechner (1995) imagines AACL as being tied to the following categories: the child within the family, the child in the community, the child in touch with the past, images of real people, and images in fantasy (Lechner, 1995). Similar to Sims (1982) objectives, Lechner (1995) allows for multiple genre’s of books to qualify as AACL, but highlights important cultural categories like family and history.

One last set of criteria I chose to include comes from Kohl’s (1995) elements of “radical children’s literature.” Though Kohl (1995) does not specify African American children here or even race as the focus of the critical lens, the set of criteria outlined truly capture what so many AACL scholars are calling for. The criteria are as follows:

1. the major force in the story is the community, beyond the family;
2. the conflict involves a whole community, class, ethnic group, nation;
3. a wide range of collective action is present;
4. the presence of an enemy who has abused power and who is nevertheless a three-dimensional person or group of people, not an abstract force;
5. the story depicts comradeship as well as friendship and love, and finally
6. there is not a compulsory happy ending or resolution of the problem. Hope and possibility are evident (Kohl, 1995 p. 66-68).

Kohl’s (1995) criteria are not meant to be exhaustive or all-inclusive. Once again, there is no perfect “radical children’s book” or African American children’s book, but this list captures the complexity of what might be required for social and racial uplift.
Nieto, 2009, summarizes the above definitions best by asking readers to examine who within the pages holds the power. Similarly, Botelho and Rudman, 2009, suggest we ask the following questions when analyzing the texts, “who is represented or underrepresented?” And, “how is power exercised?” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009 p.xiv). The answers to these questions, in conjunction with Sims (1982), Lechner’s (1995) and Kohl’s (1995) categories, help define whether or not a book qualifies as AACL. It is arguably difficult for a book to encourage African American children to “hold positive attitudes towards themselves” (Sims, 1982) if they are left powerless in the text and images of children’s literature by an author or illustrator (Nieto, 2009). More on guiding questions can be found in chapter three.

A Note on Celebrity Authors

A growing trend in the last several years is books by Black celebrity authors featuring Black characters. Chocolate Me, by Taye Diggs, Spike and Tonya Lewis Lee’s Please, Baby, please and Debbie Allen’s Dancing in the wings are just a few examples.

Martin (2004) purposefully omits a review of African American children’s literature by contemporary black celebrities stating that, “I will not discuss celebrity authors of children’s books – a growing trend right now- both because these are not the people who invest their careers in the livelihood of children’s literature and also because these books tend to sell because of name recognition despite the literary or artistic quality (which is sometimes quite poor)” (Martin, 2004 p. 204).

This may be the best time to note that I did include celebrity author’s in my own analysis and used, Chocolate Me by celebrity Taye Diggs as a selected text for professional development. I selected this text in particular because it clearly contains a hegemonic message and teachers
need to see those messages in print. I believe that to ignore these books completely is to do a
disservice to children, for like it or not, these books are in the hands of teachers and parents and
are appearing on school and bookstore shelves. It is far better to help educators understand why
these books can be problematic as well as recognize when a text has added something beautiful
to a category of books that continue to need support.

The Review of Literature and the Research Study

Attempting to engage pre-service teachers in consciousness-raising is not a new concept.
Teacher educators have been working to develop effective ways of increasing socio-cultural
awareness among white teachers for decades. Where the research stops is when students leave
their teacher education programs and enter the field. At this point, if efforts are being made to
design professional development for in-service teachers surrounding issues of race and
inequality, those efforts are not sufficiently documented. The five studies of race talk and teacher
book clubs provide a small window into the purposeful text selection and “hot topic” dialogue
process. However, the book club model, as it stands in the literature, lacks structure and support
for a facilitator aiming to move a group forward. Intergroup Dialogue offers the underlying
guiding principles on which this research was designed. The facilitator played a large and
complex role in asking guiding question, demonstrating vulnerability and creating a safe space
for dialogue. African American children’s books are rich with powerful cultural themes and were
intended as a non-threatening reflection of societal norms for the book club. Further discussion
on book club design can be found in the next chapter.
Chapter Three
Methodology

Selecting a methodology for this study stemmed from the original research question: “what is the nature of engaging white, in-service teachers in the process of “consciousness-raising” with African American children’s literature?” This question led to an extensive review of literature and the ultimate selection of three distinct methodological structures used in previous research of this kind. The first two structures served as a foundation for the design of the study. The first, a book club model, and the second, a framework for Intergroup Dialogue developed by Zúñiga et al. (2002) and later adapted for white facilitators by Quaye (2012). The third structure, a White Racial Identity Continuum, created by Helms (1990) and expanded on by Lawrence and Tatum (1998), lends itself to grounded theory using a priori (pre-existing). The remainder of this chapter provides an in-depth look at the methodology of study design and the methodology of data analysis. The methodology of study design includes the text analysis of African American children’s literature, the research schedule based on a book club and Intergroup Dialogue model, participant sampling methods, participant and site descriptions, and complex role of the researcher. (2) The methodology of data analysis includes a discussion of grounded theory using a priori codes such as the White Racial Identity Continuum as well as inductive codes as developed by the researcher, the types of data collected for analysis and finally, a researcher positioning statement.

Methodology of Study Design

Study Structure

This research study used a book club model (Flood et. al 1995; Harlin et al., 2007; Mensah, 2009; Smith et al., 2001) as well as an Intergroup Dialogue model (Zúñiga et al.,
2002; Quaye, 2012) as discussed in the literature review. Both models directly align with the leading research question and provided a substantive foundation from previous work in the field.

**Analysis of African American Children’s Literature**

When selecting examples of high quality AAACL as well as examples with problems, I used the themes that Sims (1982), Lechner (1995) and Kohl (1995) suggest should be present in AAACL. I created a table that incorporated each scholar’s themes.

**Table 2: Themes for AAACL Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sims (1982)</th>
<th>Inspires a love of the arts</th>
<th>Encourages self love</th>
<th>Coping mechanisms for negative aspects of life</th>
<th>Respect for contributions of elders</th>
<th>Accurate Black History</th>
<th>Black Heroes</th>
<th>Positive aspects of life</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lechner (1995)</td>
<td>Child in touch with family</td>
<td>Child in touch with the community</td>
<td>Child in touch with history</td>
<td>Images of real people</td>
<td>Images in fantasy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kohl (1995)</td>
<td>Community force beyond family</td>
<td>Conflict involving whole community or group</td>
<td>Collective action is present</td>
<td>Three dimensional enemy</td>
<td>Camaraderie, friendship and love</td>
<td>No compulsory ending, hope is evident</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


During my analysis I encountered specific themes not represented in the general categories developed by Sims (1982), Lechner (1995) and Kohl (1995). Examples of these themes include cross-racial adoption, the mass incarceration of African American males, and the absent African American father. I support my discussion of these themes with specific citations from scholars who study them extensively as well as a brief historical analysis where applicable.
I want to note at this point that text and image analysis in a qualitative paradigm requires
the recognition that a researcher brings his or her background knowledge and biases to a given
foundational support to the analysis process, but did not eliminate the subjective reality of
qualitative research. Based on this reality, I hope that my analysis of the ten African American
children’ books read as questioning and problematizing rather than absolute truths. My analysis
of the ten texts selected for the book club are included as appendices in this dissertation.

**Book Club Schedule Based on an Intergroup Dialogue Model and AACL Themes**

The table below details the schedule of the book club. The book club met for ten
consecutive weeks during the months of July, August and September. Meetings were scheduled
on Wednesday afternoons after a poll of participant schedules and each meeting lasted
approximately two hours. I scheduled the books across the ten weeks based on the Intergroup
Dialogue model developed by Z´uñiga et al. (2002) in conjunction with the themes present in
each piece of AACL. Each week focused on a specific African American children’s text,
accompanied by “target themes,” or possible questions. I used the themes and questions as
researcher reminders and not a script in any way. Additionally, the participants took five minutes
at the beginning or end of each session to complete an open-ended written reflection. I explain
each of these elements in detail in their own section in this chapter.

**Table 3: Book Club Schedule and Target Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>(Target) Themes</th>
<th>Guiding Questions</th>
<th>Journaling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week One</td>
<td>Informed Consent</td>
<td>• Why are we here?</td>
<td>• Who am I?</td>
<td>5 minute writing dump: Open-ended</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• How do we talk about these books?</td>
<td>• Who are you?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• How are we going to dialogue</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Book Title</td>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>5 minute writing dump: Open-ended</td>
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| Two    | Brown Like Me, Noelle Lamperti                   | - Naming Skin Color  
- Celebrating difference  
- Cross-racial adoption  
- Black children in white communities  
- Surface level narrative  
- Use of photographs  
- Child author | Why do you think the author and her family wrote this book?  
What were your overall impressions?  
How did the photographs add or detract from the book?  
Whose voice came through as you were reading? |
|        | Kevin and His Dad, Irene Small and Michael Hays  | - “Normal” activities  
- The Black male role model  
- Family Love  
- Self Love  
- Meritocracy vs disruption  
- The uniqueness of Black experience | What is the first word that comes to mind after reading this book?  
What about this book surprised you? Who is this book for? |
| Three  | Same Difference, Calida Rawles                  | - Privileging skin-tone  
- Naming differences  
- Self-love  
- Uniqueness of African American experience  
- Compulsory happy ending | What did you think of this book?  
Why would you read this book to your class?  
What was the author’s purpose? Did she succeed?  
How did you feel after reading this book?  
Did you find any problems with the book? If so, what specifically? What types of questions would you ask your students during a reading of this book? |
| Week Four | Martin’s Big Words, Doreen Rappaport and Brian Collier | • Christianity as a cultural norm  
• Authentic illustrations  
• Historical accuracy?  
• Non-compulsory ending  
• Use of collage  
• Community action  
• Lack of white villain  
• Developmentally appropriate explanation of violence | • What does the author want the reader to know?  
• What does the illustrator want the reader to know?  
• How would you feel reading this book to your students?  
• How did you feel about the ending of the book?  
• Who holds the power in this book? How can you tell? | 5 minute writing dump: Open-ended |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Week five | This is the Dream, Diane Z. Shore and Jessica Alexander, illustrated by James Ransome | • White villains  
• Authentic illustrations  
• History with emotion at the forefront  
• Use of poetry  
• Non-compulsory ending (hidden) | • How did you feel reading this book?  
• Who is this book for?  
• What does the illustrator want the reader to know?  
• Who holds the power in this book?  
• How would you feel reading this book to your students?  
Compare this book to other books that aim to teach black history. | 5 minute writing dump: Open-ended |
| Week six | Jalani and the Lock, Lorenzo Pace | • “Neo-Slave Narrative”  
• Historical Perspective  
• Narrative Simplicity  
• Racially Ambiguous Illustrations  
• White heroism  
Happy Ending to slavery | • How did you feel reading this book?  
• What were some of your first impressions?  
• Who is this book for?  
• What do you think the author wants kids to know? | 5 minute writing dump: Open-ended |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Racially ambiguous Illustrations</th>
<th>One-sided historical retelling</th>
<th>Stereotypical “multicultural” characters</th>
<th>African Americans depicted as irrational and violent without cause</th>
<th>Love between mother and child</th>
<th>Happy Ending “everyone gets along”</th>
<th>Absent father</th>
<th>How was race depicted in this book?</th>
<th>Who had power?</th>
<th>Who was powerless?</th>
<th>What does the author want children to know?</th>
<th>What does the illustrator want children to know?</th>
<th>If this book was a child’s first encounter with the L.A. Riots, how would they summarize the event?</th>
<th>How would you feel reading this to your class?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week seven</td>
<td>Smoky Night, Eve Bunting and David Diaz</td>
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<td>Week eight</td>
<td>Chocolate Me, Taye Diggs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Texts</td>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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| nine      | Visiting Day, Jacqueline Woodson and James Ransome | Community Support, Controversial content, Truth telling vs stereotyping, Grandparent as parent, Family love, Dealing with negative aspects of life, Authenticity, Hopeful, non-compulsory ending | • What was your reaction to the cover of this book?  
• Did your opinion change after you read it?  
• Who is this book written for?  
• What do the author and illustrator want the reader to know?  
• Who has power in this story? Who is powerless? What did you think of the ending? | 5 minute writing dump: Open-ended |
| ten       | All us Come Cross the Water, Clifton and Steptoe | Complexity of Black identity in America, Heritage projects in schools, Africa as unifying, Caribbean American Black identity, Respect for Elders, Slavery as defining contemporary Black identity, Identity as personal | • How is Ujamaa feeling in the beginning of the book? Why?  
• What were Miss Willis’ intentions?  
• How does Rose view her heritage?  
• How does Tweezer view Black identity?  
• What does the author want the reader to know? | 5 minute writing dump: Open-ended |

**Order of Texts**

The ten African American children’s texts were selected and ordered based on the model of Intergroup Dialogue found in chapter two. As recommended by Z’uniga et al., (2002), the controversial and emotional nature of the texts increased over time. For the first several weeks
(1-3), the Intergroup Dialogue model recommends setting community expectations for how
dialogue will occur among group members, as well as begin to explore difficult topics gently
(Zúñiga et al., 2002). The first three weeks of the book club schedule followed the model by
asking teachers to simply start naming race. Brown Like Me by Noelle Lamperti and Kevin and
His Dad by Irene Smalls and Michael Hays, depict African Americans doing culturally
ambiguous things in culturally ambiguous settings. The books show positive images and happy
children. The authors do not tackle racism. The fourth week of the book club offered a “soft” nod
towards racism in text. Same Difference by Calida Rawles begins to explore the notion of one
color of skin being better than another. This book is not by any means highly emotional, but
hints at stereotypes and societal values in regards to dark skin. Zúñiga et al. (2002) suggest
moving into “hot topics” or controversial content at this point in the schedule. From here, the
selected texts included mostly historical narratives like slavery and the Jim Crow era, but also
explored contemporary topics like Black male dominated prisons in Woodson’s and Ransome’s,
Visiting Day. White people begin to appear alongside Black people in texts as villains, which is
particularly controversial. The book club closed with a discussion of Clifton and Steptoe’s All Us
Come Cross the Water, a book that runs the gamut in terms of the complexity of Black identity.
Understanding this book and its subtlety requires acceptance of racial inequality.

**Target Themes**

The list of target themes that accompany each text in the schedule served as reminders of
the ways in which a text met the criteria for high quality AAACL as outlined by Sims (1982)
Lechner (1995) and Kohl (1995). The target themes also revealed the increasing controversial
nature of potential topics. These themes were not explicitly named at any time during the
meetings, but several did emerge naturally from participant conversation.
Guiding Questions

The guiding questions included in the schedule are modeled after questions developed by Sims (1982), and later used by Botelho and Rudman (2009) and Nieto (2009). Sims (1982) offers that children’s books and children’s book authors and illustrators hold a great deal of power, and open ended questions about that power lead to discoveries of marginalization and privilege (Sims, 1982). Similarly, Zúñiga et al. (2002) suggest focusing on emotions as a tool for recognizing insecurities and “hot topics” among participants (Zúñiga et al., 2002). Examples of these questions include,

1. Why do you think the author wanted to write this book?
2. Who is this book for?
3. What messages does this book send?
4. How were you feeling as you were reading this book?
5. How would you feel reading this book to your class?

I created each set of questions to purposefully draw out target themes and encourage emotional story-sharing, but used them sparingly. I asked guiding questions only when it seemed that stronger facilitation was necessary. Otherwise, the book club members guided the conversation themselves as I worked on “de-centering.”

Journaling or “Writing Dumps”

Zúñiga et al. (2002) recommend extension activities such as writing prompts to encourage reflection (Zúñiga et al., 2002). This private period at the end of each meeting asked teachers to download or “dump” their thoughts and feelings into a journal. The “writing dump” technique asked participants to continue writing without lifting their pen or pencil from the paper. Designed for quick writing, writing dumps aim to capture uninhibited thoughts with as
little hesitation as possible. All journaling was completely open-ended, allowing participants to write about the topic of their choice.

Although hopeful that the journals would serve as an excellent avenue for reflection especially for apprehensive participants, I found the data from the journals to be thin and surface-level. Unlike the rich, passionate narratives that came out through discussion, the journal entries remained almost entirely at the text level. The possibility for changes in the study design for future research will be discussed in chapter five of this dissertation.

Participant Sampling

Snowball sampling was used to select six, in-service elementary teachers to take part in the book club. Snowball or “chain referral sampling” is the process of relying on referral for participation and is typically used in research focusing on “sensitive” issues (Biernaki & Waldorf, 1981 p.141). I originally chose to cap participation to seven participants because I believed it would allow for a range of teacher perspectives and narratives, while simultaneously maintaining an intimate environment conducive to trust building and story sharing. Criteria for participation included being (1) white and (2) most recently employed at the target elementary school, described below. There was no requirement for the number of years of teaching experience as it pertained less directly to the research questions.

Although the study began with six participants, only three participants remained in the study after the second week. The communicated reasons for the sudden drop in participation included the busy time of year at the start of school and teacher vacations as summer came to a close. As a researcher and facilitator, I must also consider participant discomfort with the controversial nature of discussing race. I reflect more on participation in the final chapter, as well as discuss the ways in which data representation shifted to accommodate for a more intimate
group later on in this chapter. I ended up finding the small group incredibly rewarding, offering ample time for story sharing from each individual.

**Target School: Hunters Elementary**

The target school for this research was a small, urban public school in southwest Virginia where at least seventy percent of the students are identified as African American (Virginia Department of Education, 2013). This particular research site was selected for several reasons. First and foremost, I hypothesized that teachers of students of color would “buy in” to the research topic and analysis of African American children’s literature at its most basic level, recognizing that professional development focusing on African American children applies to them. My hope was that, similar to my own experiences as a young teacher in a school with mostly African American students, the selected participants would recognize African American omission in children’s texts and have a desire to explore this topic further. In addition, the selected school site, in conjunction with several other local inner city elementary schools, adopted an initiative to increase the number of multicultural children’s books read to students during the previous academic year. I anticipated that the relativity of that venture to this study would increase teacher investment. Another reason I selected this particular site for participant sampling is the strong relationships I have formed there. Five years ago, as a graduate research assistant, I helped implement a literacy intervention. I spent two days a week for a year at this school site, assisting in and out of classrooms with various literacy strategies. I believe teachers viewed me as a supportive colleague. Asking white teachers to talk about race, let alone talk about race on camera, requires establishing trust with the researcher. I expected the necessary trust to form more easily with participants from this site, due to the large amounts of time we had spent together.
Data Collection Site

The book club met in a private conference room at a local public library. This setting was selected based on ease of access for participants as well as the privacy it provided. This particular library was located in a neighboring town to that of the school site. The intimate conference room in the library, a significant distance away from the target school, offered a better chance for participant anonymity.

Participant Demographics

Blaire Robins. Blaire Robins was 26 years old at the time of the study. She was born and raised in New Jersey and attended predominantly white, public schools. She went through a traditional teacher education program in the state of Virginia and began working as a fourth grade classroom teacher in Northern Virginia after graduation. After two years of teaching she accepted a position at Hunters Elementary in second grade. She had taught one year at Hunters at the time of the study and was preparing for a second.

Rebecca Miles. Rebecca Miles was 26 years old at the time of the study. She was born and raised in Virginia and attended predominantly white public schools. She went through a traditional teacher education program in the state of Virginia and began teaching at Hunters immediately after graduating. She had been teaching fifth grade math at Hunters for two years when the study began and had accepted a job at a predominantly white, suburban school for the upcoming year.

Joyce Smith. Joyce Smith was 54 years old at the time of the study. She was born and raised in Virginia and attended predominantly white, public schools. Teaching was a career change for Joyce and she got her teaching certificate through a traditional program. She has been
teaching at Hunters Elementary for seven years as a first grade teacher and was preparing for her eighth year at the time of the study.

**Data Collected for Analysis**

Products for analysis included weekly book club dialogue transcripts, the researcher’s journal, and teachers’ written reflections. Each book club session was video-taped using a flip camera in the corner of the conference room. The only purpose of the video camera was to confirm speakers for accuracy of transcription. Video footage will never be viewed by anyone other than the researcher. I transcribed the researcher journal from audio dictation using dragon software. I recorded journal entries immediately following book club sessions in an effort to capture uninhibited reflections of the facilitation process. The selected products for analysis are supported by previous teacher book club studies and a grounded theory methodology (Flood et al. 1995; Harlin et al., 2007; Mensah, 2009; Smith et al., 2001).

**Role of the Researcher**

Marrying an Intergroup Dialogue model for facilitation with the considerations for the role of the researcher in participant observation was ideal for this study. As previously discussed in chapter two, Quaye (2012) values the “de-centering” of the facilitator to allow for participant sharing, but simultaneously recognizes the power a white facilitator has to model vulnerability in sharing narrative from his or her own racial identity journey (Quaye, 2012). The role of the facilitator is something of a juggling act, moving carefully from speaking to listening and back again (Z’u”niga et al., 2002). Similarly, Glesne (1999) breaks down participant observation into a continuum of four researcher roles that place weight on one portion of the term or another at a given time. For example, the researcher can choose to simply (1) observe without trying to participate, (2) largely observe, and participate less, (3) largely participate in discussion, with
less observation, or (4) become a full participant without making observations (Glesne, 1999). In a similar fashion, Spradley (1980) writes that participant observation occurs in five different “degrees:” (1) non-participation, (2) passive participation, (3) moderate participation, (4) active participation, and (5) complete participation (Spradley, 1980). Spradley (1980) differs from Glesne (1999) in the first and fifth “degree” of participation. Nonparticipation, according to Spradley (1980), would mean that the researcher does not communicate at all with participants. Complete participation means that the researcher is already a naturally occurring participant in the study sample, such as a teacher in a co-teaching team, studying his or her own co-teaching. Acting as a book club member, facilitator, and researcher, I experienced a range of participatory roles that excluded Spradley’s (1980) first and fifth degrees. I was not always aware of the exact “degree” or distinct role that I played during book club meetings on a moment-to-moment basis, despite a highly cognitive decision making process. My reflections on this experience can be found in the researcher chapter.

**Informed Consent Procedures**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Virginia Tech granted permission for this research to be conducted. Before any data was collected, all participants, including those who eventually withdrew from the study, signed a consent form outlining the details, confidentiality procedures and potential risks of participation. The consent form is located in the appendix of this dissertation.

**Methodology for Data Analysis**

**Grounded Theory Using A Priori and Inductive Codes**

Qualitative researchers use a variety of methods for data analysis. One of the more seminal methods is grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1994) define grounded theory as
simply a process for developing theory that is “grounded in data systematically gathered and organized” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). A grounded theory methodology involves the careful, line-by-line review of transcripts and field notes for the purpose of developing broader categories or themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin also validate the use of an existing framework or set of codes for data analysis called “a priori” (pre-existing) codes. This study specifically used both a priori codes (in this case the White Racial Identity Continuum discussed below) and inductive codes (new codes emerging from the data) for data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This methodology for data analysis was a strong fit for the study because it allowed me the freedom to be an analytical instrument and interpreter of meaning, while simultaneously required a careful and thorough examination of texts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

After transcribing all audio and video data, I began a careful line-by-line coding of all texts. Topics that appeared frequently in the data were color-coded and placed on a data matrix. For example, in the below section of transcript from Blaire, I coded the transcript as follows (individual codes are separated by commas): Line 76, 77 and 78: Grouping Hispanic parents together, sees Hispanic parents as grateful to teachers, is confused by Black mother’s reaction to her, makes dichotomy between Hispanic and Black parents. Lines 78, and 79: Sees Hispanic parents as handing over their children, feels comfortable around Hispanic parents, feels appreciated by Hispanic parents. Line 80: R agrees, Groups Hispanic parents together, feels Hispanic parents trust teachers. Line 81: Sees Black mother as not trusting her. Line 82: J confirms having previously taught Black mother’s daughter. Line 83 and 84: B asks the group for agreement/validation, feels Hispanic parents are outwardly grateful. Line 85 and 86: R validates with story of Hispanic parent gift giving to teachers. Line 87: Groups Hispanic parents together, sees Hispanic parents as grateful as a result of immigration. Line 88 and 89: Compares
Hispanic and Black parents, sees Black parents as not trusting her, feels Black parent’s reaction is unfounded.

76 B: I’m also thinking why do the English language like my Hispanic panics fall all over you like LOVE me and then the other one (black mom in her story) was like (makes face). I mean the Hispanic parents, I had taken the babies out of their hands, I mean I feel so comfortable. Like I feel so appreciated by them.

80 R: It’s true. They trust that you are going to do right by their children.

81 B: Yeah and this one (the Black parent) didn’t trust at all. Which is fine, but…

82 J: Now who was it again? (B says parent’s name) Yeah, I had her.

83 B: I mean do you guys feel like the English language parents… I mean I feel like they’ve always been so.. I mean noticeably…just so thankful.

85 R: Yeah I mean one of my little boys the mom had him bring in roses for all the teachers on Valentines day.

87 B: I think they are all so appreciative cause they’ve come from a different place. I mean I hate to compare, but I mean, you (black parent) wouldn’t even give me a chance…

After multiple rounds of coding only, I reorganized transcripts by participant narrative in chronological order, not wanting to lose possible co-constructed meaning from dialogue, but simultaneously recognizing the need to preserve individuality. From here, each participant transcript was analyzed separately, searching for broader categories across codes. For example, in the snapshot of Blaire’s transcript above, multiple codes eventually fell under larger themes, such as stereotyping and grouping parents, the need to be appreciated, validating assimilation, teachers know best and blaming Black parents. Once I felt confident that I had exhausted my inductive analysis, I shifted to the White Racial Identity Continuum (a priori codes), described below.

**The White Racial Identity Continuum: A Priori Codes**

The research question focused on “consciousness-raising,” or a shift in thinking around issues of race. I used Helms’ (1990) model of white racial identity that was further developed by
Lawrence and Tatum (1998). Helms’ (1990) developed a six-stage continuum that outlines potential changes in how whites may view themselves in relation to people of color with an increased “consciousness” of social justice issues. The table below includes both the original language of Helms (1990) in plain text, and what I see as the additions made by Lawrence and Tatum (1998) in bold.

Table 4: The White Racial Identity Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>What It Looks Like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>The individual sees nothing wrong with the status quo. Often claiming “color-blindness,” he or she is oblivious to racism and participates in it (Helms, 1990). <strong>Being white is “normal” and privileges associated with it are taken for granted (Lawrence &amp; Tatum, 1998)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disintegration</td>
<td>The individual, sometimes as a result of moving to a new place or beginning a friendship or romantic relationship with a member of another race, begins to see a system of racism at work, resulting in feelings of shame of confusion. He or she might start pointing out acts of prejudice or discrimination to others, or may try to ignore racism (Helms, 1990). <strong>The individual may experience guilt, anger or sadness, which can lead to denial or resistance. These new experiences can also be a catalyst for action (Lawrence &amp; Tatum, 1998).</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reintegration</td>
<td>If the individual has attempted to point out acts of prejudice, he or she may find him or herself isolated from friends and may retreat into old patterns of accepting the status quo. If the individual has tried to ignore racism but cannot, he or she might blame people of color for their plight in society, absolving white people (and thus him or herself) of responsibility for ending racism. They are engaged in what Professor Lawrence Bobo calls “laissez-faire racism,” where they are conscious that oppression exists, but do nothing about it (Helms, 1990). <strong>Feelings of guilt or denial can transform into fear and anger towards people of color. Resentful, blaming of the victim may be used as a strategy to avoid dealing with issues of racism (Lawrence &amp; Tatum, 1998).</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>--------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pseudo-independence</td>
<td>Often as a result of cross-racial integration, the individual ultimately cannot ignore the system of privilege afforded to white people and becomes paralyzed by his or her guilt. He or she may try to escape “whiteness” by befriending members of minority groups, pointing out the ways in which he or she is also subject to discrimination, and securing assurances that he or she is not a racist (Helms, 1990). He or she accepts responsibility for their role in racism as well as dismantling it (Lawrence &amp; Tatum, 1998).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion-Emersion</td>
<td>The individual seeks new information about what it means to be white, searching for alternative, positive models as opposed to “victimizer” (Helms, 1990). The individual seeks to answer the question: who am I racially? They are no longer paralyzed by guilt (Lawrence &amp; Tatum, 1997).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>The individual may now view being white as a positive opportunity to dismantle oppression and makes a commitment to do so (Helms, 1990). Internalization of a positive white racial identity occurs. There is now a lived commitment to anti-racist activity and ongoing self-examination. There is a recognition that white racial superiority is so deeply embedded in our culture that the process of “unlearning racism” will continue throughout a lifetime (Lawrence &amp; Tatum, 1998).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Helms, (1990) and Lawrence & Tatum (1998)

The six stages of the model are a continuous process in white identity exploration. Beginning with the first contact with people of color, the general conception for white people is that racism does not exist and they might preach a mantra that the world should be “colorblind.” In this first stage, white people maintain the status quo. Moving forward, white people may transition to the recognition of racism, usually after a significant encounter with persons of color during disintegration. The word disintegration refers to the separation a person must make from the dominant discourse in order to support claims of racism. It is in this stage that whites usually recognize their own participation in a racist society. During reintegration, whites may take a steps backwards after feeling resistance from other members of the dominant group. Pseudo-Independence refers to the full acceptance of racism and the societal oppression of people of
color, but is also accompanied by paralyzing guilt. In the last two stages, Immersion-Emersion and Autonomy, whites typically search for new white role models that support speaking out against the mainstream discourse, and simultaneously make a commitment to be an advocate for racial equality (Helms, 1990).

The white racial identity continuum served as a foundational set of a priori codes for data analysis. After I felt confident with my inductive coding, I brought in the work of Helms (1990) and Lawrence and Tatum (1998) to compare my inductive categories with the descriptions of stages along the continuum. For example, some of the larger categories that emerged from Blaire’s transcript such as blaming Black parents, fit neatly into a stage or stages along the continuum. In this case, blaming Black parents could be considered a firm sign of disintegration. Other categories, however, were more complicated and showed signs of multiple stages at one time. When this was the case, I leaned towards the status that appeared more dominant, and noted the secondary status as well. For example, Blaire’s narrative often fell primarily in contact status but showed signs of reintegration. I believe including all simultaneously occurring statuses complicates both the person and the continuum, a necessary element of analysis.

Generally, this research reinforces the strength of the continuum as a tool for analysis, but I also found limitations in using the continuum and reflect more on this in the final chapter. New thoughts and questions surrounding the continuum and its use may be one of the most significant contributions of this research.

**Data Representation**

In order to accurately represent consciousness-raising and the unique experiences of my three participants, I chose to write about each teacher in their own chapter. Each chapter begins
with a piece of transcript that I believe helps the reader to see both elements of their personality and thinking process across all of their narratives and conversations with others. For the most part, the selected portions of transcript are linear, meaning they are represented in chronological order. This is especially true for Blaire and Rebecca who demonstrated clearer shifts along the white racial identity continuum. Each section of each participant chapter is marked with a continuum status and then a theme that supports that status.

The fourth chapter in the portion of this dissertation designated for data representation is my own. This chapter, unlike the three participant chapters, answers the research question: “what are the experiences of the facilitator in engaging teachers in Intergroup Dialogue?” Data analysis for this chapter included the coding and eventual categorizing of my researcher journal. Pieces of transcript from the researcher journal are incorporated to answer the above research question. In keeping with the format of the three participant chapters, I also included an opening vignette that provides the reader with an overarching sense of my reflections.

Positioning

Although the post-positivist paradigm of qualitative inquiry rejects the notion of researcher positioning, I believe that such disclosure is important information for the reader. By situating myself in the research, I am not aiming to “step out of myself.” Reflexive practice does not suggest that in examining ourselves we move closer to an objective reality. Instead, we merely make our readers aware of our situated position in the discourse and how that discourse undoubtedly shapes our interpretations of the educational communities we observe (Hein, 2004).

I am a white woman in my fifth year of doctoral study. I grew up in a wealthy home with two white, professional parents in a small, affluent community in Vermont. As a child, my parents and teachers constantly reminded me of the inappropriateness of noticing race, let alone
talking about race. Colorblindness ran rampant in our elementary and secondary schools, a fairly
easy ideology to maintain considering we only had one student of color enrolled.
Colorblindness, originally adopted as a tool for “fixing” racism in American society, now serves
as a carrier of prejudice (Lawrence, 1995). The colorblind ideology suggests that ignoring skin
color evens the playing field along racial lines and brings us closer to equality (Carr, 1997;
Pollock, 2004). In actuality, “deleting” race words from our talk irrefutably reproduces the racial
inequalities that currently haunt us by keeping meritocracy alive and white people in power
(Carr, 1997; Pollock, 2004). After high school, I attended Bucknell, a homogenously white
university in central Pennsylvania, and did not learn about or encounter the topic of race in a
single college course. This is particularly shocking considering my anthropology major. My
college professors navigated course content by focusing on “culture.”

I encountered the “racial other” for the first time after joining Teach for America, the
controversial program designed to bring “high performing students” from top universities to
teach in “high needs” schools for two years. After spending several months as the teacher of
thirty Black kindergarteners at a charter school in Brooklyn, I began to see my racialized self.
For the first time in my life I saw the bounty of unearned privileges that accompanied my
whiteness. My students lacked resources and classroom space, had teachers who hated their jobs,
and listened to disrespectful banter about their race and culture regularly. Although my form of
racism towards my students was not as obvious, I shamed them with my silence on any topic
race related. I froze. Over the course of my first year teaching, I realized that I maintained a
deficit as a racially illiterate adult given my sheltered and racially illiterate childhood. I hurt
children with my ignorance by making assumptions about their experiences and abilities. There
I began my journey of undoing the many discourses that surrounded and molded my childhood,
the discourses that taught me to be silent about race. I began reading children’s books differently; I looked at my classroom library with new eyes. I worked to build positive representations of my students into as much of the mandated curriculum as I could.

As a researcher and former teacher, I hold certain beliefs that I must make known because of their importance to this work. I am not unbiased towards culturally relevant pedagogy. On the contrary, I believe strongly in pedagogy that works to end oppression and use a “Critical Race Methodology.” I believe that true multicultural education aims to disrupt the status quo and empower students of color by legitimizing their experiences. I believe that teachers have a responsibility to engage their students in age-appropriate discussions of race, class, gender and ethnic discrimination as well as hegemony. In conjunction with these discussions, I believe that students need to see themselves represented with beauty, grace and dignity in curricular materials. They should experience joy on a daily basis and feel empowered to skillfully navigate a system that works against them. I believe the right texts can serve as a spring-board for these conversations.

I consider myself an advocate. I advocate for anti-racist practice in education. I also consider myself a life-long learner and listener. I vow to always return to the perspectives of those marginalized when I feel most comfortable warming up to my privilege. I recognize that I will never have a complete understanding of the African American experience as a result of my race and privilege. Because of this, I will never claim true expertise in my field. Truthfully, I believe that once a member of the dominant group considers themselves “expert” in systematic, racial oppression, they lose the humility necessary for this work. I hope to continue following this path with an open mind. For now, I will keep listening, learning and advocating in the best way I know how.
A Note About a Qualitative Research Paradigm

Ely (1991) opens the book, *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles Within Circles*, by discussing the plethora of labels currently used to describe qualitative methods. Terms like *naturalistic inquiry*, *ethnographic methodologies*, *qualitative research* and *interpretive research* almost interchangeably describe the umbrella under which a researcher more clearly defines his or her precise methods (Ely, 1991). Unlike the positivist paradigm of quantitative research, which requires an exact methodology for the purpose of validity, “social science is a terminological jungle where labels compete, and no single label has been able to command the particular domain…Often researchers ‘do it’ without worrying about giving ‘it’ a name” (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p.3). This argument from Lofland and Lofland about the fluidity of labels (1984) makes method selection difficult for young researchers, particularly those who still yearn for “proper” checks and balances in the analysis process. I recognize that the final interpretation of data relies on human capacity, specifically mine, in a qualitative research paradigm and acknowledge the inevitability of subjectivity. I simultaneously take solace in the expertise of Zúñiga et al. (2002), Quaye (2012), Helms (1990), and Lawrence and Tatum (1998) as they birthed and refined such powerful tools for this type of work.
Chapter Four

Blaire

You can see it all over my face, I mean I’m so stressed out. And I debate my future in teaching because I take it all on. I put it on myself. I’m tired and worn out and my stomach hurts. I think it’s because of what we just said. Every decision and lesson and choice I make I feel like It’s going to have a long term effect in some way and I think I’m overstepping and overthinking everything because I’m scared to read or do something because it might go the wrong way. I think as teachers we have so much of an impact. I think you have to be really careful how you present. I guess that’s my overarching… it’s scary. You’re taking on this huge…and some of them will go home and talk about it. And your name is on it. What is my role? They still have parents. I have to remember that. I feel like I have so much weight. (pg. 62)

Blaire enters the room apologizing. She worries about being late (she never is), about the attendance of other participants (not her fault), how she didn’t do her hair that day (it looks great), and for forgetting to bring a pencil (I always have at least ten on the table). I’m not sure how the role emerged, but she felt ultimately responsible when one of her colleagues wouldn’t show up for the earlier meetings. “I called, I’ve texted! She said she was coming!” she looks at her phone nervously and searches for missed calls or messages. I spent a great deal of time in those first few weeks assuring Blaire that it was all going to be okay and that she did not have to worry about anyone else. I was just happy she was there.

Even with the constant stream of anxieties, Blaire is positively delightful. She is bouncy and warm, sweet and caring. She is funny without realizing it and has an infectious laugh. She is almost never at a loss for words, talks a mile a minute and I found myself smiling every time I
needed to set my audio playback to the lowest speed to even have a chance at capturing her in a transcription. Blaire was the first participant to open up and allow herself to be vulnerable at the meetings. Instead of shying away from difficult or emotional topics, she talked right through them. Blaire let the group hear her thinking, the good, the bad and the ugly, one of the most amazing and brave gifts we could have received.

I selected the opening portion of transcript because I think it demonstrates how Blaire feels the weight of the world on her shoulders and it simultaneously shows just how reflective she can be. She wants so much to do right by her students, to put her best foot forward, but she is not always sure what that means. She feels beaten down by the demands of teaching in the current high-stakes testing climate, especially in an urban school. Blaire entered the book club aware of her race, but with many conflicting feelings around racism and privilege.

For the first several weeks of book club, I found it incredibly difficult to confidently place Blaire on Helms’ continuum. A certain “obliviousness” to systemic racism in Blaire’s stories pushed my thinking towards contact, and yet it was clear that Blaire felt comfortable enough to name race. She used words like “white world” and discussed differences between her and her Black and Hispanic students – signs of disintegration or even pseudo-independence. When Blaire spoke about her students’ parents, she blamed them, showed signs of resentment and anger, and dismissed their unique circumstances - characteristics of reintegration. At one point I even wondered if a language of cultural consciousness could be learned and used without the actual raising of consciousness. Or, is victim blaming in reintegration a conscious “strategy to avoid dealing with issues of racism” or an unconscious strategy? Had Blaire previously confronted racism, attempted to share her views with others as suggested by Helms (1990) and now has fear and anger towards people of color as a strategy for maintaining her privilege? I
returned to Lawrence and Tatum (1998) and reminded myself that “an individual may operate from more than one status at a time, and which status predominates may vary with particular situations” (Lawrence & Tatum, 1998 p.3). I ultimately decided in those initial weeks that even though Blaire showed signs of disintegration and reintegration, she still viewed white as “normal,” lacked cultural competency and left herself out of any definition of racism. Blaire came to book club with a contact status. This chapter shows Blaire’s journey in the book club along the white racial identity continuum. She begins in contact with some signs of disintegration and reintegration and then has an emotional turning point in reintegration that allows her to land firmly in disintegration with a new set of eyes. By the sixth week of book club, Blaire shows definite signs of pseudo-independence as she reflects on her role in racism and what it means to have racial privilege.

**Contact with Signs of Disintegration: A Beginning**

Blaire notices her race. She notices the race of her students. She is painfully aware that she is almost always the only white person in her classroom. I use the word painfully here because I truly believe this causes her a great deal of anxiety. She recognizes that her race plays a role in the way she creates a classroom environment, especially in terms of her African American and Hispanic students feeling comfortable being who they are. In fact, the words “comfortable” “safe” and “connected” come up a great deal with Blaire. She came to book club aware, on a very basic level, that her race affords her privileges that her students do not have access to as evidenced in the below piece of transcript. This discussion came from the first session where we talked about Brown Like Me by Noelle Lamperti, a story of an adopted Black child of white parents who finds brown objects in her environment to connect to. Her fellow
participants started the session discussing how they felt the book was silly and not a great example of AACL. Blaire disagrees.

My initial thought is a little different than both of you which is cool I guess because we’re all so different. Maybe I’m a little naïve cause I love children’s books. I initially liked it because I like the connection the child was making to the brown objects in their own world. It made me feel good that they could escape to the brown objects and feel safe. I really want the kids to feel safe with me. Last year and this year I’m going to be the only white one again. Maybe they have their own escapes that I’m not even sure of. It made me feel sad to feel like children are so isolated that they have to try to feel connected to things. Like I don’t have to look at white walls to feel connected. So trying so hard to feel connected was sad. If I put this in my library I feel like my kids would pick it up and come to me and say “wow, I do the same thing as that child.” So I think it might give them opportunities to feel connected so that made me happy. I really liked it because maybe that’s their safe place. It’s so simple. Maybe it doesn’t take me talking to them every day for them to feel safe. Maybe it’s a brown chair. I think it was a neat way of finding things to stay connected in such a white world. (pg. 2)

Human thinking is complicated. Blaire is complicated, and there is much to unpack here. The irony of Blaire’s comment about being the only white person in her room coupled with her fear that her students may be isolated leads me to believe that A) she may have missed the point of the book entirely (the child in the book is surrounded by white people), or B) she may be struggling with feelings of isolation herself and had leanings towards white victimization. This is further complicated by later statements that demonstrate an understanding of her own white privilege like “I don’t have to look at white walls to feel connected” and “a white world.”
Overall though, an acceptance of the book’s narrative reveals a teacher out of touch with her students culturally and a general underestimation of their capabilities. “Maybe it doesn’t take me talking to them every day for them to feel safe. Maybe it’s a brown chair.” Isolating that last piece of text is perhaps unfair, seeing as Blaire frequently thinks out loud and often takes time to arrive at any final conclusions, whereas a different person may have the benefit of editing inside their head before speaking. I find it hard to believe that Blaire genuinely sees a chair as a way for her students to connect racially, but I also feel in this statement her hunger to soak up as many tips as possible for creating that “safe” classroom environment. She begins many of her statements with the word “maybe,” as if asking a question, rather than stating her opinion. She doesn’t feel confident in her thinking, searches for validation and even refers to herself as “naïve.” That self-reflection supports the theory that she has moved away from contact and has entered disintegration. She wants to do and be better for her students, but recognizes she lacks the tools to make that happen. I think one of the most striking things about this passage and perhaps one of the most generalizable, is Blaire’s desire to place a positive spin on the things she finds sad. She wants to wrap up her thoughts in a neat and tidy bow, not unlike the compulsory tidy endings of the majority of children’s books. But in the meat of what she says is nothing but mess and a failure to problematize the narrative in the book.

**Contact with Signs of Reintegration: Blaming Parents through a Dominant Paradigm**

Blaire spoke passionately and confidently over the course of the ten weeks about the parents of her students. And, unlike other topics she encountered, she tended not to waver in her feelings on this issue. In general, Blaire does not view Black parents as an asset to their children’s education. If anything, she views Black parents as an impediment to student success. When Blaire spoke about parents, she made sweeping blanket statements filled with stereotypes
and attacks, all under the umbrella of what is “best” for students. This issue has two layers that must be probed. First, there is the more global issue of judging parents without being a parent. This is especially problematic in schools like Hunters with high teacher turnover and a majority young staff. This judgment of “good parenting” is further complicated when the foundation for the judgments is based on white, dominant norms. Blaire’s failure to see how her comments come from a dominant paradigm demonstrates her contact status. I included signs of reintegration as well, due to her resentment of Black parents and obvious victim blaming. In the conversation below, Blaire and Joyce discuss Kevin and his Dad by Irene Smalls, the story of a Black boy and his father who spend a day of quality time together. The two discuss what they believe are their students’ experiences with their own parents. I recognize that Joyce plays a significant role in making meaning here and I will address this in her chapter.

B: I mean it was very cute with the chores and the togetherness.

J: I mean a lot of kids don’t have these role models at home to do these everyday chores with.

B: You’re right. I did think about that in terms of a role model that is actually positive.

J: And now I want to talk about how they make it a game…more of a game than work.

B: And also taking responsibility. Not being so connected to these Ipads and Ipods and video games. It’s really all they talk about. Knowing that it can be fun and silly doing chores with a great figure… but needing to have that. Even today I felt like I was waking parents up on the phone, so they (students) might look at this and say “oh I didn’t know chores could be that fun!” especially if they don’t have someone to do them with (p. 9).
Twice in this conversation Blaire talks about the need for a positive Black role model in her students’ lives and is surprised by the father in the book that is “actually positive.” She mentions “waking parents up on the phone” when she calls student’s homes, offering an example of their laziness and lack of involvement with their children. Blaire rarely offers a counter example to this behavior and when she does, it fits a particular mold. We’ll see characteristics of Blaire’s “good parent” mold later on in this section. Also, Blaire never troubles her own assumptions by considering other alternatives to the lazy, uninvolved narrative. Considerations for a parent’s alternate work schedule never come into play.

Blaire generalized in her discussion of parents as a singular group, but also made stereotypical statements about racial subgroups of parents. In this next conversation, Blaire and Rebecca discuss the differences they see between Black and Hispanic parents.

B: I’m also thinking why do the English language learners, like my Hispanic parents, fall all over you, like LOVE me and then the other ones (Black parents) are like (makes suspicious face). I mean the Hispanic parents, I have taken the babies out of their hands. I mean I feel so comfortable. I feel so appreciated by them.

R: It’s true they trust that you are going to do right by their children.

B: Yeah and this one (in reference to one specific Black parent) didn’t trust at all. Which is fine, but… I mean do you guys feel like the English language parents… I mean I feel like they’ve always been so.. I mean noticeably…just so thankful.

R: Yeah I mean one of my little boys, the mom had him bring in roses for all the teachers on Valentines day.
B: I think they are all so appreciative because they’ve come from a different place. I mean I hate to compare, but I mean you (still talking about a specific Black parent) wouldn’t even give me a chance and here are these other ones falling all over me. But I guess that’s what teaching is…trying to make them feel comfortable (p. 6, 7).

We could start analyzing this conversation with the large issue of making sweeping generalizations about racial groups. That much is very clear. There are themes of expecting assimilation all over this conversation. But, what interests me more is how Blaire battles the idea of a Black parent being skeptical of her, a white teacher in an almost exclusively Black school. We see more of this idea in the story she tells below.

B: It reminds me of this one student I had at the beginning of the year. I was dressed in a cute outfit and I was smiling and the mom, I guess she didn’t like me, because she was badmouthing me at the gas station. And, my teammate overheard this lady talking about the second grade teacher and was calling me a little white _____. (does not say curse word). Three weeks later we had this award ceremony and she was hugging me and telling me that I had to have her daughter next year and that my daughter loves you and all that. So her perception of me totally changed, but at first glance… I was a little white ______, and that really hurt me. It really bothered me because it set up my whole day. And when the little girl comes in she says she wants me to be her mommy… and I guess this mother feels so threatened. But like I said, we’ve come full circle. I’m going to have her daughter again. We’re good. Nothing went wrong, but it was scary coming into this school system. Thinking I was just going to waltz in there and do my best. I’m sure there were some parents who were like “who is this thing?” (p. 5).
Blaire recognizes that race means something. She is clearly upset by how she feels she was unjustly judged based on her race, yet she can’t seem to turn that around on herself and reflect on how she is unfairly judging this parent based on race as well. If Blaire fails to see racism, she does not see this mother’s suspicion as reasonable and contributes to the perpetuation of the angry Black female stereotype in her narrative. Additionally, by Blaire feeling the need to include that her outfit was “cute” she reveals her view that professionalism and acceptance should be based on dress and her confusion over why she was not accepted by this parent if she was dressed appropriately for her profession. A focus on dress ignores race all together and is also an example of a white dominant values as normal paradigm.

The white savior complex in this particular passage also deserves exploration. She says, “and when the little girl comes in she says she wants me to be her mommy.” There is much to unpack here. Now, I can recall back to my teaching days and remember countless times when my kindergarten and first grade students would refer to me as mommy. For me, this did not translate to them looking for a replacement parent. They would usually run away giggling as if they had just made a fantastic joke. And really, it seemed they just wanted to tell me that they cared for me. So in reality, the fact that Blaire would assume the girl’s mother would feel threatened over this, says much more about her than the mother. Believing herself to be a more suitable candidate for parenthood is the real issue here. Again, being a good parent is defined by a specific set of white, dominant parameters for Blaire, and this next discussion helps to illustrate them.

I was just explaining to a mom, an African American mom, the system to switching classes. And she is always dressed nice and her son is dressed nice. And all I have to do is call and the next day he’s so much better. And this poor kid was falling asleep in class and I found out that he stays up late at night to wait for her to come home from work
instead of going to bed with Grandma. She was so quick to say that it was her fault.

There’s another example. I feel like he’s cared for (p. 12).

To Blaire being a good parent means dressing “nicely” (by dominant, white standards) and making sure your child is also dressed nicely, but more importantly, it’s about admitting that no matter what the issue with a particular child, it’s always the fault of the parent. If you admit fault, you’ve passed the test. It should also be noted that parents learn to navigate the demands of teachers by playing this game and admitting fault, even when they might not agree that their child staying up to see them and hug them is a bad thing. I understand that this idea of parent fault may form in relationship to the many demands placed on teachers and the overwhelming lack of appreciation for the teaching profession in general. But, I would argue that a teacher refusing to take responsibility for student actions does not help to correct this societal lack of respect.

Blaire’s paradigm for values and acceptable behavior are most obvious when she talks about Black parents’ speech. Blaire struggles to see the value in anything outside of Standard English, and considers parent speech one of the leading detriments to her students’ education.

B: And where did they hear it from? Did they hear it at school? Did it come up at home? Some of these words and the way they talk… it’s what they overhear. I’ve heard their parents on the phone outside the classroom, that whole language…that’s what they pick up on. And I don’t want to go over there and tell them to talk differently, of course not, but it’s so hard to teach around what’s already been put in place. I’m worried about seeing them next week (for the first day of school). I haven’t seen them and I’m worried
if they will still be where I left them. It’s a lot of time to make up for. I can’t do all of it (p. 29).

Here Blaire begins by staying in the realm of “the way they talk,” but makes a larger generalization when she says “…it’s so hard to teach around what’s already been put in place.” This statement suggests that it is her job as a teacher to undo damage that has been done by parents, as opposed to supporting their hard work. Blaire’s privilege makes her blind to the dominant value system in place in the school system, one she has always had access to – making it appear “normal,” while any other way of living is cast as simply incorrect.

**Still Contact: The Racism-Free Life of Children**

A common theme that ran through our book club conversations was the perception that children, including the children in Blaire’s classroom, lead a blissfully unaware, carefree life. And, it should be noted that Blaire was not alone in this perception. Joyce and Rebecca readily agreed. This notion of young people being unaffected by harmful things started creeping into our discussions in small ways at first, like Blaire stating that her students had no clue how hard she worked to prepare lessons for them. But, later, the low expectations of what students experience and process became much more about race. The below conversation is from our discussion of *Same Difference* by Calida Rawles, the story of two cousins who grow up liking the same things and soon notice how they differ in appearance.

B: Well they’re cousins, right? Just two cousins who love the same things. And it’s not until the middle that they kind of figure out that maybe they are different, when everything else has been the same. They seem so carefree until they fixate on that one different thing (skin tone, hair).
L: That’s a really interesting point…carefree. So what happens with this difference?

B: It gets them thinking. Maybe it confuses them a little bit. Because everything has been so similar, and it’s scary. They question it. I mean it was so carefree until it turned deep. (Pause) You look at kids… and that’s why I really like teaching because they just don’t, I mean I know they will have worries in their life, but they’re not thinking about everything they have to do in their personal lives. They’re just happy go lucky (makes a “carefree” face). I wonder sometimes, do they know how long these centers took? I think they just walk in and think I just show up and I want to tell them so badly that I stayed until six. But I think they are just so carefree they don’t have a worry (p. 13,14).

Aside from Blaire’s obvious desire to be appreciated for her hard work (which we can perhaps discuss at a later time), I find this idea of things “turning deep” suddenly for children interesting. Blaire makes the assumption in Same Difference that the two girls noticing racial differences was sudden and perplexing. She then relates this concept back to her own students and makes the same type of assumption. She thinks that any hardships they might have in their lives are far away and not to be worried about right now. I would argue that this line of thinking frees her from the responsibility of noticing racism, and certainly her role in perpetuating it. We see this line of thinking again when Blaire talks about teaching Black history in her first teaching placement.

I remember teaching the “whites only” signs in my old school of diverse kids and they were shocked. They were like (gasps). I said, “look at you sitting next to so and so, this wasn’t allowed guys.” And they ask if their school was like this. It’s hard for them to grasp. They were really shocked when I showed them the pictures on the Smartboard of
the “whites only” signs on the restrooms and restaurants. I think it’s still hard for the kids to understand. They also really don’t understand the time line of it all. (21)

I need to admit here that it has always been difficult for me to accept that students are shocked by segregation. In truth, American schools are still largely racially segregated. The Civil Rights Project at UCLA reported that “In 2011, only 23 percent of black students attended a majority white school -- the same percentage as in 1968” (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). So, is this a socially conditioned, colorblind response or are students actually surprised when they read stories about historical oppression that looks literally identical to their current reality? It is not my job to rewrite Blaire’s experience in the classroom or her interpretation that her students were shocked by historical racism. I was not there. Instead I need to think about the societal context influencing Blaire. If the perception is that students don’t experience racism, the students that Blaire cares deeply about, then it is easier to deny modern racism’s existence. By modern racism, I mean the subtle oppressive practices that do not fall into the category of hate crime. If there is no racism, then Blaire does not need to confront her contribution to it. She gets to keep the privileges her race affords her with none of the guilt.

It was difficult for me to find the perfect place to discuss the next segment of transcript. In a way, it follows the same theme of Blaire seeing her students as carefree, but in another way it is more about her low expectations of them. We had just finished reading Smoky Night by Eve Bunting and David Diaz, the story of a little Black boy and his mother who experience the L.A. Riots of 1992. The group unanimously disliked the book, and even Blaire threw around the words “confusing” and “problematic” – a language of cultural consciousness. After the groups’ negative depiction of the book, it surprised me when Blaire announced that she would never use
it as a read-aloud, but would keep it in her classroom library for students to read independently if they wished. I decided to ask a clarifying question to probe her thinking.

B: I feel like I will put it in my classroom library and they can look at it if they want…A lot of times I don’t even get to visit with them when they’re reading.

L: Hmm.. you wouldn’t read it because you don’t like it, but you would let them read it?

B: Yeah because I don’t want to draw attention to it, but I wouldn’t stop them from looking at it. Like when they’re independently reading, I’m not really that concerned with what the message is. I don’t think a kid would ever come to me and say, “can we talk about this?” But I think any nice literature that has a medal… It’s clean. It’s free (p. 44).

The idea that Blaire’s students would only pick up on racist messages in a text if she herself led a discussion is very telling and speaks to her low expectations of them as well as her experience as a white child, never having to pick up on racist narratives in stories. She does not believe them capable of this type of critical thinking. When Blaire explained, “‘I don’t think a kid would ever come to me and say, “can we talk about this?”’ I actually couldn’t agree with her more. I do not think a child would leave their independent reading spot to approach a teacher who is clearly busy with other things. But this is so much worse, because instead of asking a teacher to engage in a dialogue about something the student finds upsetting, the student is forced to read this book and simply accept it as “truth.” The message is never troubled and students may come to associate the message as endorsed by their teacher just because he/she put it in the library for consumption.

I found the last few sentences of Blaire’s statement particularly painful. “But I think any nice literature that has a medal…It’s clean. It’s free.” It is important to keep in mind that this
statement came after an extensive conversation about *Smoky Night’s* problems. Rebecca had even suggested that the almost exclusively white Caldecott committee may have had a great deal to do with the book’s medal honor. Despite this conversation, Blaire sticks with what has been ingrained since she first started enjoying children’s books at a very young age— if it has a medal, it must be good.

**Still Contact: The Way to Teach Race – Keep it “Light”**

In the first few weeks of the book club Blaire was able to engage in the group discussion by sharing the ways she had previously navigated the subject of race in her classroom. She knew race could not be avoided altogether, especially during Black history month and on those rare days when the state standards include an African American historical figure in the list of “important Americans.” Blaire, like many other white teachers, approached race by talking about modern day equality. During our discussion of *Same Difference* by Calida Rawles, Blaire was very appreciative of the books’ “light” tone.

> B: She talks about clothing and hairdos and color and texture. She keeps it light at least. Like it’s not a deep, deep conversation. I don’t know. Again, she says “no one is better and no one is first” just like we try to tell the kids (p. 15).

Although *Same Difference* takes one step past colorblindness and notices how the girls are unique, the message in the end is still neat and tidy. This works well for Blaire who would prefer to keep the classroom conversation in a comfortable place.

**Signs of Reintegration: An Emotional Turning Point**

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, Blaire remained largely in Contact status with some signs of disintegration and reintegration for the first three weeks of the book club. In
those initial weeks, Blaire was much more likely to deny the existence of Racism and would gently push back when the content of the books pointed at current systemic racism that did not fit neatly into her framework for equality. At the end of the third session, Blaire gave the group a powerful gift. She broke through the “culture of politeness” and demonstrated frustration and anger. In the below piece of transcript Blaire is talking about the two cousins in Same Difference, but it was obvious to the group that her statement was larger than the book in front of her.

B: And does it really matter? Are there any hardships? What did it matter that they’re different? It didn’t stop them from making their choices and decisions. I mean really, (to the group) what does it matter? I mean, it’s (racism) still so…THERE…obviously, but I mean they’re fine. After they have a little conversation about it, they’re fine, right? (p. 16).

Blaire’s move from the girls in the book to a larger comment about African Americans is evidenced in the phrase, “It didn’t stop them from making their choices and decisions.” This statement simply doesn’t make sense within the context of the book. Blaire is blaming African Americans and spouting meritocratic ideals. What I find most interesting about this statement is despite the blatant meritocratic tone, she is simultaneously admitting the existence of modern day racism when she says, “it’s still so...there...obviously.” I suppose this goes back to what Blaire’s definition of racism really is and as long as it does not define her actions as problematic, she feels okay. Blaire argues that whatever differences there are between Black people and white people, should not stop them from making their own decisions. Here, once again, Blaire is blameless. It could be argued that this is yet another example of contact. What convinces me otherwise is the level of emotion behind her comment. As Zˇuˇniga et al. (2002) offer, strong emotion is a sign of confronting something that carries power and weighty meaning for the
speaker. Helms (1990) and Lawrence and Tatum (1998) argue that this level of victim blaming is a strategy to maintain the status quo after the recognition of systemic racism. The conversation in session three was controversial and everyone was feeling uncomfortable. It was in this moment that I felt there was a shift in the room. Blaire expressed what she really felt and had not tried to tie it up in a bow to save face.

**Firmly Disintegration: “I’m Sitting up There White”**

One of the most powerful experiences I got to have as a researcher and human being over the course of the ten weeks was witnessing Blaire talk about her whiteness. As the weeks unfolded, real fears associated with race started coming out. Just naming her race confidently and admitting that being a white teacher in an almost exclusively Black classroom carries weight, was an amazing breakthrough. Although I believe Blaire has held Disintegration status before, she seemed to “re-enter” the stage with new insights.

B: I guess it’s scary because you never know how the kids are going to lash back at you. Like they would say, “how do you know?” I’m sitting up there white with all these African American children and maybe it doesn’t seem like I know anything, or that I’m coming from the right place. “How can you say that? You don’t know” (imitating potential children). That’s kind of scary. I just keep thinking of this girl you mentioned (a white student teacher). What if they don’t take her answer as valid because she doesn’t look like them? (28).

In this passage Blaire expresses a very real fear that so many white teachers have. Who are they to try to talk about the Black experience, historical or current, as a white person with racial privilege? Blaire talks about this feeling in terms of authenticity.
B: It’s just that when I teach about it I don’t feel as authentic. I think it’s the same thing. I do get nervous…do I look silly because I’m this white face? “Who’s she?” (Imitating students) (p. 45).

Once Blaire started speaking openly about her fears as a white teacher, her reflections appeared more and more insightful. After reading Chocolate Me by Taye Diggs and Shane Evans, a book that has multiple pages of white children making fun of a Black child, Blaire made this statement to the group: “It’s so hard for that to come out of your mouth. Even though you’re reading from a book, it’s still coming out of your mouth” (61). I remember the stone cold silence that fell over us after she said it. Blaire felt a tremendous responsibility as a teacher of Black children and the thought of reading those racist insults as a white person to her Black students was almost too much for her. Indeed, race carries much weight.

A Positive Stay in Pseudo-independence: Reflection and Recognizing Privilege

Pseudo-Independence has always been a difficult stage for me to grasp. Helms (1990) defines the stage differently from Lawrence and Tatum (1998), describing this status as a sort of expected regression, where a person might point out white victimization as counter examples to racism. Lawrence and Tatum (1998) on the other hand, think that pseudo-independence is a beginning in accepting one’s role in racism, and a time to reexamine the privilege originally explored in disintegration. Blaire’s depth of reflection seemed to increase over the course of the ten weeks and her ability to express empathy increased. She became more critical of white villains in our books and the authors’ and illustrators’ decisions of representation. The piece of transcript below is taken from our session on Chocolate Me by Taye Diggs.

B: It’s not a dark book. The illustrations don’t match the darker issue I guess. It’s so bright and airy and fun and easy on the eye, but the deeper issue is the whole not
accepting someone. See how bright and pastel everything is. It makes it feel light and happy. I don’t know. Like when he’s getting humiliated, it’s not a dark background. It’s the brightest color you could have picked. So they aren’t illustrating it close enough to the issue (p. 61).

Her previous desire for a light tone and compulsory happy ending did not make sense with Chocolate Me and she confronted that idea with the group. Here she found the forced light tone offensive and not “close enough to the issue.” She talked about the child’s “humiliation” and how the illustrations were too bright and pastel.

Blaire made several tremendous leaps that demonstrated reflection. Despite her initial push back on the idea of modern day racism, by the end of the book club she was beginning to talk about race and identity in a more complex way that assumed it’s weighty meaning. The following thoughts came from our discussion of All us Come Cross the Water by Clifton and Steptoe, a story of a young Black boy searching for answers about his heritage and identity.

B: As far as you go back, you’re always going to be a slave or be connected to that. Maybe you come with a more American name and you say you’re from Georgia and you’re not really sure where you fit because you were taken away as a slave and all that identity stuff… because you aren’t sure where you came from (p. 65).

This example was specific to the context of the book we were reading, but Blaire’s comment opened up the idea that Black identity is not straight forward and comes with a great deal of history. She’s not making a specific point because she feels unsure about the topic. Instead she’s thinking out loud about the historical reverberations that have impacted African Americans centuries later and that in itself is a huge step.
During that same session on *All us Come Cross the Water*, Blaire began to admit some of the small ways that she has contributed to racial oppression in the classroom. This particular story was about the pronunciation of a student’s name, something I think many teachers can relate to.

B: I had a student last year and it turned out that I was saying her last name as her first name and she said that was okay and then she told somebody else that it was different. She was from Haiti and I felt like she didn’t even...she wanted to use her real given name, but knew that I, as a white teacher, would just say it how I wanted. I just keep thinking that you need to ask the kids “how do you want me to say your name?” and “am I saying it right?” because she just kept letting me say it however I wanted and she knew darn well that I wasn’t saying it right and I was saying it in my white…(falls silent) (p. 65).

Blaire describes how her race and privilege played out for this student and she carries tremendous guilt over it, another strong sign of *pseudo-independence*. She knows she did not take the time to learn and use the child’s first name from the beginning and she also sees how whiteness may be the reason that the student never corrected her. “She knew that I, as a white teacher, would just say it how I wanted.” Blaire is thinking about her position in the classroom as one of power and she knows she has the ability to make a mark on this child’s identity and sense of self worth.

**Closing Thoughts on Blaire’s Racial Identity Journey**

By the end of our time together in book club it was interesting how everyone’s comments started sounding more summative. Something about the impending last session that turned
comments into words of advice for the future. Blaire’s comment below sounds almost as if she’s giving herself some advice that she wished she’d had before.

I just think you need to watch how you’re perceived. You are their role model. I don’t know… think carefully but also let yourself be free to make mistakes and show them non-examples. Mess up. Don’t always follow the schedule so tightly. Let them talk the way they want. Let them write the way they want. Yes, there is a lot of pressure on you, but what matters in the end? Don’t brush things off because it makes you feel uncomfortable. Get on their level and be real… I need to let go sometimes (p. 74).

Blaire left the group with an excellent piece of advice, “don’t brush things off because it makes you feel uncomfortable.” After all, Blaire’s re-arrival in disintegration and eventual shift to pseudo-independence, came after her highly emotional stay in reintegration. Feeling supremely uncomfortable was a turning point for Blaire and valuable experience for the rest of us. Blaire managed to lift the “culture of politeness” from the room and opened up space for truth-telling.

It seems very unfair to suggest that this short chapter adequately captures Blaire’s racial identity journey. It was a short ten weeks in what is hopefully a lifetime of consciousness-raising. What I found in Blaire is an amazing capacity for reflection and hard work, a teacher who comes in early and always stays late, a woman who cares deeply for the students in her class, despite her self-proclaimed “naivety.” When I first started exploring this work six years ago, it was easy to assume that a person’s inherent goodness and their ability to recognize their unearned privileges were synonymous. Blaire has so much goodness. She is a product of the world she lives in and as such is afforded many privileges due to her race and economic status
that she is just beginning to explore. I hope that this conversation will continue for her, that she will take her own advice, and embrace the things that make her uncomfortable.
Chapter Five

Rebecca

I feel like people get judged as if they’re bad just because of the color of their skin. It doesn’t even take talking with someone and they’re already being judged. I remember last summer I had just bought a new car and I was walking from the mall to the parking lot and there was this Black guy standing near my car and it was strange, but my first thought was actually, I wonder if someone hit my car and he’s waiting to tell me, but then he looked at me quickly and said “oh don’t worry I wasn’t doing anything” and backed away from the car. I felt so terrible. Like how many times has a white person assumed that he was bad just because he’s Black? Like he must have been doing something awful with my car. It’s awful. I still feel bad about that (p. 35).

Rebecca walks into book club each week with a nervous smile and flushed cheeks. She pushes her long brown hair away from her face and takes a quiet seat at the table without saying too much. She almost never eats the snacks (lots of allergies) and immediately pulls out her book to review before we begin. I found myself watching Rebecca’s expressions a great deal during our ten weeks together, which often held clues to the thinking she was too reluctant to share out loud. All of her comments were accompanied with short bursts of nervous laughter, no matter how profound the statement. On a good day, asking the right question got her talking. When Rebecca did share, she almost always had a very pointed remark that she’d no doubt been stewing on, that was surrounded by linguistic stumbling. I often wondered if Rebecca was dealing with some of the same challenges I was during our book club meetings. How do I respond to what was just said? Do I agree with it or not? Does that even matter? Maybe, I should just let silence handle this one.
As mentioned in chapter three, Rebecca was in the process of transitioning to a new school when our book club started. She had been teaching at Hunters Elementary for two years, but had applied for and accepted a position at Willis Elementary outside of the city. Rebecca clearly carried guilt about her career move from Hunters Elementary to Willis Elementary. She felt as if she’d abandoned the students and teachers at Hunter’s, leaving them for a “cushier” job out of the city. And, here were two teachers in front of her that were about to start another year at Hunters, a weekly reminder of her decision to leave. This dynamic undoubtedly impacted Rebecca’s willingness to share, and perhaps Blaire and Joyce’s ability to listen.

Rebecca entered the book club with a pseudo-independent status. Throughout the ten weeks she made powerful jumps up to immersion and also backslid to reintegration. With rare exception, Rebecca notices racism, sees it as both historical and current, and knows that she is afforded privileges as a white person in society. She also feels a deep sense of guilt about that privilege and wishes she was not part of the problem. In an attempt to wish away her involvement, she slips in and out of putting racist acts on other white people, excluding herself from the equation. The opening piece of transcript is a prime example. When Rebecca tells the story of the man in the parking lot, she acknowledges the unfair assumption that white people would have about this Black man and feels the injustice of that stereotype passionately, but she also feels the need to explain that she herself was not thinking racist thoughts. Instead she tells us she was thinking, “I wonder if someone hit my car and he’s waiting to tell me.” That narrative fits nicely with the “good white” persona and perfectly aligns with the description of pseudo-independence. In several of Blaire’s stories I had to acknowledge that it is not my job to rewrite history and I must do the same here. It is entirely possible that Rebecca never felt a racist impulse towards the man in front of her car, and I may be doing harm to suggest otherwise. But,
with that being said, I want to offer that for a white person to truly understand subtle, systemic racism they would need to reflect on the times in their lives when they themselves (willingly or unwillingly) perpetuated it. Rebecca consistently demonstrates her desire to advocate for people who experience racial oppression, but she inconsistently acknowledges her role in it. This inconsistency may be only outward, with a careful deletion of involvement in many stories for the sake of the listener. I believe this is worth noting because as a researcher, I can only work with the words I am given, but have a responsibility to consider the depth of possible understanding that could give way to those words and not simply offer a surface level analysis of shared discourse.

This chapter shows Rebecca’s journey along the white racial identity continuum during our ten-week book club. Unlike Blaire, Rebecca’s jumps were small and quick with a consistent return to pseudo-independence, especially over the first six weeks. Rebecca began her exploration of racial identity long before this book club, and entered with a great deal more cultural consciousness than Blaire or Joyce. That being said, I worried constantly that the book club was not making “the match” for Rebecca, that it never offered her the correct opportunity for pushing her thinking forward. It wasn’t until we read *This is the Dream*, by Shore, Alexander and Ransome, a book that explores the Jim Crow Era and Civil Rights Movement, that I saw Rebecca challenged. After that, her stays in immersion were longer and more passionate. Selfishly, I was so thrilled to have Rebecca in the book club. She played a valuable role in combatting the problematic comments of her colleagues, and I was extremely grateful when she shared her thoughts with us.
Signs of Immersion: Can White People Ever Understand?

One of the most powerful stances Rebecca brought to our group was the idea that white people can never truly understand the experience of racism. An idea that I believe was very new to Blaire and Joyce. In the discussion below, surrounding Brown Like Me by Noelle Lamperti, Rebecca questions the white mother’s cultural competency in writing this text for her Black child.

R: Yeah. I almost felt like there was something here about why this lady wrote this. Where was it? Oh I guess it’s this thing (points to the opening dedication page). I think she did it to support her child and celebrate who they are, but at the same time I kind of wondered if it was written out of a little bit of ignorance too…if that makes sense?

L: I’d love to hear more of what you’re thinking.

R: I don’t know. I mean if she’s white and her child… I didn’t know if she had adopted many Black children or, I don’t know, like I, as a white person, will never know how it is to live as a Black person and that’s just how it is. We won’t…we might be able to teach where there is a high Black population, but there are still lots of things that go on that you would think with history and all that we’ve been through, laws that have been passed… Even when I was at Hunters Elementary there were some major fights over the color of skin. Some of them (Black students) were really proud of their skin color and others were really insecure about it (p. 2).

The realization that white people will “never know how it is to live as a Black person” places Rebecca out of Pseudo-independence and into Immersion. Rebecca believes that racism is still very much alive in our schools today and demonstrates that belief when she says, “there are still
lots of things that go on that you would think with history and all that we’ve been through, laws that have been passed…” (p. 2). She then goes on to offer the example of fights over skin color and her perception of Black students’ self-concept in relation to their race. I also found it interesting that Rebecca argued against the idea of racism as a thing of history by adding the statement about “all we’ve been through” and “laws that have been passed” (p. 2). This statement seems to purposefully make a preemptive strike on the opinions of her two colleagues who felt much more comfortable with an historical narrative of racism.

I want to mention here that I did consider whether or not this initial conversation was evidence of autonomy. And, I believe that had it existed in isolation, it really could be. However, it took analyzing all of Rebecca’s transcript to see pseudo-independence as her dominant status and that made me re-contextualize what autonomy truly represents. Both Helms (1990) and Lawrence and Tatum (1998) remind us of the fluidity of the continuum, but they also suggest that once you move towards autonomy you are less likely to slip significantly backwards. It did not make sense to see Rebecca jumping from autonomy to pseudo-independence so easily. For that reason, placing her at immersion during this conversation felt appropriate.

**Pseudo-independence with Signs of Reintegration: Reflections on Race at Hunters**

Rebecca tells several stories in which she is “in” with Black people, especially Black teachers in her previous school – a sign of pseudo-independence, but her narratives are also filled with problematic stereotypes of the Black community -much more reminiscent of reintegration. In the story below, Rebecca describes the racist behaviors of one of her former white students, whom she shared with a Black teacher, Ms. Dustin in a departmentalized setting at Hunters.

I was just thinking that I had…well he wasn’t there at the beginning of the year, but I had one white kid, and he actually…I mean I love Ms. Dustin (pseudonym). She told me she
was my Black mama and she really was. We rotated and so he had her for Virginia studies and science and as far as I understood he did not like her and I was trying to think if I met his parents because I feel like the way he acted, I’m guessing his parents didn’t like Black people even though they moved into one of the roughest neighborhoods with all Black people. And I wasn’t in the room when this happened but there was some kind of altercation and the little boy said “and this is why I don’t like Black people!” and he was the only white kid in the room! I mean he’s gonna get jumped when he walks out into the neighborhood saying something like that! I was like are you trying to get yourself killed? It was so weird to have this little fourth grader and he has obvious hatred building up towards Black people and he’s in fourth grade! It’s really sad, because he has this wonderful teacher (Ms. Dustin) and she happens to be Black and he has shut her out. She’d have to kick him out of class sometimes (p. 6).

When Rebecca told this story, she was responding to a conversation about whether or not children are exposed to racism or are victims of racism. As previously explored, Blaire saw her students as carefree and oblivious to racial oppression. Rebecca intended to provide a counter-narrative with this story, but in doing so maintained the pervasive belief that Black people are violent and dangerous. This is evidenced with phrases like “roughest neighborhoods with all Black people,” “he’s gonna get jumped,” and “are you trying to get yourself killed?” (p. 6). Additionally, Rebecca included language that would suggest she sees race as separate from personhood, one step removed from colorblindness. “…he has this wonderful teacher and she happens to be Black…” (p. 6). Rebecca excuses her colleague of her skin color and implies that we should look past race.
Rebecca also responded to Blaire’s idea of historical racism as “shocking” to students when introducing the concept in school for the first time. Blaire would describe her students as gasping when they saw segregated schools and restaurants. Rebecca disagreed.

L: Do you think your students would have been shocked?

R: No. I don’t think so at all. I mean I know my students really liked history or at least it seemed like they did. And they took great pride in it. They would come from history to math. That’s the feeling I got. They understood that their relatives went through all of this (p. 25).

I recognize that Rebecca omits any description of her current students experiencing racism in this comment and instead simply says that they are not shocked by historical racism, but in conjunction with her previous stories she combats Blaire’s idea that racism is a foreign concept for elementary school students.

_Pseudo-independence with signs of Immersion or Solid Immersion?: Learned Racism Through the Generations_

Once Blaire and Rebecca started openly talking about their whiteness in relation to their students of color, words like “nerve-wracking” came up. The two explored why they felt so nervous talking about race with their students. Blaire had used the word “inauthentic.” Here Rebecca agrees with Blaire, but adds more that leads me to feel conflicted about her status.

L to R: What are you thinking? What makes it so scary? What makes it nerve-wracking?

R: I’m white and I’ll never know exactly what it feels like to be Black and have all of this history. I mean you may have ancestry or distant relatives who aren’t as fond of Black
people. And I don’t want to think that I’m racist but I’m probably connected with somebody who is and that’s kind of weird (p. 27).

As previously discussed, I appreciate how Rebecca takes the stance that she’ll “never know exactly what it feels like to be Black” (p. 27). This stance demonstrates that Rebecca is unlikely to make claims of white victimhood. And, to her credit, she does not. Rebecca never told a story in book club that put her in the position of racism victim – a strong case for immersion.

Additionally, Rebecca offers a theme of racism as passed through the generations of white families for the second time in her narratives. The first time she offers this theme she mentions her white student and his racist parents. Although Rebecca never directly states that she believes she is racist, I must consider how her suggestion of being connected to racism through generations of her family members is her way of claiming it. Is this a strong enough narrative of taking responsibility for systemic racism to satisfy immersion? Her comments seem to come through as fear, a fear that students will think she is a racist, or “connected with somebody who is.” This stance is suggestive of pseudo-independence as according to Helms (1990), but fear may also come from accepting something in yourself – moving towards immersion. When I started Rebecca’s chapter I discussed the limitations of words and outward discourse. This theme captures those limitations well. I do not have a clear answer here, and both options must be considered.

Immersion with Signs of Autonomy: The Pledge of Allegiance

In my analysis of This is the Dream by Shore, Alexander and Ransome, I spend a great deal of time on the last page of the text, which depicts a multi-racial class saying the pledge of allegiance. In the back row of visible students, a Black boy is not pledging. His hand is not on his
heart and he looks upset or disinterested. I suggest that this is Ransome’s counter-narrative to the common compulsory ending. The detail in the illustration is subtle and not mentioned in the text. Truthfully, I did not expect my book club participants to pick up on this subtle detail. To my surprise, Rebecca did and it was very powerful for the group. Below is our conversation.

R: Well he’s not saying the pledge of allegiance.

B: Oh! Yeah.

R: And I’m not sure how he’s feeling.

B: He’s definitely not pledging.

R: This one over here looks really happy and he’s all into it, but he’s (the Black boy) all angry…(long pause) Maybe it signifies that racism is still alive?

B: Cause this is the shift right?

L: Maybe that’s today?

B: It’s interesting that he’s taking that stance and not following the leader. I think my kids do it because I stand up and we just follow the announcements.

R: (To Blaire) Do your students seem into it?

B: Not really.

R: My kids aren’t into it at all. I had to get after some of them to stand up. I don’t know if that’s bad or if I should make them do it. (long pause) Maybe he doesn’t think there is justice for all yet (p. 34).
Staying silent, for better or worse, challenged me daily in this book club. This conversation was no exception. I will discuss this further in my researcher chapter. Here was this incredible moment where Rebecca was willing to think out loud for us. You can almost see her interacting with Ransome’s painting as she talks with Blaire. Earlier in this chapter I admitted that I felt the book club did not make “the match” for Rebecca in terms of pushing her thinking forward. This conversation makes me question that assumption. As she touched the painted children in the illustration and asks Blaire, “do your students seem into it?” her reflection seemed honest and immediate, as opposed to carefully constructed. She questioned her own practice of making her students stand for the pledge and clearly questioned the validity of the pledge for her students. “Maybe he doesn’t think there is justice for all yet” (p. 34).

I see this conversation as an example of immersion because Rebecca starts to consider her role in a controversial practice. “I don’t know if that’s bad or if I should make them do it?” (pg. 34). Unlike the other more glaring acts of racism she describes in book club that make it simple to leave herself out of the equation, here is a daily practice she leads that may have consequences for her students. I would love to know if Rebecca has changed her classroom practice based on this reflection, pushing against school policy, but that is for another day.

Reintegration: Blame the Students

It took five weeks before the elephant in the room was finally discussed – Rebecca’s decision to move to another school. As the three teachers talked about the first week of school and all that needed to get done, Joyce decided to break the ice and ask Rebecca directly how things were going for her. The conversation that ensued was fairly typical for in-service teachers who teach different populations of students. They always want to talk about behavior.

J to R : And how are things going for you?
R: Good. It’s really different (hesitant to share with group).

J: Well of course! (said knowingly)

R: It’s a lot more laid back and I’m so used to the “you do it this way!” kind of mentality. It’s weird. It’s almost like I went to the other extreme…

J: So how’s the clientele compared to us?

R: So on the first day, the teacher down the hall, it was time to go to the bathroom, and she’s like “ok, go to the bathroom” to her students.

J: They all went at once?!

R: Yeah. You know if we (referring Hunters Elementary) did that there would be like five fights. And you know the bathrooms are bigger at this school so you can accommodate more kids but…

J: So did you let yours go all at once?

R: You know the first day I didn’t, but today I was more lenient in letting them go and nobody got hurt, nobody broke out in a fight. You know it’s only the second day of school, I guess some people’s true colors could come out later, but for now it’s ok (p. 49).

Rebecca and Joyce share the shock of a classroom of students going to the bathroom all at once, and I will save my analysis of Joyce for her chapter. For now, I will concentrate on Rebecca. What interests me most is Rebecca’s idea that if students had gone to the bathroom together at Hunter’s “there would be like five fights” (p. 49). But here, at Willis everything is fine. Reading between the lines of this conversation is important. Rebecca does not mention race
and neither does Joyce for that matter, but race is exactly what they are talking about. Hunter’s is almost entirely Black, and Willis is almost entirely white. Rebecca now believes that a classroom of white children can go to the bathroom at the same time without creating problems for her, whereas a classroom of Black children would have “five fights.” To truly understand why this conversation demonstrates *reintegration*, it is necessary to hear how Rebecca explains the difference between the two groups of students.

R: …at the school I’m at now you can let lots of them go to the bathroom at once and it will be ok, but in the city they have already experienced so much in their little lives that they have this pent up aggression. I mean in my class my kids would say stuff like “I hate school!” and then the last day of school comes and they’re balling their eyes out because they are about to lose their structure. They don’t know what’s going to happen this summer and all that (p. 56).

Rebecca blames the Hunters students for the behavior she assumes would occur in the bathroom. Or, she blames the “outside of school” experiences that they students bring with them each day. She describes how all of these experiences lead to “pent up aggression,” another stereotype consistent with her ideas of the violent Black person. The behavior of students of color in schools is a constant topic of conversation and that conversation typically revolves around creating more structure for success. The failure here is not recognizing that if the structure is designed to force students to make a cultural shift to white dominant norms of schooling, we have still missed the point. The routines may be followed, the fights may subside, but the lack of value placed on what students bring with them from home to school continues to shred self-esteem and create anxiety. Victim blaming and stereotyping as a strategy to avoid taking responsibility for racism is consistent with the *reintegration* status. School as one of the
environments that causes these stressful experiences is never mentioned. Rebecca even recalls students saying, “I hate school!” but shrugs it off as students not knowing what is best for them. She supports this conclusion by suggesting that by the end of the year, they’ve come around and are fearful of losing their school structure over the summer – a nod at white saviorhood. Refusing to take ownership of the school as a place of systemic racism places Rebecca firmly in reintegration.

**Immersion with Signs of Autonomy: Towards Being an Advocate**

I could not have predicted just how excellent a tool for consciousness-raising *Chocolate Me*, by Taye Diggs and Shane Evans would be for these teachers. All three participants felt strongly that this book was problematic and voiced their concerns openly. Rebecca was no exception. The dialogue was bursting with passion as Rebecca aimed to protect the Black child in the story from his racist white peers. She notices immediately that the white boys were simply rewarded for their behavior and the Black child has no real closure. Rebecca displays an immersion status as she talks about classrooms of white children who would only learn to reinforce the status quo from *Chocolate Me* – a real nod towards systemic understanding.

R: The only thing I kinda felt at the end…was… she brings out the cupcakes and then goes out and shares them with the white boys and I felt like there wasn’t any closure with the white boys. It’s like, they were poking fun at him the whole time and ate his cupcakes. Is that done on purpose and that’s something he (Taye Diggs) deals with as an adult? He sees his child dealing with it maybe? I just felt like there was no closure for me. I mean it definitely represented it well, as far as what African Americans go through
with being made fun of but I just… if you read this to a classroom full of white kids are they gonna get it?

L: Keep going…

R: Well it’s like…they were picking on him the whole time and there were no consequences or closure.

J: And he didn’t retaliate. He thought about it. But then mom brought him back to the realization.

R: I was like what about the white boys?! They get cupcakes at the end?! Well his mom cheered him up, and then he had cupcakes. What could happen tomorrow? It’s gonna happen all over again! That’s how I felt! It’s horrible!

J: It’s almost like the mom is trying to buy them.

R: I mean it’s a very good representation but the end really bothered me. I really don’t know…except for…maybe the really insightful, or empathetic white children are gonna think that was really mean, but are all the kids gonna think about that? That was my only major problem with this book which is a major problem. It was so good, but at the end it’s just (holds hands up in frustration) (p. 59, 60).

Rebecca appreciated how the author represented what some Black children might experience when teased for their appearance. It is painful, but also truthful, an important element of successful AACL according to Sims (1982) and Lechner (1995). Rebecca did not think the book was too harsh in the beginning and says, “it definitely represented it well, as far as what African Americans go through with being made fun of” (p. 59). It’s important to note here that Black
experience is not monolithic and should not be presented as such. Many Black children go
through life without being teased for their appearance.

She also feels immense frustration that the white boys were rewarded for their racist
comments and feels as if the Black child’s mother only furthered the cycle of hate. “It’s gonna
happen all over again! That’s how I felt! It’s horrible!”(p. 59). Recognizing the hegemonic
function of Chocolate Me seemed to be a turning point for Rebecca. She came to the book club
recognizing that some examples of AAACL were better than others, but she was unaware of just
how blatantly offensive many can be. One week later, Rebecca was reflecting on her own lack
of awareness and gave advice to a pretend new teacher.

R: (as if talking to a new teacher) Do you know what’s in those books?!

L: I was that teacher. I thought as long as it looked right on the cover and showed Black
people in the books that I was on the right track.

R: That book from last week, Chocolate Me, I think about a book like that being out
there, and it hurts me. And I think it raised my awareness of what we’re dealing with (p.
74).

In this reflection I hear advocacy, a charge to make a change in her practice, and maybe even in
the practice of her fellow teachers. On the tenth day of the book club, Rebecca held an
immersion status with signs of autonomy. She discussed racism as systemic and felt a charge to
advocate for Black students. She saw how a children’s book could be a reflection of how white
people maintain their power and Black people remain oppressed. She left the room that day as if
she had news to share and work to do.
Closing Thoughts on Rebecca’s White Racial Identity Journey

From the very first book club session it was evident that Rebecca had already started processing the question of what it means to be a white teacher in an almost entirely Black school. Unlike Blaire, she had already moved through the contact and disintegration stages of the continuum, accepting that she had privileges as a white person that her students did not have access to. She could easily name her race and the race of her students, without feeling the need to whisper. She could even point to the ways in which our society currently discriminates against Black people. And, depending on how you view Rebecca’s narrative of family and generations of racism, she may be having difficulty shaking pseudo-independent status because of an unwillingness to boldly name her role in racist practices. Struggling with this concept led me to one of the largest thinking points I gained from this study: must you be a racist to be anti-racist? There will be more on this question in the concluding chapter. In her descriptions of racist acts, she was always an observer and never a perpetrator. When she did get close to the idea that she might be a contributor to racism, it was in the context of knowing someone who was blatantly contributing, like a friend or family member, which again, could be her way of claiming that responsibility. For the first six weeks of the book club, I was sure that I was wasting Rebecca’s time. Of course I was grateful she was there to help ease my discomfort when one of her colleagues said something truly problematic, but that was all selfish. What was this book club doing to challenge her? It wasn’t until Rebecca stopped to analyze the illustration on the last page of This is the Dream that I saw a significant shift in her thinking. She could be the teacher standing at the front of that room, leading the pledge for her students. It was easy to see Rebecca’s discomfort that day as she touched the pages of the book.
It seems too neat and tidy to suggest that there was one defining moment in someone’s journey that lead them on a different path, but if I had to name a moment over the course of this ten weeks, that was certainly Rebecca’s. The signs of *immersion* got stronger after that and her narratives made larger claims about the unacceptability of the status quo. The quiet Rebecca who came to book club, who mostly listened and monitored her speech closely, left with bold opinions and a refueled fire for change. It was a fire that I believe she’s had before, one that fizzled out with the overwhelming daily tasks of a teacher and the comfort of one’s own privilege. If nothing else, this book club served as a necessary check-in for Rebecca, a reminder of why we teach and the vast amount of work yet left to do.
Chapter Six

Joyce

L: So, any more thoughts on how you would explain the hatred in this picture (the Woolworth’s sit in) to students?

J: I’d tell them the way I was told: there are good whites and there are bad whites, just like there are good Blacks and bad Blacks.

L: Can you tell me a little more about that?

J: Well, I think they have to learn that they get to decide who they are going to be. They can choose to be good or bad (p. 35).

Joyce is a full twenty minutes early to book club each week. She sits quietly in the room with me while I prepare snacks. She thumbs through magazines or scholastic catalogs. For the first several sessions, when it was just the two of us in the room and we were waiting for others to arrive, I would keep the conversation away from race. I asked her about her family (not her favorite topic) and about teaching in general. She usually provided single word answers or the occasional short phrase, but always followed by a hearty laugh. This was fairly common for Joyce in the book club sessions as well. It was increasingly apparent by Joyce’s facial expressions and body language that dialogue around race was a new concept for her, despite having worked in an almost entirely Black school for over a decade. Had she formed opinions about race relations in our country? Yes. Was she used to sharing them? No. It took many weeks and lots of listening before Joyce engaged fully in the conversations around race, class and culture.
Although it reads harshly as an introduction to someone, the opening piece of transcript helps to demonstrate the way Joyce views race and the way that view is a thread through much of her narrative. Her views are consistently meritocratic through all ten weeks of our book club and represent the way she has been raised to think about race by her “progressive” parents. To Joyce, racism is relative and she feels lucky to have been brought up by parents who did not preach outward hate. Joyce does not see systemic racism. She believes that all oppression faced by African Americans should be left in the past and that the struggles were and are no different than those faced by other groups. She also defines herself as “non-prejudiced” and frequently points out pieces of text or illustrations that capture the theme of the great American “melting pot.”

Placing Joyce on the continuum was challenging at first. And, similar to Blaire, doing so raised the question of whether or not we need to assume that someone has experienced disintegration to be in reintegration. The two seem dependent on one another. If reintegration is a sort of necessary backslide from the positive experience of disintegration, then I must assume at one time, Joyce experienced disintegration. But the fact is, there is very little evidence of this is Joyce’s transcript. The only quote I have that leads me to believe she has spent time in disintegration came during our fourth week. Joyce explained, “it’s hard when you’re interacting with somebody who is very prejudice. It is hard. And, how they look at you when you’re not prejudice” (27). This quote fits with Helms’ (1990) description of the reason a person may move away from disintegration and into reintegration. Helms (1990) writes, “if the individual has attempted to point out acts of prejudice, he or she may find him or herself isolated from friends and may retreat to old patterns…” Joyce’s quote about how people look at her for her non-prejudice leads me to believe she’s experienced isolation from friends as a result of disintegration. That being said, with this quote from Joyce as the only sign that she has at one
point experienced *disintegration*, I can only say with certainty that Joyce showed signs of both *contact* and *reintegration* during our time together.

I need to admit that my first, stereotypical impulse was to write Joyce off as a woman of a different generation, living in the south, too set in her ways to move along the continuum. I needed to check myself many times over the course of the ten weeks and I continue to check myself now. What a waste it would be to assume that age defines our ability to empathize and reflect. I hope that this experience was a beginning for Joyce, a difficult and uncomfortable beginning. She did a great deal of listening as her younger colleagues explored issues of oppression and privilege with passion and vulnerability. That must carry meaning.

I also feel compelled to note that I recognize, as a younger researcher, that I have not yet experienced life in my fifties and cannot possibly accurately capture that for Joyce. I believe that is an important consideration for the lens through which this research was completed. The remainder of this chapter, like the others before, is a representation of Joyce’s journey on the White Racial Identity Continuum over the course of the ten-week book club. Joyce did not demonstrate significant movement along the continuum over time. She remained in either *contact* or *reintegration* completely, but that does not mean she did not experience growth. Over the course of the ten weeks, Joyce spoke more frequently and with more passion, even when her comments were problematic. She listened intently and praised her colleagues for “thinking deeply.” She moved past a culture of politeness and engaged in difficult conversations – an important beginning to forward momentum.

**Text Analysis as a Crutch: An Important Note**

Joyce loves children’s books. I think it might be her favorite part of teaching first grade and the reason she joined the book club in the first place. She is particularly proud of her African
America Children’s Literature collection. On the third week of book club, she came in carrying a huge stack of AACL picture books from her personal collection. She was so excited to share them with us. There were some amazing texts in the pile – mostly historical narratives. I found it fascinating that Joyce had gone so far as to amass a fairly impressive collection of AACL while simultaneously feeling uncomfortable discussing the themes in the books. It demonstrated her understanding of the need to represent African Americans in text, but stopped there.

Joyce seemed genuinely surprised during those first two meetings when our conversations veered away from surface level text analysis and moved towards larger narratives surrounding race. Frequently she would listen to the thoughts of her colleagues, but then returned to the text and illustrations when she felt a need to participate. Below is a typical example of Joyce’s text analysis.

J: And I felt like I couldn’t really figure out how they’d picked the words to change the size. It was strange. (some of the words are put in a different color and made larger). Like in the middle, the green.

L: So maybe that was a bit more distracting as opposed to helpful? (p. 13).

This behavior occurred so frequently that I felt a need to discuss the downside of using AACL as a tool for consciousness-raising in the concluding chapter.

I also feel compelled to point out that despite Joyce feeling uncomfortable discussing larger narratives of race, class and culture, she returned to be book club week after week, even with my reminders that withdrawing from the study was an option at any time. I must believe that Joyce felt stimulated by the conversations even if she spent a great deal of her time listening.
Signs of Reintegration: Low Expectations and Cultural Stereotyping

In the first several weeks, most of Joyce’s participation revolved around the things her students could not do or would not understand. She spoke in sweeping generalizations about “our kids” and their capabilities. Occasionally, Joyce mentioned individual students performing well academically, but any statement about “our kids” was always negative. Many of her generalizations contained stereotypes of Black people and most demonstrated very low expectations for students, both are signs of reintegration. When reading Brown Like Me, by Noelle Lamperti, Blaire and Rebecca spoke about whether or not they believed their students would relate to the book in terms of looking for brown for a sense of connection. Joyce took the conversation in a more literal direction and commented that her students would not feel connected to the specific images in the text because the main character is in the country, not city. She says, “and our kids would probably never think about goats and dogs and horses. Maybe dogs, but I don’t think they’d think about a motorcycle” (p. 3). Here Joyce assumes that her students have no experience with animals or something as basic as a motorcycle, because of their demographics.

Later in the same session, Joyce interrupts a back and forth between Blaire and Rebecca about the possibility of their students disliking Brown Like Me. Joyce misinterprets the conversation and adds, “right because it doesn’t take much for our kids to get on the defensive” (4). She expressed a common stereotype of the defensive and angry Black person even as a teacher of very young children. Similarly, a week later, when discussing whether or not an example of AACL is good or bad, Joyce offers, “as little as our kids think today, they wouldn’t even know when it’s something good” (p. 73). This low opinion of student capability accompanied by racial stereotyping demonstrates a firm reintegration status.
I also find it interesting that as Joyce makes the broad statements about “our kids” she also takes ownership by using that phrase. Why not “those kids” which would remove her entirely from the equation?” It was strangely reminiscent of the parent who teases her children, but would never allow someone else to do so. I saw love and defensiveness mixed up in a lack of cultural knowledge and low expectations.

**Reintegration: White Victimhood**

Joyce’s narratives of white victimhood also demonstrate *reintegration*. She continuously works to balance out the stories of racism against Black people with an example of the hardships of white people. The examples of white victimhood, though simple at first, grew more passionate over time. With our first book, *Brown Like Me* by Noelle Lamperti, Joyce and Blaire skimmed through the pages and had the following interaction:

B: Maybe when they are looking for brown we’re looking for…

J: White! (p. 3).

The interaction is quick but powerful. Joyce feels the need to interrupt Blaire to offer the white narrative. At first, I almost saw Joyce’s comments of white victimhood as signs of *contact*; a feeling that there really is no racism and we really are all treated equally. I changed my mind over time as Joyce increasingly blamed Black people for their plight in society. Joyce’s comments below helped me see just how problematic her thinking around race is. I want to note here that this conversation was one of the most difficult for me in terms of holding back my opinions. I will discuss that further in my researcher chapter.

J: Well even if you think of all the killings going on right now… like Ferguson. What could they have done to persevere and got through it? What could they have done so that they wouldn’t have been killed?
L: Interesting. Keep going. Can you tell us more about what you’re thinking?

J: Like for the Blacks, no even for whites. Why are they so…like what comes to mind is that I wonder why these white kids are after these Black kids and why do they (Black people) feel they are in so much danger? I wonder if it just builds up. And then society makes a bigger deal out of it than it really is. …..(long pause). I don’t know. That didn’t come out right. I think if you deal with people people to people, versus history what-ifs and the could-haves and what might have been, would it be different? Just like there are good Blacks and whites and there are bad Blacks and whites. So we’re really not any different. We’re the same.

L: Even though whites didn’t experience slavery in the same way or Jim Crow?

J: Yeah because with the Depression whites had their own form of slavery kind of. Well I think they had to physically work hard in order to survive (p. 15).

Equating historic mass oppression like the enslavement of Black people to the Great Depression shows a complicated mix of ignorance and fear. At this point Joyce is simply working too hard to justify her argument that everyone has equal opportunity for success in this country. I will discuss a lack of knowledge as a theme later on in the chapter. Joyce’s victim blaming as evidenced in statements like, “what could they have done so that they wouldn’t have been killed?” aligns with Lawrence and Tatum’s (1998) explanation of reintegration. “Resentful, blaming of the victim may be used as a strategy to avoid dealing with issues of racism” (Lawrence & Tatum, 1998 p.3). To me the word “strategy” seems to imply consciousness. But, conscious racist behavior does not align with the concept of the “good white,” a title Joyce would most certainly give herself. Here in lies the biggest problem of all, Joyce truly does not
see how she contributes to racism. Although blatant from the outside, and highly problematic, Joyce simply speaks her own truths, an unconscious strategy that keeps her firmly in reintegration.

**Reintegration: Parent Blaming and Stereotyping**

A large portion of Joyce’s narratives around parents came from our conversation before book club that fourth week. I asked her about the challenges she was facing at school. I cannot say I was entirely surprised by her answer. It’s the answer I hear most frequently from teachers in general. Joyce believes parents are the biggest challenge in her school. Similar to Blaire, she blames Black parents for student performance and stereotypes them as not caring about education.

L: What would you say is the most challenging thing about teaching at your school?
J: Parents.
L: Really?
J: Yep.
L: What have your experiences been like in that arena?
J: All talk and no action. That’s if you get in touch with them. Like I had one set of parents last year that I didn’t see all year long. They had to work, which I understand, but it seems like at some point during the year you would… and this was a well-rounded child. And their grandmother lived with them, so it’s not like they were by themselves. And she was a very high reader. She could carry on a conversation…very bright, but I just never saw the parents (p. 17).

It took Joyce less than one second to respond to my question. She believes parents are a barrier to her doing her job. Interestingly enough, in her very first example the parents are obviously
fantastic by any white, dominant standard. Joyce herself describes the child as “well-rounded,” “a very high reader” and “very bright.” She also recognizes that the parents need to work and this could be an issue for parent teacher meetings. Perhaps Joyce is stuck in such a cycle of parent blaming that she no longer thinks of parents as an asset at all, even when there are obvious strengths. Her dominant status and view of normal eclipses the possibility that she would benefit from a parent’s perspective.

In a second narrative from the same conversation, Joyce shares about a student who she believes is stealing from the classroom. She blames the mother for this “learned behavior.”

J: And I had one that was a thief. And the mother knew it. And she could look right at me and the girl would have it in her pocket and the mom would swear to you she doesn’t have it. And mom’s like “I know she lies, I know she steals.” But, then I don’t understand why she’s protecting her. And where is she getting it from? That’s a learned behavior from somewhere. I can say that much (p. 17).

It is striking any time I hear a teacher refer to a child with a bold negative description. Joyce calls her first grade student “a thief.” Not a child who once stole, but “a thief.” This language demonstrates a lack of empathy and general distrust of the students in her classroom. It is a clear example of how a Black child gets stereotyped and labeled as bad from a very young age. Joyce’s complete lack of awareness around these racist practices confirm both contact as well as reintegration.

In several narratives Joyce blames parents and Black people in general for not “helping themselves.” This meritocratic views runs consistently through her comments. She also makes
sweeping generalizations about the families on Medicaid and how her tax dollars support them. The below piece of transcript provides an example.

J: I had a family, at the end of the year, one of the kids was getting an award and they walked from Country Cookin’ all the way to our school to make sure they were there for his award assembly. So I said we’re going to get you a ride back. So somebody in the office took them home. People like that you don’t mind helping, but you got to help yourself first. The thing about it is they’re all on Medicaid so it’s not like they have to pay anything. That’s why I pay my taxes is to help them. But you got to get to the appointment! (laughing loud) (p. 18).

The conflicting views in this story are difficult to understand. On the one hand, Joyce describes in detail the lack of resources and opportunity this family has to “help themselves” as well as the overwhelming desire they had for supporting their child, as evidenced by the description of them walking long distances to attend an award ceremony. But, on the other hand, none of those details stop Joyce from taking a meritocratic stance. She still expects them to grab their boot straps. To me, this may be that hint of disintegration that then gets promptly shoved away for fear of needing to accept systemic racism. Because of Joyce’s obvious parent blaming in all of the above narratives, I see her in reintegration.

Lack of Historical and Cultural Knowledge: A Barrier to Growth

Teachers should have foundational knowledge of history and culture. One element of the book club experience I found particularly stunning was the general lack of historical and cultural knowledge of participants. And, I did consider titling this section “ignorance.” I’ve debated this title with several race scholars and still feel conflicted. On the one hand, I completely respect the argument that the phrase “lack of knowledge” excuses participants from getting information that
is readily available to them and fundamental to their job. You cannot teach content without content knowledge. Not to mention the powerful position that too much of the race conversation in our country revolves around the feelings of white people. Should I not include the word ignorance because I want to avoid hurt feelings? I eventually decided that using the word “ignorance” although tempting, simply places all blame on teachers the way they place blame on students and parents. At what point in their schooling were they given access to accurate historical content? The problem is institutional and should not fall solely on the shoulders of teachers to rectify. That being said, I found it difficult to separate out Joyce’s general “lack of knowledge” with an apathetic view towards the importance of students’ identities. In the below piece of transcript, Joyce talks about helping one of her students “from Africa somewhere.”

J: … One year I had a little boy that needed glasses. Couldn’t see thunder. And they were from some other nationality. Africa somewhere…one of those African tribes. And mom says she’s lost his Medicaid card. And I said well then get another one! (laughing) I said, “I can’t do that.” She said she didn’t have one either and I said, “get yourself one too.” So we did end up getting him glasses. It helped a lot…(p. 19, 20).

The purpose of Joyce’s story is to show how she has helped to support the students in her class. Unfortunately, it also demonstrates her failure and overall lack of desire to learn about her student’s ethnicity and culture. Joyce throws off the phrase “one of those African tribes” as if it is an unimportant detail and simultaneously displays a huge gap in knowledge around geography and culture. Failing to note which country her student immigrated from and her assumption that he is a member of an “African tribe” can be considered a stereotype associated with primitiveness.
As mentioned before, it was not cultural knowledge alone that compelled me to discuss a lack of knowledge as a theme for Joyce, but also a lack of historical knowledge. If there were a defense of this lack of knowledge from a curricular standpoint it would be that the first grade Standards of Learning for social science as dictated by the state do not include any Black historical figures. However, Martin Luther King Jr. is a part of the social science standards for Kindergarten. I conclude from this that a first grade teacher must have the historical knowledge to build on the kindergarten standards and support students for future learning. Not to mention the necessity of accurate historical knowledge as the foundation for socio-cultural awareness.

The below piece of transcript came from our discussion of *This is the Dream* by Shore, Alexander and Ransome.

J: Sorry I’m terrible at this stuff but who was Jim Crow? I don’t know him. (points to picture where a black picketer is holding a sign that reads “Jim Crow”).

B: Me too! I’m terrible with history!

L: Jim Crow was the short hand name for the laws that kept things segregated. “Separate but equal.”

J: Oh ok, right (p. 35).

In retrospect, I could have used this opportunity to provide more information about Blackface and the Jim Crow minstrel character, but I recognized that Joyce was not asking about the origin of the term Jim Crow. She was not sure what Jim Crow meant at all. I realized that I had a made an assumption about the foundational historical knowledge my participants would have coming into the book club that would allow for deeper engagement in these conversations. Without the basic understanding of the historic oppression of Black people, I see little room for the
understanding of modern day systemic racism. This oversight will be discussed in the last chapter of this dissertation.

**Contact: Let’s all get Along**

Although *contact* is typically defined by “colorblindness,” I argue that Joyce’s desire to discuss the ways in which we are all the same, and avoid naming difference demonstrates a low-level status. Joyce admits to seeing race, but she prefers the picture of cultural and racial diversity in which all the children of the world are holding hands. Typically, Joyce praises authors and illustrators that paint this picture and highlight sameness over difference. When discussing *Same Difference*, by Calida Rawles, Joyce offers how much she likes that the author brought out “the positive.” She says, “and she (the author) brings out how they’re alike before she gets into the differences. She brings out the positive, I guess” (p. 15). The idea that difference is equal to negative and sameness to positive highlights Joyce’s vision of paper-doll multiculturalism. Similarly, Joyce interpreted this sense of multiculturalism in *Smoky Night*, by Bunting and Diaz. She said, “and on this page it’s got all your different pieces of cereal. I thought that was really interesting because that could be all of your Black and white. It could be all of your different nationalities” (39). Indeed, Joyce likes the vision of all cultures coming together for common good, but has normalized the values of white, dominant culture as the definition of that common good.

Several times over the course of ten weeks, Joyce used the term “melting pot” as a positive descriptor of the country. Joyce even saw this message of the “melting pot” when an illustration from *Martin’s Big Words*, by Rappaport and Collier clearly depicts a distressed African American child standing in front of a torn American flag. Blaire and Rebecca begin the conversation.
B: That’s a girl, right? It looks like the flag is torn up in pieces. Like we’re trying to put the pieces back together.

R: She’s having to try to break through and this is illustrating that time.

J: And like the people are all over the world, so are these different pieces representing others all over the world. The melting pot. (22)

Based on Joyce’ last comment you might assume she has a different image in front of her. Despite clear signs from the illustration, she clings to a “let’s all get along” mentality. Additionally, the American flag carries significant positive meaning for Joyce and she shows her privilege by normalizing the flag as a positive symbol for all people, a sign of contact. Joyce reveals this again when we discussed *This is the Dream*, by Shore, Alexander and Ransome.

B: I like this page (the one that mixes races of children in a collage).

J: Yes, me too. I loved that page. It shows you that this could be anybody. Different ages, different nationalities…I thought this page was very powerful with all of them saying the pledge of allegiance. Even though they (African Americans) had people against them, they still believe in America. (33)

Here Joyce also hints at White Victimhood and sameness with the statement, “it shows that this could be anybody.” Joyce’s belief that all groups of people have experienced equivalent hardships builds the foundation for her meritocratic stance and refusal to see systemic racism. The “melting pot” and other views of assimilationist multiculturalism demonstrate a contact status.
**Reflection: Signs of Growth**

As stated in Joyce’s introduction, the White Racial Identity Continuum only captures large shifts in thinking around race. Over the course of the ten-week book club, Joyce did not outwardly demonstrate significant shifts in thinking. She remained in either *contact* or *reintegration*. But, Joyce’s stagnant status designation does not mean a complete lack of growth. What I witnessed was a beginning for reflective practice that largely stemmed from the openness and vulnerability of her colleagues. In a rare, but powerful reflective moment during our last session, Joyce shared the following with Blaire and Rebecca.

J: Me being older, it’s been good to hear other viewpoints. My experience at the city school is my first experience with all African American students that I’ve ever dealt with. Things that have come up that I’ve never dreamed of...It’s been nice to see how you all view things. I’ve really enjoyed it. It has not been a burden.

B: Similar, different?

J: More in depth (p. 71).

Joyce’ admission that she believes her colleagues are thinking about issues of race and culture in a “more in depth” way than she is, shows that some processing may be occurring outside of book club, a processing I failed to capture in this research.

**Concluding Thoughts**

After many rounds of analysis of Joyce’s transcript against the White Racial Identity Continuum, I felt deflated in her seeming lack of growth, which made me consider if my expectations were unreasonable. She consistently showed either a *contact* or a *reintegration* status in her narratives. It truly took the writing process to clue me in to the more subtle ways
Joyce embraced this process. I am so grateful for the experience of having Joyce as a participant in the book club, not just for her unique contributions, but also for how her narratives helped highlight the limitations of the continuum as a tool for analysis. Joyce made growth – significant growth- that could not be accurately captured on the continuum. And, I would argue that any person who may be discussing race with others for the first time, may also require a different scale.

Joyce listened openly to differing viewpoints and walked straight into controversial topics. She discussed her age and how working at Hunters Elementary for the past several years was her first experience teaching all African American students, a sign that true disintegration may not have occurred for Joyce in her lifetime.

Joyce believes in equality, but through an unconscious lens of white dominance and assimilation. Her privileges are so normalized that she cannot see the historical and modern day systemic oppression of Black people. Her desire for “paper-doll multiculturalism” is consistent with the “good white” and a culture of politeness. She wants her students to believe that they are the same as everyone else and have the same chances for success. I truly believe this comes from a good place, but with a lack of reflection on how her own daily practices reinforce negative stereotypes of Black people, and run the risk of significantly diminishing her student’s sense of self-worth.

I hope that Joyce experienced a beginning over the ten weeks that will fuel personal curiosity around race, class and culture. I hope she continues to have difficult conversations and follows the lead of her colleagues as they explore their privilege. I hope she keeps listening, especially to those narratives she deems “more in depth” than her own, and that those same
narratives help her to see the great power she has in her classroom and the impact her words have on all students.
Chapter Seven

Lauren

I wanted to show them that having done something ugly in your past or even in your present does not necessarily mean that you won’t do great things later on. When I think about it, that’s really in a nutshell the whole reason for this book club. If I didn’t believe in the ability of white teachers to become agents for change, this book club wouldn’t be happening. I’ve been called a self-hating white person on numerous occasions, and in some ways I do understand that criticism. But, I hope that this study helps validate that I do have hope in the capacity of white teachers who teach children of color (Researcher Journal, p.10).

Before I started collecting data and meeting with participants, I decided that my researcher journal needed to be transcribed from speech, and not carefully planned and edited speech, but raw, in-the-moment speech. My participants offered a tremendous gift to the research community with their willingness to be vulnerable. I believe I owe the same unedited thoughts to this research. Of course, I could have polished my words and carefully crafted arguments that absolve me of my failings, but this dissertation leaves enough room for that. My researcher journal captures my insecure and evolving thoughts as a white woman wrapping my head around this process. Quaye (2012) and Zúñiga et al. (2002) offer a strong framework for facilitating racial dialogue. They encourage accessing participant emotion, “de-centering” the facilitator and allowing “learners to be knowers” (Quaye, 2012 p.113), but those suggestions are not a script. They still leave the highly cognitive, minute-to-minute decision making to the facilitator. I hope this chapter helps to demonstrate the complexity of those decisions, the times I succeeded and the times I failed.
I selected the opening section of my researcher journal because I believe it reveals that I still struggle with my white racial identity and constantly debate my role in advocacy. I clearly agonize over having been called a “self-hating white person” and what that means for my role in this work. I have explained this criticism through the recognition that I am calling for white people to not hold all the power in society (read lose power). What white person wishes to lose their dominant position? Does it defy one side of humanness- the search for power - to embrace another side – the belief that equality makes us all better and there is not one dominant truth? I have learned so much from this experience, including that a fully actualized autonomy status is simply a commitment to “unlearning racism throughout our lives” (Lawrence & Tatum, 1998 p.3) and the willingness to keep asking these difficult questions. Reflection must be continuous and life-long.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on four major categories that dominated my reflection of the facilitation process: (1) my early judgments of participants and the role that plays in analysis, (2) the highly cognitive task of “de-centering” the facilitator, (3) the times I chose to be vulnerable and share unflattering narratives of my experience as a white person, with mixed success, and (4) feeling the pressure of time and coming to the conclusion that a shift in thinking can not be forced. The data in this chapter comes from both my spoken researcher journal as well as the book club transcript.

**Early Judgments**

The ability to withhold judgment is a myth. I found myself constantly trying to use the phrase “benefit of the doubt” as a mantra when doing initial reflections. I think I understand now that to offer someone the benefit of the doubt is really the willingness to continue listening right up until the last moment. I believe that to judge and analyze is human. And, from the very first
meeting, I was already trying to place my participants along the continuum and compare them to one another. My purpose in bringing out those early judgments is not to admit fault per se, but to admit that I recognize that any initial analysis no doubt changed the way I facilitated. My perception of their positions along the continuum as well as assumed communication styles must have impacted the trajectory of our conversations over the course of the ten weeks.

In addition to roughly placing participants along the continuum, I also found myself relating more or less to certain participants, and being bias towards them in one direction or another as a result. In the first entry of my researcher journal I write, “Rebecca seems to be in a different place than the rest of the participants” (Researcher Journal, p.1), meaning I already believed she was further along the continuum. I am sure that I found a certain kinship in Rebecca and discussed in her chapter how I saw myself in her when I first started teaching.

In that same entry of my journal I say the following about Joyce, “Joyce is a little bit more reserved. I don't think she has opened up for the group yet and I think that it'll take a couple more meetings before she decides that she's comfortable enough to share” (Researcher Journal, p.1). In the chapter I write about Joyce, I reflect that it does in fact take her several weeks before she shares more openly with the group. Looking back at my journal and my initial judgments, I have to question whether or not some of my early thoughts are a self-fulfilling prophecy. Was Joyce going to take three weeks to share more with the group no matter what? Or, did my assumptions alter the way I communicated, leading to that outcome? As teacher educators, we remind teachers that their expectations of students are extremely powerful. I must then assume in this scenario that my expectations hold similar power.
“De-centering” the Facilitator: A Constant Cognitive Task

In my researcher journal I am always reflecting on the difficulty of “de-centering” - balancing inner dialogue with a spoken response is exhausting and thrilling all at the same time. And, designing research that specifically aims to capture growth and change as opposed to a stagnant problem altered the complexity of “de-centering.” To me, it was never about not responding at all, but carefully selecting responses to clarify and probe for more. After the first book club session I had something of an epiphany about what exactly feels difficult about “de-centering.”

I have to admit that it was very difficult for me to not be inside my own head during the meeting. Actually, at first I was going to say it was difficult for me not to chime in and try to gently challenge someone or encourage someone in a different direction but that part actually wasn't so hard. I think I was prepared for that, but it's more the constant considerations I felt like I was making. Should I let a narrative completely unfold before making a decision about whether or not to gently nudge someone? (Researcher Journal, p.1).

The phrase “inside my own head” points to that exhausting cognitive task of decision making. It was less about refraining from inserting my opinion and more the meta-analysis of what types of communication lead to reflection on the part of participants. In the same journal entry I consider the power of simply letting things unfold naturally.

I think because it's really the first session, and people are just beginning to have these conversations, it's probably best to just let things unfold. I think it would've been detrimental if I were to open up and start to take over too much of the conversation. If anything I think it's best for people to just feel comfortable sharing and if I were to make
them feel as if there was some type of right answer out there then they would shut down and I certainly don't want that. So I think this is the best way to go for now (Researcher Journal, p.2).

Despite my initial reflection on how prepared I was for not inserting myself during difficult conversations, I still struggled with how to challenge my participants in the right way at the right time. In one of my journal entries I begin to distrust the “de-centering” approach entirely and question if I had validated racism in my participants. I was always warring with how you demonstrate an appreciation for sharing and vulnerability while simultaneously challenging stereotyping and other forms of racism.

The biggest problem I'm finding, or that I keep coming back to is this delicate balance between not challenging so much as to alienate but also in saying nothing, sometimes I feel like I validate peoples’ opinions that may be seriously flawed or racist. How do I walk the line? When designing this study, I was initially afraid, and I think truthfully my advisors were afraid, that I would alienate my participants by pushing my beliefs on participants. If anything, I think I’ve created a space where people feel truly comfortable sharing just about anything, including really problematic things. When I thank someone for sharing am I validating their racism? … At what point as a facilitator do you push a little harder and challenge a bit more and suggest to someone that they're wrong. I fear that in trying to be so gentle I have actually gone in the wrong direction and not challenged someone enough (Researcher Journal, p. 17).

The push and pull I felt about response or silence was a significant element in my journal entries through the entire process. But, I also experienced moments of confidence in my ability to create
a safe, but uncomfortable environment. Largely, I reflected on the decision to remain mostly silent and affirming in the first two weeks. The third week of the book club felt like something of a transition for all participants as I increased the amount of clarifying questions.

Today during the book club was by far the best meeting that we had. There were tears. There were hugs. There were joyous moments. I felt like there were some breakthroughs today. I allowed myself to do a little bit more prodding, asking a few more questions now that I feel like there's enough comfort in the room. There is a feeling of trust and safety building within the group and people have started to take risks, admitting faults. To me, this is huge because I see a window where gentle challenges from me might be accepted (Researcher Journal, p.9).

If I could graph my comfort level with facilitation over the course of the ten weeks, I believe there would be a general upward trend, but with downward spikes in spots. Just like the fluidity of the continuum and the ability to be in several stages at once, I still struggled with moment-to-moment decision making right up until the last day. This only makes sense with the increasing comfort of participants as well as controversial topics. Yes, I was gaining skills as part of a reflective process, but the challenges were mounting as well. There were moments during facilitation that I felt emotional, particularly surrounding Joyce’s arguments of white victimization. Immediately following the eighth week of book club, I got in my car and started recording.

Today was a day where I could feel myself actively calming my body and my face as a facilitator so that I could maintain a certain...neutrality...that’s not the right word at all, but it’s as good as I can do in this moment. I recognize that I am fallible and I think that’s
important, thinking of how to respond to comments, even if it’s with complete silence or a head nod, is an *active* process. It’s not like just riding the wave and seeing what happens. I realize that my actions as facilitator carry meaning in the group and it is not easy, especially when really problematic things are said… Joyce made a lot of big claims today about basically white victimization and how slavery was no different than say something like the depression. There, that moment, that’s what I’m talking about. That’s the kind of statement that can make you internally gasp if you allow it to. But you can’t gasp, that shuts everyone down, instead you listen and nod, ask for more information or even pass it to the group. At least, those are my active decisions. What’s right doesn’t always feel right until it does. The payoff must come later. I hope. (24)

I never lashed out at a participant or shut down a conversation. I saved my frustration for the tape recorder. But, those strong internal responses never went away and I hope they never will. Comments like Joyce’s should be painful and elicit negative feelings. I believe that expecting such arguments can lead to a dangerous downward spiral of complacency and acceptance of the status quo.

**Modeling Vulnerability: Telling Stories from my own Life as a White Teacher**

Quaye (2012) writes about the unique opportunity white facilitators have to model vulnerability and share stories of how they’ve grown in their understanding of privilege and oppression. I took this call seriously and knew that I would work to carefully select avenues for this type of modeling, but without force or significant interruption.

One of the first stories I decided to share with the group was about my second year of teaching. My discomfort with all things race stopped me from engaging in a necessary and
powerful discussion with two students in my school. Here is the story I told, pulled from the book club transcript. It still embarrasses me a great deal.

L: It’s totally scary. I understand. I remember in my second year in the classroom I was walking through the hallway and they weren’t my students, could have been, but weren’t. Both of the students were Black and they were in an argument about something, and one of the boys speaking to another boy was so angry and said to him “You’re such a dumb slave!” And I totally froze. I just froze. I had no idea how to unpack it, what to say, I felt so out of my element as a white woman. I felt like no matter what I say right now, I am going to offend someone, or I’m going to sound stupid maybe. And, I’ll live with it forever, because I never addressed it. I kind of just walked away. I know that I was a teacher and I had a responsibility to do something, but I had no idea what to do.

J: What Did you do?

L: Nothing. I did nothing. I just didn’t know what to do. And I feel like this is a reality. And these are the kinds of things that are hard to say out loud. I am white, and because of that I think I made a mistake here on lots of fronts and I didn’t know enough.

B: I’m thinking what have I done that’s similar? (p. 28).

I included several of the follow-up comments because I want to show how this story opened up a much larger discussion. It was from this story that Blaire shared her feeling of inauthenticity as a white woman when discussing race with her class of entirely Black and Hispanic students – some of the most powerful reflection I believe this study captured. After the session was over, I discussed the experience in my researcher journal.
I decided to tell two stories from my own life/teaching today that make me appear either very silly or very racist and both of the things in the stories were true. I’ve held off on sharing my own stories so far because I didn’t want to be heavy handed in any way, even with stories that make me vulnerable. I wanted to share a story that demonstrates the power of admitting fault and racial ignorance. I decided to tell the story of my second year teaching and overhearing one African American third grader tell another “you’re a stupid slave.” The point of the story is that I knew I was wrong and admitting that makes me stronger, not weaker. Doing that reflection makes me a better educator. Say it out loud - a fool for a while, keep it inside - a fool for eternity. Sometimes the truth is ugly and that's certainly the case with some of the stories I’m telling and hearing (Researcher Journal, p. 9, 10).

This journal entry seems confident when I look back on it, but it's more tentative if balanced with my utter embarrassment of this narrative ten years later. I know that admitting wrongs makes you stronger, but that doesn’t completely eliminate my reticence in sharing.

For as many successes as I felt I had with modeling vulnerability, I also told stories that missed the mark and undoubtedly did more harm than good. During the fifth week of book club, when conversations around stereotyping and racism were getting more complex, I shared a story about being chased by two Black men in my school community in Brooklyn. The story was supposed to demonstrate my white guilt and desire not to stereotype based on race while simultaneously showing how this one experience made me fearful of Black men, but the truth is, I did not prepare with a purpose adequately and my lack of clarity around the point of my story came through. Here is the narrative from the transcript.
L: I understand that thinking about race is complicated and we have to reconcile our experiences... but experiences are just that, experiences, and not representations of an entire group of people. For example, one time in my school parking lot when I was walking from the door of the building to my car, I was chased by two Black men. I remember seeing them out of the corner of my eye and thinking that I did not need to run because I was just being racist. When they got closer to me and they did start running, I started running too, but our school was right next to a police station, so as soon as I approached the station, the two men ran in the other direction. I felt so much guilt and pain over that (p. 47).

Rather than analyze narrative at this point, I first want to include my researcher journal notes from that day where I do some thinking around this problematic story.

I'm learning when to share when not to share. I feel like I told a story this time around that was completely ineffective and perhaps did more harm than good because my participants weren’t ready for it. The story I told about being chased by two Black men in my community where I was teaching, the whole point of the story was to say that I had felt conflicted about whether to run, to trust my instincts versus to quell my racist thoughts. The point of the story was not to confirm a stereotype but I'm afraid that's what it did. I wish that I had put a little bit more thought into that story before I told it. Like I said, I’m learning and that comes with failure I suppose (p. 16).

My journal entry here still does not get at the heart of the problem of telling this story. What was the point of sharing it? What was I trying to achieve? I told this story without a plan and without thinking through audience. Probably in a selfish desire to have a dialogue around identity, white
guilt and the issue of equating one negative experience with an entire population of people, I missed the mark entirely and reinforced racist stereotypes including a necessary fear of Black men. This story yielded almost no conversation, only looks of concern for my safety and wellbeing. The problem with telling a story like this and having it fail so miserably from a facilitator standpoint is the lack of confidence that comes with it. This was not an isolated misstep, but a ditch I had to dig my way out of in order to feel comfortable sharing again. I stopped trusting myself and my ability to analyze narrative.

Today I decided not to share a vulnerable story that would have, I think validated some of their feelings or maybe even challenged some of their feelings because of the way that my story went backwards on me the last time. I tried that strategy when I told the story of being chased and fighting stereotypes in my head and that really backfired on me. I’m clearly a bit scared off about inserting myself into the conversation to model vulnerability. I am still learning how to do this facilitation and I think it's going to take years of practice before I learn when to push and when to just let things rest and when to validate (Researcher Journal, p. 20).

The experience of having narrative backfire on me had a lasting impact. After that book club session I did go on to model vulnerability in other ways, but with much more care and reservation. As much as I’d like vulnerability to happen spontaneously, I learned that fully processing a narrative myself and clearly defining its purpose should be paramount. I respect Quaye’s (2012) thoughts on the unique positive position of the dominant, white facilitator and I now, more than ever, respect the power that facilitator has to validate racism.
Feeling Pressured by Time: A Shift in Thinking Cannot be Forced

It should be obvious. I knew entering this process that change cannot be forced and yet the passing of time still concerned me. When I felt like my participants’ narratives remained in a consistent status I questioned the effectiveness of the study. As previously stated, I designed this research to do more than capture a problem, but instead to raise sociocultural consciousness. The question was always there – is it working? I found myself using my researcher journal as place to think through the structure of the study. Is one hour a week for ten weeks enough? How would I do things differently? After only the third session I started imagining a re-design.

I think that if I were to redo this study I would absolutely say two hours. If someone shows up late or the library closes early it seems to completely throw us off… and it takes people a while to warm up talking about this content. The first 15 minutes or so everyone kind of sticks to the book and the book is what they feel comfortable talking about and then experiences from their lives start coming out. So I feel as if it would be important to change that and spend a bit more time just unpacking their experiences (researcher journal, p.7).

Feeling pressure to facilitate change over time no doubt disrupted the more careful decision-making that went into selecting responses during sessions. I inserted myself more, and as evidenced by the narratives in the previous section, did so with mixed success. It pains me to admit that the process of raising cultural consciousness was slower than I expected, despite the warnings of others. And, of course, it only makes sense that with complicated histories and unique experiences with race, each participant comes more or less ready to admit to privilege. After session seven, I started thinking about this process as a starting point for participants, and it’s value beyond the growth that exists within the framework of the ten weeks.
I know too that the time frame of ten weeks gives me this sense that I need to help a change happen as we get closer to the end. This is session 7 and I’m feeling this pressure, like only three more weeks to make a difference, but I can't expect miracles to happen and when someone isn’t ready, then just laying these seeds is a huge first step. I know that personally some of the most important things to happen in my own journey happened years and years ago but they didn't make sense to me until much later, so I need to recognize that just because I'm not seeing change now doesn't mean that there isn’t a potential for change in the future (Researcher Journal, p.21).

It’s one thing to understand theoretically that change cannot be forced, maintaining that mantra in practice is another thing altogether. I need to balance the belief that change is possible with the knowledge that it takes time. Creating experiences for cultural consciousness-raising with participants in mind lays the groundwork for personal reflection that happens over a lifetime.

**Concluding Thoughts**

This is the beginning of my journey with the facilitation of intergroup dialogue. Although I’ve had experiences discussing race as a teacher at both the K-12 and college level, this was my first time applying my extensive review of literature to a structured professional development experience for in-service teachers. I failed and succeeded in many ways. In working within the framework of the white facilitator as outlined by Quaye (2012), I attempted to model vulnerability by sharing stories of my own insecurities as a white teacher in an all Black school. Often revealing my weaknesses encouraged deep reflection from my participants, but in the case of the story of being chased, I reinforced stereotypes of the aggressive Black male, a backslide for consciousness-raising. I also found the process of carefully selecting responses as well as choosing to be silent, both exhilarating and exhausting. The highly cognitive task left me drained
at the end of each session. I felt immediate success in my ability to “de-center,” but still questioned how “de-centering” works with carefully selected challenges. I found a balance, but not without missteps. I feel proud of my beginning, but continue to look ahead towards future research.

I return to the White Racial Identity Continuum frequently for my own personal development. I take solace in the words of Lawrence and Tatum (1998) when they discuss the life-long work of racial identity reflection. A true autonomy status, a status I believe a facilitator should have, is not an ultimate arrival or finish line, but a reminder that the work is never over.
Chapter Eight

Discussion

Return to Literature

I opened this dissertation discussing the ways in which white teacher privilege includes invisible norms for schooling. These norms stem from cultural values specific to white, middle class families and therefore favor white, middle class students in schools (Delpit, 1995). When these values are seen as normal, applicable to everyone, and not culturally specific, teachers view their students of color as coming to school with a deficit (Delpit, 1995). Teachers fail to recognize the unique skills and ways of learning their students of color bring with them each day (Delpit, 1995), and label them “a problem” very early on in their academic careers (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). With students of color labeled “a problem,” Villegas and Lucas (2002) offer that the potential for lowered expectations increases, and, in a cyclical fashion, students meets those expectations with low performance (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Wolfram, 1999).

In many ways, this study can be viewed as an indictment of teacher education and other non-traditional programs – the view that teachers leave their certification programs never having confronted the potential for this deficit frame of reference. This is not to say that consciousness-raising has been ignored entirely. Well-meaning teacher preparation programs have responded to the need for “consciousness-raising” by adding one or two courses in “multicultural education” or “diversity” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). These courses are largely ineffective, as they fail to demonstrate that culturally responsive pedagogy needs to exist throughout the curriculum and not in one isolated area of the day (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). It would be simple to blame teacher education for all teachers ill-prepared to confront issues of racism in their classrooms, but the
work of racial identity development is not job specific and is life-long. Yes, ideally the meaningful conversations begin well before a first teaching placement, but that is a problem for all educational levels to confront. The cycle of backward blame crosses all contents and is not particularly helpful. Instead of placing blame, I felt and continue to feel passionately that in-service teachers still deserve a chance to engage in dialogue surrounding race, class and culture no matter how many years they have been in the classroom.

The introduction of this dissertation included a discussion of Critical Race Theory as theoretical framework for this research. I believe this study upheld the six tenets of CRT that align with educational research as outlined by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1994). From study design to data analysis and representation, this critical lens structured and fueled my research. The six foundational tenets are as follows: “(1) CRT recognizes that racism is a pervasive and permanent part of American society; (2) CRT challenges the dominant claims of objectivity, neutrality, colorblindness, and merit; (3) CRT challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis…; (4) CRT insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color…; (5) CRT is interdisciplinary; and (6) CRT works towards eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression” (Dixson & Rouseau, 2006, p.4). I validate these six tenets throughout the research process beginning with conception and study design.

In recognizing the first and second tenet of CRT and their link to white privilege, this study aimed to counteract the “deficit model” and raise the cultural consciousness of white, in-service teachers. Asking teachers to reflect on their current practices and white identities in a non-threatening way required the support of Zúñiga et al.’s (2002) Intergroup Dialogue Model partnered with Quaye’s (2012) principles for a white facilitator. To the best of my ability, and
considering the confounding variables and multiple themes in each text, I created a schedule of African American children’s books in accordance with Z’uñiga et al.’s. (2002) stages for increasing the controversial nature of topics over time. The analysis of African American children’s literature and in turn the order of books presented was situated in CRT tenet three, “CRT challenges ahistoricism and insists on contextual/historical analysis…” and tenet four, “CRT insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color…” (Dixson & Rouseau, 2006, p.4). Six out of ten texts included historical narratives that are foundational to the “permanent,” and “pervasive” racism that exists in society today. Additionally, I honored tenet four by problematizing the books written by white authors and the ways in which those voices, loaded with privilege, may or may not accurately represent Black perspectives.

In the analysis of data, I used this critical lens in the coding of text. Indeed, I did not approach analysis as a neutral party, but rather a firm believer in the six tenets of CRT. Throughout the analysis process I named pieces of participant narrative that worked in opposition to CRT. For example, a contact status along the White Racial Identity Continuum is defined by the exact elements that CRT tenet two works against. Beliefs of “objectivity, neutrality, colorblindness and merit” ran consistently through the book club transcripts.

I also believe it was ultimately a failing on my part to assume I would not be upholding tenet six, “CRT works towards eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression,” by simply capturing the existing statuses of my participants. I believed tenet six required I facilitate and demonstrate participant growth along the continuum. Perhaps even using the word “simply” reinforces this misconception, for the process of placing participants along the White Racial Identity Continuum was not “simple” at all. In the end, I came around to the idea that capturing existing statuses, and certainly ones that demonstrate the
need for CRT in research, was significant in and of itself. The remainder of this chapter includes a discussion of this study’s contributions to the field as well as its limitations. I end by looking ahead towards future research and offer thoughts on my journey.

**Contributions to the Field**

**Contributing to the Literature in the Field of In-service Teacher Whiteness**

This study worked to fill the gap in literature that exists for whiteness and in-service teachers. In order to ground this study in an existing body of literature, I included the growing field of pre-service teacher whiteness. I believe the addition of these whiteness themes for in-service teachers is vital and unique. I found solid replications of the pre-service whiteness themes discussed in chapter two, including colorblindness, “saving” and “conquering,” white victimhood, and disconscious racism. All participants demonstrated clinging to a “culture of politeness,” which works to silence the naming of race, at some point in their narrative. This replication of themes demonstrates that these specific profiles of white teacher still exist and still deserve attention. And, the field should note a high degree of urgency, considering the responsibility these teachers have for their current students’ success. I recognize that a qualitative research paradigm does not aim for generalizability. That being said, I would consider it a failure to ignore the implications of these findings and simply call these profiles isolated occurrences. I believe we need to question as a field the ways in which we measure teacher readiness for placement in diverse schools or any school for that matter, especially considering the high stakes for doing so. What degree of socio-cultural awareness is acceptable for teacher certification? I would argue that without a basic understanding of white privilege, white teachers are assuredly perpetuating the status quo in their classrooms. This is further complicated by the national teacher shortage and difficulty schools with large populations of students of color have in attracting high quality
teacher candidates. We must find a way to raise the expectations of the profession and work simultaneously to support those teachers who demonstrate the desire to truly hear marginalized voices.

**Contributing to the Literature Surrounding Teacher Book Clubs**

I believe this study also uniquely contributes to the body of literature surrounding teacher book clubs targeting issues of race, class and culture. Specifically, I chose to analyze data for each participant as opposed to finding themes across the entire group and in doing so was able to represent that data in significantly more detail than existing book club studies. For example, Florio-Ruane (2001) and similarly Harlin et al. (2007) report themes of empathy, critical thinking, beliefs about racism and reflection. These themes are strong, but lack detailed insight into unique participant thoughts. In contrast to the method of whole group analysis and representation, I found it nearly impossible to lump participant narratives together. Their experiences and places on the continuum varied a great deal. I felt confident in the decision to engage with each teacher uniquely during the analysis stage and doing so offered insight into the White Racial Continuum as a tool – a perhaps even larger contribution to the field of both pre-service and in-service teacher education. I include my reflections on the continuum as a tool for analysis in its own section of this discussion.

Although several of the teacher book club studies I reviewed were guided by similar research questions to my own, I noticed a general lack of discussion around white privilege and a larger focus on “othering.” I certainly understand the difficultly of capturing reflections of white privilege. This type of thinking simply cannot be forced. I do, however, feel proud that this research study succeeded in several strong reflections of whiteness and the implications of that
whiteness for students of color in the classroom. This is truly the work that needs to be done. These types of reflections should remain the goal of gently facilitated consciousness-raising – even if only scratching the surface. I certainly credit the use of thought-provoking, illustrated text for these reflections, but the inclusion of the Intergroup Dialogue model developed by Zúñiga et al. (2002) was crucial to the strength of this study. The model’s structural support for study design and Quaye’s (2012) thoughts on the role of the white facilitator deepened the process from beginning to end. In particular, the outlined role of the white facilitator required continuous reflection and later analysis on my part. The inclusion of my own chapter in this dissertation uniquely contributes to the field as I admit strength, weaknesses and share general vulnerabilities in my own thinking. Too often we hold researchers as unquestioned knowers, fit for accurate analysis of the thoughts and feelings of others. In reality, my biases and ignorance are just as messy, complex and ever-changing as other humans. Instead of then seeing myself as unfit for research, I ask the field to join me in vulnerability, accepting the unlimited potential for many truths and a continuous search for improvement.

Reflections on the White Racial Identity Continuum

This research study validated Helms’ (1990) White Racial Identity Continuum as a tool for analysis. It offered a strong set of a priori codes to be used in conjunction with inductive codes pulled from the data set. The continuum provided a solid structure as I searched for narratives that reflected cultural-consciousness and I would absolutely consider using this tool for the analysis of future research data.

I might also suggest incorporating this tool as a means of capturing the socio-cultural awareness of pre-service teachers in teacher education programs. The continuum allowed me to
see the clear replications of the whiteness themes in the existing literature and in turn, the profiles of white teachers that require attention from the field.

I would also like to discuss perceived limitations of the White Racial Identity Continuum. During the analysis process, I warred with questions about each stage and how they are potentially dependent on one another. Although the continuum is presented as fluid, there is certainly a clear hierarchy. And, in particular, in order for a person to align with the norms of a disintegration status they need to have experienced reintegration. This was striking in the process of analysis for Joyce because her transcript did not demonstrate clear reintegration but instead much firmer disintegration. This raised a major question for me about certain assumptions the continuum makes. The largest assumption being that in order to have a contact status, one must consider themselves a non-racist, or what I like to call “the good white.” The beginning of the continuum is actually where many white people assume they’ve made an arrival - as non-racists they feel confident they are not contributing to oppressive practices. So, my question continues, what happens when someone is an active white supremacist? What happens when signs of disintegration or the blaming and stereotyping of African Americans, is not disintegration at all, but something perhaps pre-contact? Where is this phase on the continuum? Or, have we already decided as a field that this form of racism cannot be unlearned and therefore should not be included? I do not have a clear answer here, but I do feel that to write off those whites who believe firmly in their own racial superiority is potentially shortsighted. With the right education and historical context could there be movement along the continuum for these people as well? I will certainly dedicate my future efforts as a white advocate and researcher to engaging with this question and call others to do the same.
Reflections on Study Design

The Benefits and Pitfalls of Using African American Children’s Picture Books

I selected African American children’s picture books as a tool for consciousness-raising for several reasons. First, AACL beautifully and uniquely captures both historical and contemporary hardships faced by African Americans as well as celebrates African American culture in various forms. Second, using picture books as a tool capitalizes off of elementary teachers’ general love of children’s literature and through that love, engages them with weighty issues and self-reflection in a less threatening way. This would be in contrast to tools like peer-reviewed articles and opinion pieces often used in college courses. I feel differently about the incorporation of those more substantial texts as a result of this study, and discuss this further at the end of this section.

Over the course of the ten weeks, I saw many of the texts offer strong starting points for participant conversation. For example, Chocolate Me by Taye Diggs and Shane Evans invoked passionate concerns from all three teachers. Similarly, the stunning simplicity of Kevin and His Dad brought out thoughts on economics and teachers’ perceptions of Kevin’s privileged position in relation to students at Hunters. That being said, there were two, significant and unanticipated downsides to using AACL as a tool for consciousness-raising with teachers. The first was the tendency teachers had to remain at a fairly surface level with text analysis, as discussed in Joyce’s chapter. By continuing to discuss the quality of illustrations or the style of font, teachers could avoid controversial content. The picture books themselves are not solely responsible for this either. In retrospect, I could have offered clearer guidance on using texts to springboard sharing life experiences, something I shared only a handful of times over the course of the ten
weeks. I felt nervous at the potential for prescriptiveness, resulting in forced, inauthentic dialogue. Perhaps there was a middle ground which could have served both purposes.

Additionally, I failed to anticipate the general lack of historical knowledge my participants would have, and the selected AACL did not include sufficient content to support this need. If repeated, I believe partnering AACL with historical documents, artifacts or even scholarly texts could radically impact participant engagement and reflection. I recognize now that providing historical content geared towards adult learners would only strengthen the potential for deep dialogue and consciousness-raising. Texts I failed to include because I assumed they would be threatening, are crucial to fostering socio-cultural awareness. These texts are the ones that offer the “meat” that seemed to be missing from this study. In many ways, this book club could be seen as the beginning stages of Zúñiga et al.’s (2002) Intergroup Dialogue model. This ten-weeks could be built upon with the inclusion of “hot topic” scholarly texts and historical documents over a greater period of time.

Journals

When originally designing the study, I assumed that providing journals to participants and requiring weekly open-ended entries would offer a unique opportunity for reflection. I anticipated that for those less inclined to voice their thoughts in meetings, journal writing had the potential to create a safe space for processing. What I found is that teachers, in the midst of their overwhelming task driven lives, treated the journals as one more task that needed to be completed for compliance. Questions of page length and topic came up. In an effort to avoid forcing specific topics or themes, I always asked them to simply write about what they were thinking and what was resonating with them. The journal entries I received from all three
participants were almost entirely surface level summaries of book plots. No one wrote a single “I statement” in a journal entry. I, of course, firmly believe in the potential of writing as a means for reflection and have seen this done successfully in multiple studies, but I failed as a facilitator to present journals in meaningful way. As a result, I never inspired “writing as thinking” for these teachers.

**Failure to Include Personal Histories**

If I were to repeat this study, I would consider conducting at least one semi-structured interview for participants to capture some of their personal history. In an effort to focus solely on the experience of participants across the ten-weeks of the book club, I failed to think through just how powerful having that background knowledge of life history could be for both humanizing these teachers and contextualizing their entry points on the continuum. I also recognize that multiple studies have focused entirely on life histories and including such data has the potential to massively expand the depth of the study and complexity of analysis.

**Offering the White Racial Identity Continuum for Self-reflection**

It seemed reasonably clear from the beginning of the study design, that the White Racial Identity Continuum could and should be used as a tool for data analysis. What I did not consider was providing each participant with the continuum as a tool for their own self-assessment and reflection. I felt afraid that offering the continuum would in some way force narratives or worse, silence participants who had never considered their own racial identity along a continuum. But, that fear may stem from low expectations of participants, and I must consider that the continuum could provide necessary explicit instruction and in turn a better chance for growth. I also recognize that explicit instruction only works with appropriate background knowledge as an
element of participant readiness. All of these questions must be revisited before beginning future research.

**My Journey**

I knew from the beginning that my facilitator and researcher roles would require intense reflection, allowing me to delve deeper into my own racial identity development. I found the experience to be even more complex and highly cognitive than I initially assumed, warring with questions of what it means to be a white advocate that holds power and privilege. I also have no illusions of how frequently I fall silent in my advocacy, and I am working on distinguishing between periods of silence to reflect and maintain health and wellness versus the silence that accepts the status quo. I truly believe these two silences to be different. Although I would like to say my advocacy is consistent and all silences productive, I do find myself warming up to my privilege and disengaging from issues that I see as separate from myself and my family. I have the privilege to compartmentalize my advocacy, considering something like my Facebook page to be a place for “fun” and “networking” while others use their pages to tirelessly make public the brutal racial injustices occurring around the world. The fact that I stay silent in this instance may not be a sign of health, but rather a sign that I see these issues as peripheral to my life. I have much work to do. When periods of withdrawing occur, I take solace in the uncomfortable feeling I get not engaging. For the first time in my life, that feeling of discomfort is stronger than the discomfort of diving in. I hope that with the completion of this dissertation I am offered a beginning, a chance to enter the world of research and push my boundaries as a thinker. I hope to look back on this work in five years, and sheepishly see how far I have come.

When discussing this dissertation with others, I have heard repeatedly that this work is more important than ever. This past year, the media has brought our attention to a great many
injustices against people of color, including the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, and India Kager. This year we’ve seen the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the highly problematic counter-movement, All Lives Matter. We’ve seen the Confederate battle flag taken down and in response, flown ever more proudly by white supremacists. So yes, when people tell me that this work is important now more than ever I tended to agree. But, upon reflection, what I really want to say is no, this work was important long before media attention and will continue to be important if and when that attention dies down. What the media and viral capabilities have done, however, is provide an opportunity to capitalize on those ready to listen and make larger strides in this field of research. If more people suddenly see race as important, then I hope to work with that influx of people to engage in hard, yet critical conversations. Yes, now is the time, but it has been and always will be the time.
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APPENDIX A: Analysis of Selected AAQL

Analysis of *All us Come Cross the Water* (1973) by Lucille Clifton and John Steptoe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sims (1982)</th>
<th>Inspires a love of the arts</th>
<th>Encourages self love</th>
<th>Coping mechanisms for negative aspects of life</th>
<th>Respect for contributions of elders</th>
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<th>Child in touch with the community</th>
<th>Child in touch with history</th>
<th>Images of real people</th>
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<th>Kohl (1995)</th>
<th>Community force beyond family</th>
<th>Conflict involving whole community or group</th>
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Each addition reading of *All us Come Cross the Water* sparks new thoughts for me.

Published in 1973, it is the oldest book I have selected for the book club and is written and illustrated by the well-known activists, Clifton and Steptoe. *All us Come Cross the Water* is a story of Black identity and the complexity that accompanies it. The main character in this text is a boy named Ujamaa. We must consider the historical significance of the word Ujamaa. The name of a development strategy for socialist attainment in Tanzania by leader Julius Nyerere, Ujamaa describes “equitable economic production and distribution” (Ibahawoh & Dibua, 2003, p.59) and in combination with steptoe’s meaning for the name, “unity,” we can assume a certain essentialist message.
In the opening of the book, Ujamaa’s teacher, Miss Wills, asks all of the children to stand up and speak about their heritage. When Ujamaa does not stand up, Miss Wills asks him to stay after class. She assumes that he remained seated because he was ashamed of his heritage, but this is not the case at all. Miss Wills says, “We must not be ashamed of ourselves, Jim…You are from a great heritage and you must be proud of that heritage. Now you know you are from Africa, don’t you?” (Clifton, 1973 p. 8). Ujamaa does know this and he is very proud of it, but is upset by the fact that Miss Wills called him Jim as well as lumped all of the Black kids together as having African heritage. Ujamaa later says to his friends, “Africa is a continent, not a country and she say she want everybody to tell what country” (Clifton, 1973 p. 10). The incident at school sparks Ujamaa’s curiosity about his heritage and he goes on a mission for information. He talks with his older sister, father, great-grandmother and the homeless man he befriended across the street. Each have a unique perspective on Ujamaa’s family’s identity as well as have differing opinions about its importance as a topic of conversation. *All Us Come Cross the Water* sparks some interesting conversation and dives deep into the complicated concept of Black identity in a way that other children’s books do not (Clifton, 1973).

Clifton expertly addresses Black identity as distinctly American and post-slavery with the comments Ujamaa receives from his sister, Rose and his father, Nat. When asked where the family is from, Rose tells Ujamaa that “Mama was from Rome, Georgia, and Daddy from Birmingham” (Clifton, 1973 p.12). When Ujamaa probes deeper, and asks his sister to go even further back in time, Rose says, “Mama’s Daddy from Georgia too” (Clifton, 1973 p.12). Ujamaa is dissatisfied with the answers he is getting and pushes again. This time Rose’s response makes him very angry. She says, “they wasn’t no way back before that. Before that we was a slave” (Clifton, 1973 p.12). On this one page alone there is much to unpack. Rose implies that
African American heritage began with slavery in the United States which translates to the contemporary Black generations that do not feel a connection to any African country and feel upset when they are asked to include that as a portion of their identity.

It is not until Ujamaa visits his great-grandmother that he gathers more information about his family’s heritage pre-slavery. She says, “my mama say her and her mama was brought from Whydah in Dahomey in 1855. My mama was nine years old…Nat’s people look like Ashanti people. They come from south in Ghana” (Clifton, 1973 p.17). Every time Ujamaa gathers a bit more information, he is quickly excused by the person he is talking to and left to make connections and draw conclusions himself.

The last person Ujamaa talks to, Tweezer, the homeless man across the street, offers some of the deepest wisdom. Unlike most depictions of homeless people as mentally ill or not carrying much worth in society, Ujamaa describes his “older man friend” as incredibly smart with a great deal of experiences. I appreciate Clifton turning another stereotype on its head here. Tweezer explains that even though African Americans have a varied heritage from many different countries in Africa, “All us come cross the water…we one people…wasn’t none of us free…” (Clifton, 1973 p.23). Ujamaa shares that his name, given to him by his great-grandmother, means “unity.” Tweezer explains that a boy with the name “unity” needs to understand that African Americans being forced into slavery was a unifying experience and plays a large role in Black identity (Clifton, 1973).

One particularly interesting moment in the book comes when Ujamaa is thinking about his Black friend Bo, who he describes by saying “…Bo aint even lived in this block that long and his Mama is from a island but we all brothers anyhow” (Clifton, 1973 p.24-25). In this one
simple sentence, Ujamaa names his friend as Carribean American and also recognizes that their skin color unites them even if their heritages are different. Clifton packs so many complexities of Black identity into this book by letting a child, Ujamaa, think out loud for the reader (Clifton, 1973).

Steptoe’s illustrations are muted and imprecise, but not inauthentic. The clothing worn by characters are distinctly seventies era, as are the natural hairstyles. The most striking image comes when Tweezer is describing the trip made by so many Africans “across the water” in slave ships. There is a strength and a pride in the faces of the people on the ship. All the Africans are facing forward with heads held high as the waves lap alongside the boat. It is a beautiful image for such a horrific time in history (Clifton, 1973).
Analysis of *Brown Like Me* (1999) by Noelle Lamperti

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*Brown Like Me* fascinates me for many reasons. First and foremost, I selected this text because it is an example of a sub-genre of African American children’s literature, the celebration of skin-color. But, this text has a twist. Noelle, the child-author, is the adopted Black child of a white family and lives with them in a white-washed community. Coincidently, that white-washed community is Norwich, Vermont, the town I grew up in. Not only did I choose this text without realizing the small-town connection, I remember reading this book to my students in Brooklyn and seeing it in my colleagues’ multicultural book bins. It is one of the first books to appear on Amazon with a search for African American children’s books, which is shocking, considering it was published in our small little town, by the barely recognizable New Victoria Publishers.

Perhaps it is the unique theme of cross-racial adoption that keeps it circulating so widely. Cross-racial adoption has been highly controversial for decades. In fact, a policy to stop cross-racial adoptions all together stemmed from the argument from “African American professionals” that the adoption of African American children into white families is psychologically damaging to
the child (Alexander & Curtis, 1996). Considering the research looking at “white saviors and conquerors,” I would infer that cross-racial adoption of African American children by white parents is a complex and multi-faceted issue that deserves to be researched with extreme care.

In Brown Like Me, Noelle feels strange as one of the only brown people in the community and begins to notice other things in her environment that are brown. She notices the rug, her friend’s boots, brownies, and a pile of leaves. I selected this book as one of ten because although it is representative of the large “celebration of skin” genre, it is also quite problematic. I want to praise this book for acknowledging difference, a first step, but I am disappointed in the surface level naming of brown skin and objects. The basic naming of skin color is not uncommon in this type of text and certainly ranks above texts that preach colorblindness. However, I find it difficult to believe that a Black child in an all-white community finds kinship with a pile of brown leaves (Lamperti, 1999).

Another reason I selected this text is the unique use of photographs. Noelle is captured on each page as she notices the brown things. She is a beautiful child and the photographs are wonderful. Her energy and spirit jump off the page. The images of Noelle with her family satisfy the most and provide a foundation for conversation with children about cross-racial adoption. Noelle rides horses with her mother and climbs trees in the woods with a friend. These images in particular provide a unique contrast to the largely urban environments in AAACL. In fact, unless a text is historical, rural settings are almost impossible to find in the contemporary literature (Lamperti, 1999).
As mentioned in chapter two, there are an increasing number of African American children’s books written by Black celebrities. Many Black celebrities respond to the lack of African Americans in children’s books and take it upon themselves to add some. Martin (2004) refuses to include these texts in the AAACL genre and believes they detract from the work of serious authors and illustrators. Though I agree with Martin (2004) that these books have many problems, I also recognize that these are the books being sold at the large booksellers, like Barnes and Noble. They are appearing in classrooms and are in the hands of children. For these reasons, I believe that simply ignoring these celebrity-authored texts exacerbates the problem.

*Chocolate Me* tells the story of a little Black boy who is teased by his white classmates. As a result, he finds himself wishing he was more like them. The below excerpt demonstrates several of these painful insults.

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<th>Analysis of <em>Chocolate Me</em> (2011) by Taye Diggs and Shane W. Evans</th>
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As a result, he finds himself wishing he was more like them. The below excerpt demonstrates several of these painful insults.
When we’d play, they’d say, “Look where your skin begins! It’s brown like dirt. Does it hurt to wash off?” They often stared at my hair. “Why do you look scared? It’s so poofy and big, like a wig. Not straight – don’t you hate to comb it?” As they pointed at my nose, I froze. “It’s so big and wide!” I tried to hide (Diggs, 2011 p.8-14).

I find this portion of the book disturbing on multiple levels. On the one hand, I respect Diggs for showing the cruelty of these racist, white children. I do not doubt that this type of racist bullying exists. What challenges me here is Diggs’ text combined with Evans’ illustrations. As opposed to authentic depictions of white and Black children, Evans’ has chosen cartoonish drawings that make light of this horrifying situation. The children have giant heads and crooked smiles. They almost appear to be bouncing around the page. As a result of these strange, comic illustrations, it is not clear if the reader is supposed to feel badly for the Black child, or laugh with the white children. Sadder still is when the main character, who is nameless in the text other than “chocolate me,” wishes he was white. “Why can’t I be more like Timmy or Johnny or Mark with straight hair and a different nose? I suppose my teeth wouldn’t seem so bright if my skin were a bit more light…right?” (Diggs, 2011 p. 20).

The book begins to redeem itself when the little boy’s mother convinces him that he is good looking. She does so by comparing all of his African American features to delicious foods. “You have skin like velvet fudge frosting mixed in a bowl…cotton candy hair soft to the touch of my fingertips or braided like rows of corn with a twist…look in the mirror and love what you see!” (Diggs, 2011 p. 23-25). The little boy decides that he does love himself and the next page shows him holding up a t-shirt that reads “CHOCOLATE ME!” in big bold letters. I understand the point of this book and appreciate the element of self-doubt that leads to self-love. If the book ended here I might even be satisfied with its redeeming qualities. It does not, however, end here.
The little boy, now pleased with his dark skin takes a batch of chocolate cupcakes out for the three white boys who had so cruelly teased him. The four boys laugh and hug one another as they eat the cupcakes. The little boys’ mother smiles in the background. This ending is deeply disturbing. I can not fathom why this little boy needs to make friends with these bullies, or how giving them cupcakes will turn them in to loving friends. This ending sends the wrong message to children. Sometimes “lets all get along” is not the answer. I believe this last scene is another example of how this text appears comical, making light of a very sad reality for so many Black children (Diggs, 2011).
Eve Bunting and David Diaz’s, *Smoky Night* (1994), attempts to shed light on, what is presumed to be, the famous LA Riots of 1992, also known as the Rodney King Riots. Told from the perspective of a small boy, Daniel, *Smoky Night* follows several families making their way to a shelter as people riot on the streets. In all the chaos, Daniel loses his beloved cat, as does a neighboring store-owner, Mrs. Kim. The story describes a contentious relationship between Daniel’s mother, an African American woman, and Mrs. Kim, a Korean woman, that ends happily when their two lost cats are found playing together at the shelter. Using the cats as a model, Daniel suggests that a peaceful relationship is possible between his mother and Mrs. Kim and asks them to forget their differences. Eve Bunting’s clear agenda of promoting non-violence comes across in the one-sided, negative depiction of the rioters. If intentions aren’t clear from the storyline itself, simply glance at the very first page where Bunting dedicates the book “to the peacekeepers.” Of course, it is not the theme of non-violence that upsets me here, but the way that the rioting is given no context.
The illustrations, text and refusal to name race all support a hegemonic and surface-level look at a very important period in history. The remainder of this analysis explores the ways that Smoky Night fails as an example of high quality AACL and in turn, reinstates the dominant narrative that fuels the continued racism in our society (Bunting, 1994).

The text of Smoky Night appeals to some audiences because of the slow unraveling of a mystery. The reader continues to turn pages, searching for the missing clues that eventually create a full and meaningful story. Unfortunately, these details never come. The text fails to provide any background information that contextualizes the events taking place. Evil people, presumed African American, thieve and destroy the businesses that surround Daniel’s home, villainized with every move. Why the riots? What made these people so angry? In the beginning of the story Daniel is watching the rioting from the family apartment window. Daniel’s mother explains rioting to him in the following way,

“It can happen when people get angry. They want to smash and destroy. They don’t care anymore what’s right and what’s wrong…after a while it’s like a game,” Mama says.

Two boys are carrying a TV from Morton’s Appliances. It’s hard for them because the TV is so heavy. “Are they stealing it?” I ask. Mama nods (Bunting, 1994 p. 10).

Daniel’s mother presents an incredibly one-sided explanation of the rioters behavior. African Americans are seen as criminals, stealing, looting and smashing as part of “a game.” She states that they are angry, but what they are angry about is avoided altogether. The author clearly attempts a historically and racially conscious text, but fails miserably in execution by skirting around facts. All historical context for rioting is omitted. “One of the most important conflicts of the Los Angeles riots was the tension between Koreans and African Americans...The killing of a
young African American, Latasha Harlins, in a shop quarrel by Korean store owner Soon Ja Du… was seen as the key to the catastrophic collapse of relations between L.A.’s black and Korean communities” (Lie & Abelman, 1999, p.75). The beating of Rodney King by white police officers is also conveniently left out of smoky night story. The failure to include these vital details reinforces the prevailing discourse that the African American population is angry for no reason at all and should be feared for their irrational behavior. The text of Smoky Night continues to confuse me. On the one hand, Bunting chose an extremely violent and powerful historical event as the backdrop for her tale, but then, as if suddenly timid, dances around the subject with an almost joyful text, one that tells of friendly animals and happy endings. If Bunting deemed the Rodney King Riots too violent for children, why choose the event at all? In an effort to eliminate the harshness and the violence of an historical event, making it “appropriate” for children, Bunting failed to recognize that avoiding these realities only pushes young minds to fill in the gaps themselves, quickly developing inaccurate conceptions of history and entire populations of people (Bunting, 1994).

David Diaz, award-winning illustrator of Smoky Night, uses a combination of paint and collage to support Bunting’s text. Diaz’s collages contain a wide range of materials, from pieces of cereal to dry-cleaning bags. Although I appreciate the creative efforts that went in to each illustration, they are indeed beautiful and thought provoking, I struggle to see a deep connection between the collages and the text, unlike Bryan Collier’s work in Martin’s Big Words. Some collages match the text and others are simply abstract. For example, Diaz expertly places real dry cleaning bags that are crinkled and torn under the text that describes looting at the dry cleaners. This is a great choice and offers a unique backdrop for the story. On page 30, however, where
the two cats are found by a firefighter, the background collage is pieces of broken china, plaster and a blue painted fish stencil. It distracts the reader and pulls you out of the story.

Diaz paints the array of characters in *Smoky Night* as raceless. Mrs. Kim (presumed Korean), looks almost identical to Mrs. Ramirez (presumed Latino) and even Daniel’s own mother (presumed African American). Diaz swaps natural skin tones for deep purples and blues, leaving features ambiguous. *Smoky Night* offers a “multicultural” array of characters with stereotypical names and occupations as well. Mrs. Kim owns the market. The Ramirez family who live next door to Daniel and his mother have a pet Parrot named Loco (crazy). These token characters have no back-story that might invite the reader to see them as multi-dimensional, instead they appear and disappear quickly in the chaos. It should also be mentioned that this story can be added to the large collection of books in which the African American father is mysteriously absent. These racially ambiguous characters almost make sense in Bunting’s timeless, placeless narrative, but present a significant problem for the children of color who hope to see themselves represented in books. Perhaps the author and illustrator of *Smoky Night* leave race ambiguous to suggest that racial differences should not matter and that we should all “just get along,” the perfect accompaniment to the sugar-coated storyline. Many children of color know better. From a very early age, their race has meaning. Therefore, a story like *Smoky Night* comes off insincere and unrealistic. In an effort to sweep the ugliness of society under the rug, Bunting and Diaz created a children’s text that only furthers the dominant discourse surrounding racism and alienates children of color in the process (Bunting, 1994).

Although I would not put this book in the hands of teachers without significant group work and analysis, it is not without some redeeming qualities. The love between Daniel and his mother is evident every time they are painted together. On page 19 they are snuggling in bed as...
she whispers sweetly to help him to help him fall asleep. On page 9, she wraps Daniel up in a hug from behind as they watch the fire blaze outside. Family is clearly a focus in this text and it is illustrated beautifully. This book is also child-centered and meets Lechner’s (1995) criteria for a child in the family and a child within the community (Lechner, 1995). Daniel is a part of a larger world and we see him situated in a city neighborhood during a time of extreme turmoil. *Smoky Night* has so much potential for meeting criteria of a child in touch with history, but misses the mark in a significant way. In unprepared hands, *Smoky Night* could do more harm then good.
**Analysis of *Kevin and His Dad* (1999) by Irene Smalls and Michael Hays**

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*Kevin and His Dad* has a beautiful simplicity that drew me in right away. This book is not blatantly disrupting the status quo, and requires a bit more thought to see the benefits. At first glance, *Kevin and His Dad* is an example of what Sims (1982) might call tokenism. After all, any child of any race could be thrown into the story and it wouldn’t change drastically. Martin (2004) on the other hand, would most likely admire the way African Americans appear doing everyday things commonly seen in stories about white people. And certainly a book depicting the happy childhood of a Black child should not be ruled out as accurate representation. After all, the experience of being Black is multifaceted and that includes social class.

The story begins on a Saturday morning with “Mom” away from the house. We are not sure what she is doing and that is fine, because she is not the focus parent in this book. Unlike the vast majority of African American children’s literature, as well as literature depicting African
Americans in general, a father plays a central role in this story. Kevin’s Dad is far from stereotypically, too. He does domestic chores like vacuuming, dusting and organizing. He shows Kevin how to enjoy these tasks and do them well so that there is time just to play later on. Smalls does an expert job of reflecting this in the flowing text. Kevin shares, “we clean, clean, clean the widows, wipe, wipe, wipe them right. My dad shines in the window’s light” (Smalls, 1999 p. 8). In Hays’ accompanying illustration, Kevin stares up at his father adoringly while they methodically move their dust rags along the windowpanes. The two move from room to room straightening up in a playful way. “Next we pitch, pitch, pitch the papers, fold, fold, folk the funnies, basket, basket, basket the books, tidy, tidy, tidy the toys” (Smalls, 1999 p. 10). The sense of pride in keeping the home neat is evident, but there is also time for a little silliness. “Dad tells a joke and I start to giggle, and I laugh and laugh until I wiggle. We stop and take a little rest. Being with my dad is really the best” (Smalls, 1999 p.14).

From the very first page, themes of love and family stand out. Kevin mimics his father’s actions and clearly sees a hero. The two sip identical milkshakes at the Pancake House and Kevin holds on to the lower end of the vacuum with every push and pull his father makes when they clean the rug. Kevin’s father, lovingly teases his son and tries to make him laugh. “I see a spot,” Dad says as he touches my face and rubs my hair all over the place” (Smalls, 1999 p.10). Again, the uniqueness of this father-son relationship is noteworthy and certainly meets the criteria of self-love and family outlined by Sims (1982) and Lechner (1995).

It’s difficult to tell where Kevin and his dad live in the beginning of the story. Their house is large, with spacious rooms and lovely furnishings. Their home hardly compares to the tiny apartment in Smoky Night or the brownstone Peter lives in in all of Ezra Jack Keats’ books. Outside the windows, the view is lush and green, suggesting suburban or country living. Then on
page 22 and 23 Hays’ illustrates a scene that looks identical to Sheep’s Meadow in Central Park in New York City. Kevin and his father play baseball in a gorgeous green field surrounded by sky-rise buildings. What I find unique about this setting is that the size of their home in a city or just outside of a city makes them financially well off, perhaps even better than well off. After baseball in the park, Kevin and his dad go to see an action movie. They stand in line with men and women of all races. Everyone is smiling, including the white woman who hands the pair their tickets. It is in the combining of these elements that the question is raised, is this book an accurate depiction of life for African Americans as defined by scholars like Sims, Lechner and Kohl? On all fronts, Kevin’s family seems to be living the “American Dream.” They are well off, have a beautiful home in a lovely city, have money to spend on luxuries like movies and do not encounter any racism. Could this book be compared to the controversy surrounding the famous Cosby Show? The main criticism of The Cosby Show was that it ignored issues of racial inequality and reinforced meritocracy. The happy sitcom family never encountered racism. Bill Cosby played the respected Dr. Huckstable, after all (Nelson & George, 1995). The argument could be made that Kevin and His Dad similarly promotes this vision of meritocracy. Then again, Small’s and Hays’ story takes place during just one day, whereas the Huckstables miraculously avoided being the targets of racism for years. A murkier question still, is depicting an African American family as financially stable disrupting the status quo or promoting meritocracy? I am not sure that I have an answer here, but I do believe that each book deserves a unique analysis. African Americans cannot be lumped into one essentialist category, suggesting identical experiences.
Analysis of Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier’s, *Martin’s Big Words* (2002)

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Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier take the reader through an accelerated version of Martin Luther King’s life. The text opens with Martin as a child, holding hands with his mother, staring at a water fountain that has the words “white only” written on it. Martin’s mother reminds him that this sign should not prohibit him from becoming a great man. She says, “you are as good as anyone” (Rappaport, 2002 p.9). From there, we see Martin in church reading his bible and listening to his father’s sermon. Here we learn the reason for the title of book, as Martin decides that he will use big words when he grows up, just like his father. The remainder of the book jumps to Martin as an adult, preaching and fighting for civil rights and desegregation. The book ends with Martin’s tragic death and a hopeful message that “his big words are alive for us today” (Rappaport, 2002 p.35).

Rappaport and Collier do many things well in *Martin’s Big Words*. On the very first page of the book, both the author and illustrator write a note to the reader about their motivation for
writing this text. This is especially important for Rappaport, a white woman, who has made a career of writing African American children’s books. As previously discussed in chapter two, white authors and AAACL is a controversial topic. Rappaport’s experience and intentions are both important factors to consider. The author writes about her experience teaching at a Mississippi freedom school in the summer of 1965. It was the first time in her life that she saw “the fragility of being black in white America” (Rappaport, 2002 p.7). She describes that in order to write *Martin’s Big Words*, she read lots of biographies and speeches. She also read articles written by academics that focus on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It is comforting that Rappaport has done her research and of course, she notes that she was impressed with Martin’s Luther King, Jr.’s way with words. Rappaport expertly pulls out poetic phrases from the text and repeats them throughout the book in large, bold font (Rappaport, 2002).

Collier’s illustrations are a sight to behold. In the illustrator’s note, Collier describes his use of collage to “piece together many different things that have no relationship to each other, until they’re put together to form a oneness” (Rappaport, 2002 p.7). Depictions of African Americans are authentic and lovely. He captures the various decades with the use of a printed-paper and paint combination. For example, the bold floral pattern on Martin’s mother’s dress is clearly representative of the 1930s. Collier also focuses his illustrations on the church and symbols of Christianity. Burning candles, colorful stain glass windows, the bible and orchids near the pulpit appear on many pages through the book. Christianity and Prayer are a large component of *Martin’s Big Words*, which is relatively rare in contemporary African American children’s literature despite being a major part of many African Americans’ lives. The separation of church and state may discourage authors and illustrators who anticipate their books being read in classrooms to include religious themes. The inclusion of this cultural norm in *Martin’s Big
Words is unique and offers an excellent mirror for young African American children growing up in Christian households (Rappaport, 2002).

The most striking image in Martin’s Big Words appears on page thirty. Unlike the rest of the book which largely focuses on historical images of Martin himself, this page portrays a little girl who’s placement in history is unknown. She could truly be from any decade, which is perhaps exactly Collier’s point. This beautiful girl, perhaps nine or ten years of age, stares straight at the reader. Her facial expression is complicated but shows a hint of determination. She is dressed in a shift made of kente cloth. The pattern contains delicate leaves. A matching head-scarf holds back her natural hair. Behind her, the American flag is cut into pieces and haphazardly thrown back together again. Stars are torn in half and stripes no longer align. She has been hurt by the United States and nothing quite makes sense. I could spend hours analyzing this image with students and teachers. It is such an incredible representation of the complexity of African American identity (Rappaport, 2002).

Despite being a strong overall text, several elements of Martin’s Big Words disappoint me. Most importantly, I was surprised by the lack of villainization of white people. In fact, white people do not appear in Martin’s Big Words at all. I want to imagine that this choice was made with the intent of prioritizing the depiction of African Americans, but what ends up happening is that signs like “white only” become the villains. I believe this is damaging, leading the reader to believe that these signs and laws appeared out of thin air. There is clearly a fight going on, but who is this fight against? The vast majority of white people at the time who were fighting for segregation to persist are conspicuously missing. Another issue I have with Martin’s Big Words comes from the need for historical accuracy in AACL. Rappaport describes several historical events, including the day Rosa Parks was arrested, and follows the event with the words: “Martin
walked with them and talked with them and sang with them and prayed with them” (Rappaport, 2002 p.21-22). I believe that Rappaport was aiming for a certain poesis here, as opposed to a literal explanation of events, but this is confusing for children. Martin Luther King Jr. was not physically present for all of these historical events and the repetition of the phrase leads the reader to believe that he was (Rappaport, 2002).
Analysis of *Same Difference* (2010) by Calida Garcia Rawles

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within the black community has been attached to skin tone throughout history (Bond & Cash, 1992).

Unlike most celebrations of skin–tone that follow a fairly rote “let’s all get along” and “we are all beautiful” narrative, Same Difference, begins with the honest presentation of a problem. Here are two female cousins who see the differences in their hair and skin and are making judgment calls about better and worse. They are far from colorblind and notice their difference. “One day at their grandmother’s house, they dressed in her beautiful pearls and became more than just two pretty little girls. In front of the mirror, they played like princesses. But when they looked closely, they just saw differences” (Rawles, 2010 p.10-11). The history surrounding African Americans receiving more or less privileges depending of skin-tone is very real and painful. And, “passing for white” continues to be a topic explored by race scholars. Bond and Cash write, “as Blacks are taught to be proud of their skin color, many Blacks remain ‘color struck;’ that is, they differentially attend and respond to shades of Black skin (Bond & Cash, 1992, p.875). In Same Difference, the girls question this difference and ask their grandmother about it. “‘My skin is dark, and hers is light. And our hair, it’s different, too. We’re not the same, no matter what we do.’ Is one better?” asked Lida. “Is one worse? If this was a contest who would come in first?’” (Rawles, 2010 p.16-17). The honest announcement of children making value judgments based on physical attributes is refreshing, considering the number of books that take the colorblind approach.

Rawles use of rhyme adds a great deal to this book. The girls’ grandmother, who is dark-skinned like Lisa, helps each one see their unique beauty through lovely comparison images. “Lida, your hair looks like waves in the sea. Swirls as thick as molasses flowing carefree. Lisa, your hair twirls like the wind, with tiny little curls built right in. Soft as cotton candy, puffy as a
cloud. You both have ponytails that make me very proud” (Rawles, 2010 p.25-26). The illustrations are bold and striking with an interesting mix between reality and fantasy. For example, when the girls’ grandmother describes their skin, the illustration blends their faces into the sky she is comparing them to, with clouds on their cheeks and sunset in their hair. Rawles writes, “Lida, your skin color is like the mornings’ golden sky, with rich vanilla creams and honey yellow clouds passing by. Lisa, your skin color has cinnamon red hues, mixed with sweet purple plums and the sky’s midnight blues” (Rawles, 2010 p.20-21). I want to make the point here that Same Difference focuses heavily on physical beauty and the importance of feeling pretty as a young girl. This is problematic and never really addressed. I would prefer a book that is less about ponytails, pink and pearls and more about personalities. However, considering I am not focusing my research on gender inequality, I will leave this issue to others.

Unfortunately, Same Difference does have the “compulsory” happy ending that Kohl (1995) warns of. Despite a strong beginning addressing a very real problem that Black children face, the roots of the problem aren’t discussed. Why do these two children feel the need to determine who’s skin and hair are better? I believe Rawles missed an opportunity to bring historical roots to this book. The story remains fairly surface level and the cousins happily decide that though they do have unique differences, no one is inherently better as a result.
This is The Dream captures raw, historical truths of racism in the Jim Crow era in a developmentally appropriate way. Unlike other historical African American children’s texts like Martin’s Big Words, or Smoky Night, Shore and Alexander do not sweep white villains under the rug. The beautiful poetry of Shore matched with Ransome’s striking painting and collage technique, make this book a real gem. The book begins by establishing some of the “norms” of Jim Crow. We see “white” and “coloured” water fountains and Black people forced to sit on the back of buses.

These are the fountains that stand in the square, and black and white signs say who will drink where. These are the buses-a dime buys a ride, but people are sorted by color inside. These are the tables where “WHITES ONLY” eat at tables up front at lunch-counter seats (Shore & Alexander, 2006 p.5-9).
The norms continue through segregated classrooms and separate sections of libraries, focusing on unequal education. Then, the poem takes a strong turn towards activism on page fourteen, where three brave, but terrified Black students walk into a white school for the first time. They are guarded by soldiers and behind them, white faces scream angrily. This image stops the reader in their tracks. You feel compelled to spend a little extra time with this two-page spread, before moving on. “These are the students who step through the doors where people of color have not walked before” (Shore & Alexander, 2006 p.14-15). The remainder of the book follows African American activism in the simple beautiful poetry. The last several pages show white children and Black children playing together, eating together and sitting in the same classroom.

*This is the Dream,* does many things well. But, most significantly, it focuses on the treatment of African Americans during the Jim Crow era as opposed to hiding behind historical dates and facts. Too frequently, Black history is taught in a emotionless, hurried way, avoiding the real reason this history needs to be taught – context for continued inequity in contemporary society. Ransome’s illustrations are once again the star of this book, similar to his work in *Visiting Day.* As I mentioned above, the bold honestly in the pictures draws the reader in and envoles empathy like no other text I have read. One example of this is on page eighteen and nineteen. Ransome recreates the 1960 Woolworths lunch-counter sit-in by four African American college students in Greensboro, North Carolina. The illustration captures the horrific treatment of these four students by white protesters behind them. Angry white people pour sugar, ketchup and crack eggs on the heads of the students at the counter. The treatment of Black people is not imaginary in this image, like in other children’s books. It is terrifying and accurate (Shore & Alexander, 2006).
At first glance, or even first ten glances, the fault I found with this impressive text, was the ending. It comes across as hopeful and inspiring, but also compulsory and too neat. It is one step away from all the children of the world holding hands. The last image of the book shows a classroom of students of many races, all reciting the pledge of allegiance with their hands on their hearts. The American flag stands tall at the front of the classroom. Then, after reading this text once again, I saw something I had not seen before in this image. In the back of the classroom, there is a Black boy who does not have his hand on his heart. He is not smiling like the rest of his classmates. There is something about this image that means even more to me now, with Ransome’s subtle nod towards the continued hardships faced by African Americans in this country. I so look forward to reading this book with a teacher book club, and wonder if they will notice what took me so many readings to see (Shore & Alexander, 2006).
**Analysis of Woodson and Ransome’s *Visiting Day* (2002)**

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Out of the hundreds of African American children’s books I’ve read, *Visiting Day* (2002) perplexes me the most. Every time I flip through the pages I feel differently. Every time I read a related scholarly article I feel confused. *Visiting Day*, might be the greatest example of why the analysis of African American children’s literature is so challenging and why so many voices in the field are important. The author’s and artist’s notes in the back of the book are invaluable. Illustrator, James Ransome, says it best when he writes, “when I first received and read Jackie’s (Jacqueline Woodson) text for *Visiting Day*, it stopped me cold. I sat down to gather my thoughts” (Woodson, 2002 p. 32). I could not agree more. The highly controversial book is told from the perspective of an African American girl, presumed early elementary school age, who goes with her grandmother to visit her father in prison. Every time I’ve taken this book with me to conduct analysis in workshops or my classes, I usually get the same gasping comment, “Is that what I think it is?!?” I think the gut reaction people have just from observing the cover and title of the book is important to break down. Admittedly, it is easy to imagine the absolute worst of this
book. But, with African American males imprisoned at six times that of white males in 2009 (NAACP, 2009), it makes sense this narrative is common in far too many children’s lives. Western and Wildeman (2009) discuss the historical context over the last thirty to forty years as we continue to see a rise in Black male incarceration.

Political currents have flowed to law and order and away from rehabilitative criminal justice policy. Retribution and incapacitation were embraced as the main objectives of criminal punishment…producing astonishing incarceration rates among young African American men (Western and Wildeman, 2009, p.222).

So, the question remains; what was the author thinking? Does this book perpetuate a stereotype of African American males as criminals or is it an accurate reflection of a broken system? After multiple reads of visiting day, I would argue for the later. The book contains joy, love and stems from the personal experience of the author who accurately captures an important element of identity for many African American families.

From the very first page there is much to unpack. The book opens with the little girl’s grandmother (neither are given names) frying up chicken in a large sauté pan, “only on visiting day is there chicken frying in the kitchen at 6am and Grandma humming her secret just-for Daddy-and-me smile” (Woodson, 2002 p. 2). Fried chicken has long been considered a racist stereotype associated with African Americans, and the flip side of that argument is that it is a significant cultural tradition. In the book, Building Houses out of Chicken Legs, Williams-Forson writes about chicken and soul food in general as much more than nourishment, but a way that Black women resisted assimilation and shaped a feminist identity (Williams, Forson, 2006). Also, Slocum argues that “Embracing should food is a statement of racial pride precisely
because it reclaims foods previously despised – those animal parts that slaves had to eat and those that their owners would not” (Slocum, 2010 p.306). Fried chicken in Visiting Day appears in celebration of family along with other stereotypically southern foods. The little girl and Grandma, along with several other families of prisoners (all Black), eat the chicken, “corn bread, and thick slices of sweet potato pie until maybe we think we’re going to pop” while riding the bus to the prison (Woodson, 2002 p. 19). The families on the bus are all smiling and appear joyful as they eat the shared food. This raises doubts of realism. Is it possible for family members of the incarcerated to find so much joy in visiting day? Or, is this a powerful modernized image of the picanniny – with African Americans portrayed as overjoyed with their current circumstances? Perhaps not. The reality for families in similar circumstances to those in Visiting Day necessitates finding joy under such circumstances and continuing to live life.

Images of the prison in Visiting Day are authentic and racially representative of the abundance of imprisoned African American males. When the family arrives they are greeted by barbed wire and watch towers. The visiting room is packed with other Black faces, inmates and families alike. The most striking image in the whole book may be on pages 25 and 26, when the little girl has clearly been told than visiting time is over. Smiles disappear and father and daughter are led away from one another, while the most prominent white face of a prison guard appears in between them. The guard stands tall and emotionless with his hands behind his back. This clearly purposeful representation of race and power captures the reader and provokes an emotional response, especially considering white faces are few and far between in this book. The little girl is reassured by her grandmother that “it’s not forever going to be like this” (Woodson, 2002 p. 25).
The love of family is undeniable in *Visiting Day*. As primary caregiver while Dad is imprisoned, Grandma works around the clock to provide a good childhood for the little girl, and takes on all the roles a parent would. She cooks, braids hair, snuggles and offers lessons on manners and respect. Love is in the foreground and background of almost every one of Ransome’s illustrations. Daddy’s prison cell walls are covered with the little girl’s drawings of family, and even adorned with tiny hearts. At home, the living room walls have photos of embracing family. The faces are blurry, but the point is made, prison has not completely destroyed this family’s commitment to one another. Grandma takes her role of parent seriously, educating the little girl about empathy and respect. On page 10 a family acquaintance, Mrs. Tate, comes over to drop off presents for her son who is also in the same prison. We learn that this woman cannot afford the bus fare for traveling. The little girl describes her grandmother shooting her “a look” that warns her to “sit quiet” (Woodson, 2002 p. 10).

*Visiting Day* is a fantastic example of Lechner’s (1995) criteria of the child within a community. The little girl is not only surrounded by the love of her small, non-traditional immediate family, but has the kinship of other prisoner’s families as well. There seems to be a bond over the difficulty of having a loved one who is incarcerated, and this is logical. On the other hand, it is shocking just how many people from this small community are traveling to see their imprisoned sons, fathers, brothers and friends. Again the question is raised, is this an accurate reflection of the current prison system and it’s effect on families, or does this perpetuate a racial stereotype?

*Visiting Day* meets an impressive four out of six criteria outlined by Kohl (1995). The community beyond the family is substantial, and the ending is hopeful without being overly cheerful. Grandma and the little girl experience a range of emotions on their trip to the prison,
and when they arrive home it is dark outside and they are alone again. The reality that Daddy is gone comes back with substantial weight. On the very last page of the book, the two are sweetly wrapped up in a hug and begin to dream of the day when Daddy will be home with them, acknowledging that until that day comes this is just the way it is going to be.

I believe that *Visiting Day* could easily be damaging in the wrong hands. Although Woodson and Ransome throw light on extremely important topics, including the mass incarceration of Black males and the effect that has on families, this text has the potential to be exploited and used to promote stereotypes. Reading this text with accuracy requires background knowledge and a willingness to accept the complexity of black identity. *Visiting Day* requires a critical eye from the reader and an appreciation for detail.
Jalani and the Lock, written and illustrated by Lorenzo Pace, offers an emotional and deep look at slavery through the eyes of a child. It is a fantastic example of the “neo-slave narrative” (Martin, 2004). The book, so unlike many others, captures the darkness of history, while simultaneously maintaining a simple narrative, easily understood by young children. Lorenzo Pace, an African American author, uses the stories passed down through his family, as well as the family slave ship lock to inspire this stunning narrative. The author’s aim, to tell a story that accurately represents history in a child-friendly way, is highly successful. The remainder of this summary discusses the general narrative of the book, and concludes with an exploration of text and images as supportive elements in the story’s anti-racist agenda.

This story opens with young Jalani going against his mother’s wishes and playing in the forest by himself outside their home. Soon, a strange man appears and kidnaps Jalani from this forest, forcing him into slavery with locks and chains. A ship carries him to America where he
can never play and must always work. Despite the sadness that speaks so well in the story, the book ends with a necessary flicker of hope. Abraham Lincoln (a questionable focus for heroism) declares that slaves should be free and Jalani goes on to have many children and grandchildren as a free man. Most importantly, the lock, used as a symbol of all the treachery of slavery is passed down in the family—a constant reminder that though the world may continue to change, this inconceivable period in history will never be forgotten.

If an anti-racist text aims to disrupt the hegemonic discourses surrounding race, then *Jalani and the Lock* fits the criteria in several ways. First and foremost, the text itself offers a simple and honest look at slavery. In hegemonic historical texts, the events of slavery are often “sugar coated,” especially when presented for a young audience. This “sugar coating” promotes misinformation and a general lack of empathy for how historical context shapes current societal norms. The preaching of “forgive and forget” comes more easily to educators who aren’t using texts that describe the horrors of the slave trade. Similarly, the immediate naming of Africa and America suggests that slavery was in fact a real event and should be taken seriously. Young children work to differentiate between fact and fiction from an early age and learn to categorize books into genres. In the younger grades, the miscategorization of a historical text as fairy tale or fiction is highly problematic. In the case of miscategorization, children learn that slavery is nothing but an old wives tale, akin to other fictional stories they’ve been told. The text in the story also describes the painful push for assimilation, asking a young audience to question the fairness of Jalani having to give up his language and his culture when coming to America was forced upon him. Children of the dominant culture learn to believe in the necessity of assimilation for non-dominant people at a very young age. This book necessitates a hard look at that dominant belief.
At first, I questioned the success of the images in this book. The illustrations take on a child like quality. People look more like monsters than humans, with skin color ranging from blue to red to purple. I hold the belief that illustrations that accurately represent race are far more valuable in AACL because the depictions validate racial identity for children. On the other hand, illustrations done by children offer a certain raw quality and are supportive of the simple narrative. The squiggly lines and bold colors seem to indicate that slavery really did affect children, not just adults. The illustrations may even be suggestive of drawings done by Jalani himself, as if in reflection of this life-changing event.

I take issue with two major events in Jalani and the Lock, the first of which being the heroism of Abraham Lincoln. This is not to say that Lincoln was not important to abolishing slavery, clearly he was. But, in a simple narrative like Jalani and the Lock, naming Lincoln as the hero takes the focus off of African American struggle and places a white man at the center of it all. A white hero came along and suddenly things were all better. McPherson (1995) suggests that modern day historians would unanimously agree that “the slaves freed themselves.” Slaves were able to escape to Union military camps and in doing so forced emancipation on the Lincoln administration (McPherson, 1995, p.1). Additionally, Race itself is never mentioned in this narrative, and the images are not helpful. Race needs to be assumed by young readers and I’m not sure that it will be. Abraham Lincoln is the only white character named in Jalani and the Lock, which does not allow for necessary contrast to the white people who kidnapped Jalani. So, in this way, did white people collectively come to save the day? This leads me to the second major issue in Jalani: the entirely too happy ending. Kohl (1995) specifically states that the best AACL does not have “a compulsory happy ending or resolution of the problem. Hope and possibility are evident” (Kohl, 1995 p. 66-68). Though Jalani keeps the lock as a reminder, the
story ignores that Jalani will face many more reminders of his experiences as a slave, namely continued racism. This rosy end is no doubt aimed at providing that sense of hope Kohl speaks of, but I feel Pace glossed over any potential hardships in order to offer a neat and tidy “fairy-tale” ending.
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Teacher Participant

Title of Project:
African American Children’s Literature as a Tool for Consciousness Raising in an Elementary Teacher Book Club

Principle Investigator:
Dr. Heidi Anne Mesmer, Virginia Tech Faculty
Dr. Brenda Brand, Virginia Tech Faculty
Lauren Catherwood, Virginia Tech Doctoral Student

I. Purpose
The purpose of this study is to provide a rich professional development experience for white, elementary teachers who are currently teaching in a predominantly African American school in an effort to make this social advocacy classroom environment more attainable. A social advocacy classroom can be defined as a classroom in which the teacher purposefully addresses unjust societal practices that marginalize certain groups of people. In a book club setting, teachers will engage in consciousness raising, “a process that encourages participants to recognize, question, broaden, and challenge individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and behaviors that perpetuate estranged and oppressive relations between groups” (Z’uniga et al., 2002). Teachers will analyze both text and images in ten African American children’s books, searching for stereotypes, power, privilege and societal uplift.

II. Procedure
Over the course of ten weeks, teachers will participate in book club meetings at the Roanoke Higher Education Center. All meetings will be video and audio recorded. During meetings teachers will:
A. Discuss their thoughts and feelings about selected African American children’s books.
B. Respond to quick writing prompts related to the book club experience.

III. Risks
Involvement in the book club comes with potential risks. Broken confidentiality of fellow participants could lead to strained relations with co-workers or administrators who disagree with one’s stated personal views. The most extreme potential risks include public condemnation by parents or administrators or advocacy groups who disagree with your opinions, and negative effect on promotion or job retention. These risks are not anticipated. You have the right to withdraw from participation at any time by notifying the researcher verbally or in writing.

IV. Benefits

Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board: Project No. 14-574
Approved July 14, 2014 to July 13, 2015
Participating teachers may choose which of the book club books they would like to keep for their own professional use. The books they select will be gifted to them at the end of the study. The researchers have selected these texts for the purposes of this study only and do not endorse the texts for curriculum use. Teachers will only be eligible to keep books from meetings that they attended.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality
The researcher will keep all data collected confidential. Information gathered from the study will be used in a dissertation and may be used in reports, presentations, and articles in professional journals. However, the participant’s name will not be used in any report, presentation, or article and identifying information will be changed so that data cannot be connected to individual. Pseudonyms will be used. No identifying characteristics of the participant will be revealed in any reporting of the data. Despite efforts to preserve it, anonymity may be compromised.

The researcher will catalogue and code the data, including audio and video recordings of group meetings. The tape recording will then be transcribed for further analysis. Only Lauren Catherwood, Dr. Mesmer and Dr. Brand will have access to the tapes and transcriptions.

All data will be retained for a maximum period of one year in secure locations under the supervision of the primary researcher. After that time, all data will be destroyed.

It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study’s collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation
The participant will have the option to keep texts of their choosing for professional use, keeping in mind that the ten selected books are not endorsed by the researchers for curriculum use. No other compensation will be offered.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw
The participant is free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free to respond to any research situations that you choose without penalty. You are free to request that any discussion transcript of yours be removed from the data set without penalty. There may be circumstances under which the investigators may determine that you should not continue to be involved in the study.

VIII. Subjects’ Responsibilities
I voluntarily agree to participate in the research project. I have the following responsibilities: to participate in ten book club meetings.
I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for the collection and analysis of the following materials (please initial all that apply):

___ transcripts made from all video and audio recordings of meetings
___ transcription of teacher reflection journal

_________________________  __________
Participant’s Signature     Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:
Lauren Catherwood          570-772-4537         laurenec@vt.edu
Dr. Heidi Anne Mesmer      540-231-8343         hamesmer@vt.edu
Dr. Brenda Brand           540-231-8334         bbbrand@vt.edu
Dr. David Moore, IRB Chair 540-231-4991         moored@vt.edu

You will be provided with a duplicate of the original of the signed Informed Consent.