CRITICAL RACE THEORY AS DIALOGIC PERFORMANCE WITH WHITE TEACHERS: ADDRESSING COLORBLINDNESS

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ABSTRACT

BENJAMIN BLAISDELL: Critical Race Theory as Dialogic Performance with White Teachers: Addressing Colorblindness (Under the direction of George Noblit)

This study is an attempt to both uncover and challenge the adherence to colorblind views and practices of white teachers with regard to race and racism in schools. Employing a performance ethnography approach, the study attempts to position white teachers as both unintentionally supportive of and potentially resistant to institutional structures and ideologies that marginalize students of color. The performance approach also positions these teachers as co-performers in the research act itself, thus close attention is paid to what they can offer towards the goal of challenging colorblindness.

Particular attention is paid to the potentially educative aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a tool that can be used to promote and analyze dialogue with white teachers about race. By using CRT in this dialogic fashion, the study can focus on the complexity and contractions involved in teachers’ approaches to racial equity. Specifically, the teachers in this study both support and resist colorblind approaches to such equity, and CRT as a motivation and tool of analysis enables the study to focus on the possibility of fostering more critical antiracist practice.
To Pablo: For reminding me about why this work is important and for teaching me about the possibility of the material world more than any book, method, or theory ever could.
I want to thank all of the teachers in this study. I respect them for the work that they do, and I hope I continue to honor their commitment to education.

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CHAPTER 1
THE PROJECT

In this dissertation/study, I examine the ways in which white educators conceptualize and perform race. I use a performance ethnography research approach with seven teachers to discuss issues related to race and education. In particular, I use critical race theory (CRT) in a dialogic performance (Conquergood, 1985) with these teachers in order to open up and analyze conversations about how white teachers think and act from colorblind perspectives, how they believe they perform race as teachers, and what they consider racism and its impact to be on their students.

The conceptual framework I describe below focuses on how CRT can inform teacher education. Specifically, I point out teacher education literature that explains the persistence of liberalism in the thinking and practice of white teachers, the negative effects of this liberalism on students of colors other than white, and the need for teacher education to address it, in particular regarding issues of race and racism. I then discuss how CRT can be used to combat this liberalism. The performance approach to research I follow encourages me to focus on the pedagogical aspects of performance (Denzin, 2003). As each of the conversations I had with the teachers in this study were, in essence, performances about the meaning and significance of race and because one of my overarching goals is to inform teacher education, I set up the following conceptual framework as a way to investigate how these performances are pedagogical to me as the researcher/teacher educator. That is to say,
I examine how they inform my approach to teacher education, an approach that involves following the CRT agenda of making issues of race more visible and interrogating racism.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

I use critical race theory (CRT) in several ways in this study. First of all, I use CRT to inform current perspectives about race in the field of teacher education. The intent is to critique how teacher education addresses issues of race in order to propose how the field can better affect educational practice. I examine the potential for change in teacher education from my perspective and experience as a white teacher educator of primarily white in-service teachers. Second, and at the heart of this study, I use CRT to enter into a dialogue with high school teachers about race in education. In this part of the study, the core tenets of CRT will be a motivational guide for the dialogue. In addition, I use CRT to analyze the ensuing dialogue. The intent of the discussion is to a) affect the practice of the teachers in the study and b) examine how CRT can be used with teachers to challenge notions and practices of colorblindness, to uncover whiteness in teacher practice, and to promote teacher practice that is equitable for all students. Finally, I do not only use CRT to expose the whiteness and complicity in racism of the teachers in the study but to discuss the whiteness and complicity of all whites, including myself, as well. By analyzing how all whites are complicit in institutional forms of racism and including myself in that complicity, I hope to avoid merely (re)centering whiteness and whitening a theory that comes in large part from the perspectives and experiences of scholars of color. I hope that focusing on complicity and then challenging that complicity will enable me to use CRT in a way that honors its commitment to racial change. I also hope that the examination of my own whiteness will
reveal complications, cautions, and implications for both white scholars who do work on race and the field of teacher education.

With each of the ways I intend to use CRT, I hope both to ground theory (both CRT and theory from education) in the world and work of teachers (i.e., make the theories more reflective of teacher experiences) in order to ultimately make theory constructive to teachers, teacher educators, and those who do research with teachers. By using theory in this way, I hope to use it for transformative ends. The end goal of this study, then, is to use theory in ways that effect change—of teacher practice, of teacher education, and ultimately of students’ lives—and address the problem of school racism.

**Teacher Education**

My intent in this section is to examine and critique how the field of teacher education addresses issues of race and racism in education—highlighting the field’s strengths, limitations, and possibilities—in order to examine how CRT can further the field. In particular, I will argue how CRT can help teacher education overcome the presence of liberalism in teacher thinking and how scholars in the field can also work towards the transformational goals of critical theory/pedagogy. As Giroux (1997) points out, liberalism in educational discourse persists in ways that continue to frame students as needy or deprived (of culture, experiences, etc.). Below, I explain how some teachers continue to follow this type of thinking (in addition to how some challenge it), specifically in regards to race in education. I also show how some scholars, both from teacher education and whiteness studies, have worked against that liberal discourse. I will highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of this scholarship in order to explain how CRT can further the agenda that these
critical scholars maintain. What is common to all of these scholars is their desire to work against the dominant discourses in education, which Giroux argues, “fail to understand how schools are implicated in reproducing oppressive ideologies and social practices” (p. 130).

**Race In Teacher Education**

Some studies that focus on teachers’ racial attitudes have arisen since Banks’ (1995) claim that studies on race in education focus more on children’s rather than teachers’ attitudes. However, Sleeter’s (1992) assertion that studies that have dealt with white educational professionals’ perceptions of race and whiteness have focused much more on the perceptions of pre-service rather than in-service teachers still holds some truth. For example Cochran-Smith (1995), McIntyre (1997), and Sleeter, (2001) have all researched white pre-service teachers and how they conceptualize race and racism in pre-service education. Cochran-Smith (1995) attempted to uncover white pre-service teachers’ perspectives on teaching minority students in order to recommend changes in preparing pre-service teachers for working with diversity in their classrooms. Though her focus is on making recommendations that primarily involve changing the structure of teacher education in order to prepare pre-service teachers, one of her approaches to working with teachers is similar to mine. She tries to uncover educators’ personal and professional experiences and opinions in order to position teachers as intelligent individuals who teacher educators can work with towards achieving the goals of addressing diversity.

In a similar attempt to get teachers to address their personal racial experiences and identities, McIntyre (1997) interviewed thirteen white pre-service teachers to explore what their whiteness meant to them. McIntyre found that even though their conversations did not
lead the teachers to collective action to address racism (as she had hoped), the investigation into teachers’ and teacher educators’ whiteness and racial identity was important in order to address the “highly disturbing” (675) ways that whites make meaning of their whiteness. This calls to mind Parker’s (1998) call for scholars\(^1\) to interrogate the existence and dominance of whiteness in education as a way to combat racism. It also addresses one of the primary avenues for investigation as recommended by Sleeter (2001).

Sleeter (2001) reviews the research on teacher education programs and their attempts at preparing teachers to work with minority students. She finds that the research in teacher education does not provide a clear answer about how to address the problem of preparing a primarily white pre-service education student body to teach a racially diverse population of students in schools. In her experience, most white students in pre-service education programs have limited multicultural awareness and often hold colorblind views on race. While the research does show how some teacher education programs have had at least limited success in specific situations, Sleeter concludes that most of the research shows that an “overwhelming presence of whiteness” (p. 102) exists in teacher education and that it is clear that the dominance of this whiteness has to be addressed. She recommends that “improving White attitudes” (p. 102) should be an integral part of teacher education and also that research should continue on this attitude development when pre-service teachers become in-service teachers. So, this study attempts to follow this recommendation and to encourage teachers to examine their own whiteness—and how it contributes to racism in schools—along with Sleeter’s (1992) recognition that work with in-service teachers is rare.

\(^1\) I want to point out that Parker specifically mentions the usefulness of CRT for scholars of color to study whiteness and its links to racism. In this study, I attempt to heed the cautions that white scholars should have using CRT and will discuss this more thoroughly in the Chapter 6.
Studies in teacher education do exist in which researchers examine their own whiteness (Marx and Pennington, 2003; Hytten and Warren, 2003; Thompson, 2003; Allen and Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004; Blaisdell, 2005, forthcoming). To a large extent, these studies focus on the complications involved when white teacher educators try to combat racism in a primarily white pre-service teaching force. However, even though the articles by Hytten and Warren’s (2003) and Allen and Hermann-Wilmarth (2004) discuss how the authors attempted to address their students’ privilege, the articles do not discuss in detail the strategies that university personnel can use to open up the examination of potentially racist classroom practice with their students. Furthermore, McCarthy (2003) critiques several of these articles—in which teacher educators address their students’ as well as their own whiteness and racism—claiming that they “fail to go down analytical paths that might have enriched their efforts and provided more complex perspectives in the production and reproduction of whiteness in teacher education” (p. 131). As I will argue below, I believe this study, through its use of CRT, attempts to develop and use a way to analyze how white teachers both practice and combat whiteness and white dominance.

Some studies also exist that have examined white in-service teachers’ attitudes about racism (Sleeter, 1992; Lawrence and Tatum, 1997; Johnson, 2002). Each of these studies described whites following a colorblind ideology. Thus, white teachers neither acknowledged their own racial privilege nor the existence of practices that marginalize students of color. Johnson’s (2002) study, using a life history approach, specifically asked the questions: “…what experiences help White teachers reflect on concepts of race and racism, and how might their racial views influence their teaching?” (p. 153). Johnson opens up dialogue about how teachers’ racial attitudes affect their teaching practice. While my
study does not follow one of Johnson’s main recommendations, which is to expose white teachers to “perspective on racism from those who experienced it” (p. 163), in any major way, it does follow her recommendation that the use of narrative should be used to “critique [white teachers’] complicity in maintaining racial privilege” (p. 164). In fact, my use of CRT and dialogic performance, both described below, more directly engages in this critique with teachers and attempts to further the type of work in which Johnson engages.

Other studies that have examined the perspectives of and opened up discussions with in-service teachers regarding issues of race in education did not focus on the perspectives of white teachers only (Metz, 1990; Cohen, 1993; Foster, 1993; Henze, Lucas, and Scott, 1998; Kailin, 1999). Rather, they focused on mixed groups of teachers or on black teachers exclusively. Most of these articles focus on how teachers perceive issues of race and racism (which is an important aspect of my study as well), but they do not focus on how to uncover these perceptions. None of the articles offers in-depth ways for researchers to enter into these conversations, though they do point out reasons why the dialogue is difficult. In my study—in the discussion of dialogic performance and the use of CRT below—I hope to also focus on how researchers and teacher educators can begin open dialogue on race.

One of the above articles that has been very useful in setting up the conceptual framework for this project is by Judy Kailin (1999). Her study specifically addresses some of the questions that mine investigates:

What do teachers think is meant by racism in education? Where do they think it exists, if at all, in their schools, and how do they see it being expressed?…Do they recognize the hidden ways in which White supremacy operates in the absence or the tokenizing and distortion of people of color in the curriculum and in other aspects of the general climate or culture of the school? (Kailin, 1999, p 724).
Kailin codes teacher responses about such questions in several ways, but almost half of the responses put the responsibility for racism on black students, parents, or staff. This is seen in responses that negatively label black home life (e.g., “Black students come from bad home environments and do not value education,” p. 732) as well as in those that code black student behavior in negative ways (e.g., “Black students are ‘intimidating,’” p. 733). In addition, over 40% of the responses attributed racism to primarily overt acts of racism by whites. In these responses, teachers recognize that whites often use coded language to speak negatively of black people. “While there were no overt racial epithets reported, the language was clearly contemptuous, though couched in the coded language of racism often used for Blacks and other people of color, as in the “other,” or “those people,” or “those people from Chicago,” “and even those people from the apartments” (p. 739). What each of these types of response shows is that whites perceive racism to exist either in overt acts of racism by whites or in the behavior or those whom Kailin calls the victims of racism, i.e., non-whites. Very few responses showed whites acknowledging either their own complicity in racism or the existence of institutional forms of racism (e.g., curricular design, in-school tracking practices, discipline policies, etc.).

Kailin’s study is important to mine in at least two ways. First, it highlights how liberal thinking affects white teachers’ perceptions of racism. As Giroux (1997) argues that the racial discourse of liberalism narrates minority students (and their parents) as in positions of deprivation, ignores the institutional factors that act on those students (as the institution itself is seen as neutral), and therefore does not acknowledge the actors who contribute to the continual reconstruction of institutional norms. The comments that Kailin uncovers are indicative of that liberal discourse of deprivation and thus give me types of responses to look
for in the teachers I interview. Second, Kailin’s shows that researchers still need to work with white educators, particularly in-service teachers, on recognizing how racism exists via complicity and institutional racism.

An important aspect about all of the studies I have mentioned thus far in this conceptual framework is that they emphasize the need for researchers to examine the racial attitudes of white in-service teachers in order to determine how those attitudes lead to complicity in racism. In addition, as Johnson (2002) argues, researchers need to confront those attitudes so as to lead to perceptions and behaviors that do not privilege whiteness. Thus it is important to examine the ways in which white teachers practice and privilege whiteness. In line with the previously cited critique by McCarthy (2003), what I find has been lacking in much of the teacher education literature has been a discussion of the “tools” that teacher educators can use with teachers to confront whiteness. While this study is not designed to be a piece of whiteness studies—the agenda is not to examine whiteness as a phenomenon but more specifically to examine how practices of whiteness contribute to racism— I do draw on whiteness studies in my definition of whiteness. To a large extent I used Frankenberg’s (1993) definition:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a “standpoint” a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, “whiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p.1)

This conceptualization of whiteness provides a useful tool to “see” whiteness in education. As I will explain in the sections on CRT, I also believe that CRT is particularly useful in providing tools to analyze these unmarked practices.

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2 I will explain more about the difference between whiteness studies and CRT in the section on CRT below.
In both my research and my work as a teacher educator, I encounter resistance from white teachers in discussions on how race and racism exist in schooling, even from teachers who claim to have what I would call a social justice agenda in their teaching. They often make comments about feelings of guilt or blame. While the teachers can often acknowledge the presence of overt or explicit racism, they have a tougher time accepting institutional racism and complicity. For them, racism is something that originates from individuals, not the structure of institutions such as schools. Thus, the remedy to racism is individual rather than structural. These types of comments are indications of the persistence of liberalism in teacher thinking (as Kailin [1999] highlights in her article). In addition, while these teachers often understand the concept of structural racism, and even believe that it exists in the abstract, they do not always see how that racism manifests itself, usually through white privilege, in their own teaching.

In this study, I hope the teachers and I can begin to uncover such complicity through our dialogue. Rather than resort to essentializing these teachers as many in academia do (Allen and Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004) and only critiquing them for not having the same vision of social justice education that I have, I hope to show how CRT can be used with teachers to analyze whiteness and understand the racial dynamics of their teaching practice as well as my own practice as a white teacher educator and researcher. In the end, these discussions are valuable in promoting pedagogies and identities that work against white privilege and implicit and institutional forms of racism.
Critical Race Theory

CRT is valuable in interrogating whiteness. As Lazos Vargas (2003) points out, there are various traditions and trajectories of CRT, and she employs the term critical race studies to encompass CRT and the related fields that have risen from it, fields that also center race with a highly critical stance. On one level, different interpretations of CRT can appear to be contradictory. For example, a racial fatalist view challenges the assertion that racial equality will ever occur in the U.S. This view exists side by side with a “liberal optimism” (p. 4) that is more hopeful for racial remedy. Lazos Vargas argues that this combination of fatalism and optimism is an important aspect of critical race studies. Optimism motivates scholars to work towards racial equality while fatalism provides a check against changes made too easily. In this study, I adhere to Lazos Vargas’ optimistic assertion that CRT “can be interpreted as holding that American society can become more racially just and that Whites can overcome racism” (p. 4, emphasis in original) and Matsuda’s (1991) belief that CRT maintains a commitment to eliminating racism. This vision of CRT seeks to understand the nature of racism so that it does not maintain the same effect on people’s lives. CRT does this by analyzing how racism is created and maintained via a system of norms rooted in whiteness. “Once we understand how our categories, tools, and doctrines influence us, we may escape their sway and work more effectively for liberation” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000, p. 213). For whites, this understanding must include an awareness of how those categories, tools, and doctrines make us complicit in racism. The ways we set guidelines, organize knowledge, and create policy are rooted in and perpetuate white privilege, and CRT can help us expose the creation of that privilege, a privilege that makes us complicit in racism.
In this way, CRT maintains a connection to whiteness studies, both which uncover and challenge practices of white privilege. One difference between CRT and whiteness studies is in where structural critique originates. In CRT, such critique must come from the margins, from new perspectives. Matsuda (1995/1987) describes the need to look to the bottom. People who have experienced injustices such as racism, in fact those who are the continual victims of it, have a better understanding of that perspective. Just as civil rights lawyers often pursued their own agenda (rather than that of the parents they claimed to be fighting for) in school desegregation cases (Bell, 1995/1976), scholars who are not targets of racism may not be the most appropriate to lead the fight against racism. This is not to say that white scholars cannot do work against racism but that they should let scholars of color take the lead in the pursuit of this agenda (Delgado, 1995/1984; Guinier and Torres, 2002).

Equally important is the difference in how CRT and whiteness studies challenge white privilege. Both highlight practices of whiteness that marginalize people of color. The difference is in the specific concepts that CRT offers (some of which will be described below) that can be used to analyze and challenge those practices. In addition, where whiteness is at least in part concerned with working towards positive white identity formation (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998; Rodriguez, 2000), CRT uses these concepts to work more exclusively at tearing down material and ideological barriers to racial equality.

It is also important to note that while CRT scholars center race in their analyses, class and gender bias are not irrelevant forms of inequity. Rather, they believe that race has played a significant and central role in discrimination in society and social institutions like schools (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In fact, by centering race, CRT scholars believe that these other

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3 Giroux (2001) actually does make this claim but, at the same time, he also stresses the importance of the Frankfurt School.
social ills can be cured as well (Guinier and Torres, 2002). Issues of race and racial inequality are in some sense similar to other issues of inequality. Racism however, is a particularly visible form of inequality. In racism, who suffers is related to the color of one’s skin, so it is easier to see the victims of the inequality. Because of this visibility, attending to racial inequality illuminates other forms as well. For example, Guinier and Torres (2002) explain a case in which the visibility of race helped scholars and activists illuminate a clear example of discrimination and create structural changes that positively affected the lives of people of color as well as those of other traditionally marginalized people. The case involved an attack of affirmative action policies at the University of Texas, Austin. Ultimately, the case led to a decision on admissions policy that benefited people who suffered from both racial and class oppression. On the material level, more students of color and poor white students were admitted to the University of Texas. On the ideological level, policy makers had to re-examine their views of equity and equitable admissions procedures. Activists were able to challenge an ideology of colorblindness in admissions procedures and come up with a plan that was “consistent with the stated goals of the university” (p. 72). By appealing to democratic principles, these activists were able to use racial analysis to help both students of color and poor white students. Racial awareness in this case, then, led to more racial and class equity.

This nexus of material and ideological change is important for such social change to be sustained. The work of Iglesias (2002) and Delgado (1995/1984) shows that the ultimate goal of CRT is not to only change laws or rules but also to change ideology and action. Changing a rule within an institution without changing that institution’s ideology will only allow the institution to maintain its current inequities (Iglesias, 2002). So, changing

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4 See Guinier and Torres (2002, pp. 67-74) for a fuller description.
institutional ideologies is necessary. Changes in rules and law are part of this project but they are not the end goal and we cannot rely on rules and laws alone. Bell (1995/1976, 1995/1980) has shown how changing laws is not enough. Laws can be circumvented or accommodated to maintain privilege. Segregation still exists in schools, and in some cases it has gotten worse since the Brown decision. On the other hand, changing (or at least engaging) ideology can change how people act in ways that can have positive effects on the lives of people of color. So, ideological change is a necessary to bring about material changes in people’s lives, and in the end, material change is the goal of CRT. CRT doesn’t fight for the idea of desegregation. It fights for better schools, better resources, and better curricula for people of color.5

I try to use an attention to race and racism in my own work in this way because I also believe that it can lead to more democratic schools. In particular, I want to use CRT analysis with teachers because I believe it is a way to take advantage of the spirit of their colorblindness (i.e., their ideologies)—which is that they want, as one teacher in my study has put it, to “see every student as a 10”—to achieve more color-conscious, equitable pedagogy (i.e., their material practice). To put it more succinctly, I want teachers to think differently so they will also act differently.

Analytical Tools of Critical Race Theory

Here I will explain the main tenets of CRT and how they lead to tools of analysis that teacher educators can use with white teachers to challenge colorblindness, white privilege, and racism. First of all, CRT maintains that racism is “normal, not aberrant in American society” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000, pg. xvi). A liberal ideology looks at racism as

5 Bell (1995/1976) makes this argument, which even goes back to the work of DuBois (1935).
abnormal occurrences that can be eliminated one-by-one. Institutions are value-free and those abnormal racist occurrences can be cut out of them, leaving intact the fair and just institution. CRT, by contrast, states that the actual configurations of institutions involve racism. Rules, categories, and definitions favor whites over people from other racial groups. Therefore, what becomes important for CRT is to critique colorblind assumptions as they fail to recognize this racial component of institutions.

Another main tenet relates to the history of property rights in the U.S (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT asserts that equal rights have been tied to property rights rather than human rights and that this connection continues to produce racism. That is to say, human rights have actually been determined by and through property rights in ways that privilege whites over non-whites.

A third main tenet in CRT is narrative or counterstory (Delgado and Stefanic, 2001; Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). As history is a tool that has been used by whites to maintain privilege, traditional accounts of history have left out the voices of the marginalized. Therefore CRT uses narratives from these groups (in essence, looking to the bottom) to challenge the assumed neutrality and race-less-ness of those accounts, thus historicizing institutions and highlighting the voices of people of color.

The tenets I describe above relate to several of the analytic tools that I believe can lead to acts of transformation in schools: naming whiteness, the intersection of whiteness and property, and revisionism. A goal of this study is to show that CRT (through the use of these analytical tools) can offer teacher education practical ways to transform school sites and educational practice.
**Naming whiteness**

CRT maintains a critique of colorblindness. As racism is inherent in U.S. society, claims of colorblindness and colorblind ideologies and language make invisible the presence of racism and how race is practiced in institutions like schools. For example, practices like tracking, and even detracking, can be used to establish systems of meritocracy that appear to be equitable but that actually privilege whiteness (Oakes, Wells, Jones, and Datnow; 1997). Educators can claim to place students in certain tracks because of their academic abilities while ignoring how measures of those abilities are related to race. Similarly, detracking measures that “open” higher tracks to any student who wants to choose them still allow educators to ignore both how students may be pushed not to choose those tracks or why they may do poorly once they do choose them. To counter such measures, it is important then to name whiteness, i.e., use CRT to examine the social construction of whiteness (Parker, 1998). Those practices that have been constructed in ways to privilege whites and prevent students of color from doing well must be named for their whiteness—i.e., the way they privilege whiteness. Parker points out that CRT can be particularly useful in critiquing claims of educational meritocracy, claims based in a view that education is and should be racially neutral. The purpose of naming whiteness is to counter the claims of meritocracy by uncovering the privilege given to students raced as white and the limitation put on those raced as other than white.

This naming of whiteness is important in this study. Through the interviews, I have tried to work with the teachers to look at the whiteness of their thinking and teaching practices (including but not limited to discipline techniques and choice of content) and at how those practices may favor their white students. Practices like tracking can be used to
maintain systems of meritocracy that appear to be equitable but that actually privilege whiteness. Educators can claim to place students in certain tracks because of their academic abilities while ignoring how measures of those abilities are related to race. Here is an excerpt from one teacher I interviewed:

T: …after a year of teaching a basic class where students were—it was behavior—I spent at least 50% of the time dealing with behavior problems. I mean students with IEP [individual assessment plans] and talking back… I think that if we could integrate some students. From standard to honors it might work but if it was an equal mix, I don’t know.

The teacher is talking with me about her thoughts on detracking. She has a problem with tracking but also has a problem with letting go of it completely. In this type of case, I try to talk with teachers about why there might be more behavior problems in lower track classes and why there are more non-white students in those classes. Naming whiteness is important in these discussions. I try to work with the teachers to look at the whiteness of their teaching practices (including but not limited to discipline techniques and choice of content) and how those practices may favor their white students. If the curriculum that teachers use reflects cultural backgrounds of their white students and the teaching techniques they employ follow white modes of interaction, teachers may unknowingly favor white students. If teachers’ perceptions of the abilities of their students and the value of their students’ experiences are based on white norms, teachers may inadvertently forming negative judgment of their students of color. These practices may contribute to the way tracking plays out along racial lines. Naming such practices for their whiteness shows how teachers contribute to the privilege for students raced as white and put limitations on those raced as other than white. The purpose of naming whiteness is so that teachers can see how their practices contribute to racism.
In another example, the same teacher from above acknowledges that there are institutional problems that cause racist practices such as unfair tracking but cannot see how the whiteness of her own practice contributes to the process. Here is how she responds to a CRT article.

T: I get a very strong tone [from the article]. As a white person reading this article I almost feel like I am personally being accused. And I think the flaws are in the system. I think that system is flawed and I think that there are people who are consciously and unconsciously contributing to the problem. But I think that we need to look at the system.

She believes institutional flaws (i.e., “the system”) and conscious, overt racism exist, but hesitates to label unintentional acts as racist. Naming disciplinary or pedagogical acts for their whiteness—that is, for how they are based in socially constructed white norms—can help teachers like this one better see how they do contribute to racial inequality (i.e., how they perpetuate “the system”) and, thus, how they can subsequently alter their practice.

Perhaps they will be able to change how they choose curriculum, alter how they interact with students, and even come to new understandings of their students of color. While I have not been able to completely convince the teacher in the above example that we as white teachers contribute to racism against our students, I have been able to get her to consider the idea that whites actively maintain their privilege.

T: [Schooling] is flawed in a way that gives advantage to whites. CRT would say that whites have constructed it that way, not that everyone wants to keep minorities down, but that they want to keep that privilege.

BB: But you think that whites don’t have that intention [of keeping minorities down], so they aren’t racist?

T: But I can see how…I could be swayed in some way to agree with what you said. I think that there are some gray areas here.
Getting closer to the understanding of complicity may eventually help this teacher address her own privileging of whiteness. I will come back to the excerpts used in this section in the next chapter so as to analyze them further. Here I use them with the intention of highlighting that the goal in naming whiteness is for the teachers to come to new understandings, so they can attempt practices that do not privilege white students over others.

Property

The ability to name whiteness is tied to the ways in which whiteness and property rights are linked. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) have asserted the need for an analysis of property in education, such as analyzing curriculum as property; this type of analysis is important in working with teachers to name whiteness. First of all, there is an issue of access. White students have access to more rigorous curricula, even when class is controlled for. This simple type of analysis of curriculum as a form of property can be used to further equal rights arguments. It can show that not all students have equal rights because they do not have access to the same property. However, by itself, this type of analysis does not explicate how access to rigorous curricula is tied into the ownership of whiteness itself. Harris (1995/1993) explains how whiteness is property. It is something people can use to 1) use and enjoy certain privileges and 2) exclude other people. The system of slavery in the U.S. caused a situation where people needed to classify who counted as a citizen (or a person even). Certain rights, such as the right to vote, were only afforded to full citizens. To be a full citizen, it was deemed that a person must own property. Since slave could not own property (in fact they were considered property), they could not be full citizens. Even when slavery was abolished, Blacks were denied the right to own property and thus access to full

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6 Harris explains other dynamics of whiteness as property as well, but these are the two that I have found most illustrative in this study.
citizenship. It was thus also important to be able to determine who was and was not white. Both the right to use and enjoyment and the right to exclude exist in this situation. This created the legacy of whiteness in which those who are considered white, or who “own” whiteness, are able to create rules, regulations and laws that guarantee their privilege. In schools this privilege plays out in how students are afforded access to curriculum.

This legacy continues today. Rules and regulations, such as those used in schools, also help ensure the maintenance of white privilege. The practice of assigning whiteness as property now exists in White teachers’ notions of what a good student is.

T: I think that there are social connotations with those students that don’t even have to do with the curriculum objectives. We prefer students who sit, and raise their hands, and don’t talk, and we have this bias towards them even if we don’t realize it. And I know from my reading that that’s limited. Teachers unknowingly assign whiteness to their students and this denies the equal access to curriculum for the students they do not assign whiteness to. By not naming these notions as white but rather couching them in terms of acceptable behavior or appropriate speech, whites create regulations that in effect guarantee their own unequal access to more rigorous curriculum and make deviants who do not have equal access. This practice of assigning whiteness allows educators (like the teachers in Kailin’s [1999] study) to maintain a liberalist view that sees individuals as responsible for their own oppression and ignores the systems of categorization that lead to that oppression.

Thus, when teachers ascribe to certain notions—such as those of appropriate speech (or any behavior)—they may unknowingly hold lower expectations of students, discipline them unfairly, or interact with them in ways that negatively affects their access to curriculum. Not understanding the curriculum itself as white only exacerbates this problem. Non-white students may have a disadvantage in accessing curriculum that does not represent their
culture and unfairly represents the culture of their white classmates. Therefore, by working with teachers to question the history and whiteness of their views of what it means to be a good student and of their curriculum, researchers and teacher educators can affect their students’ access to curriculum. By examining how standards such as those for appropriate speech are raced, teachers can bracket their notions of good students in order to analyze them and work towards more equitable practice by developing ways of thinking that do not privilege whites over non-whites.

Furthermore, the dynamic of whiteness as property helps create what Iglesias (2002) calls racial spaces. The concept of racial spaces refers to the way in which whites have used and denied the mobility of resources to ensure their own privilege. In effect, places become raced in ways that either ensure or deny people of color access to privilege and rights. By examining how classrooms are racial spaces, I illustrate how educators can frame their students as deserving or undeserving depending on how those classrooms are raced. For example, Duncan (2004) has discussed how certain schools are discussed in what he calls racial time. Poor, urban schools are given the label of “primitive,” as compared with society around them which is labeled “developed” or “modern.” By describing a space such as a school as operating from a previous, less-developed time—in essence, “timing” the space—that space becomes racialized because it does not live up to a white, developed nation’s version of progress. This “timing” places blame on the schools for not keeping up or serving their students well and relieves other aspects of society for creating those conditions in schools, just as under-developed nations can be blamed for what is considered their own lack of progress.
Property analysis can help researchers analyze how teachers place blame on students, especially those in lower-level classes. These students are blamed for the types of classes they attend and for the conditions of those classes. Students are given “primitive” conditions and resources—creating “primitive” spaces—and then blamed for not appropriately or adequately using and enjoying those spaces. Analyzing how classes are racialized can shift blame from the students and put it on the practices that create and place students in classes with inferior conditions. Researchers can analyze how teachers assign whites and contribute to the construction of classrooms as racial spaces in order to work with teachers to understand how segregation is being accomplished in multiracial spaces and how teacher practices, like discourse, do affect their students. By shifting the blame for lower student achievement away from the students and more to structures that race students and classrooms, teachers can begin to change the discourse of their teaching practice.

Revisionism

Naming whiteness and analyzing the dynamic of property can help teacher educators counter the liberalist narratives that teachers use to understand and describe their students. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) explain the concept of revisionism, or revisionist history. An aim of CRT is to tell alternative histories (of institutions or events) in order to show the racial dynamic of dominant versions of history. For example, Bell (1995/1980) has explained how the Brown decision was not necessarily the good-hearted attempt at equity that some may claim it to be. He has shown how desegregation was really in the interests of whites and that it was not until these interests arose that people were willing to desegregate schools. CRT scholars attempt to critique standards versions of history that hide white privilege. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) have also used a version of revisionism via counterstory. They
counter traditional resistance theories that highlight how students end up hurting themselves by resisting the oppressive structure that act on their lives to tell stories that stress how Latino students have been able to enact transformational resistance and succeed in spite of those structures. In these stories, they reframe student action as positive acts in which students assert their agency.

I believe teacher educators can work with white teachers to re-historicize many of the assumptions they have about teaching and students. For example, one teacher in my study has discussed her school’s attempt to detrack by opening honors classes to any student who wants to take them. This policy shift did not change the number of minority students in the honors classes. The teacher wondered about this lack of change and why the students would not want to take the honors classes. Researchers can work with teachers to take a revisionist look at both the school’s attempt to detrack and the minority students’ reaction. Teachers would be able to examine how the school puts up other barriers that prevent minority students from enrolling in honors courses, in effect perpetuating a version of segregation. Teachers can again look at their choice of curriculum and modes of interaction, and they can examine their perceptions of students’ abilities and experiences in order to critique and ultimately alter their practice. Teachers could begin to work against the ways in which their practice is complicit in maintaining segregation, so that they can then envision ways to take down barriers, for example, to the more rigorous curriculum of honors courses. In addition, with a new revisionist look at students’ decisions not to take honors courses, teachers might not see such decisions as a failure on the students’ part but as intentional acts made with good reason. By coming to a view of students of color as people with agency, teachers may be able to understand students’ decisions and employ students’ reasoning in reform attempts
such as detracking. Again, as does naming whiteness, revisionism can transform educational practice that can affect students’ lives positively.

**Liberalism and Antiracism in Teacher Education**

I began this study by using CRT to examine the concept of colorblindness through the eyes of teachers in order to understand how teachers’ beliefs in colorblindness relate to their teaching practices. I moved from an examination of colorblindness, to one of whiteness, and then to discussions of race and racism more broadly. The hope has been to dialogue with teachers about race in order to affect perceptions and practices that privilege whiteness and marginalize students of color. In effect, what I have attempted to do in this study was to challenge the liberal manifestations of antiracist ideology and practice that the teachers adhere to with the hope that they can use the social justice motivations they already have to develop more critical forms of antiracism.

As liberalism assumes an apolitical stance regarding the culture of societal institutions, a liberal interpretation of the institution of education promotes several practices that resist a more critical understanding of how education unintentionally supports racial disparity. Each of these practices has implications for teachers’ approaches to antiracism. First, liberalism values neutrality. In education, this means that teachers believe schools to be culturally neutral in structure. Thus, the school rules, in-class discourse, and curriculum are assumed not to promote any one culture over another. In such a viewpoint there is no acknowledgement then of the link of those structures to whiteness. Second, therefore, liberalism promotes colorblindness. As institutions are culturally neutral, acknowledging racial difference and making decisions based on race are themselves practices betray fairness.
Schools are assumed to be culturally neutral, so they do not privilege one race over another. As racial privilege does not exist for any group including whites, to make a decision based on race would thus be unfair and would not support a liberal approach equity.

Such a colorblind view of equity only recognizes intentional forms of racism. Since the institution itself is fair towards all, it cannot possibly marginalize any group of students based on race or any other cultural difference. Instances of racism are anomalies (not systemically inherent) and racial disparity is not caused by the institution itself. Rather, such disparity must stem from either these anomalies (which are intentional acts by those who do not follow the institution’s rules) or from outside sources (and in educational settings, teachers might name these sources as economics/poverty or the culturally deficient home lives of people from certain cultures). Therefore, the solutions to racial disparity do not exist at the institutional level. Racial equity can either be achieved by working against those anomalies. This might include working against those who practice explicit, intentional forms of racism. It might also include claiming that the responsibility for racial equity lies outside of the school or even with those who actually suffer the consequences of disparity. If only they had better resources or their families valued education more, racial equity could be achieved.

The teachers in this study all wanted to work towards racial equity. They all already adhered to some practices that promoted that equity. In addition, none of them adhered to extreme forms of liberalism in their antiracist practices. My intent with them became uncovering and eventually working against the remnants of liberalism in their approaches to racial equity. Using CRT helped me develop a conceptual framework for this goal. In essence, CRT aided me in an attempt to move the teachers towards more critical approaches
to antiracism so that they could better realize the goals of equity they already carried with them. A performance ethnography approach to research, and in particular the practice of dialogic performance, was key in this attempt.

**PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHY**

In order to promote the pedagogical potential of CRT and this study (i.e., getting the teachers, myself, and the academic community to develop new understandings of colorblindness, whiteness and race), I follow a performance ethnography approach in my interviews with and the teachers. According to Denzin (2003) and Conquergood (1985, 1998), a performance approach challenges the maintaining of analytic distance from the participants, as this type of distance cannot lead to new ways coming to understand the world. Rather, “[p]erformance approaches to knowing insist on immediacy and involvement” (Denzin, 2003, p. 8). The implication for such an approach in my study is that I must focus on the research with teachers as an act where we come to understand the world in new ways, as an act of meaning making, and as an act that has relevance to the teachers themselves. Denzin asserts that performative research acts are inherently political—i.e., they are interpretations that look at and critique experiences, the context in which those events occur, and even the people involved. In this study, the interviews with teachers are performances where the teachers and I examine and critique teacher experiences with race, racism, colorblindness, and whiteness.

In performance ethnography, the research act itself is a performance. The primary purpose of the research act is not intended for the researcher to extract knowledge from the participants. Rather, researcher and participants take the role of co-performers
(Conquergood, 1991) in meaning making. By using CRT to analyze the teachers’ conversations, discourses, and classroom practices, I do maintain the role of expert research/ethnographer who can determine the meaning of what the research participants do and say, but using a performance approach tempers this role. “The language of drama and performance [gives…] a way of thinking and talking about people as actors who creatively play, interpret, improvise, interpret, and re-present roles and scripts” (Conquergood, 1991, p. 187). In this study, the performance is an act of meaning making around race, whiteness, and colorblindness. This is an act that the participants and I perform together. For all of my intentions of the type of change this should effect in teachers, the teachers in this study have had a major and active role in determining the change that occurs.

A very important implication of this approach on my role as a researcher relates to what happens to this research when the research is finished. Denzin (2003) asserts that performances are pedagogical. The researcher still does have the last word when the research appears in academic journals (or dissertations). In this way, the research helps the researcher’s career and should advance the researcher’s discipline in a substantial way. However, another goal of performance ethnography is to challenge the dominance of textuality, or as Conquergood (1998) puts it “the hegemony of the text” (p. 25). A performance approach challenges ethnographers not only to take information they learn from their research and write it in scholarly journals. The effects of the research need to be more immediate than that. So, it is important that their work becomes pedagogical in various ways that text alone cannot achieve. While the work of this study will end up as text in a dissertation and scholarly journals and may make an effective commentary on the field of teacher education, I also hope the research act affects the teaching and lives of the teachers I
work with. I hope they come to new understandings and practices regarding traditionally marginalized students. Equally important is how I have been similarly affected by the research. I have come to new understandings of teachers and students and of my research and teaching practices. These new understandings have helped me discover new ways to approach social justice education as a teacher educator and researcher.

*Interviews*

The data collection for this study consisted of open-ended, ethnographic interviews with seven high school teachers. Data collection consisted of two to three rounds of interviews with each participant. The initial interviews lasted approximately one hour each. These initial interviews were intended to explore the teachers’ conceptualizations of colorblindness and perceptions of race and racism. While the research began with a set of research questions, the research design was flexible and emergent, which allowed me to react to the conversational flow of the participants and to follow pertinent topics of conversation as they arose. At the end of the initial interviews, each participant was given one or two articles, one that explains the basic tenets of CRT (given to every participant) and one that discusses whiteness and colorblindness (given to the first two participants only).

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7 Research questions (with probes) include:

A) What does it mean to be colorblind? Is it a practice that you adhere to? Do you employ it in your classroom? If so, in what ways? What are the benefits of being colorblind? What are the drawbacks? To what extent is taking a colorblind approach to matters of race supported in your school?

B) What opportunities are there in your classroom for discussions of race? How frequently do such conversations occur? If they do occur, how is race talked about by your students and yourself? How is Whiteness conceptualized?

C) What are your perceptions on racism? To the best of your knowledge, what could you say about your students’ perceptions on racism?

As the study continued, the conversations around the CRT article were more relevant to the dialogues I was having with teachers, so I discontinued using the second article. The second interviews were conducted at a later date after the participants had read the article(s). This second round of interviews\textsuperscript{9} included a discussion of the articles and a reexamination of the conceptualizations of colorblindness and perceptions of race and racism. These interviews lasted from one to two hours. I conducted a third interview with two teachers. Each of these teachers and I felt that we had more to discuss with each other. Each of these interviews lasted approximately two hours.

Four of the teachers are women and three are men. Interestingly enough, the men wanted to be interviewed in a group, and usually in more social settings (i.e., at a cook-out and at a bar). So, while I took notes and tape-recorded each of the interviews with the women, I was able to tape record only the first interview with the men. For the second interview with them, I only took field notes.

\textit{Dialogic Performance}

In the interviews, I specifically employed a dialogic performance (Conquergood, 1985) approach. It is a way that the researcher balances commitment and detachment. A dialogic performance positions me squarely as a participant in the study in a way that also makes me acknowledge my position and power as researcher. Because the teachers and I are co-performers of a dialogue on colorblindness, whiteness, and race, I will not be detached

\textsuperscript{9} Research questions with probes include:
\begin{itemize}
  \item A) After hearing/reading about critical race theory, what is your initial reaction? What parts of the theory ring true for you? What parts do you not agree with? What about the theory confuses you?
  \item B) After hearing/reading about the critique of colorblindness, what is your initial reaction? What part of the critique rings true for you? What part do you not agree with? What about the critique confuses you?
\end{itemize}
from the meaning making that takes place. The aim of an ethnographic approach that involves dialogical performance is to “bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another” (p. 9). Through the use of ethnographic interviews in this manner, I attempted to co-construct new understandings of colorblindness, whiteness, and race that the teachers (other) and I (self) arrived at together. By encouraging open conversation and debate, dialogical performance both acknowledges the distinctions between researcher and participant as it also challenges those distinctions.

In a version dialogic performance that adheres more closely to Conquergood’s (1985), the co-performers and I would decide together both the major issues to be addressed by the research and the manner for addressing them. In this study, I adapt dialogic performance, thus both maintaining some aspects of that approach and changing others. All of the teachers in the study and I agree that racial disparity is an issue in schools. On that point, we are on the same page about the key issue to be addressed. However, some of the teachers and I have different opinions about the causes of that disparity. My main concern is that white teachers are unintentionally complicit in institutional forms of racism that promote that disparity. One way these teachers maintain this complicity is by adhering to liberal forms of antiracism. So, one of my goals in this study is to use the interviews to move the teachers to adopting more critical approaches to antiracism so that they can challenge their complicity in the unintentional, institutional racism that leads to disparity. By pushing the teachers in this way, I maintain dialogic performance’s allowance for differences of opinion, but I also challenge a traditional approach to dialogic performance in that I have come up with the mode of resistance to what I see as the dominant ideology of liberalism. My ultimate goal is to positively affect the academic success of students of color, and in
attempting to achieve that goal, I both work with and against the teachers’ motivations when I interview them. I do at least attempt to balance the ways I challenge them by adhering to dialogic performance’s commitment to learning from the co-performers. Specifically, I try to pay attention to how the teacher can also inform me about the solutions to racial disparity and the contexts in which they work.

Data Analysis

I have analyzed each of the interviews according to the analytical tools of CRT that I discuss above—naming whiteness, property, and revisionism. In addition, I look at each series of conversations for both what they say about the interconnected topics of colorblindness, whiteness, and race and how they say it. To do this, I look at each encounter as a performance. I look at both the performative (what identities we perform) and the pedagogical (how the teachers and I have come to new/different understandings) aspects of those encounters. So, in addition to examining teacher thought and practice via CRT, I draw Fuoss’ (1997) articulation of the three dimensions of contestation that can be used to analyze cultural contestation in cultural performance—the direction of effectivity, the modes of effectivity, and the spheres of contestation—and I specifically use the first two in analyzing the dialogues of this study.

The direction of effectivity refers to whether a cultural performance supports or adheres to dominant ideology (i.e., ideology that contributes to domination) or whether it resists that ideology. Fuoss (1997) uses Thompson’s (1990) articulation of ideology in describing the direction of effectivity.

'Ideology involves ways in which meaning serves, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of power which
are systematically asymmetrical—which I shall all relations of dominance. Ideology, broadly speaking, is meaning in the service of power’ (Thompson, 1990, p. 7). In his view, ideology involves a culture’s production, circulation, and reception of symbolic forms that either either establish or perpetuate relations of dominance. (Fuoss, 1997, p. 84)

Thus, ideology as I use it in this study refers to liberal ideology as a dominant form of ideology in schools. The direction of effectivity as I use it then is whether the teachers’ performances of racial understanding either support or resist that liberalism. The modes of effectivity, then, refer to the more specific ways in which those teachers’ performances either support or resist that ideology. That is to say, the modes of effectivity are the symbolic forms teachers use to either support or resist liberalism and how they use those forms. These symbolic forms are the personal understanding of race and racism that the teachers and I hold. To reiterate, in my analysis I describe how the teachers’ and my performances of the meaning of race and cycle of racism support or resist interpretations that rely on liberalism. I explore the specific ways in which we do that, focusing on the personal understandings that we each employ when we negotiate the meaning of race and our relationship to the existence of racism. In addition, I interpret how each of us makes use of the interview itself (what I designate to be the specific special sphere that is important to study for this project) as different participants perform the interviews in particular ways. Using the analysis of the direction and modes of effectivity help me interpret and structure how the teachers and I perform these conversations about race and how we liberal ideology interferes with my goal of promoting more critically antiracist understandings and practices.

In each set of interviews I look at how the language we use shifts (i.e., how we come to new understandings and how we may advance or regress in our dialogue) and how we

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10 Though liberalism is not necessarily the major view of education held by the teachers in this study. Rather, it is the ideology that acts on teachers via the structures of schooling.
contradict ourselves as I see these as places where the performances are particularly pedagogical. Focusing on these breaks both between and within our rationales/logics—what McIntyre (1997) calls “‘aha’ experiences that emerged in the research project” (p. 658)—helped to determine the direction of the interviews and offered me a chance to deepen the dialogue that I had with these teachers. It was in these fissures where the teachers and I could challenge and inform each other. These “aha” moments helped structure my representation of the interviews as well.

Data Representation

In each separate chapter I present and interpret the dialogue I have with that teacher. In these chapters, I present each teacher as a character in the overall performance (i.e., this research study). I discuss what the dialogue with each character says about the related concepts of colorblindness, whiteness and race (i.e., each character’s frame of reference about these topics) and include the role CRT played in that dialogue. I use the concepts of direction of effectivity, modes of effectivity, and spheres of contestation (Fuoss, 1997) to show how white educators perform racial understanding in a dialogic fashion.

I present these performances in a series of chapters. Some chapters focus on a single teacher. In other chapters, I group two or three teachers together as the “aha” experiences I encountered in discussions with each of them were similar. In Chapter 2, I present two of the teachers, Stephanie and Melissa. These were the earliest interviews I conducted, and my analysis of those conversations has focused on how these conversations help set the stage or this study. Through my talks with these teachers, I learned some of the main issues relevant to white teachers’ conceptualizations of race, especially the complexity and non-static nature
of colorblindness. Conducting and analyzing these conversations helped me gain insight into how white teachers both adhere to and contradict liberal accounts of race and racism. In addition, it was these early interviews that helped me learn to articulate CRT in a more coherent way.

In Chapter 3, I present the conversation I had with Sarah, a young middle-school teacher. The focus of this conversation was often Sarah’s attempt to understand the sticky issue of race. So, as I analyzed these conversations, I realized that much of the dialogue involved me learning how to play the expert about the issue of race and education. Sarah did not challenge my viewpoints very often. Rather, she wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how to deal with her own complicity in racism, especially via white privilege. Therefore, she challenged me to articulate my own racial understanding, something I think I learned to do in more nuanced ways because of my conversations with Sarah. In addition, Sarah’s dialogue highlights the complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction involved when race conscious whites try to address their own complicity. In effect, the conversation with Sarah helped me understand how CRT could be used a dialogic practice.

Elizabeth, a veteran middle school teacher and proclaimed feminist, demonstrated a contrast to Elizabeth’s desire to learn, and in Chapter 4 I present my dialogue with her. That is not to say that Elizabeth neither listened to new ideas nor wanted to promote more race conscious pedagogy. I believe she, indeed, wants to promote racial equity as a teacher. However, more than any other teacher in the study, Elizabeth challenged my opinions and assertions. In part, her opposition seems to stem from her feeling that teachers are not respected as professionals (especially by academics and politicians) who already attempt to address racial inequity. It does also stem from her views on what counts as racism, views
which both adhere to and counter liberal accounts. Interestingly enough, Elizabeth greatly enjoyed the interviews, which seemed to come from her stated pleasure of debating issues related to teaching. I also believe the dialogic nature of the interviewed positioned her both as an intellectual and a professional, which she believes to be major functions/characteristics of a teacher’s job. As Elizabeth and I displayed a mutual respect and comfort in challenging each other, this is the interview that I believe best illustrates the notion of co-performing in a dialogic performance manner and it is an example of actually using CRT as a dialogic practice.

In Chapter 5 I present Elijah, John, and David, three high school teachers whom I call The Boys. I present them together primarily because they made the choice to be interviewed as a group. Many of the issues of the other chapters—e.g., the presence of liberalism—existed in these interviews but to a lesser extent. Two of The Boys, in particular, were highly racially conscious teachers and they spoke frankly about the recognition of their own racial privilege and their attempts to combat that type of privilege in their practice. What I gleaned from these conversations was their performative nature. The Boys and I very much positioned and narrated ourselves as racially conscious educators (in effect, disassociating ourselves from the many white teachers, whom we consider not to have the same worldview that we do). So, in some ways, analysis of these conversations helped me understand my aspirations as a race worker/social justice educator more deeply. In addition, my dialogic style in this chapter was distinct from the other chapters, and this was in part due to gender. Even though I would describe each of the women in the study as confident in their opinions, especially Elizabeth, I felt it more difficult to challenge The Boys, and I believe the fact I let the fact that we are of the same gender affect my style of interaction. I will discuss how this
interview was different from the others Chapter 5 itself. I will point out the particular performative nature of that dialogue.

I conclude the study in Chapter 6. In each of the narrative chapters, I will discuss what the conversations taught me about being a teacher educator. In Chapter 6, I sum up what was learned, examine the pedagogical nature of the study in more general terms, and point out the implications for teacher education more broadly. In discussing what CRT can offer to dialogue on race, I bring the discussion back to the implications of CRT in teacher education. As I focus on the broader pedagogical aspects of the study (i.e., what we learned and what can be learned) as well as its limitations (i.e., what is still left unclear or unresolved), I will also discuss more in more detail the practice of dialogic performance.
My personal philosophy of teaching is what affects all other things. The idea of being color is not my foundation. My foundation is that I try to see every student as a 10, a 10 in terms of potential, and so from day one I don’t want to know what people think about my students ahead of time. I want to give to every student. I don’t like to know how they did last year. I like to give them a chance from day one. I let them prove themselves or not prove themselves. I think that students should be given the opportunity to change. I know I’ve changed. I want students to reach their full potential in my class. That may be idealistic, but that’s where I’m coming from. – Stephanie, 10 grade English teacher

A challenge in this study has been how to question teachers—i.e., to challenge their notions of colorblindness and privilege—who attempt to promote socially just pedagogies and who want to work towards racial equity. I admire Stephanie’s desire to want the best for all of her students—to treat them each as a 10. She has high standards for all of her students and goes out of her way for struggling students. At the same time, I find it problematic not to take a student’s academic, experiential, and racial background into consideration. Stephanie acknowledged this herself.

Ben: Do you think that people of color experience racism and face other impediments that may affect their performance?

Stephanie: Yes, and I think African American teachers would say that African American students are at a disadvantage because they are minorities…I think that it is true that African Americans face obstacles that white students don’t.
Stephanie never claims to be colorblind. She acknowledges the obstacles that AA students may face and claims that her students’ racial backgrounds are important to their identities and behaviors. However, Stephanie still adheres to colorblind ideology in certain ways. Her example points out how complexly colorblindness can exist. It is sort of a moving target. So, my early interviews in this study—with Stephanie here and with Melissa, who I will also discuss in this chapter—have taught me that simply labeling teachers as colorblind (or privileged or racist) is not an accurate or useful way to challenge colorblindness. Rather, these first two interviews helped me understand how the CRT practices of naming whiteness and property analysis could be used in dialogue with teachers, and that this dialogic approach was more valuable in challenging colorblind and liberal ideology.

What has been equally challenging in this study is how to present my use of CRT to analyze teachers’ ideologies in a way that also shows respect for these teachers as both professionals and allies in combating racism in education. In other words, writing this chapter in itself is a performance of me—a doctoral candidate—learning to how to write a performance-based dissertation. I maintain the position of expert in that I am the one writing up the narratives and interpretations and in that I ultimately decide on the interpretation that I will present. However, I also try to temper my expert status. I went into these interviews with dialogic intent, with the sensitivity that the teachers could challenge me and I may learn something in the process. To reiterate Conquergood’s (1991) term, I attempted to enact this research study with the teachers being co-performers. So, the way I attempt to present the dialogue in this chapter is in discussion format.  

11 Interestingly, as these were the first interviews, my interviewing style adhered more closely at first to traditional modes of interviewing in social science—i.e., I used the interview in large part to extract knowledge from the research participants so as to comment on that knowledge using theories from my field. Yet, these
dialogue in the order it occurred so as to present the trajectory as well as the content of that
dialogue. I also discuss what was learned about the issues—naming whiteness, the use of
property analysis, and dialogic performance—important to the entire study. I present the
issues that exist in teachers’ dispositions and actions, the complexity and contradictions of
those issues, and how I learned to how CRT could be used to examine those issues.

Before I go into the issues, I will introduce the two teachers, Stephanie and Melissa.
In some ways, they are similar. Both are young white women in their second year of
teaching, both graduated from the same, prestigious Masters in Teaching (MAT) program of
a major southern university, and both are English teachers of regular and honors high school
English. There are some differences as well. Stephanie teaches at a magnet high school in a
mid-size southern city. The population of the school is 60% African American, while most
of the remaining 40% is white with very small percentages of Latino and Asian students.
Stephanie teaches honors and academic 10th grade English, world literature. Melissa, on the
other hand teaches in a high school in a nearby college town (the same town where she
completed her MAT). Melissa’s school is about 80% white, 15% African American, and 3%
Latino, with 2% consisting of students from other races. Melissa also teaches 10th grade
English, primarily academic level courses.

In this chapter, I focus on the ways these teachers differ in their thoughts about racial
disparity. Specifically, while I consider both teachers to aspire to racial equity in their
practice, Melissa seemed to believe in and embody a practice that adhered more closely to
the key tenets of CRT (though she does not use the terminology of conceptual framework of
CRT specifically). This is not to say that there were no aspects of Stephanie’s practice that

Interviews with Stephanie and Melissa taught me to understand CRT more deeply, and this deeper
understanding helped me be more dialogic in the future interviews.
also promoted racial equity. However, Stephanie’s comments did seem to stem more from a liberal ideology that espoused colorblindness and failed to recognize and white privilege. So, while both wanted to know more (in general and from me specifically) about how to be more racially equitable in their practice, Stephanie had more questions about how this could be done (as came out in her comments about “the system”) while Melissa saw more possibility of how to conceptualize answers.

CRT has been valuable, then, in highlighting both the issues/questions that Stephanie has regarding how to alleviate racial disparity and the potential for change Melissa’s comments offer towards that aim. So, I will use Stephanie’s comments to illuminate the issues at hand and then Melissa’s to put forward possible ways teachers can address these issues via CRT. It has been interesting for me to see that, more than with the future interviews, I followed a more traditional research model in these interviews, extracting “knowledge,” experiences, and stories from the teachers rather than taking part in a dialogue. Analyzing the interviews and the few instances of give and take that did occur, at least, did inform me of how to follow a dialogic approach in the future interviews.

**UNCOVERING COLORBLINDNESS AND LIBERALISM**

Giroux (1997) asserts that the liberal ideology that dominates educational discourse de-politicizes culture. As this discourse does not recognize that power is linked to specific types of culture, it does not see schools as culturally dominant institutions. Therefore, it also posits that issues of culture—such as racism—that exist in schools to stem from outside of the institution of education. Therefore, as the discourse does not acknowledge the racial
(and potentially racist) aspect of the institution in which it functions, liberal interpretations of race and solutions to racism rely on colorblind arguments.

Simply put, colorblindness means not seeing a person’s race or color. In education this plays out in the practice of not taking into consideration students’ racial backgrounds when teaching them, grading them, or responding to their behavior. Teachers may say that they do not see color or that they treat all students equally, regardless of racial background. Both Stephanie and Melissa disavowed being blind with regard to color but adhered to this concept of equality.

Stephanie: Yes, I think ‘think that people of color experience racism and face other impediments that may affect their performance.’ … I think that it is true that AA face obstacles that white students don’t.
Stephanie: I probably don’t overcompensate for the disadvantages of minority students, which is, in terms of the students you get, there are white students who have disadvantages and they don’t get more.

Melissa: I work very hard to treat kids fairly. I know that minority students face challenges that white students don’t. Saying that none of that matters isn’t true.
Melissa: I’d say that I’m reaching out…but I don’t give the [minority] students anything that I wouldn’t give other students.

These quotes show the contradiction inherent in their views of colorblindness. That they wanted all their students, regardless to racial background, to succeed is what I call the spirit of colorblindness. I see this as a positive viewpoint. It resonates with ideas of caring (Noddings, 1992) and having high standards for all students. At the same time, both teachers recognized that students’ racial backgrounds could affect the obstacles they face in educational settings. When these ideas of colorblindness come into contact with pedagogical practice in public school settings, teachers respond in different ways. I will show how these

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12 I do not go into a discussion on caring here, as it is not the focus of this study. I do think, however, that an examination of the nexus between caring and antiracist practice could prove very fruitful for teacher educators. Tapping into teachers sense of caring may be a good entry point to promote racial consciousness as well.
teachers responded in ways that both supported and resisted the liberal ideology that promoted colorblind interpretations of the reasons why their minority students were not performing as well as their white counterparts. I start with Stephanie because she was the first teacher I interviewed and because it is the interview that has most clearly illustrated for me the issue and complexity of colorblindness. Specifically, Stephanie’s comments exemplify many of those that I have heard from the pre-service teachers I have worked with. They illustrate the liberal interpretations that many teachers use to understand racism.

Stephanie was a 10th grade English teacher. She taught AP, honors, and academic\textsuperscript{13} level courses, and admitted that, despite minority students (primarily African American) representing 60 percent of the school’s population, she had only a handful of African American or Latino students in her honors or AP courses. As my following discussion will show, Stephanie was a teacher that thought about the racial disparity she saw in school, desired to do something to address that disparity, yet adhered to aspects of liberal ideology that may have actually hindered how she could address the issue. As I stated earlier, my dialogue with Stephanie uncovered for me the complexity of and contradictions inherent in a colorblind viewpoint.

Here, I present an interaction I had with Stephanie. I show this extensive excerpt of our dialogue for three reasons. First, it again shows the contradictions inherent in colorblind views. Second, it highlights the connection of such colorblind views to liberal thought. Third, it offers an opportunity of where I could name the whiteness of Stephanie’s thinking, which is one step in combating colorblindness. I will explain each of these reasons after the interaction.

\textsuperscript{13} I use the teachers’ terms for the hierarchy of course levels, which are from “highest” to “lowest”: advanced placement (AP), honors, academic, and basic. The term academic was recently adopted at both schools to replace standard—i.e., non-honors—courses.
Stephanie: I do have more issues with tracking. I see that…I think that the way the school system is set up…how can it not be a problem? The fact that there is no real diversity in our honors and academic classes.

Ben: Why do you think this happens?

Stephanie: The system is already set up. I do think it’s largely tied to parent involvement. Parents who can get involved with pushing student to do well…“Are you doing your homework?” “You need to do well in school.” It’s a value. So they want them in the higher classes. Now does that mean that the majority of students in the standard classes who are African American—does that mean that their parents aren’t as involved and don’t care as much? No, that’s not what I mean. What I’m saying is that something is flawed in the system.

Ben: Would you advocate for detracking?

Stephanie: I think that I lack experience to say that at this time. My first year I would have said, “Definitely,” and then after a year of teaching a basic class where students, where it was behavior [issues]—I spent at least 50% of the time dealing with behavior problems. I mean students with IEP [individual assessment plans] and talking back, and of course I could have done a lot of things differently as a new teacher, but I think that I lack the knowledge and experience to answer that questions. I think that if we could integrate some students—from standard to honors—it might work but if it was an equal mix, I don’t know.

In the above interaction, Stephanie was hesitant to be seen as placing the blame for in-school segregation on minority parents—i.e., she did not want me to think she believed that African American parents did not care as much—and at the same time, she in fact placed blame on these parents and students for African American students not being in honors courses. The students’ own behavior was what made them ineligible for honors courses. So, Stephanie recognized that racial discrimination existed in the form of in-school segregation. However, she did not recognize the racial dynamics of how African American students were kept out of honors courses. Rather, she placed blame on an abstract idea about the institution of schooling—the “system”—that had no actors intentionally keeping certain students out of certain classes. The system was what was at fault, and Stephanie failed to recognize the
specific institutional factors that caused this system and how these factors discriminated according to race, among other things.

This failure to recognize the discriminating dynamic of institutional factors is exemplary of liberal educational thought. In a liberal interpretation of racial inequality, there is no way the institution of education could be preventing racial integration, especially not intentionally since schools are basically value neutral with regard to culture. Therefore, Stephanie found the only visible reasons for the lack of integration of African American students to come from the students and their parents themselves. In this view, if the parents could change the way they motivated their children and if the students could behave differently, perhaps integration would be possible. Also, integration in this view could only occur if it did not dramatically challenge the structure of the institution as it currently existed. Stephanie could see some standard students being put in honors courses, implying basic students could not be integrated. In addition, the standard students could be moved up only if an equal mix of honors students remained in the class, insuring that there were enough of the right kind of students who could guarantee the current nature of the honors course be maintained.

\textit{INTRODUCING CRITICAL RACE THEORY}

It is in this type of conversation with Stephanie where I began to see potential in naming whiteness —naming the whiteness of the institutional norms of the “system” and interrogating Stephanie’s white way of labeling student behavior. One early instance of when I tried to challenge Stephanie’s adherence to a liberal interpretation of racism was when we had a discussion of what thoughts or actions counted as racism. Stephanie saw
racism very much in the intentions of the actor. She saw teachers as people who were for the most part trying to help and care for their students, so the language of racism felt very strong to her. The following part of this conversation came after Stephanie read an article on CRT in education:

Stephanie: [School] is flawed in a way that gives advantage to whites. CRT would say that whites have constructed it that way—not that everyone want to keep minorities down, but that they want to keep that privilege.

Ben: But you think that whites don’t have that intention, so they aren’t racist?

Stephanie: But I can see how… I guess I could be swayed in some way to agree with what you said. I think that there are some gray areas here.

At this point with Stephanie, I just began to see how I could question what I saw to be a contradiction in the liberalism of Stephanie’s thinking, so I tried to expose that contradiction. Later in this discussion we revisited the definition of racism:

Stephanie: [The article] says racism is not a series of isolated acts. I found that to be a very strong statement and perhaps it should be called discrimination, not racism. Discrimination to me means inequality where racism connotes conscious acts.

Ben: CRT would argue that racism is not just conscious acts but it is part of it. Institutional racism, structures of society like schools, and processes of school like tracking, if they have consequences that systematically hurt minorities and favor whites, those institutions are racist in their outcomes. People benefit from the system and play a part in the system by supporting it.

Stephanie: That makes sense to me.

Ben: Do you think the institutions of school, such as tracking, are racist?

Stephanie: I’d rather say it has racist outcomes.

Stephanie and I at this point still may have had some disagreement in our definitions of racism, but I also got the sense that she was deepening her sense of what the “system” actually was. I felt that she was thinking through the issue that an institution actually has
actors that at least perpetuate the norms of that institution and that the system does not have to be constructed the way it currently is. In a rudimentary way, by naming the white privilege that exists in institutional norms, I was helping Stephanie begin to envision a different way of thinking within such an institution.

I want to note that despite our disagreements on the definition of racism, Stephanie was always open to my questions. Her openness allowed me to begin to examine what I saw to be liberal and colorblind views. It also helped me feel comfortable in questioning her on her perception of behavioral norms. For example, several times in our discussions, Stephanie either mentioned or alluded to African American students giving each other a hard time when they would do well in class (e.g., she mentioned that they would comment to each other that they were acting white if they performed well in honors courses). In addition, she talked about the students in her standard classes, most of whom were black, as “not wanting it,” i.e., they did not want to do well or try in school. Interestingly, she did acknowledge that there might have been something in the structure of honors classes that prevented students from succeeding. “No one, white or black, wants to be in the atmosphere of honors classes.” However, she still placed the blame for why African American students were not taking honors classes on their behavior and on their parents’ lack of desire to influence that behavior.

Stephanie: I came in wanting to have the same high expectations for both classes [honors and academic], but the problem is when you have students who don’t want it. I think the barriers are in the system, but also one of the things we hear from teachers is that we are here to help the students, but how can we do that when they don’t respect you, they give you discipline problems. At least fifty percent of the time [in the standard class] was on discipline issues, fifty percent, so I think there is not only a responsibility for the system but for parent involvement.
In these types of cases, Stephanie did not acknowledge the ways in which students’ and parents’ past schooling experiences and current school practices may have influenced how minority students and parents may have been responding to schools. At other points in our discussion, she indicated that she thought the English curriculum did not represent African American culture and that more African American teachers were needed because they would be able to help African American students in ways white teachers could not. So, even though she did believe that school curriculum and personnel did not represent the culture of African American students, quotations like the one above indicated to me that Stephanie had not made the connection between discipline problems and this lack of representation or other school practices. Here, I am not making a causal claim about representation and discipline. Rather, I am trying to show that teachers’ assertions (as exemplified in Stephanie’s comments) about the barriers to equal education for minority students are at least partially rooted in liberal interpretations about the nature of public institutions and of racism.

I attempted (and unsuccessfully I believe) to work Stephanie through a whiteness-as-property analysis of school tracking practices. I explained how white students may have more access to curriculum that represents their culture and how teachers assign whiteness to students who follow certain patterns of behavior. As I discussed in the first chapter, when teachers assign whiteness in this way, they help certain students access more rigorous curriculum because those students are deemed as able to handle it. I discussed this idea with Stephanie but failed to do so in a detailed way. I believe that one of the reasons my attempt to use this analysis with Stephanie was unsuccessful was that I did not have good examples that illustrated the specific ways in which teachers assign whiteness. Stephanie’s reaction was that my argument was interesting, but that was all. I do not think she could see how this

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14 This was really my first attempt to use property analysis outside of a being a student in a graduate course.
process actually happens, something I was still in the basic stages of being able to do.\(^\text{15}\) Interestingly enough, an early motivation for this study was to ground CRT in the work and lives of teachers. This agenda, though realized to a certain extent by the end of the study, was more difficult to work out initially.

Revisiting Stephanie’s and my conversation on the definition for racism for a moment, I want to show how I believe that property analysis can help teacher educators work with teachers to name whiteness, something I was not able to do at the time I interviewed Stephanie.

**Ben:** You hesitate to put the label of racist on [the school’s tracking practices].

**Stephanie:** I guess if it was designed to have those outcomes, then yes, those who created it were racist and maybe that is the case. But because, at this time, and with all of the teachers I see who are trying to make a difference…I am more hesitant to say. I would agree that it has racist outcomes and that the system is racist. So if one would define not consistently seeking a way to change a racist system as racist…\(^\text{16}\)

At this point, Stephanie trailed off, commenting that she is unsure about how to define racism. I asked her what other teachers might think, and she admitted to being interested in learning about this. Stephanie believed that most teachers really want to make a positive difference in the lives of their minority students and I agree with her. However, I think teachers betray this objective when they follow the kind of liberal, colorblind interpretations of racism that Stephanie exhibited in earlier comments. At this point in the interview process, I did not know ways to analyze this type of comment that would not make teachers like Stephanie feel directly and purposefully responsible for the racist outcomes their

\[^{15}\text{I will show what I believe to be better uses of property analysis later in this chapter and in future chapters.}\]

\[^{16}\text{I am reminded here of Tatum’s (1997) analogy of institutional racism being a like a moving walkway at the airport for those have racial privilege. Even if whites do not walk, they are still carried forward, so the only way to not take advantage of racism is to actively act against it.}\]
students suffer. However, in analyzing these types of comments using the tools offered by CRT, I began to understand how CRT’s property analysis could be useful to respond to this type of comment. It could help teachers see the whiteness of institutions, in effect enabling them to better address their own complicity in institutional racism without calling them racist. In the interaction immediately above, I might have been able to talk Stephanie through a property explanation of how teachers assign whiteness to certain students, in essence giving those students better access to more rigorous curriculum. We could have talked about how teachers mark certain kinds of students as bright, gifted, “good students,” etc. based on white ways of seeing. In using these labels, teachers may unintentionally support the segregation of minority students because the labels and, thus, contribute to the institutional racism of the school. In addition, it may have been my own preoccupation with Stephanie’s and my different definitions of racism that prevented me from seeing property analysis as a useful tool at that time. I had not yet found a way to use property analysis articulate the difference between liberal and critical modes of antiracism so as to work with Stephanie and accomplishing her antiracist goals.

**LEARNING CRT**

I now shift to my conversations with Melissa to examine how naming whiteness and property analysis can help challenge the liberal interpretations of colorblindness and race. My interviews with Melissa helped me learn how to use property analysis in a more useful way. While Melissa held certain understandings of racism that were similar to Stephanie’s and while an adherence to liberalism at times was evident in her comments, Melissa was very astute about school practices that contributed to racist outcomes such as segregation. Together we were able to develop a more detailed understanding of how to name whiteness
in school and teacher practices, and she helped me more deeply conceptualize how property 
analysis could explain the dynamic of racism in schools.

Melissa, like Stephanie, taught 10th grade English (world literature), and she also 
taught both academic and honors courses. The minority student population (primarily 
African American) of her academic courses more or less represented the minority population 
of her school, ranging from 10 to 15 percent. Meanwhile, in her honors courses she 
experienced the same phenomenon as Stephanie: she had two African American students in 
her three honors courses.

Melissa to an even greater extent than Stephanie recognized that minority students 
face challenges that white students do not. She also believed that teachers were responsible, 
at least to some extent, for addressing those challenges in school settings.

Melissa: I know I’ve made allowances for minority students that I haven’t 
made for whites. Society tells us that’s not fair, but in my own philosophy it 
is fair, but in school and in the news you’re told to treat everyone equally.

Here, Melissa did not equate fairness with sameness. Her concept of fairness was based in 
equity, not equality.

Melissa: Everyone is not equal. It’s unfair for a kid who has a private school 
background to be compared with one who has no [books] at home, no 
resources.

In her teaching, Melissa tried to make up for these disparities the best she could. She 
discussed with me trying to get to know her students well, trying to reach out to them and 
their parents. She went to their sports games and attempted to understand them beyond her 
classroom, all of what she called “just good teaching.”

However, like Stephanie, Melissa also had a tough time looking at teachers as 
responsible for/complicit in the racism in school. Her reservations about narrating teachers
as intentional actors in this racism were based in her view of how much power teachers hold. After reading the CRT article, which does narrate teachers as those with power, she made this comment:

Melissa: I had a little trouble with the idea that white teachers are the ones in power. I think that people who chose to go into teaching aren’t the most powerful in society anyway. People who go into teaching aren’t that privileged.

Ben: Why do the authors talk about them as privileged?

Melissa: It’s not that they’re not privileged, but they are specifically choosing a profession in which they are not going to be. So that throws a wrench. The argument is that people get power, they keep it, and they want more. But teachers don’t have it. They are looked down on in society.

So, Melissa on the one hand recognized that schools, and many teachers, create circumstances that place minority students at a disadvantage, but on the other hand she did not see racial dynamic of how white teachers contribute to that disadvantaged situation. A discussion with her on whiteness as property helped us both understand how white teachers do in fact contribute to those disadvantages in a race-based way. What is interesting about Melissa’s above comment about power is that immediately previous to that comment she stated the following:

Melissa: I think most of [the article on CRT] is true. I think it’s a specific factor in how [minority students] achieve and how they do in school. The most interesting argument is one about power, power that we have that we don’t even realize. Thinking about education as a commodity—I agree with that.

So, while she may have had trouble seeing white teachers as particularly privileged and powerful—and I actually think she does make a good point about the career choice that teachers make and how teachers are viewed by society—she was open to thinking about how white teachers do, indeed, maintain an unrecognized form of power. This recognition helped
lead us into a discussion of racial inequality in terms of property. As the following excerpts show, we were able to see and agree upon the ways in which teachers contribute to tracking minority students out of more advanced courses.

Melissa: In a school setting, power comes through resources. One of the better arguments made [in the article] is that schools are not offering AP courses. I usually think of resources as computers, but white students are getting better classes, which will get them into college and get them better jobs. And get power.

This statement focused on inequity between schools, but it also opened the door to talking about how the same segregation occurs within schools.

Ben: If it is whites trying to maintain power and access, how is that done and how have you seen it done?

Melissa: That was one of my bigger problems with CRT. I sat and thought about it but couldn’t figure it out. 95 percent of honors classes are white and we’ve tried to change that. We’ve taken away all restrictions to get into honors classes—any minimum grades, no writing samples, just sign up. And we still have 99 percent of the classes—I have 3 black kids our of 75 honors students. I just don’t know how it is being done.17 I wish I could stop it from happening.

From here we got into a discussion of how this segregation may be done, or at least into how teachers may be complicit in the practice. We discussed how teachers view students in racialized ways and how this racialization in turn affects how teachers view minority students’ abilities, how they advise on class choice, and how they give them access to more rigorous curriculum. We did not explicitly give this practice by teachers the name of assigning whiteness, but I think the following passage is an example of how teachers do, in fact, assign whiteness based on how they perceive student behavior. In responding to Melissa’s previous statement, I asked Melissa about cultural and social capital.

17 Here, Melissa’s understanding is still rooted to an extent in the ideology of liberalism. The institution of schooling is seen as value-free. Since the explicit barriers to honors courses were removed, no barriers exist. Liberal thought in this way does not recognize the culture of the institution—i.e., discourses and ways of being exist that privilege some and discriminate against others.
Ben: Do you see cultural and social capital playing in in any way?

Melissa: I definitely think that is the case. I teach English and we are the only department that has honors, along with math. There are more minority students in 9th grade honors, and then they seem to drop out. And perhaps it is because the students don’t have that discourse with the teacher, their grades drop and then they get discouraged from continuing. Because they aren’t expressing their knowledge the way white kids are when they think, “Why am I bothering?” That’s cultural capital, knowing how to play the game.

Introducing the concept of cultural capital to the discussion helped Melissa begin to see how school discourse—i.e., aspects of the culture of the institution of school—set up barriers to access. From here, Melissa and I were able to talk through how teachers support the liberalism inherent in this school culture, committing what Solórzano (1998)—drawing on the work of Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Willis (1978); Davis (1989); and Delgado and Stefancic (1992); among others—calls racial microaggressions.18

Melissa: I think that there are things that we [teachers] are doing, not intentionally. I am a 10th grade honors teacher and other teachers try to help these kids, but being pretty rigid about what a high performing student looks like and acts like and produces is causing that kind of thing. I think that there are social connotations with those students that don’t even have to do with the curriculum objectives. We prefer students who sit and raise their hands and don’t talk, and we have this bias towards them even if we don’t realize it. And I know from my reading that that’s limited.

These comments have taught me to look at how teachers view students’ behavior in racial ways and how they assign whiteness to those students who act in the preferred ways. In Melissa’s interpretation, sitting and talking in the ways preferred by school personnel was in essence behaving in white ways, or ways preferred by whites. Teachers prefer those white ways of being and react to students according to whether they employ those ways of being or not. Furthermore, once teaches appropriate some level of whiteness to student, those

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18 Solórzano (1998) summarizes the work of these scholars by defining racial microaggressions as the “subtle and covert ways” in which whites exhibit racism towards minorities. The participants in his study commented that these forms of racism had the effect of them “feeling out of place,” encountering “lower expectations,” and feeling “invisible.”
students become more eligible for honors courses or more rigorous work in the view of
teachers. By leading Melissa through a racial property analysis of school discrimination, I
was able discuss with her how teachers are complicit in institutional racism without
instigating feelings of blame and causing her to defend her personal practice as a socially just
teacher. She could see how there might be things that she says or does that may hinder
minority students’ chances at success in her class or affect their choices to attend honors or
standard courses. The reasons why African American students in her school were not taking
honors course might have been a little clearer to her.

What is interesting here is that I did not give Melissa any profound insight or
knowledge. Most of her comments came from thoughts already possessed. I just helped
walk her through a property analysis of those thoughts. It is from this type of dialogic
performance that I learned to more concretely see and better explain the property arguments
that I already believed in. I could see how property analysis could be used to dialogue with
teacher about complicity in racism. In fact, naming the whiteness of teacher practices and
using a property analysis of teacher conceptions of student behavior and ability showed me
how CRT could be used with teachers in order to create revisionist accounts of the causes of
the racial disparity that exists in schools. Teachers like Melissa already carry these accounts
with them. Dialoguing with Melissa using CRT as a guide just helped me bring out these
stories and let us see them in a new light.

For example, she recalled a conversation about 9th grade curriculum change in her
English department (which had already done a lot to increase the diversity of author
representation in the 10th grade curriculum):

Melissa: There was a lot of resistance to taking off the white authors [from
the 9th grade curriculum]. There are five required books. Raisin in the Sun is
the only one by a black author—some considered To Kill a Mocking Bird to be diverse. Some wanted to replace Animal Farm with Black Boy and people freaked out. One guy went so far as to say that 70% of the literature would represent 15 to 20% of the population. I can’t believe he had the nerve to say that.

Melissa had an understanding that this teacher in her department viewed literature written by black authors—like Black Boy—as only speaking to black students while those written by white authors—like Animal Farm—hold universal merit and can speak to all students. So, she already had a critical understanding of the racial dynamic of the curriculum as property and of how whiteness is seen as the norm—i.e., white it is not seen as a race, so white authors can represent people from any race. Using the tool of naming whiteness helped me uncover with Melissa how comments such as those above are rooted in a vision of whiteness as a form of property. We discussed how teachers, who are mostly white, have trouble giving up what they know. The way I interpreted and explained this practice to Melissa was that some white teachers are unwilling to give up their white racial advantage. This made Melissa explain it in terms of teachers’ comfort zones.

Melissa: I think the big thing is that [white teachers] are going to have to look at different standards in how things are done. Some of these teachers have been looking for the same qualities in a paper for 20 years. I think the fear is in not knowing and giving up your time. I think it’s hard. The fear of giving up Animal Farm us the fear of leaning something new. There is a comfort in teaching something you are familiar with. And if you are not familiar, then it’s a problem.

Melissa was careful not to portray teachers as intentionally discriminatory. She was sympathetic to the difficulty involved in teachers giving up what they are comfortable with, yet at the same time she thought change was necessary. By putting this conflict in racial terms in a dialogic fashion, Melissa and I were able both to avoid labeling teachers and to discuss the possibilities for teachers to change their unintentionally discriminatory practices.
Melissa talked about attending seminars that focused on culturally relevant approaches to teaching and her attempts to alter the English curriculum, and her insights show how teachers can begin to work towards anti-racist approaches to education. Equally important, Melissa’s discussion of these insights and possibilities helped me see the value of using CRT in dialogue with teachers and begin to put into words the possibility for change that such dialogue could offer.

CONCLUSIONS – BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND

Despite the potential touchy topic of conversation and despite the fact that these early interviews did not involve as much give and take on the ideas as I had originally envisioned, overall the dialogue with both Stephanie and Melissa was fruitful. I was able to challenge liberal, colorblind interpretations of and approaches to antiracism to an extent, and I was able to do so without essentializing the teachers or promoting narratives of racist selves. I believe this dialogue became possible because of the respect I showed for each of the teachers as professionals and intellectuals. In fact, Melissa made comments of disdain for the ways in which school administrators approach equity education with teachers. She was also sensitive to how she believed non-educators (e.g., politicians, the public, etc.) did not view teachers as professionals. So, I believe the fact that I used a very dialogic approach in interviewing these teachers, in effect setting them up as professionals, helped me sustain a conversation in which we both learned. In less performative approaches to ethnography, interviews may lead to expert analyses of participants’ words and much less attention may be paid to the pedagogical potential (for either the participant or the researcher) of the interview itself. In
other words, the educative aspects of the study are left to the analysis and implications stages of the study and not the data collection process.

What I found as I interviewed these two teachers, reflected back on those interviews, and poured over the transcriptions was that these two interviews informed me on how to enter into and perform a research study that examines teachers’ conceptualizations of race. This chapter, then, has been very much about what the interviews (the words and the actual interactions) with the teachers taught me about how to use CRT to analyze views of race. Specifically, these interviews taught me how to begin to name whiteness and how to partake in a property analysis of whiteness. Before conducting these interviews, I understood both concepts in the abstract but could not apply them. These interviews showed me how they could be applied in dialogue with teachers.

In addition, these interviews helped frame the study in several ways. They taught me the complex nature of colorblindness in the views and practices of teachers, how colorblindness is attached to liberalism and how that liberalism exists in teacher thought and practice, and how teachers both are complicit in institutional racism and work against that complicity. Furthermore, analyzing these interviews pointed out to me that the study is as much about asking the teachers what they consider to be racism as much as it is an examination of colorblindness. In this regard, the teachers performed both ideological and counter-ideological understandings (in respect to liberalism as a dominant form of ideology) of colorblindness, whiteness, and institutional racism. I have showed the contradictions within and between these teachers’ comments – contradictions that reveal the coexistence of perceptions that both adhere to and resist liberalism in its dominant ideological interpretation of racism.
Finally, though I could not articulate it with these teachers at the time, these two interviews helped me hone my intentions in the study. Specifically, they helped me recognize that my intent was to move teachers from liberal approaches to antiracism that rely on colorblind arguments to more critical approaches that recognize institutions as value laden in terms of race and culture. I wanted the teachers to acknowledge and use approaches that, like CRT, center race as both an ideological construct and a lived reality. That is to say, I wanted to the teachers to address how race is a complex issue but one that central to the nature of schooling.

So, these initial interviews were pedagogical to me in that I more deeply learned to articulate CRT and I began to see how to apply it to the practices of teachers. CRT helped me to uncover these contradictions and showed me its potential in countering some of the problematic aspects of liberal ideology. This process of uncovering and challenging the ideological undercurrent also served the aim of teaching me how to “see” in a more material way the analytical tools of naming whiteness, property, and revisionism, tools that became valuable for me in future interviews and in my own teaching.

Discussing examples of classroom experiences with both teachers enabled us to name the many ways whiteness existed in school practices. This naming helped us revision (i.e., re-interpret) those experiences in more racially conscious ways. Furthermore, dissecting the way teachers assign and control whiteness helped me get a better hold on what property analysis can do in teacher education. Melissa’s understanding of how teachers use students’ cultural capital to assign them certain standards of whiteness helped me provide a response (at least in my thinking) to Stephanie’s labeling of students as not wanting education based on her observations of those students’ behaviors. Even though I was not able to challenge

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19 I will explain these ideas of race more when I present my interviews with Sarah in Chapter 3.
Stephanie’s labeling in these interviews to a great extent, what I learned from Melissa about teacher practice has provided me with a new way to work with my own pre-service teachers. Stephanie’s comments are similar to those I hear from many students in my education courses. These discussions were concurrent with a course on social foundations and multicultural education I was teaching. I found that they helped me talk with my students about how teachers’ conceptualizations and labeling of their students—i.e., as either “good students” or as “needy” or “disrespectful” students—was linked to how these pre-service teachers used standards of whiteness to judge their students. That is to say, the pre-service teachers’ use of white norms to judge their students affected their perceptions of those students’ desires and abilities.

The reason this property analysis has become so useful to me is that it offers a language that counters the specific modes of effectivity that teachers may employ to support liberal interpretation of racial disparity. For example, when Stephanie labeled students as “not wanting it,” she was viewing the school structure as culturally equal for all students, regardless of their racial and cultural backgrounds. Thus, such labeling supports liberal interpretations of institutions such as schools as value-free. Property analysis has helped me learn how the modes of effectivity that support dominant ideologies exist in practices such as labeling. Furthermore, this analysis has helped me uncover and thus explain to white educators how such modes of effectivity make us complicit in institutional racism.

Of course, my big failing at the time of these initial interviews, especially with Stephanie, was that I had not yet developed a language that could help me explain this complicity in a productive way. With Melissa it was not as much of a problem because of the critical racial consciousness she already had developed. Therefore, my inability to be as
dialogic as I intended to be did not affect that conversation as much. With Stephanie, however, I was so focused on using CRT that I did not pay attention how to work with her more dialogically and take advantage of her liberal racial consciousness in order to promote more a more critical approach to antiracism. In Chapter 3 and 4, I will discuss how I learned to develop and use CRT as dialogic performance. In chapter 3 especially, I will explain more of the insights I gained about CRT in this way. There are aspects to CRT that make it fit very well with dialogic approach, and I will discuss the value of this approach to me as a teacher educator.
...In terms of being colorblind it’s sort of funny... we have a school vacation for a week or two weeks, and I come back and I’m like “Oh yeah, a lot of my students are black.” When I’m teaching for months I don’t even notice that, and when I’m away and I’m on vacation and am around a lot more white people then all of a sudden I become aware of “Wow, I’m in a school of a lot of African Americans!” And I don’t even notice. And when I see pictures developed, too, of like school trips and my class, I go “Wow, there are a lot of minority kids!” and you know it’s just interesting. – Sarah, middle school math teacher.

Sarah was an interesting person to interview. As I will show, like Stephanie and Melissa she had a complex view of colorblindness. In a later section of this chapter I will explain how that colorblindness played out in her thinking and practice. The comment above, for example, shows that she claimed some sort of blindness with regards to phenotype. At the same time, her thoughts on whites’ complicity in institutional racism (including her own complicity) challenged this blindness. These thoughts were key in Sarah already promoting a critical approach to antiracism. So, before talking about her conceptualization of colorblindness, I will discuss Sarah’s astute understanding of complicity.

Sarah taught middle and high school math at a public charter school in a mid-sized southern city. While she lived in the same predominantly white college town as I did, the
city where the school was located had about a 45% African American and 45% white population (with the remaining 10% of the population being a mix of students of Asian, Latino, and other backgrounds). Before teaching there, Sarah taught middle school in the college town, but despite the experiences of many white teachers, she preferred the city school and was effective there.

Sarah: Part of the reason I left tutoring to go into teaching was that I didn’t feel like I didn’t get to help African American students. I had all these rich white kids coming to my house for $45 an hour. I felt I was so good at doing that (math) that let me help different people who can’t afford me. When I move to NY, I will go back to tutoring because I’m trying to have a baby. It’ll be less stress. I may find that I really do miss teaching. And I’ve had great result in terms of my tests, end of year tests. The first two years at Phoenix, 100% of my kids got 70% and better – Algebra 1, Geometry and algebra 2. This year I had one kid fail algebra and three fail geometry, on the EOC. I lost my perfect record. [Laughs.]

Though the exact numbers of the racial breakdown of her students varied from class to class, approximately 80% of her students were African American and this fact seemed to increase a racial awareness she already possessed.

It is also important to note that I knew Sarah before I interviewed her. About five years before the study, her husband and I taught ESL together for one year at a local high school in the college town. So, when first talking to Sarah, I often wondered in the back of my head what his thoughts would be on what I was saying. I knew some of his views with regard to race and education—views that were similar to mine in some ways and different from them in others. As the interview progressed, however, I quickly got wrapped up in our conversation. That may be in part due to the fact that Sarah was a rapid-fire speaker and was very intense in conversations. She put all of her energy into them and asked hard

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questions—for the most part because she really wanted to learn more. She really did want to learn more about the topic of racism.

As I stated, Sarah already had a keen understanding of whites’ complicity in racism in education (not to mention in society in general). It was something she had thought quite a bit about. Like me, she already carried with her the belief that all whites have racism.

Ben: Is colorblindness a good practice in regard to race, and is it a practice that you adhere to?

Sarah: I think it’s an ideal to strive to. I don’t know that everybody reaches it. I think it’s important to be colorblind, but I don’t know if in practice everybody is.

Ben: What about anybody? Do you think that anybody is?

Sarah: That’s like saying is anybody completely without racism. I think that people might like to say that they are but I think it’s very … it’s almost impossible that anyone truly is… that anyone is truly without any sort of their own racism, even if they don’t want to admit it themselves.

Her views on colorblindness exemplified the spirit of colorblindness, what Stephanie might call seeing every student as a 10—as I will show shortly—but more than with any of the teachers I interviewed she also acknowledged her own role in perpetuating racism and wanted to resist liberal ideological interpretations of that racism. In this sense, she had Melissa’s same sensibility of the racial microaggressions that whites commit unintentionally. She often asked herself about the racial dynamics of events that occurred in her school and in her own interactions with students. Even when she became tempted to divert conversations about race to a discussion of class, she used that same self-critique to acknowledge the important of race.

Sarah: On page 50 [of the CRT article], when it’s talking about inequality, race is the central construct of understanding inequality. I guess I still wonder…isn’t inequality also caused by class? There are poor whites and there are wealthy blacks. Um…I guess I would say still, my gut would say, it
is primarily race, but I feel like…I don’t know…I guess that class should be talked about also as being like the second biggest factor to inequality.

Ben: Um, yeah it’s interesting…

Sarah: And I don’t know if they even were feeling like…I don’t know if it even… it didn’t really address when there are you know wealthy… I guess it’s just myself, I mean I grew up middle class, lower middle class, I had a lot of financial aid…like I know there are wealthy blacks that I met that were not on financial aid, so I saw you know… I mean I’m not poor, but then there are a lot of poor whites who never make it to college, and there are some wealthy blacks who do go on to get MBAs and go to college, but I think it is… I mean it’s not as prevalent…

Here I really got the sense that Sarah was trying to work out for herself her internal conflict in thinking about race versus class issues. It seemed to me that she was hoping our conversation would help her work through such conflicts. So, I feel like we had similar beliefs on how much race contributes to inequality, and that she was using the interviews to work out an ideology—perhaps a more clearly articulated worldview—that helped her explain it to herself, let alone to others. This is a real “aha” moment for me because these interviews did the same for me in regards to CRT. They helped me use CRT to work out a mode of effectivity to resist colorblindness and liberalism. I will revisit this idea in the conclusion to this chapter. For now, I will show how our conversation about the race versus class issues helped us center race:

Ben: Um…What I often ask in my scholarship is that, it’s—relating this back to feminist theory and social class theory—when people do feminist theory, [I feel] they are rarely asked, “Well why don’t you also do class?” And when people do social class theory, [I feel] it’s rare that people say, “Well you can look at race there.” …Maybe it’s changing now, I don’t know. But when you talk about race theory, about centering race, and from whites especially…

Sarah: They say, “Why don’t you do class?”

Ben: And [CRT scholars] are not saying class isn’t important, but they’re saying…
Sarah: Race is primary.

Ben: In race scholarship, race is central because you can’t explain—like if you do studies of students or property—social class doesn’t explain everything. There are still more people [of color] that suffer the consequences, even if you control for class. So I think that’s what they’re saying.

In trying to work out a response for Sarah on why CRT centers race, Sarah was able to fill in the gaps in my articulation. So, not only was our discussion on the centering of race educative for her, it was also educative for me about how to more deeply understand and then articulate the need to center race in analyzing school inequity. In essence, much of what my dialogue with Sarah turned out to be was to help her gain a deeper understanding of the how of complicity (for the most part we already agreed on the what). She wanted to understand more deeply how racism happens so that she could work better at challenging it in her practice.

Sarah was also especially astute at recalling interactions—both those that involved herself as well as others—questioning the racial dynamic of those interactions, and trying to understand how they might include examples of racial discrimination. One example that shows her willingness to question the racial dynamic of an interaction was when she described her school’s director’s attempt to push students to get their GED rather than continue on to get their high school diploma.

Sarah: I worry at school. I feel like it’s happened a lot, but then again our school is very much minorities [i.e., predominantly minority students], so it’s hard to say is it happening because of that or because we have poor students—you know if you have poor whites is the same thing happening—but I feel like our director a lot this year and last year really encouraged a lot [of students] to drop out and get GEDs, when they were like 16 or 17 and they were still in 8th grade or 9th grade. But I don’t know if that’s because they are African American or…
Even though Sarah did not know if the director was suggesting the pursuit of the GED for these students because they were African American, she was willing to ponder the racial dynamic of his thinking. In the end, she was not nor could not be sure, but what is important about this comment is that she was trying to understand the racial aspect of this type of practice by a white educator. Similarly, Sarah also acknowledged her own feelings of racism that she carries with her.

Sarah: …when I think about my own racism—everybody has it—driving around in certain parts of the city [that have large percentages of African American]… just driving around back roads of the city, I sometimes do want to make sure the windows are rolled up, the doors are locked, and I feel like more scared, and I’m aware that it’s a minority and not really with poor whites, I’m aware that I’m having…

Ben: So, you’re saying that you notice more in a poor black neighborhood than in a poor white neighborhood.

Sarah: Yeah. So, then I start to think that I feel a little more racist and a little guilty clicking it [a door lock] if I’m going by somebody [who is poor and black].

Ben: So it sounds like you are saying that you don’t have negative feelings towards black people, but there is something that makes you think…. So what you are saying that it is a little more broad than just intentional.

Sarah: Exactly. Right.

Sarah acknowledged—at least at some point—that her actions were based in assumptions about people from different racial background, and she was willing to question those actions and the racial dynamic of her assumptions.

This type of questioning opened up Sarah to considering actions that might actually counter complicity. Later in the same part of our conversation, we discussed part of the CRT article by Ladson Billings and Tate (1995) where they explain using race as an ideological construct. In that section, the authors discuss Omni and Winant’s (1993) argument that race
cannot be looked at only as either an ideological construct (i.e., a social construction) or an objective condition (i.e., a material reality). I attempted to explain what the authors are trying to say, and Sarah’s response again showed her willingness to consider an example of potential institutional racism and how one teacher attempted to combat it.

Sarah: I just had a huge question mark at the bottom of page 48. I did not understand that part at all. It talks about is race an ideological construct or an objective condition, or an epistemological—you know that whole paragraph I was just like confused.

Ben: [I spend some time looking over the paragraph]. Okay, so it’s saying that if it’s an ideological construct…I think what they mean is if it’s only a social construction—like it’s all in our heads, that we’ve created, that if you believe that that’s all it is—it has no real reality, that you ignore how that construction is actually affecting people. I mean biologically there’s no such thing as different races. We’re all part of the same sub-species—things like that—it doesn’t make any sense biologically. However, socially, we have lived realities and it has effects that are material, such as whether a student is punished or not, or who historically has been able to own property, all of these types of things. So, even though it may not be a hard reality—what they say here is an objective condition—it still has some material effects. So, you can’t think of it as purely a social construction. You can’t think of it as pure reality either because who counts as black and who counts as white, it all falls apart in this sense, because people are mixing, races aren’t clearly…

Sarah: I see what you are saying, I see… It made me think that in terms of racism, there’s panic a lot about the kids, of their race being wrong. Like a lot of times it’ll have a little box on a standardized test. It’ll say black, and they’ll be, “Oh, no, no, no, I’m mixed race,” and they’ll be “Look, they made a mistake here on this one, it says I’m white, but I’m black,”… it bothered them, and also there were questions about, “Did you parent go to high school?” “Did your parents have a college degree?” all these surveys that they do. One teacher who is white, I thought this was great, he brought up that kids go into these tests feeling bad, like “Oh wow, here I am checking I’m black, I’m checking that my parents only have a high school education or 8th grade education, and now I’m going to take this OG test,” you know, knowing that this person next to me may be checking that my parents have a PhD. And

21 I explain the difference as I understand it. Again, Sarah’s direct questions about concepts from the article force me—on the spot—to articulate those concepts as if I am the expert in CRT (and race in education in general). By forcing me to articulate in this way, I learn through the study to put my ideas “out there,” to see what I think about my articulation, and to re-conceptualize and solidify my understanding of race and CRT. I will explain this process more in Chapter 6.

22 I really get caught up here with words like reality, hard, objective, condition, etc.
they feel bad about this going into the test… [so he decided to] do this the day before the EOGs. So, that was sort of interesting how…

So, my explanation of how race is ideological construct—that it is socially constructed and as a construction also has material consequences—helped Sarah think of an example of how the construction of race affects her students.23 She saw that the designation of race on standardized tests and students having to mark their race may have induced in them what Claude Steele calls stereotype threat (Steele, 1997). Furthermore, in her example, Sarah was able to think of actions that potentially resisted the racist outcomes, such as stereotype threat, that marking race may cause. I do realize that it is certainly difficult to know to exactly what extent Sarah’s colleague was able to counter the stereotype threat his students may have been feeling, but in focusing on Sarah’s understanding of this event, I do believe that she was able to see how teachers are a part of a system (as Stephanie might put it) that re-inscribes racial “realities” and therefore imagine possible response that counteract potentially racist consequences. Discussing an article on CRT—and specifically the CRT tenet that race is constructed in ways that privileges those raced as white over those raced as non-whites thus reifying white privilege—helped Sarah develop her own worldview about the existence of racism and then to possibly use that worldview to resist liberal interpretations of how to counter discrimination.

As we continued our dialogue on the existence and reification of racism in society in general and in education in particular, we were able to use discussions of property to more deeply understand the construction of white privilege.

23 Interestingly, this example also shows that thinking of race can also lead to thinking of other forms of inequity, in this case inequity related to educational background. This supports Guinier and Torres’ (2002) assertion that politicizing race can lead to working against other causes of inequity as well.
Sarah: Okay. On the next page, top of 58,\textsuperscript{24}...does this mean that there’s so much in terms of bad experiences that have affected Americans that in order to feel better about their own superiority...?

Ben: Yeah, or anything. Even if we find the status quo reasonable as whites—I took the test, I got this score, so I deserve to be in this class; or I took the test, I didn’t do as well, so I don’t deserve to be in this class—without looking at the bias of the test, the lack of resources that may have affected how I study for the test, the history of being in schools before then. So, if we don’t look at that critically...

Sarah: In terms of...

Ben: Oppression becomes rationalized. They deserve to be in those classes because of x, y, and z...they didn’t take the test, they didn’t do well.

What I was attempting to do in the above interaction was explain how in using the structures of schooling as they currently exist, people actively take part in the segregation of students into different classes. I wanted to show that a history of access to resources, or denied access as the case may be, has affected their current placement in schools. This in turn affects their current access to resources, such as certain types of curriculum. Sarah’s questioning about a specific part of the CRT article that addresses the interrelation of justification and the history of access helped me to word complicity in terms of access to property. I still had a long way to go to make that argument more coherent, but the dialogic nature of the interview gave me a place to start.

\textit{COLORBLINDNESS REVISTED}

To open this chapter I presented a quotation from Sarah in which she discussed times when she did not notice or forgot people’s skin color. In fact, she brought this up more than once.

\textsuperscript{24}In this section of the article, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) are discussing the need for the use of counterstory to disrupt the rationalizations that prevent whites from understanding or interrogating their own privilege.
Sarah: I know myself that I’m so not visual. I feel like there’s been some moments where there’s been people that I couldn’t describe and I can’t remember if they’re white or black. I feel like that’s happened once or twice. That I was kind of like, wow! … You know what it is, when somebody comes to the door, when there’s a random stranger sometimes coming to visit or see somebody [in my class], there are times when I don’t remember if they were white or black. And that has happened a couple times. I remember thinking, “Oh, that’s kind of weird,” like that I’m so non-visual I don’t even notice that… It’s not something when I see them more than once, but if briefly a parent comes to the door, or something, and if I say, “Someone came by yesterday for you,” and they ask, “What did they look like?” “I can’t remember. I don’t even remember if they are white or black.” I remember saying that at some point, and thinking…more criticizing myself, thinking, “Damn Sarah, you’re so non-visual that you don’t even remember that!” [Laughs.] … But I think a lot of it is that—especially when I’m at Phoenix for a long time—that I get used to the norm being that everybody’s black and that the exception is that sometimes somebody is white.

I got the sense from Sarah that her experiences of forgetting people’s skin color were accurate, that she honestly did forget color at times. However, the last part of her comment above is important, that she did notice color when it was related to difference. For example, she did notice color when it is the exception:

Sarah: Because it is four out of my five classes that are majority African American and just the one seventh grade pre-algebra class… And it wasn’t just… I did think in my head, “Oh, that’s interesting, the class that had the most whites was my hardest class behavior-wise.” I did have that thought.

She noticed, and admitted to noticing, when students’ behavior did not fit her expectations of racial behavior. Again, she did notice her own form of racism and called that into question. I was not sure what to do with this part of our dialogue at first. It was and still is hard for me to imagine not noticing a person’s race, but Sarah was so honest about her own ideas on race that it is also hard to imagine she was lying to me. In analyzing this conversation, I began to explore in new ways how different forms of colorblindness might exist. Maybe Sarah exemplified a certain type of visual colorblindness (i.e., a colorblindness based on phenotype or racial appearance) versus a cultural colorblindness (i.e., a colorblindness based on some
sore of understanding of behavior as related to ethnicity). Perhaps visual colorblindness, the claim that she often did not notice a person’s skin color, was linked to how she saw colorblindness as a goal. She believed a person’s skin color should not matter for their chances at being successful in school, for example. Our extensive dialogue on the topic did bring out that same sense that Stephanie had of a spirit of colorblindness.\(^{25}\)

Sarah: I will say that I’m an equal opportunity pusher. I’m really pushy with all my kids in terms of getting them all to succeed. I don’t know that I’m conscious of it, but thinking of how I try to equally get kids of all races to come for help at lunch or after school or equally calling all parents trying to get everybody on board to raise their grade. So anybody who has Ds and Fs, I’m on the phone pushing.

So, regardless of race, Sarah was going to push her students to be successful in class.

However, Sarah went back and forth about how much she noticed a person’s skin color or race. In the same part of a conversation, she explained that she judged students on their math performance alone and then immediately described how that student’s race made her think about her decisions with that student. For example:

Sarah: When I try to decide in terms of moving kids in math class, moving them up a level or down a level based on how they do on the placement test…I think I’m very careful to make sure that I’m… I’m really just looking at the numbers. [I note that she is struggling a bit about how to express this]. I’m not at all concerning myself with somebody’s race. I’m looking at how they did on the test, how they’ve done on previous tests, how their records look. You know I don’t know that I’m really thinking about…because my school is majority minority students. That’s sort of my… people stand out more if they’re white in terms of race, but I don’t know that I’m thinking about that. I did think that toward the end of this year there was one kid who did very poorly, he started off pretty good and then he did really poorly and he was one of the few white kids we have, and I ended up not moving him down, and I didn’t even ask myself, “I wonder if by chance…” [alluding to the fact that she made this decision because he is white.] It did go through my head [later] that I had somehow partially thought he is smart enough to handle it. I actually had those thoughts later but then I looked at the numbers and I thought, “Well, his numbers were in the 80s, they were with people that I kept

\(^{25}\) I actually told Sarah the story of Stephanie’s comments about seeing every student as a ten at one point.
in that level,” but it was interesting that I actually thought about it [that decision not to move him ad the possible racial factors in that decision].

Ben: So, you might not have thought about it at the moment but you did later.

Sarah: Right.

At first, she claimed that race was not a part of her thought process at all, but when she reflected on whether or not keeping the student in the same level class, she did call the race-less-ness of her decision into question. Like with Stephanie at times, I saw colorblindness as somewhat of a moving target – sometimes it meant one thing and sometimes another. This movement in the concept furthered our conversation.

Ben: So it sounds that you are saying is that the way you strive to be colorblind is by relying on test score performance or homework score performance, academic performance. Is that correct?

Sarah: Yeah [hesitantly], and I guess I’m more treating kids on other … are they trying… in my mind it’s always interesting… in treating the other students—but it’s very mixed up on what their race is—are they doing their homework, are they raising their hand, are they behaving in class? I feel like I have strong students and weak students of every race.

Sarah here adhered to some version of a universalizeable vision of a good student. That is to say, in the above comment, she put forth a vision that there is a way to behave in class and, furthermore, the way of behaving is not related to race and applies to all students. This vision of the universal good student was supported by other comment she made and may have been connected to her desire for all of her students to succeed—her spirit of colorblindness. This is what she said when I ask her about the advantages of colorblindness:

Sarah: Oh, I always think it’s a necessity that when we’re treating everybody equal and we’re not coming in with preconceived notions of “well in my experience Hispanics and Black student don’t do as well” [she says this part putting on another person’s voice], if you have these racist thoughts then you’re going to put that on the child and not grade them fairly and it’s going to be a self-fulfilling prophesy. I think it’s really important that you don’t [do that.]
When I then ask her about the drawbacks to being colorblind, however, she resisted the notion that a universal proper way to behave existed.

Ben: Do you think there are any drawbacks to being colorblind?

Sarah: Well, okay, here’s one. I guess that the shouting out—I read Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria\(^{26}\)—and that sometimes culturally African American students shout things out instead of raising their hand, and if you have the white model of you-have-to-raise-your-hand-if-you-wish-to-speak, then you might not realize that some of these African American…it’s cultural that they’re shouting out and it’s not that they should be penalized by this white code of ethics of how you should behave in the classroom. So, if you’re aware of, okay they’re black, you know tolerating different behaviors.

So, Sarah did practice a kind of color consciousness. She wanted to take students’ racial backgrounds into consideration when reacting to their behavior in the interest of equitable treatment. The above comment led us to talk about the importance of noticing difference. Like with Stephanie, I noticed a contradiction in Sarah’s belief in the ideal of colorblindness and her insistence of the importance of noticing racial difference. So, like with Stephanie, I attempted to dialogically question Sarah on this contradiction.

Ben: This sounds like that there are cases where you believe in colorblindness, however, would in that type of case it not be important to notice difference?

Sarah: Right, like I’m saying in that case it would be important to notice differences.

Ben: Do you think it’s possible to notice differences and be colorblind?

Sarah: Yeah [assuredly]. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ben: …You used the phrase “treating everyone the same.” If people have different behavior patterns, how do you treat everybody the same? I guess what I’m asking is what does treating somebody the same mean to you?

\(^{26}\) Referring to Beverly Tatum’s (1997) book.
Sarah: Having the same high expectations for achievement. [Pause. ]
Academic achievement or…behavior. Having the same high standards

Ben: So, if you have the same high expectations of behavior, does that mean you have the same expectations of specific behavior? [Pause on both our parts.] What I’m trying to get at is you make it sound like you realize that it may be a cultural phenomenon that black kids may shout out more and that to them in certain circumstances that may not be considered bad behavior.

Sarah: Right.

Ben: But in some other code of ethics that may be.

Sarah: Right

Ben: It sounds like then that you have to have—even if you have high expectations—that you have different expectations.

Sarah: Right. Yeah. And I don’t know that in practice I always do that. I mean I know Isaac [who is black]—and in that class of 15, maybe 11 were black, one Hispanic, and three white—but he, I just felt like as a person had trouble not shouting out and so I think I let him shout out more without getting as upset as I would with other students, who I felt like could not control it, but I don’t think it was based on race. I think it was based on him.

So, our discussion moved again. In some sense I was try to nail down Sarah’s version of colorblindness and how it affected her practice. It seemed that, at times, what she thought to be the ideal of colorblindness did not always match up with her actual thought process or practice in class, but that at times she also did base those actions in some sense of what I have called the spirit of colorblindness. While she diverted the conversation away from race (articulating how she responded to students based on their individual personalities), difference—i.e., being cognizant of difference—was important to her in order to help her students to succeed.

Ben: It sounds like what’s important is that difference to you is based on individual students.

Sarah: Yeah, it really is. I think I was thinking more of for other people in general, allowing for different behaviors based on race, but I guess for me
myself it’s…I tend to be much more strict, wanting quiet, wanting—whether
that’s a white value or whatever—wanting kids to raise their hand, but
occasionally—I don’t know why I picked Isaac, I taught him two years in a
row—I felt like he could not control it.

She had an ideal of good behavior in her class—wanting quiet—but she was also willing to
break her own rule about noise in order to be able to work with particular students. Her rules
and her exceptions to them were not entirely based on race—the idea of caring about students
despite or because of their differences may have also been important—but she was interested
in considering what was racial about them. She felt that considering this racial dynamic via
cultural difference was important for her to be equitable as a teacher. Our conversation
served as a way for her to work out how she could acknowledge difference in order to
maintain that goal of equity. For example, she was very astute about how race may have
factored into parents’ involvement in decisions about which classes their students would be
in.

Sarah: I was very much aware that Allison, [the director’s daughter, who is
white], I definitely wanted to move [her down a level], but he would not have
her be moved. And Scott, who’s white, I talked to his mom and he also ended
up staying. And so like I was aware racial-wise that when I’ve called parents
who are white and say I want to move the kids down, the parents fight me on
it more, and there kids end up not moving down… And I remember that
bothering me in a way because I was thinking that… I think culturally
sometimes some African American parents may think, “Okay the teacher
knows what’s best, I’ll just do what they’re saying,” versus some of the
Caucasian parents thinking, “No, I want to move my kid up,” etc, which may
be based wanting the kid to have challenge or wanting the kid to be with more
kids of their same race.

One important aspect of our dialogue was that my motivation in it was to get Sarah to see her
contradiction. My adherence to the CRT ideal that colorblindness masks the categories—like
good student, proper behavior, etc.—that whites have constructed and used to maintain their
own privilege, resisted the liberal ideal that categories exist or can be created that apply to
everyone in the same way. I believe Sarah to some degree actually also adhered to that challenge to colorblindness and supported a more color conscious ideology, especially as she conceptualized difference. CRT was a motivation for me to draw this ideology out of Sarah with the hope that she might challenge those aspects of her thinking and practice that still adhered to liberal interpretations of the necessity of colorblindness. In the preceding excerpt, Sarah was aware of how cultural differences (as she saw them) could lead to different ways of accessing the structural aspects of an institution of education. She believed that some white parents might have a culture that enables them to gain access to a certain curriculum. She did not use the term entitlement, but her comments hit on the possible senses of entitlement that white parents might have, and furthermore, she was willing to question the racial dynamic of that sense of entitlement—e.g., white parents might want to move their children so as to be in classes with more white students.

At the same time, Sarah both posited and resisted essentializations about black culture. At times, she commented that black students had more trouble raising their hands rather than shouting out. Even though she commented on this type of behavior to highlight how it is important for teachers to be understanding of different types of behavior because they may be valued by different cultures in different ways, she did essentialize black students as behaving in a certain way when she made these comments (and I notice that she did not do the same with white students). There were other times, however, where she commented on how such behavioral difference was an aspect of individual difference (versus cultural difference), i.e. with her student Isaac. She thought his tendency to shout out might not have been so much a cultural practice but rather just his individual way of behaving. Again, I was
able to use CRT motivations to delve into what is possibly racial about the way she sees and interprets her students’ behavior and academic performance.

Sarah: I think I very much judge kids on intelligence, on how smart they are. One of the smartest kids is black and I think more about how brilliant she is and I know some white kids who are lazy. And I wouldn’t say I have negative feelings about kids that are not smart but I think in terms of grouping in my mind [to understand how she thinks of her students for this research performance.]

Ben: Do you think definitions of things like intelligence can be racial? Not racist but racial? Like when you talk about a white code of ethics or having a white understanding of something. Or do you think of that as more universal.

Sarah: [long pause] I mean it might be a white code of ethics [her tone is very unsure/hesitant here.] I think of it as being more intellectual being doing hours of homework, getting good grades, but it’s just uniform for everybody, but maybe that is just coming from my own definition.

In this interaction, I was trying to name the whiteness of what white educators may see as universal ideas, such as intelligence. I was using terms she had used previously in the interview—specifically “a white code of ethics”—to get her to challenge any adherence she might have had to universalizeable definition of intelligence. My questioning was motivated by my own belief that universal categories mask the whiteness of those categories. So, when she switched the conversation from intelligence to homework, I attempted to question a universal way of interpreting how students do homework.

Ben: I mean I’m curious…because I wonder, too…if we judge student based on how much homework they do, maybe a student has more time to do homework or a different context…

Sarah: For my grading, that may be why I do think of homework as being very different than…in my grading I don’t count homework. They get different grades for effort and citizenship than for content. For moving people to the next class I use the content grade. It would be interesting to look however to see if whites got better grades for effort and citizenship. So I get kids who do really well on tests and quizzes but who may get low grades on effort because their homework is horrible. I’ve had some people [teachers]
argue with me that that doesn’t make any sense…My students can get good grades anyway because they’re showing me they know the stuff.

I am not sure my questioning in this interaction ever got Sarah to understand the potential white quality of her views on intelligence or homework—an understanding I do think she was able to discuss at other points in our dialogue. She saw that citizenship may have a racial quality but not that content might as well. So, she relied on the content grade when moving students from class to class. However, she did at least recognize that context may affect student performance on homework, so she did not use that in her grading. She at least attempted to make her grading more equitable. Also, with homework she was willing to consider the possibility that whites may have been getting better grades based on contextual factors. The whites in her school tended to be wealthier than her black students so maybe they did have more resources to rely on and perhaps that did lead to them getting better grades on effort. So while I did not get Sarah to see categorization in the same way that I did with regards to intelligence, my contextualization of her decisions was an attempt to revision decisions that teachers make. Sarah did explain and think about how she attempted to achieve equity in her practice, and by discussing those attempts in racial terms, perhaps she was able to gain a deeper understanding of how race affects teacher decisions.

**DIALOGIC INVESTIGATION AND CRT**

I think it is important to remember that Sarah wanted to be more racially equitable in her practice. I attempted to use naming whiteness, property, and revisionism for us both to come to new understandings of how to work towards racial equity. Because of her desire to understand, more than with any other interview I was in the position of expert, of the one with the answers. While I took on this role to some extent with Sarah, I also tried to
challenge it so our conversations could be more dialogic, so we both could learn.

Interestingly enough, what I learned from my conversations with Sarah was a next step with regard to dialogic performance. From Stephanie and Melissa, I learned how to use some of the tools of analysis that CRT offers. I learned some of the ways that whiteness could be named in order to revision teacher thought and action that appear racially benign but that potentially contribute to the cycle of structural racism. I also learned from them how to analyze some of the ways in which access to property interplays with whiteness in classroom settings. Those conversations taught me about the usefulness of CRT in an analytical sense.

From Sarah, on the other hand, I learned how to take that knowledge of CRT and make it more dialogic, to use it to work with Sarah to delve more deeply into investigations of teacher practice. Specifically, I was better able to recognize liberal understandings of race and racism and articulate critical reexaminations of those understandings. The tools of CRT, especially revisionism, were still very useful in these talks, but I was able to use the more encompassing comprehension of CRT that I was developing in order to cultivate a motivational, more epistemological basis for an argument about the centrality of race in spaces like schools. From Sarah’s and my give-and-take I was also able to better articulate why race is the central point of analysis for CRT and what that means. Furthermore, because Sarah and I were able to agree on the centrality of race and develop a way to articulate it, I was able to push Sarah on what I saw to be remnants of liberalism in her practice. I may not have always been successful in getting her to see the racial dynamic of all situations in the same way that I did, but we were able to go into detail about exploring what is potentially racial about them. So, while the conversations with Stephanie and Melissa were pedagogical about what CRT can offer to the examination of complicity in an
analytical way, the dialogue with Sarah was pedagogical about how to make that examination more dialogic.

Sarah’s questioning was a very important part of fashioning this dialogic investigation. Her pursuit of deeper understanding and a more coherent way to articulate that understanding were very useful for me in cultivating my own functional articulations of concepts relevant to CRT and race in education.

Ben: Do you think he would consider himself to be colorblind? I mean, you may not know that.

Sarah: Yeah. I guess I’m talking about my definition. Could you tell me what you think the definition is of colorblindness?

Ben: The definition that I use and that most people in my field would use is that you either don’t or claim to not see a person’s skin color and/or you might see but you go out of your way not to treat people differently because of it. So for some it means that, people who say they’re colorblind might say, “I don’t even see color, I don’t even notice.” Others might say, “Yeah I see it, but I don’t think about it, and I treat everyone the same.” Might your director say something like that?

At times in our dialogue, such as those I describe above, I was lucid about articulating concepts, such as colorblindness, that are important in understanding racism and racialization. In excerpts such as above, I may not have articulated the most comprehensive (or even most accurate) definition but I did put forth a definition that captured some of the key aspects of the concept and one that was clear to Sarah. In addition, I was more or less confident that my definition did not counter those used in the fields in which I work (such as teacher education, sociology of education, etc.) At other times, I had much less confidence and much more difficulty in articulating the processes of racialization. For example, in the following excerpt Sarah and I discuss the definition of racism and about who can actually be racist.
Sarah: Yeah, but well then, what if they’re black but they’re a CEO of a company, and they’re in a position of power? Then can they have racism?

Ben: Well, some people say they can have power and they can have prejudice but they can’t really have racism, because even though they’re connected—it depends—some people say yes they can. Some people say well if they have negative opinions of they’re own group, then that’s internalized racism. [I can’t tell if I was just floundering to be careful or if I’m avoiding the question. Do I know the answer? This is big part of my interviews with Sarah. And I think it is interesting here when I am typing this up, that I am imagining potential audiences—like at conferences—where my opinions are out on the table!]

I wrote the bracketed notes above when I was transcribing the interview. As I show in this commentary on my own comments, I am unsure of the answer about possible actors in racism. I am also unsure of my position as expert on the subject. I imagine others in my field as cops in my head, to borrow a term from Boal (1992, 1995), policing me for my ideas and the way I posit them.

These instances of uncertainty were at least as important to the development of my understanding as the times I was more confident in my comments. Whether my reactions were lucid or not, Sarah’s questioning pushed my thinking on race and CRT in very dialogic ways. Her questions were not intentionally challenges, but they were direct questions that did not let me talk around concepts but rather forced me to explain them in specific terms. This dialogue made me think of how I wanted to examine issues of race as a teacher educator, and at several times in both my note taking and transcription I made side notes about the implications of my comments for me as a teacher educator. For example, I made the following comment when we continue our discussion on what counts as racism and who can be considered racist.

Ben: Basically what I’m saying is that it all comes down to how you define racism. So, on some levels I’m more interested in what people think rather than us all agreeing on a definition of racism because I can’t get us all to agree
on a definition. In class I’ll say, “Here’s the definition I’m going to use.” So based on this definition... but in the end it becomes more of semantic argument, so I try to use other language to get at what people are thinking...

[Note: So maybe in class I should have students label/analyze situations on several levels and different definitions—and they can use their own later and defend it.]

In this last quote, I was really learning what I think is important about the word “racism” so as to combat discriminating practice, and in the bracketed section—which I wrote at the time of the interview—I was thinking about how I could use these ideas as a teacher educator. I could again envision an audience, this time the students in my pre-service education courses. I have heard the argument from these students many times that racism is an intentional act based purely on the dislike or distrust of the “other” and therefore anyone can be racist—whites, blacks, Latinos, etc.—and that there is no difference in the type of racism that people carry. At the moment of the interview, I could picture and hear these students and therefore imagine how the new understanding of racism that Sarah and I developed in the moment might be educative for me in how I respond to and work with such students. At times in the conversation, when I heard these students in the back of my head, I used the interview with Sarah to test out my ideas on how to respond.

Ben: Some people might say, “well, if they have prejudices against whites, they’re prejudiced, but still not racist because even though they have individual power, they don’t have power because they don’t have racial power. They have other power but...” So it really depends on the definition.

[Note: I quote the imaginary person here – is that to save me from putting “my” opinion on the table, which this is, or did I just switch to my opinion?]

In this instance I was using the dialogue to help me be the “expert” on race in education. I imagined those various audiences—such as pre-service teachers—where this conversation may play out. In the bracketed section, I pondered the phrasing of my comment. Sarah’s direct questioning really made me focus on how I word such responses about the issue of
racism. So, I was learning to be an “expert” on race and a teacher educator. This was very performative research in the pedagogical sense.

In the end, my conversations with Sarah have made me think about how this type of dialogue can be used to resist the liberal ideology or race. I can test out responses to all of the cops in my head—e.g., students, race scholars, or my dissertation committee. I am left wondering, for example, about how different types of colorblindness, such as racial or ethnic, may support or resist liberalism in different ways and with varying degrees of effectivity. I wonder how these different manifestations have different modes of effectivity. That is to say, what are the particular ways these forms of colorblindness resist and/or support liberal interpretations of racism in education? How can dialogic performance be used to develop practices that counter such racism? I believe Sarah has shown some possibility in some of the solutions she has engineered. Furthermore, using CRT to probe her thinking has enabled me to think more about how I can continue to examine and challenge practices and thought that lead to racial discrimination. I further developed a resistant mode of effectivity for my practice as a teacher educator.

CONCLUSION

There are many ways I could have interpreted the conversations with Sarah. I have stuck close to CRT in my analysis because it paid such a primary and important part of my motivation in talking with Sarah and because, for me, it offers a clearly articulated challenge to the liberalism that still exists in teachers’ thought. Furthermore, using CRT with Sarah has helped me understand CRT as a theory. As a theory—rather than just another method to study race—CRT has epistemological implications. Its centering race is especially important
in the way it can be used to combat colorblind, liberal interpretations of racism. For example, earlier in this chapter I showed Sarah’s and my attempt to conceptualize race as both ideological construct and a lived reality. Drawing from Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) article on CRT, I was able to help Sarah see examples of the effects of racial construction. In addition, I centered race to discuss inequality when I explained to Sarah the idea of racial representation.

Sarah: At the bottom it says racial theory is one of the least developed fields of social theory, and I was just thinking about why with all of these things that people have discovered about race, why it’s not been developed? Do you have any thoughts?

Ben: There are probably many reasons but in my opinion part of it is probably that it’s often—not that this is not true with gender but it is certainly true with race—if something comes from something like a black epistemology or a black way of thinking, there’s this claim that it doesn’t represent everybody. It’s like, “Oh, that’s the black way of thinking.”

Sarah: Oh, I see.

Ben: There’s no question of that when it comes from the white way of thinking. It’s, “Oh this is just the normal.” No one questions its racial content when it comes from the white...

Sarah: Right.

Ben: … You see that with politicians. There’s often not a question about a white politician being able to represent all Americans, or a republican can represent both republicans and democrats. But when black politician goes, there’s a worry among many whites that they’re only going to represent black people.27 They’re going to only have black interests in mind. And sometimes even with women, but in my own opinion…that happens more when it’s with other races there are questions about it. I think you see that also with actors.

Sarah: Like playing parts.

Ben: Yeah like playing parts. A white actor can be like a hero, not a white hero, but just a hero, whereas a black person can on occasion, but often it’s a black hero. It’s not just a hero. There’s some change in that but I think you

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27 While I have thought about this before, it is Guinier and Torres’ (2002) explanation of this phenomenon and of racial representation (p. 168-176) that helped me articulate it here.
I attempted to describe to Sarah how racial representation occurs in unique ways. How whites view representation in racial ways is linked to how we view the racialized other. This practice shows that racism still exists in whites’ thinking. Therefore, combating this racialization of the other requires changing the thinking of whites in ways that challenge our worldviews. So, while race is certainly not the only form of discrimination that occurs in politics, it does exist in a distinct way. Centering race in the analysis of this discrimination takes a way of thinking about discrimination in which race is central (though not exclusive of other forms of discrimination). This takes the practice of thinking in racial terms. Thus, it is more than a method. Motivation and worldview are equally important. As I will show in Chapter 4, being able to think about issues in racial terms is useful when working with teachers who resist framing their practice into such terms. In that chapter I will show how the resistant mode of effectivity I developed here helped in the conversations with Elizabeth and how Elizabeth helped me work out a language that makes that mode more effective.
CHAPTER 4

MOVING TARGETS: RESPONSIBILITY AND DEFINITIONS OF RACISM

Ben: …when I talk about racism exists and racism as inherent, that doesn’t mean that I think most white people hate black people, but I think ways society has been structured and I think it is in a large part whites have been dominant for a long, long time in society that those things happen that lead to racial inequality. [Through this description often nods and says, “right, right,” in affirmation.]

Elizabeth: So do I feel like that’s a racist outcome?

Ben: Just tell me what you think about it.

Elizabeth: No I’m still thinking about it…[we both laugh]… Um… I think that that’s a position…I’ll say yes keeping in mind that for me racism… racist is always more about the perpetrator than about the results.

Ben: So you do have somewhere in there that the word racism has some derogatory [connotation for the person who is labeled]…

Elizabeth: I’m afraid I really do, yeah.

Ben: I’m guessing most people do.

Elizabeth: But I just realized I did. [She laughs.]
– Conversation with Elizabeth, middle school social studies teacher.

Elizabeth more than any other teacher I interviewed challenged me on what I considered to be racism and particularly on white teachers’ complicity in it. She often fought my views of white teachers’ complicity in spite of doing some of the very things in her practice that I think white teachers need to do to work against that complicity. A part of her desire to challenge came from her desire to do just that, to challenge and to argue, aspects of
her personality that she admitted to. She also felt that teachers were not treated like professionals by either politicians or those in the academia, which made her weary of the critique of teachers, who she saw for the most part as professionals doing all they could to help their students. Her resentment for the lack of professional treatment was similar to Melissa’s in that she did not like to be seen as un-intellectual.\textsuperscript{28} She wanted to have a say in what the solutions to racial inequity should be and saw teachers as agents of equity. Her resentment was also different from Melissa’s in that, while Melissa was more open to engaging with the teacher education literature or with teacher educators themselves, Elizabeth maintained her skepticism that researchers in teacher education could offer her anything but critique. Another part of this difference in response to academia could be due to the fact that Melissa was in her second year of teaching and much more close to the world of teacher education while Elizabeth was in her tenth, though I believe other factors, such as Elizabeth’s enjoyment of argument as I mentioned above, were important as well.

There were also aspects to her personality that enabled me to challenge her back and made me see some potential for movement in her thinking, especially with regard to how teachers are complicit in institutional racism. She considered herself a feminist, so she did not have a hard time seeing that some in society are put in less privileged positions than others. In addition, she was a very socially and politically conscious person in general. With regard to race, she often admitted to the white cultural dominance that exists in society even if at times she could not see all of its incarnations or see the possibility of how teachers could challenge it. Her acknowledgement of white dominance did allow me to push her on seeing the ways that dominance rears its head in schools and the classroom. Like the other teachers

\textsuperscript{28} In fact, a large reason of why she enjoyed being in this study was that I attempted to treat her as an equal and position her as an educational expert.
in the study thus far, Elizabeth beliefs and practices towards racial equity contained both liberal and critical elements. In my attempt to highlight and promote those more critical aspects, we got into very detailed and hearty discussions about what teachers could do to counter racial inequity.

Elizabeth’s penchant to challenge what I said along with her respect for being challenged herself helped make this the most dialogic interview in the study, at least in Conquergood’s (1985) sense of how a dialogic approach involves a give and take between co-performers. Elizabeth did not usually hedge on language, which allowed me to be more direct about naming complicit practice than I was with any other teacher. In addition, and also because of her directness, I had to challenge myself to listen to Elizabeth when I disagreed with her (which was often) so I could learn her perspective more deeply and possibly leave myself open to changes in my argument. I also had to challenge myself to come up with articulate responses to her statements so as to potentially shift her thinking as well. I will illustrate what we both learned from this dialogue later in the chapter.

THE SPIRIT OF COLORBLINDNESS

Ben: Have you heard the word colorblindness and what does that mean to you?

Elizabeth: It means that when you look at or deal with someone, your primary thought about them has not been treated as a category. They’re not necessarily white to you or black to you or Hispanic or whatever. It doesn’t mean to me that you are unaware of that info. It just means that it’s not any more relevant than the color of their hair.

Ben: It’s not so much that you don’t see it, but it’s just a physical feature.

Elizabeth: Yes! [with affirmation but not overexcitement]. I guess that’s more my personal definition of it.
Elizabeth, like most of the other teachers I interviewed had a complex view of colorblindness. At least as a concept, she understood it as being able to see skin color, but to treat people the same regardless of color. As the following excerpt shows, in practice she recognized that behaving differently with different people because of their cultural background could also be important in some circumstances.

Ben: Do you see [colorblindness] as something as something as positive or negative or…

Elizabeth: Yes, both. It’s more like… It’s along the lines that you don’t want the negative aspects of racial stereotyping or racial experience to influence your behavior with the current crop of students, but you also do need to be aware that there are legitimate cultural, racial differences the same way that there are… that I would deal with a male differently than a female—in very minute ways. I might conceivable go into an interview with the parents of a Hispanic child differently than I would the parents of a black child different than the parents of a white child, but ideally I guess for me… it’s not just that. It’s what I know about the parents’ interaction with me in the past. Has that been positive or negative? What I know about if they seem to support education or not.

She believed that cultural difference, then, did matter in how she acted with parents. However, it was not only cultural difference that matters. Her interactions with these parents as complex individuals and not just as racialized subjects were also important to her. Thus, it seemed to me that Elizabeth understood that culture (and she was referring more specifically to race and ethnicity here) had an affect on how parents interacted with her, but that within specific cultures, individual variation also existed. Culture was important but not determinate.

Her last statement from the previous excerpt betrays another area of complexity and ambiguity that I observed in Elizabeth’s understanding of race. She understood that a parent’s way of interacting might be affected by their cultural background(s), but at times she shifted in and out of an understanding that there might be different acceptable ways to
interpret behavior. In other words, at times she indicated that there may be different ways to show a support of schooling that are based in part on racial and ethnic background and at other times she adhered to the idea that there was a “right” way to show such support. While I believe that most of the time Elizabeth seemed to understand that attitudes such as a support for schooling were affected by the interplay between cultural background and societal experience, comments such as the one above also indicated to me that there are times when whites may forget that interplay and how it affects people’s reactions.

For the most part, however, Elizabeth was willing to do a lot to help her students succeed and her ability to do this was partially based on a sense of racial and ethnic equity.

Elizabeth: If [the parents] speak English or not has become a serious issue. There’s a Hispanic parent I know who speaks almost no English and one of the things that I am always willing to do is speak Spanish—and I know just enough to embarrass myself publicly—and I’m really willing to do that because then a lot of Hispanic parents get, “okay, if she’s, the teacher, willing to embarrass herself, then it’s okay for me to try and speak English now.” And it doesn’t always work but it often really helps the dynamic.

In cases like this, Elizabeth seemed willing to challenge her own comfort zones in the interests of her students and their parents. In addition, while Elizabeth was not always willing to leave her cultural comfort zone, her astuteness about her own whiteness did enable her to expand this zone in order to be a better teacher.

For example, we discussed the ways in which Elizabeth acknowledged the cultural differences of her students and tried not to judge them because of those differences. In one instance we talked about her articulation of the behavior of her Latino male students.

Ben: It is interesting because you use the…word aggressive with the Hispanic males, as being aggressive towards women. And I don’t mean to critique you, but I just mean to… is it a negative to you?

Elizabeth: I think that is what I was trying to say. To me it did always feel very aggressive. I still feel like it is aggressive, but I understand that’s
because that’s my culture speaking…But I realized about a couple of months into it that [how the students behave] is not my culture. I can’t judge that culture, and I can’t these people telling me things based on my cultural ideas of what is a good idea. So, yes, I do use the word aggressive, and I do mean aggressive because it felt aggressive, but at the same time it wasn’t aggressive—except for the one kid who was being harassing—by a different culture. So, yes, that’s what I mean.

For Elizabeth there were different ways of behaving appropriately that were based on the various standards of different cultures. She was able to bracket her own judgment about such behavior—she admitted it felt aggressive to her but also prevented herself to some degree from categorizing that behavior in ways that would materially affect the students in a negative way. In addition, I got the sense that Elizabeth was able to distinguish between an acknowledgement of different standards and a stereotyping of those cultures because of their difference. In other words, she recognized different ways to interpret what is acceptable may exist, but she did not assume that students and parents adhere to any specific interpretations. Rather, she related to her students and their parents as not only members of a race but also as complex individuals. In fact, it was Elizabeth’s racial consciousness that allowed me to open up a discussion with her about what I saw as her partial adherence to a liberal ideology that viewed school standards as neutral.

So, there were some areas where Elizabeth’s thought, if not always her action, adhered to liberal ideology. In particular, her beliefs about how certain thoughts and actions were linked to racism and her opinions about possible counter-responses to that racism adhered to liberal interpretations. Yet, her understanding of the significance of racism was complex. She understood that whiteness and maleness dominate and that racism and sexism exist, but overt (rather than institutional) forms of those oppressive forces were at the forefront of her thinking when we discussed how to challenge those forces. It was almost as
if the other forms—the subtle, insidious forms—were the way things were, and that fact
might not be desirable but “we” (meaning people in general) have to deal with it. Oddly, her
pedagogy seemed to do more than just deal with it.

Thus, it seemed to me that there was some confusion to her about how racism existed
and was manifested. She knew that she was born into a racist society and with white
privilege, but because it was so dominant and prevalent, there was not much that could be
done about it. In addition, at times she said it was racist to ignore and not acknowledge that
dominance and privilege, but at other times she thought that calling such ignorance racist was
going too far. In the latter instances, she seemed to indicate that if people did not
intentionally oppress people, they were not being racist even if they did not do anything to
challenge their own privilege. This intentionality was important to Elizabeth’s
conceptualization of racism and I tried to draw it out.

Ben: It sounds like your conceptualization that school is somewhat this
neutral place.

Elizabeth: I think structurally schools and on paper schools are neutral places
but of course since they involve people… I mean I could never dispute like
what you asked earlier which is that are teachers teaching equitably… I mean
some teachers don’t, some teachers are racist or sexist… I remember having a
sexist teacher in school…but I don’t think most teachers don’t intend to be
those things. I like to think most anyway.

I tried to use a naming of whiteness with Elizabeth to convince her of how I believe
that white teachers are complicit in racism when they do not challenge the privilege and
dominance we have. By adhering to a view of school standards as culturally neutral, for
example, teachers do not acknowledge how those standards act on students of different
cultural backgrounds in different and inequitable ways. In addition, I analyzed the ways in
which Elizabeth (like other white teachers, myself included) might have affected her racial
minority students’ access to curriculum by uncritically utilizing such standards. For example, it did seem to me that she had some standards, which she admitted are set by white culture, that had to apply to all of her students. I was able to challenge the whiteness of those standards and the potential effect of that whiteness on her non-white students. I attempted to challenge her by getting her to admit that by employing these white standards she at times might have affected her students’ access to the curriculum and might have assigned levels of whiteness to certain students (and not others), which enabled some students and not others to take advantage of the standards.

It is interesting how she responded to my inquiry. When she described how she decided which standards she used, the language she used often marked what she claimed were white standards as the “highest” standards. She also tried to challenge that hierarchy once it was pointed out to her. For example, in the following excerpt we began discussing how teachers’ interpretations of their students’ behavior lead to judgments of those students that may affect those students in material ways. That discussion led us to talk about how teachers determine standards of behavior, and we used a specific example of comments she made earlier about Latino males, i.e., that their behavior felt aggressive to her.

Ben: I guess I’m trying to see where interpretation becomes judgment.

Elizabeth: Ahh!

Ben: It’s complicated… Interpretations seem to me to have consequences.

Elizabeth: Yes.

Ben: Like when we interpret something as aggressive… sometimes aggressive is considered okay. It’s rarely considered okay in that type of situation in school. So if we categorize something like that [the behavior of her Latino male students] as aggressive, then does that not potentially have negative consequences on people?
The negative consequences I was alluding to here are related to a whiteness-as-property argument. By categorizing certain types of behavior as aggressive, I believe teachers can unintentionally assign whiteness to—or in this case exclude people from whiteness—via the utilization of such categories. The consequences can be that students who are excluded from the ownership of whiteness do not have access to the same curriculum, or at least not in equitable ways, because they do not then gain the right to use and enjoy the privileges that whiteness offers them.

Elizabeth: I completely agree with you. There’s a problem with what you said.

Ben: Okay. Good.

Elizabeth: You said “in school.” Cultural norms unfortunately play such a profound role in how we make rules that there has to be some bottom line, and that might come from any number of places. So, we have a bottom line, which is that you will not sexually harass people, and the definition of what sexual harassment was came from the culture making the rules, and so in our culture it is inappropriate to walk up to a woman and put your arm between her legs [which one of her Latino male students did]. It was [inappropriate] in their culture, too, apparently…

Ben: And realizing that he was the exception… [She acknowledged this earlier.]

Elizabeth: Yeah, he was. But he had a pack with him. Middle schoolers run in these packs and he was the front man for this pack thing. And nobody else was doing that, but they were sort of supporting him in that role. So, in a school, that was over the top. And one of the reasons—and I think when you’re [the teacher] making rules, you’ve got to set the bar kind of up here [indicated high with her hand] because when you’ve got three very disparate cultures coming together, all of them with strong backing and strong tradition on their side, you have to have a much higher standard. Like you have to go with the highest.

Elizabeth’s comments did two things that are interrelated. First, I noticed that “up here” to Elizabeth indicated that the white standard was highest (and shortly I will show how I challenged her on this). It seemed that Elizabeth saw the white standard of behavior as the
one that all students should follow because it she thought it was the most strict. Using this hierarchy also affected the second thing Elizabeth’s comments did. Namely, she attributed one person’s behavior to an entire group. Observing one Latino boy sexually harass a girl was not separated from what she thought was aggressive behavior on the part of the Latino boys as a group. Second, even though the rest of the boys did not harass the girl, Elizabeth’s comments indicated that they were still complicit in the inappropriate act – “they were sort of supporting him in that role.” Latino boys in this case were denied access to whiteness because of the actions of one boy. Thus, creating and then using a hierarchy where white behavior was seen as the most strict—and the most appropriate for school—set up a standard that prevented Latino male students from equitable treatment. In terms of property, and drawing from Harris (1995/1993), those students were denied the right to use and enjoy the privileges of whiteness because they were excluded from access to whiteness itself.

Luckily, I was able to challenge the way in which Elizabeth denied her Latino students access to whiteness and the way in which she viewed standards of behavior along a racial hierarchy. As our conversation continued, we talked about how different racial groups can have different standards of what is considered appropriate and I tried to challenge how she viewed those differences in potentially marginalizing ways. For example, Elizabeth talked about the difference in what cultural groups consider to be appropriate personal space. As Elizabeth pointed out the different preferences of her students, I asked her about how she positions those differences in a hierarchy of appropriateness.

Ben: What is the highest standard in that circumstance?

Elizabeth: The most *uptight* standard is the white people…

Ben: And that’s the highest standard?
Elizabeth: Okay, so…

Ben: You did say highest before [when talking about which standard you have to apply in classrooms with a mix of racial groups].

Elizabeth: I mean highest setting the bar the highest. Not the highest in the sense of the moral point of view. Highest in terms of the highest…

Ben: I’m trying to understand what you mean.

Elizabeth: What I was thinking was… Oh, I guess highest is often used as sort of an exceptional thing. No, what I was meaning was that it’s got the most rules applied to it. Like the most criteria… So you said in school… but then outside of school and between people who are old enough that know what they are doing… So, what I consider appropriate in school has got to be a different standard for me. Like I joke with my friends, “Oh, I’m being Ms. Corporate now.” And that’s because I’m suddenly this completely uptight must-have-this-many-rules person as opposed to how adults in society and the world can interact.

I still question her method for determining which standards she applied—e.g., was having the most rules applied to a standard also the most equitable way to set that standard, what were the potential consequences of setting the “most rules,” and did these standards affect different groups of students in different ways? It still seemed that by merely using the “most rules” was still working from an understanding that rules are culturally neutral, that all rules affect all students in the same way. However, I was at least able to get Elizabeth to consider the language she uses in explaining her rule making process. She also had to articulate that process and not take it for granted. In fact, while I do not think I moved Elizabeth’s thinking on standards as much as I would have liked during the course of our interviews, my questioning of her thinking did often force her into such articulations, and there were times where Elizabeth did admit that she had to think about her opinions and practices more. In these areas, I saw the potential for hope in challenging the remnants of liberal ideology in her practice.
I use the word remnants because it was in those situations where I felt Elizabeth shifted in and out of an adherence to liberal forms of racial understanding. Hers was not an absolute belief in the neutrality of standards. Often, as I believe several of the excerpts above show, she resigned herself to universal standards because she saw no other recourse in practice. She had an odd sense of not seeing that there were more things teachers could do even though her comments made it sound that when actually teaching, she did in fact look for ways to do more. One possible factor that may have limited her ability to see new possibilities was the way in which she viewed the positionality of teachers as actors in the structure of schooling. With regard to racism, she certainly acknowledged that the structure of schooling has a racist dynamic to it and that blacks and Latinos suffer most from that dynamic. However, she had a harder time seeing how teachers promote that cycle of racism.

The following interaction shows Elizabeth struggling to understand how this complicity exists. Specifically, she struggled with the idea of intention in relation to racism and complicity.

Ben: It sounds like you’re talking about racism as an intentional act. [She smiles, and then there is a long pause.] I’m not saying that’s bad or good, I’m just trying to get at what you think.

Elizabeth: I didn’t smile because I thought you were wrong [at my interpretation of her definition]; I smiled because I realized I’m not sure.

Ben: So if I say, “there is racism,” what does that mean?

Elizabeth: Well what I was going to say—before you said “intentional”… damn it! [She says this softly and somewhat jokingly… then there is a long pause as she is thinking of how to word this]…judging based on racist stereotypes…and assuming superiority based on that judgment. Is that highfalutin?

Ben: So, judging based on stereotypes and…
Elizabeth: Assuming superiority… Now the intentional part of that… [pause]… I’ve actually wondered this before and I have talked to people before. We did a day-long seminar on difference, and one of my teammates who is black came out of her room afterwards and—and she’s a very good friend of mine, we’re family—what she was saying to me was that during that seminar it [racism] had been defined as judging people on what I had just said, but I guess to me … so I come to this with preconceived ideas. I can’t help it. I grew up in a world that hands me these ideas. I think to me racism is when you ignore the truth that your presented… I don’t know how to put this that’s making sense…

As I tried to nail down her thoughts on intent, Elizabeth made comments like those above in which her own articulation of intent shifted. In other words, it was unclear to me whether she meant that in order to name a practice as racist, whites had to simply not see new truths or we had to intentionally ignore those new truths once we saw them, and this was an important distinction for me. If whites can unwittingly ignore new truths and thus not be responsible for perpetuating racism, there seems to be less of an opening to promote antiracist thoughts or behaviors on the part of whites. I wanted Elizabeth to acknowledge that both forms of unawareness—intentional or unintentional—could have the same negative consequences, so I questioned her on this.

Ben: So, intentionally ignore or…?

Elizabeth: But that’s now where I’m having trouble. I think intentionally.

Ben: So you just don’t know…

Elizabeth: If I have an idea… If I have a racial idea and I’m right because a lot of people have told me this or it’s been implied repeatedly by society and then I bang into a situation that proves that stereotype wrong, if I continue to believe it because it makes me feel better about myself, that’s racism. However, we don’t always plan to do that, so that’s where I’m still having trouble with that word “intentional,” like we might not realize that we…like we like to think that we’re…I know I’m not answering your question—it’s because I really don’t know. I think human beings are very, very capable of self-justifying—like, “My behavior is okay because…” and we don’t consciously necessarily go through that process. It’s just there. Like, “It will mess up my little world if I have to admit that that is not true.”
This excerpt points to the value of interpreting whites’ understanding of racism and complicity. I was able to get Elizabeth to think about her articulation of how intent relates to complicity. I believe getting teachers like Elizabeth to focus on the language they use is important. Drawing from Hall (1997), Madison (2005) states, “Representation has consequences: How people are represented is how they are treated” (p. 4). Similarly, the language people use to describe their behavior has consequences. Language enables people to reify their reasoning (or as Elizabeth said, their ability to self-justify). As people can use language to sanction the way they categorize or apply standards, interrogating this language is a step to affecting those modes of categorization. To again paraphrase Delgado and Stefancic (2000), the modes of categorization that people employ influence the way they dominate others, thus understanding these modes can lead to dismantling their oppressive nature.

**DIVERSIONS, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, AND LEARNING**

Elizabeth’s acknowledgements rarely came without a “yes, but.” In other words, even when she agreed with my articulation of the racial dynamic of school practice, she also had to challenge at least some part of that articulation. These challenges usually occurred by diverting from my questions and examples and then using her own questions and examples. Those she used varied at lease slightly (and sometimes in a more major way) from the ones I used. Hers often used what I deemed to be extreme language (as I will show below) and hypothetical situations (though I believe they were at times based on real ones). These diversions had the effect of keeping me on my toes. They taught me how to more deeply analyze the racial understandings of a white person who still relied on aspects of liberal
ideology to explain racial disparity—especially in the sense that school practices were culturally neutral and thus did not contribute to that disparity—and I had to constantly think of new ways to respond to that logic. They also highlighted both the effective and ineffective ways I articulated complicity.

Elizabeth especially disliked solutions to racism that threatened a liberal sense of meritocracy. For example, observe the following interaction when I asked Elizabeth if minority students were faced with and affected by racism in ways that white students were not. This is a clear and typical example of her “yes, but” type of response.

Elizabeth: Okay, I think the simple answer is, yes. I think that everybody deals with racism, but there are more problems for anybody who is a minority student.

Ben: Okay, so then if you have minority students, do you think it is… how do you think teachers should respond? Is it the teacher’s responsibility to then to do things that they might not do for white students?

Elizabeth: No. [She says this very quickly.] Wait, wait… uh okay… It’s kind of like my problem with affirmative action. I understand it’s one of the better ways to get kids into colleges. Absolutely we have to get minority kids into colleges, absolutely. And we have that background and we’re never going to break the cycle on stuff… but I don’t think it’s good for anybody if I simply say, “Oh no, I know you didn’t understand this because of who you are, so I’ll just ignore that answer on that test.”

I find it interesting that Elizabeth immediately equated doing special things for minority students with dumbing down the curriculum or low standards. When asked if minority students face challenges white students do not, Elizabeth agreed but also calls it the “simple” answer. So, one part of Elizabeth’s response is that she did not want to simply agree with my assertion about racism. I believe another part of her response clung to a liberal notion of universalism, of the universal subject, a notion which is based on a view of society and its institutions being culturally neutral. What is good or bad for one person is good or bad for
every or anybody regardless of racial or other background. A teacher cannot make exceptions because of a person’s race because that would imply that they have to go out of their way for any individual because of specific circumstances. This type of response upholds the idea that “we” (all people regardless of race, gender, cultural background, etc.) are all inherently the same. This type of thinking does not recognize that the view of the universal subject is based on a white ideal. So, it is of course impossible to think of a remedy to inequity that centers on race as such a remedy challenges the notion of inherent sameness. Therefore, racial disparity is caused by intentional acts of racism or by the victims of that disparity. It becomes the responsibility of these victims to overcome it even if they do face challenges that that those with racial privilege do not.

In addition, Elizabeth saw minority students as facing specific challenges related to race but did not always see it as the teacher’s responsibility to counteract that fact, and I of course wanted to challenge the latter notion. So, I was trying to get Elizabeth to think of things that teachers could do to help minority students succeed, and interestingly enough, I believe Elizabeth did some of this in her practice. However, she did not put this aspect of her practice in racial terms. This might be because she would do it for any student who had a particular issue to face that got in the way if his or her learning, and while this was probably true, I also believe that acknowledging a student’s background relies on a racial awareness, one in which I believe Elizabeth actually had. Elizabeth’s adherence to a colorblind ideology actually prevented her from seeing her own practice in racial terms. In addition, while I believe she practiced aspects of a racially conscious pedagogy, I also believe it is important to challenge teachers like Elizabeth on the liberal, colorblind remnants of their thinking. As I stated before, the language people use has consequences.
In Elizabeth’s case, my hope was that I could get her to expand her racial consciousness generally and to revision practices such as affirmative action more specifically. Without getting into a discussion about the various types of affirmative action and what they actually do, in this case what I think is important for white teachers to understand is that policies that pay attention to race (i.e., use race as a central construct in decision-making) are not practices that promote lower standards. So, I challenged Elizabeth on her articulation of affirmative action, which she implied meant lower standards for minority students.

Ben: Do you think that’s what Affirmative Action does?

Elizabeth: No, but I think that that’s one of the problems is that people don’t understand how to address [racial disparity], and so they think making the exception is like that… So, okay… [laughs because of the delicacy of the conversation]… I’m going to say no I don’t do anything special, but then… I’m what you call a demanding teacher, so I tend to find myself trying to get kids to come in for extra help a lot… and, most of the people I find I try to come in are boys [hesitation in her voice]… and more… I don’t know… and people from minority groups… just because they’re not doing as well. So is that doing something special? No, because I would do it for anybody. But then I go to the kids that are struggling in my class and encourage them to come for extra help, and coincidentally they’re black.

Ben: Do you think it’s coincidental?

Elizabeth: No, because I think that I teach in a certain style that is really demanding and very highbrow, big words and stuff, and I think that the language I use is a language that you’re only going to be exposed to if you live in households with parents who understand what “didactic” means, for example. So, I think that I am a victim of my own upbringing enough to… I have to teach from where I am.

Here, she recognized that there was some racial aspect of how she spoke and taught. The conversation continued:

Ben: So then you wouldn’t go out of your way to change your language…?

29 Feagin and O’Brien (2003) provide a concise description of the types of affirmative action and how affirmative action is often “misrepresented by many whites” (p. 194).
Elizabeth: Well, I was actually going to say something else which is that we did this weird thing at Cardinal which was that we studied this what-kind-of-learner-are-you test, you know are you kinetic, auditory, or whatever, and a much larger percentage of our black kids were auditory learners. So, I am a very auditory teacher, so on some level what I’m actually doing should appeal more appeal to…but then the language I’m using…and yes, to answer I do every once in a while—quite often—try to put it in their language or like explain it or some it up and then they laugh at me because I’m trying to speak their language, but then maybe they get it which is the main point. Wow! That’s a disaster! I don’t know. [We both laugh.] I don’t know if I address the issues or not.

Elizabeth to some extent did recognize that going out of her way to make sure students understood meant breaking down her paradigm of teaching (and her views on standards) to some degree. She acknowledged the racial and class aspects of her speech and general interactional style and could even imagine how her style may have worked well with her primarily African American students. To some degree, this was the way in which Elizabeth broke from liberal thought. Rather than only alter her teaching in ways that fit within her current way of speaking, she knew that changing her speech might help students, so she was willing to do that. So when I posed a very simple challenge to her comment, “I have to teach where I am,” Elizabeth could envision potential adaptations to her speech that provided challenges, even if only simple ones, to liberal notions of universal and colorblind pedagogy. Her last comment, “what a disaster!” referred to the messiness of her response to my questioning, indicating that by delving more deeply into her thoughts on the dynamic of race allowed for potential changes in her thinking.

To me, the messiness also indicated that she was trying to think through the raciality of her thought and practice. Importantly, following up with her diversions, sticking with them in our conversation, allowed us to come to some acknowledgement of the racial aspects of action. At the same time, I had not yet developed a language that helped lead to that
acknowledgement. I believe the interviews with Elizabeth did eventually help with such a
language, but it was not until near the end of our conversations that I began to envision how
to promote awareness in racial terms without also instilling in white teachers a sense of being
personally blamed. Later in the chapter, I will describe more how the interviews with
Elizabeth were educative to me.

So, despite the instances of where Elizabeth could revision her practice in racial
terms, my method of interviewing did not sustain such revisionism. She would often go back
to comments that indicated that her thinking still retained many other pretenses of liberal
ideology. It was still hard for her to imagine changes that did not fit within the current
structure of schooling. For example, observe the following interaction.

Ben: …probably most students can succeed in higher level classes.

Elizabeth: They can’t, and not because of racism.

Ben: And that’s where I disagree. I think most students can succeed in higher
level classes.

Elizabeth: Sure, if there’s ten people in the class and I can spend two hours
working with you personally because you don’t know any of the background
whereas the kid sitting next to you knew it all already and I could …

Here she was critiquing the structure of traditional middle school classrooms. She had a
good point that that structure does affect a teacher’s ability to promote equitable pedagogy.
However, given that structure is what it currently is, she again could not imagine what
teachers could do to work against racial disparity. She could not see a solution to the
disparity. So, she diverted the responsibility for it to the “system,” to use Stephanie’s word
from chapter 2, and away from teachers. I did not help as I countered her statements without
offering her information to back up my claims.
Part of the motivation for Elizabeth to divert away teachers’ responsibility was probably due to the teachers she worked with—“I understand that I actually am a little privileged. I’ve worked with amazing teachers at both schools…”—and to the fact that some of her comments about the disabling aspect of the structure of schooling may have been accurate.

Elizabeth: At Cardinal, a school of 1200, it was much more the rules were the rules. It was a lot of students. The rule had to be much more the rule because it was just that big, and because assistant principals had stacks of discipline forms on their desk, and you can’t take this amazing amount of time. But then at Phoenix with 190 students, and this is a big year, like the way my teammate and I do discipline is when two kids are in a fight, we pull them out separately and we talk to them separately, and then we bring them together and then there is the result of that. And there was a discipline thing on Friday and it took us—I was supposed to be coaching a soccer game and the other coach had to do it all alone because for about an hour I was working with my teammate. The two of us were working to resolve a problem between two kids. You just don’t have the amount of time to do that in a traditional public school.

So, I do agree with Elizabeth that racially aware practice can be made much harder depending on the structure of a school. However, what is also interesting to me here is that she chose to work at Phoenix. She recognized that she could construct more equitable responses to students because of being at a smaller, more community-focused school. As much as Elizabeth challenged that there was anything more teachers could do, by pushing her to continue to think about the accuracy of that thought, I was able to get Elizabeth to see how she challenged her own statements, if only in the context of a small, community-based school. Perhaps if I had followed up on her decision to teach at Phoenix or if I had delved into her practices at both Phoenix and Cardinal, I might have been able to get Elizabeth develop language that put her practice into racial terms and perhaps see more possibility for teachers in working towards racial equity.
PEDAGOGICAL, COMPLICTY, AND BLAME

We kept going back and forth about teachers’ responsibility and the potential for change within the current structure of schooling. A key pedagogical aspect of this dialogue was our discussion on the meaning and use of the word “racist.” This part of our discussion helped me learn how to respond to diversions from teachers’ responsibility in the construction of critically antiracist responses. I learned to think more about how certain uses of the word “racism” could label white teachers, and I learned a little more about how to name whiteness and draw out complicity in racism without resorting to such labeling. In fact, much of the following interaction helped me think through a book chapter I had written about that subject.30 In addition, and very importantly, it is during this part of our conversation where there seemed to be a real opening in the liberalism of Elizabeth’s thought. In many ways this was the most dialogic part of our interviews. She was still challenging, I am still challenging back, but we were also both receptive to each other’s arguments, so the conversation was more immediately pedagogical for both of us.

It was using the language of property analysis (i.e., access to curriculum) that helped me learn how to articulate complicity without assigning blame.

Ben: Why do you think [the word “racism” is] pejorative?

Elizabeth: I think because I associate it so closely with the word racist. And because I think…

Ben: But why is racist a pejorative word?

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Elizabeth: Because… racist behavior is not just differentiating differences between the races. It’s, in my opinion, it is using those differences to subjugate, to downplay another’s racial aspect.

Ben: Do you see it therefore as somehow intentional?

Elizabeth: Not necessarily.

Ben: Okay. So, you think even though there’s this pejorative meaning and that it’s a nasty thing… I am trying to get at the intentionality. Some people see racist like it’s I do certain things as a teacher that prevent some of my minority students from being able to [access] the conversation as well as the white students, access the material as easily, and that’s my discourse style, and I don’t notice that and I don’t do anything about it, and my discourse prevents some of my minority students from accessing the curriculum as well… If I don’t know that I do it, and it happens but I don’t know why it happens because nobody tells me. In my view, it doesn’t mean that the person is intentionally racist. It doesn’t mean that they have prejudice, but it does mean that there’s racist outcomes. I’m not labeling the teacher as racist but I’m labeling the outcome as racist. So there’s some practice that you’re taking part of that leads to racist outcomes.

Here was one of those instances when I really try to nail down how white teachers like myself can be unintentionally complicit in institutional racism. I am learning how to continue to use the word racism but also not reify teachers as racist individuals. To borrow concepts from Buddhist thinking, I did not want to construct any essential sense of self—of whites as essentially and acontextually racist—as such a sense of self leaves no room for change. At the same time, I also thought it was important not to shy away from the terminology of racism and to name it as such since the word denotes the vicious outcomes for those who suffer from it. Though in the previous excerpt I do not believe I did a good job of describing education in property, it was an attempt at property analysis. The language of property analysis—about access to materials, curriculum, and an equal education—helped me put words to the “system” in a way that allowed me to describe it as continually

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31 Again, I explain these Buddhist concepts and this argument in more detail in the book chapter in mentioned previously.
constructed. In addition, this language helped me balance out an acknowledgement that there are actors in racism with an avoidance of the reification of whites as inherently racist individuals. In essence, I was learning how to move from liberal understandings of racism to critical interpretations of antiracism.

As our conversation from above continued, I tried to refine my understanding and articulation of this balance of acknowledgement and blame. This attempt led to an important realization on Elizabeth’s part (and here I return to the except I opened the chapter with).

Elizabeth: Okay… now do you want me to say if I agree with that or not?

Ben: Well, at least tell me what you think about it.
[Pause]
When I’m talking about racist, that’s how I’m thinking about racism… When I talk about racism exists and racism as inherent, that doesn’t mean that I think most white people hate black people, but I think ways society has been structured… whites have been dominant for a long, long time in society that those things happen that lead to racial inequality. [Through this description often nods and says, “right, right,” in affirmation.]

Elizabeth: So do I feel like that’s a racist outcome?

Ben: Just tell me what you think about it.

Elizabeth: No I’m still thinking about it…[we both laugh]… Um… I think that that’s a position…[still thinking]… I’ll say yes keeping in mind that for me racism, racist is always more about the perpetrator than about the results

Ben: So you do have somewhere in there that the word racism has some derogatory [connotation for the person who is labeled]…

Elizabeth: I’m afraid I really do, yeah.

Ben: I’m guessing most people do.

Elizabeth: But I just realized I did [laughs].

This was a real “aha” moment in our dialogue. I sensed a substantial shift in Elizabeth’s tone after this. It started her to question less in a challenging way and more to understand what
teachers can do to fight racism. She was still skeptical about how teachers could possibly combat the institutional structures that promoted racism and she still diverted responsibility from teachers (and even towards minority students themselves at times), but her tone indicated to me that her challenges were, in part, inquiries into what counted as racist behavior (on the part of teachers) and what could be done to change practice.

Ben: And I would say that, personally for me, when I think about the term and I’m saying that I want to fight racism, including racism by whites and my own racism, I’m not looking at it as labeling myself as a racist person. But some of my actions might be because they lead to racist outcomes. And that doesn’t mean that I want to do it, but to me it’s like well, if I can learn how that happens, then I can also change it.

Elizabeth: Well, then, okay… what is it then, seriously, what is it then when… when the student, and I guess in this case the majority student,32 chooses to not ever come for help, chooses to not to do the homework ever, chooses to write notes to their friend in class? I’m just really trying to understand [and from the struggling in her tone, I think she really is]…

I believe this shift to wanting to understand occurred in part because of my reiteration of the attempt to avoid labeling white teachers. Again, this interaction was very educative for me, as it led me to think more deeply about how to articulate the balance between naming and blaming. It also impelled me to think about what I consider to be racism. In other words, I had to contemplate the more particular details of teacher behavior to see how they might be acts of complicity (in racism as well as other form of subjugation) and then explain that I did not think teachers intentionally wanted to oppress students of color. For example, here is my response to Elizabeth’s previous question.

Ben: [What I am trying to say] is that it is on the onus of the teacher to try to figure out what is going on and to try to do something about it.

Elizabeth: And when we try? And we really do change our behavior and our speech patterns and our approach and they still flunk, is it still a racist outcome? [Good question!]

32 The majority of students at her school were African American.
Ben: It *might* be a racist outcome. It doesn’t mean that the teacher… I’m not… personally I try to shy away from people as racist because I don’t think that most people who go into teaching want that.

So, in our discussion I continued to try and balance an adherence to the word “racism” and an avoidance of assigning blame. Yet despite my attempt to distinguish between complicit and intentional racism, Elizabeth was hesitant to accept the usefulness of my distinction. We continued to bat around these ideas: the word “racism,” the idea of complicity, and the locus of the cause for racial disparity. As Elizabeth was very good at coming up with examples (sometimes extreme examples) that challenged my articulation of these issues, our conversation got quite detailed about what purpose such an articulation serves.

Elizabeth: Okay… I will agree with your argument. I’ll also say I think it’s an incredibly dangerous argument.

Ben: Okay, because?

Elizabeth: Because inherently every single person’s behavior therefore can be labeled racist, sexist, ageist, [I insert, “I would agree with that.”] and I think it’s impossible for us to wander through life having decided that and not assign any blame.

Ben: Here’s the two things that I—and I would agree that maybe… I mean part of the process for me is learning how to communicate this without it leading to blame [I briefly mention the Buddhist perspective and the book chapter I wrote]… I am trying to learn how to communicate this in a way that doesn’t assign blame. Because that’s why I really am careful how I use the words racist and sexist and classist. And that’s why I am very clear about my definition meaning about the outcomes and not the intention because I am trying to get away from it being a blame thing. Because once you blame somebody and you label them, and I do this, I just retreat and find a defense as opposed to really addressing what might be the real issue. And that’s why sometimes I wonder if racial is better than racist.\(^{33}\) Is there a racial component…

Elizabeth: I think for most people it’s the same.

\(^{33}\) Interestingly, in the editing process for my book chapter, the book’s editor often changed where I wrote “racist” and inserted “racial.” I am still undecided about which word is more accurate and/or more useful.
Ben: …maybe [hesitantly]… but to me saying there’s a racial component and there’s a racist outcome has a different tone at least. But getting back to your point about everything can be racist, sexist, ageist. I would say, yeah it probably can be. I would agree and maybe it is. My point is I don’t think, and this is where you may disagree, I don’t think as a white male I can ever completely get away from some of the things I do having racist or sexist outcomes. [Note I include sexist because it may be more of what Elizabeth thinks about as a labels herself a feminist.]

Elizabeth: Intentions or outcomes?

Ben: Outcomes, not intentions.

For me, the idea that whites can never escape racism did not indicate that whites cannot also counter racism, but for Elizabeth it did. In my thinking, revisioning how whites are complicit (via a naming of whiteness) actually creates space for change. Our whiteness may be baggage that hinders our socially just motives but it is not an unmovable weight. It does not prevent us from any movement.

For Elizabeth, on the other hand, whiteness and complicity articulated in such a way was more limiting. It made her divert responsibility for racist and sexist outcomes again to those who suffer from discrimination.

Elizabeth: I think there’s no way of getting away from it being racist or sexist outcomes because you’re not just dealing in a vacuum, you’re dealing with me, my response is going to based on my own…

[And later in the interview…]
If you were talking to me, as a male talking to a female, you might be working your darndest to not be sexist, but it might end up that I feel discriminated against or that I feel or whatever, even if you were working your best. But that’s my response. You might have actually done everything right. Well, by whatever definition of right there is. This is my point. If you’re not working in a vacuum, my response is also going to be conditioned by my own experience. So, you might have absolutely let me have my say and whatever you need to do, but because you didn’t respond to one question I asked, and I’ve had conditioning that makes me feel that that means a man is ignoring me. So, I guess my problem with labeling…I’d say it was a two-way thing. And so I think it becomes… therefore I think it’s dangerous. Does that make sense?
Elizabeth thought about those cases where whites have done “everything right” and minorities still feel as if racism is present. While I do not doubt that such examples may exist—or at least may potentially exist—I do not feel as if they are representative of the way whites interact most of the time, nor do I find such extreme examples useful for counteracting racism. At the time of the interview I did find Elizabeth’s comments very interesting because they made me think of why I find it so necessary to focus on the responsibility of, to use Elizabeth’s word, the “perpetrators” of racism. I also think it is important that Elizabeth included the phrase, “Well, by whatever definition of right there is.” This indicated an acknowledgement on her part of the social construction of right and wrongs and indicated an opening into how to question her about how whites are dominant in those constructions. These are the places where I think whites can be questioned about how we categorize in ways that maintain our own privilege and contribute to structural forms of racism.

Ben: Okay. I’d agree it’s a two-way thing, but I guess it’s—and I think it’s a very interesting way to look at it. I am going to have to think about this more [she laughs and I admit that she makes a good point]. But what I think is that… when racism… even when a black person’s, a black student’s response, even if it was not intentioned by a white teacher in a racial way and they did things to fight against that racist quality, and a black person still gets some kind racial negative connotation from it, that is still in my opinion—I agree they [the black students] have some play there, they have some action—to me they are still the victim of the racism. They are still the one being materially affected. So, I still think it—I guess what I would say is that I agree with you, but if my intention really is to be good, don’t blame them either, and don’t blame myself. Don’t blame them and say, “Well I tried and they’re really not trying,” which may be the case, but to think of it that way, to always keep thinking about, well how can I [the teacher] still be compassionate.

This last point was key to me—my own “aha” moment—and it was Elizabeth’s questioning that made me realize how essential it was to how I have thought about racism. Through these intense and open discussions I realized that my articulation about white’s complicity in
racism was about accepting responsibility. It was, and is, about whites accepting responsibility for their part in racial disparity no matter what other factors may be involved and accepting the responsibility to try and do something to challenge racism regardless of those other factors. It is not to ignore those factors but to work against racism even when realizing all the factors that contribute to it. So, critical antiracism involves countering racism regardless of whether or not whites are intentionally responsible for racial disparity. As I said, this was a real “aha” moment for me. At the time of the interview I was not yet able to explain my ideas on responsibility. Reflecting back on the conversation, however, has helped me put words to my agenda as a teacher educator attempting to adhere to a social justice approach to education. Looking back over my interviews with Elizabeth (as well as with the other teachers), I realized that there were several areas in our interviews where I attempted to explain this type of responsibility, but it was Elizabeth’s challenging that helped me see and articulate critical antiracism more clearly.

Power is an additional issue that is important in understanding responsibility, and it was a largely unexamined factor in our discussion. Elizabeth gave the example of someone (a hypothetical person) trying to do “everything right,” or everything they could to not take part in oppressive behavior. She also, however, alluded to the fact that varying definitions of right and wrong could exist. Through my discussion with Elizabeth I realized that I believe it is the responsibility of those with power (especially those in positions like teachers) to be reflexive about the ways they define right and wrong if they are going to support equitable approaches to education. As whites maintain privilege and power through our systems of categorization, white educators must recognize our part in the reification of our power via such systems. In addition, as those who have suffered from discrimination have an
understanding of it that those with power do not (Matsuda, 1995/1987; Delpit, 1995), it is the responsibility of those of us with power who desire to be socially just educators to draw from the wisdom of those who suffer from discrimination in order to understand our privilege, power, and complicity.

CONCLUSION

As I have reiterated many times in this study, I believe a dialogic approach to challenging whites on their complicity is important. Researchers can employ dialogue that carefully balances a maintenance of their epistemological motivations with a respectful acknowledgement of the experiences and social construction that influences their co-performers in the research in order to promote whites to question the construction of our systems of categorization, privilege, and worldview. Such a balance can still push whites to think differently while also avoiding labeling whites as racists. It can avoid assigning blame in an unproductive way and can instead promote more reflection on the part of whites, at least of those who want to combat racism.

During my conversations with Elizabeth, I came to a deeper understanding of what it meant to promote such open dialogue—i.e., to be dialogic. I understood better what it meant to be coming from different viewpoints. From earlier interviews with other teachers and from conversations with my pre-service teachers, I knew that I often had a different understanding of complicity from many other white educators. However, from the interviews with Elizabeth, I began to understand how these different understandings could be put into dialogue in order to make new meaning and come to understandings that potentially support an antiracist practice. We were able to shift from discussing the accuracy of CRT to
white teachers’ complicity in racism and then to teacher’s responsibility to counteract racism.

While I do not believe we got into the specifics about what teachers can do as much as either of us would have liked, I do believe we both put teacher responsibility into question.

We each drew on our own experiences to discuss the possibility of what teachers can do. For example, Elizabeth mentioned a student she had in class.

Elizabeth: I had a student last year… she’s definitely a very good in-class student. She never was loud. She never was disruptive. She always did her homework. Even though she obviously hadn’t tried much, at least she had tried something, so she was in many ways a perfect in-class student, but I also know she spent a lot of time in class writing notes to her friends. She doesn’t really care, and she was absent the day of a test, and she was often absent the days of tests. So, I arranged for her to take it the next day at lunch. She didn’t do it. I arranged for her the following day after school. She didn’t do it. And I was her soccer coach, and she was supposed to do it the next day, her third attempt, and she came to soccer practice instead, and I said, “No.” And she’s like, “Well, I’m going to go back now and take it,” and I said, “No.” And she was just stunned that I cut her off, like I had not done up until that point. And I actually think I had done her a disservice by being so accommodating. She just absolutely expected that when it was convenient for her, which would be never, but when it was convenient for her to take that test, that’s when it was going to be available.

…

She was never absent for another day there was a test. Well, that’s not exactly true, but…

For Elizabeth, deviating from the policy had negative consequences on this student, and when she “cut her off,” the student was actually better off. However, I do not think her example showed a strict adherence to her classroom policy. She was able to be strict with her student because she also had a relationship with her. Elizabeth made a decision based on knowing this student individually and not because it was what she would do in every case. I also countered her example with one of my own.

Ben: It’s an interesting case. I guess when I try to look at, even for myself, when I think about how I would address it… I think about a similar student in DC that we had at this charter school. It was hard to get him to do anything. I mean was hard to get him not to swear… we had this policy, swear three times
and your out, but if we had held to that, he would have been out in a day... so in his case, he wasn’t doing anything, was it better for him to be in school or is it better for him to be out of school?

... With this guy, if we had kicked him out of school, he would have been gone. But two years later, when I was gone from the school, he actually was getting ready to pass the GED. And I would have never have guessed that he would even have done that. I would never have guessed it. So, for him it wasn’t the three-strikes-and-you’re-out that helped him. It was that he needed time to acclimate to the... he was a drug addict, he came from no family, all different things... Maybe sometimes it can be too much slack, but in the end if the kid’s out of school, what services does the student get? I mean to me I agree that your example is interesting, but what happens next is also a very important part of the issue.

I tried to use this example to show how policies can have consequences that we (educators who honestly care about our students) do not actually want to come about and how working against such policies can be positive. Even when Elizabeth was initially resistant to interpreting my example in the same way that I did, she did also articulate how she would have responded.

Elizabeth: There’s two responses to that... One, I would look at the effect of that behavior on the students in the classroom. Like, what happened to the students around him? If you tell him you’re gone if you keep doing this and you continue to disturb everybody’s work? And that is... if we are looking at results as opposed to intentions, then we have to look at that result. What happened to other students in the class? What happened to their ability to follow what teachers say seeing that example? Okay, the second thing is what I would have done with that kid, and it’s of course so easy for me to say what I would have done because I’m not there and not irritated or trying to help him, I would have suspended him for a day and then re-wrote the policy with him. And I would have said, I would have integrated in more slowly.

So, Elizabeth still focused on this student’s behavior and how it did not fit in with a classroom structure (as it existed in ideal form in her mind). I certainly do understand that she worked in a public school, the context of which makes it very difficult to interpret and respond to students as individuals. Despite that context, she was able to think about how she
might adjust the school policy to work for this student. In fact, as we discussed earlier, working at a smaller, charter school helped Elizabeth think about these types of solutions.

So, for Elizabeth, constructing solutions to racial disparity entailed thinking about teachers as complicit actors in institutional racism and beginning to resist liberal interpretations of possible challenges to that disparity. She was learning to articulate how she balanced the difficulty of the contexts in which she has worked with how she approached her responsibility to be equitable. For me, putting teacher responsibility into question helped me learn how to more clearly articulate how I think teachers are responsible for racism and how they can counteract their own complicity. A large part of this new articulation meant balancing naming and blaming. As I briefly mentioned earlier, I worked this out for myself through a use of Buddhist concepts, an area I have been and will able to continue to explore in my professional life. In addition, I was able to draw on personal examples that helped show what the focusing on teacher responsibility (versus student or parent responsibility) could look like.

Even though we drew from different points of reference, we were both able to see each other’s point of view because of the dialogic approach to the conversation. Because we stuck with these stories and dissected them together, we were both able to move in our thinking a bit and come to mutual respect and understanding of where each of us was coming from and how we might be able to think and act in different ways. Small interactions—such as the one above in which we compare our reactions to struggling students—illustrate how we were able to maintain our own positions and also incorporate the other’s thinking into our own.
I attempted to position Elizabeth as an equal in our dialogue. My sense is that she truly felt as one. At one point when I was concerned that the conversation might seem like I was attacking her too much, she replied, “Are you kidding, I love this stuff!” Elizabeth’s willingness to discuss the sticky issue of race enabled me to challenge her on her adherence to liberalism and for her to explain how she actually did resist it at times. Liberalism and colorblindness were really moving targets (not a simple dichotomy of support and working against). It took a real sticking with it to get at it at all. More than any other interview, this one moved from the focus of understanding what the issues are to more detailed discussion of how teachers can find new ways to think and act. I had learned from Sarah to think of CRT as dialogic performance and this set of interviews with Elizabeth gave me the chance to practice it as such.

In summation, I want to reiterate that it was Elizabeth’s motivation to work against racial disparity that helped us both learn from this dialogue. Even though she relied on liberal notions of antiracism at times, she also practices aspects of critical antiracism. Specifically, she challenged the cultural neutrality of curriculum and classroom discourse in order to make her classroom more equitable for her non-white students. Furthermore, her willingness to bring her practice into dialogue with me knowing I would challenge her in some aspects of that practice allowed us both to form new ways to promote more critical antiracist practice. Finally, what I learned from Elizabeth has helped me reconsider and potentially re-narrate the earlier dialogues of this study. With Stephanie, I can now understand her thinking and practice as antiracist in intent. It is her adherence to liberal forms of that antiracism that may prevent her from realizing the racial equity she actually does want to promote. With Melissa and Sarah, I can now see their practice as already
critically antiracist. In retrospect, our dialogue helped us all better understand it as such. Discussions that included an attention to CRT gave us some of the tools to better analyze school experiences so as to better promote the racial equity they are already working towards.
Yeah, the idea that it’s very nice to have a warm place in my heart that I can go back to at all times. And when you see people who don’t have that sense of something concrete and solid that you can call your mother and father and get warm feelings to be back on par again. When you see kids who don’t have that option, that ability, through other means you can come to empathize to them at least, and see the gaps, see the holes, see the weakness, and say, “I want to do more for that other person” because no one else is going to do it for you. – Elijah, high school history teacher

I think art is also one of those tools that is incredibly educational to see the better side and experience true creativity and expression of humanity. I think there’s just something magical that lives in the ability to open your spirit up to art, poetry, you know and see with poetic eyes. When you see with poetic eyes you look at the beauty and the hope and the potential of humanity and not just the history and way it is and how it’s securing your privileged state. – John, high school English teacher

The two voices above show the tenor of the dialogue I had with the three male teachers whom I call “The Boys.” When I first used this term (in my thinking about our dialogue), I used it somewhat jokingly. I had three men whom I knew before the study—one relatively well—who thought it would be good to do the interviews all together over a cookout at one of their houses. We spoke outside around a table, food grilling in the background, and I immediately got the sense that this conversation was different from the others. For one, the casual atmosphere made it hard for me to dive right into interviewing. It was almost as if we had to speak as friends first. Two, we were all men. I did not know why and how that changed the way I worked with these teachers at first, but I do believe there is a
different way I question and challenge men and women on their beliefs. Later in this chapter I will draw from Gilligan’s (1982) work (along with a critique of that work) to discuss differences in how men and women relate to caring with the hope to describe, in part, how I interacted differently with these teachers. Three, I quickly realized that the two these teachers quoted above—Elijah and John—relatively young men in their late twenties, had very in-depth understandings about the racial dynamics that exist in schools and society. They have thought and continue to think about it a lot, and they articulated their approach to racial equity according to critical interpretations of antiracism. So, my motivation very much changed as compared to the other teachers I interviewed. A couple of the other teachers from previous chapters were very astute about social justice issues. Sarah had a strong racial awareness but positioned herself as a learner with me. Elizabeth had a strong social justice motivation but was hesitant to put her practice into racial terms and examine it that way. Elijah and John, on the other hand, had a strong racial consciousness and put their practice into racial terms. They understood teaching and education from a racial perspective. This is not to say that the women did not work towards racial equity in equally substantive or effective ways or that The Boys were better at realizing racial equity but rather that these two men’s articulations corresponded more closely with my own articulation of antiracist practice.

These above factors, in essence, made this set of interviews much more of a discussion about what can be done to promote antiracism and where such a motivation comes from. We performed ourselves, or at least aspects of ourselves as socially just, antiracist educators. So, I use the title, The Boys, now to emphasize the playful (though still deep) tenor of our dialogue and to keep the emphasis that we were talking as a group. Especially in
the first and deepest conversation, we were very much four equals batting around ideas over food and drink on a summer night.34

Because of this different focus, CRT actually had less of a direct impact on interpreting the dialogue, and I let the different tenor of the discussion prevent me from using this analysis with The Boys directly. CRT was still a motivation for my questioning, but at the time I did not see the need to use it to challenge these teachers. Instead, what became forefront was a discussion of possibility. We talked about what teachers who desire to work against institutional racism can do to enact such a practice. In these conversations what became very pedagogical to me was that educators (teachers and those in academe both) could use language that is very hopeful. In this respect, this dialogue was very performative in the sense that a performance perspective of critical ethnography illuminates “what could be” and not just “what is” (Madison, 2005, p. 5).

Using more language that reflected a critical (versus liberal) understanding of racial disparity, Elijah and John were much more vocal in the discussion than the third teacher, David, who did not speak much until the other two had left. While they both spoke with language that was filled with hope and possibility, David was open about his struggles in working with poorer African American students and his comments represented language that is more typical of what I have heard from white pre-service teachers and other white in-service teachers, language that may still promote racial equity but that also adheres to liberal interpretations of that racism. Interestingly enough, David was the only one of the three who intended to continue teaching. The other two saw much more possibility in their social justice work outside of the teaching profession. At the time, both intended not to be teaching

34 Later in this chapter I will critique the decision to conduct the interview as a group and my complicity in that decision.
the next year. So, David’s language often had the effect of bringing the conversation back to the seemingly more mundane aspects of classroom dynamics and the certainly more problematic aspects of race and teaching.

David: Kids, it just doesn’t seem like they care. I think it’s whether black, white, it doesn’t matter. I mean when kids just act like they don’t care, it’s a negative for me.

Despite such comments, and since Elijah and John were much more vocal, this set of interviews was the most performative in the sense of identity. They presented possibilities of how teachers with social justice motivations could sound and act. They were performing their social justice selves, the parts of their identities that were concerned with anti-racist thought and practice. Both Elijah and John were very astute about how racism is perpetuated in society generally and in school more specifically. Furthermore, both of them tried to enact anti-racist practice in their classes. To a large extent, this had the effect of them seeing themselves as outsiders to a certain degree. Interestingly, this outsider status was something they also saw in their childhoods as well. They narrated stories about how they came to think the way they do. Throughout the conversations, I had a hard time examining these teachers’ views, but when challenges did arise, they were often sparked by comments David made. In this way, he proved to be a functional and even necessary counterweight to the hope and possibility that Elijah and John exuded.

**RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS – EMOTION AND ANTIRACIST EDUCATION**

The conversations started in a different place from the other interviews in the study. I did, however, ask the boys about colorblindness and what they thought of the concept.

John: It just makes me wonder what angle that term’s being used. Like (a) people aren’t really colorblind. They are definitely affected by people’s color,
whether it’s conscious or unconscious. And (b) I guess the flip side to that is 
would be that people tend to treat certain races as invisible. They are blind to 
pople of a different color and don’t really perceive their entire humanity.

Ben: It sounds like it’s not a practice or ideology that either of you believe in.

John: Not a bit.

Elijah: Because it’s not a reality. … Here at Central High School, really 
anywhere, it’s something that… race is so evident and in your face that at 
times the person sees somebody as their race. So there really is no way to 
subscribe to colorblindness.

These comments exemplify the importance John and Elijah put on seeing and acknowledging 
racial difference. They were also able to articulate both how racism exists in a structural, 
institutional manner and how liberal ideology supports these structures. Subsequently they 
were aware of how white teachers like themselves were complicit in those structures.

John: I think there’s a lot of teachers at our school that definitely try to be 
aware of race and take a very vehement stance to be proponents of that race 
and…those are people who tend not to blinded by culture, but really conscious 
and forcing themselves to address it, and then there’s also people who are 
completely blinded by it, and I definitely think that there is…there’s racism. 
You know, racism is present. It’s prevalent. It’s not free from the doors of 
Central High School. Institutionally speaking, I think just the way that we 
structure our teaching that there is complete lack of equity, and I think it is 
racist in its nature for us to not equalize our resources. You know, our 
greatest resource as public schools is our teachers, in theory. Teachers are our 
greatest resources, and it we truly believed in equity, then our greatest 
teachers, our most experienced teachers, would be teaching students of all 
races, and it wouldn’t just be the teachers that have been there the longest, are 
supposedly the best teachers, teaching just AP classes. That’s kind of my 
biggest beef with just equity and latent institutional racism at least at Central 
High.

John, before even reading or discussing CRT, was able to articulate complicity using the 
connection between structural racism and property. He understood that access to valuable 
resources, such as good teachers, was affected by race. Elijah and John’s racial 
consciousness—the fact that race was on their minds a lot already—moved us much more
quickly into their views on colorblindness and the existence of institutional racism in school and teacher practice to what they personally do to combat those practices. For both Elijah and John, this consisted of thinking and talking about teaching in humanistic, emotional terms. Their primary motivations in teaching went beyond academic learning and certainly beyond any sense of doing well on tests or academic objectives.

John: Being able to, in art, experience the other point of view...being able to see a different side of humanity and to understand their tragedy and their pain and their suffering and their oppressive history without having to go through it, to be able to vicariously through the role of a character—perhaps within art and theater—feel it. We have to feel what it is to be someone else. We can’t just learn about it and regurgitate the data about what is and what has been through the curriculum but to feel it.

Elijah: It has to be emotional.

John: It’s only human empathy and emotion that will really empower people to want to change things.

According to Giroux (1997), as liberal discourse does not position societal institutions such as schools as cultural in any political way, liberal ideology promotes equality through an adherence to the structures of society as they exist currently. Success and equality in education will come through following the structures (i.e., the processes and modes of categorization) that exist in schools. For Elijah and John, these structures did not address a fundamental aspect of what education should be. For them, a prime part of education was for emotional, not academic, development. In addition, they connected the achievement of racial equity with this emotional development. Thus, the modes for success and equity that they employed resisted liberal interpretations of racial change (or any kind of equity) as occurring through current teaching and curricular practices that focused on academic senses of intelligence and were rather linked to the development of their students’ ability to tap into.
their feeling, affective selves. Elijah articulated this through talk of connecting to people emotionally, about changing people’s hearts.

Elijah: Who wants to suffer? Nobody. And who wants to change the way they are through suffering, through feeling pain? No one physically. But if we can do that in the four walls of the classroom... how do you make a kid feel somehow less painful while—for the sake I’m not going to harm you or hurt you—and in order to actually see what’s going on here you need to feel pain. You need to feel it, but it’s all cerebral. This kind of idea of moving head or moving heart, John and I talked about. But how do you move heart? You can’t do it with just words. You can have the best speeches but if it’s not well spoken, with passion, then it’s mute. So, the role of the teacher is to try to find a way to be emotional... how can you bring emotion into the class or how can you get these experiences. You can change hearts. If you get to someone’s heart in one day, you get them forever.

Later when I discuss how these teachers identified themselves as antiracist educators, I will show where Elijah’s desire to “move heart” came from and on what this means to him. For now, I think it is important to note that Elijah and John were the teachers in this study who used language that most closely adhered to my preconceived notions of what critical antiracist practice consisted of. The other teachers in the study certainly gave me insight into what it could look like, but Elijah and John articulated versions of antiracist education that was most overtly critical of liberal interpretations of the construct. The interviews with them brought out a detailed wording of their philosophies of education, which included a critically antiracist mission. For John, art and to a certain extent nature were key concepts and practices that helped him articulate his mode of resisting traditional interpretation of education.

John: I think art is also one of those tools that is incredibly educational to see the better side and experience true creativity and expression of humanity. I think there’s just something magical that lives in the ability to open your spirit up to art, poetry—you know and see with poetic eyes. When you see with poetic eyes you look at the beauty and the hope and the potential of humanity and not just the history and way it is and how it’s securing your privileged state. Just two weeks ago I was at Washington, DC with students and one of
John believed that using art and performance with his students enabled them to see the world both critically and with a sense of social justice. At several times in the interviews, he commented on how art helped him move conversations from “practical” language to what he termed here as “seeing with poetic eyes.” Though he did not use the term liberalism, I interpret the kind of language John hopes to use with and instill in his students to be one that breaks free of liberal interpretations of the way the world needs to be. He sees a real possibility of social change with such language.

John: … kids who go through it, kids who are a part of our shows, the kids who work with outward bound, the different programs that I work with where they’re engaging with people of a different race and they’re engaging in very societally aware issues within the context of that program… they’ve shown that they learn that it’s something that should be brought to the forefront of their consciousness. There’s not a whole lot of people who engage in something that’s very moving and empathetic in its nature and just totally ignore it. I’ve seen it work incredibly successfully in my arts and theater and in the outward bound crews that I’ve worked with and kids that I take on hiking trips. And nature is another one of those arenas that I think is incredibly effective for just being a space for people to learn what the… I think nature is the art of place in a sense. It is a blank canvas. Everything’s working harmoniously together, in perfect rhythmic circles, and there’s no real laws of inferiority and superiority. It’s all kind of working together, and I think that just creates a space that’s a very unique, pure space for conversations about the absurdity of hierarchies that take place.

Nature was a real liminal space in John’s eyes. Like art it could be used to get students to be aware of something important beyond the day-to-day structures (like the hierarchies) that
play on their lives. I failed to ask him what happens to students when they leave such spaces and return to the less artistic spaces of their everyday lives and failed to ask about how art and nature could be used more to promote antiracism in the current structures of schools. I do not want to downplay the hope and possibility that Elijah and John see through such views of education, but I do think it is important to put that hope in context.

The teachers themselves added this context at times in the interviews. Despite all the hope Elijah and John saw with students and getting them to see, these teachers were somewhat more pessimistic about how this could work with teachers. Though they admitted to working with some teachers who were highly racially conscious they also acknowledged that some teachers are not. Furthermore, they pointed out that various structures of the institution of education made it hard for teachers to adhere to antiracist educational practices.

Elijah: The problem with No Child Left Behind, and that’s the problem that with teachers, we view our success in changing achievement through scores, and that’s just [indicates a lot of frustration]… that might happen eventually, but if you judge your success on that, it’s very frustrating… and you can be blinded by what’s actually more important…you’re not going to judge success for 10 or 15 or 20 years about how they have been affected, in effect about how they handle themselves with their families, their companies, their job. And so whereas I hope that I am changing people to think about society, think about class, think about themselves, and their role in their world, if you don’t see changes in the numbers that the school gives you credit for at the end of every year, you could have the most rock solid lesson plan about helping out this kid right here, and you may not do well on the tests, and nothing’s changed in that respect, but he goes home happy that day, the next day he might come in a little early with a smile on his face… so it’s difficult to judge success.

John: And that’s administratively one of the main things that’s fucked up is that…we’re teaching in this construct where that’s the primary focus and it almost reinforces to the teachers that it’s not important to desire to bring about some ethical, emotional growth within students.

For John, the prevalent ideology that drives schools did not support teaching for ethical, emotional growth. Teachers who wanted to promote such growth are in a difficult situation
because this humanistic approach resists the more traditional, liberal views of educational motivation. Elijah pointed out that standards-based and standardized testing movements like No Child Left Behind only made such a humanistic approach harder to implement. Schools do not give credit for how much a teacher can get a student to smile, for example. His comment about helping out “this kid right here” indicated that his motivation also does not adhere to a liberal paradigm of helping out the majority of the students at expense of the minority. That is to say, he did not follow a pedagogy based on academic averages but rather on some sense of social consciousness. Both Elijah and John talked about the frustration they felt because of how the structures of school hindered such a consciousness as the major motivation in education.

In addition, both John and especially Elijah (the teacher who was most quickly leaving the teaching profession) talked about the personal challenges they faced as teachers with more explicit approaches to equitable pedagogy. Both had heard people talk about them as “anti-white.”

John: You know, [a student] was just telling me the other day—his girlfriend is white, he’s black—and he was saying, “Lara, why don’t you go watch the game in John’s room?” And she said, “John doesn’t like white people.” And that to me was just totally my anti-creed.

Elijah also had examples of comments that labeled him as anti-white, and these were said to him directly.

Elijah: “If you’re going to promote this [i.e., non-white] race, aren’t you doing at the expense of other people [i.e., whites] as well?” “Shouldn’t you take just as much passion and pride in the contributions and successes of every person, including white people?” “Are you racist against white people?”

Ben: You’ve heard that?

Elijah: Yeah.
One the bases for this type of reaction is that many whites see society and schools as absent of color, and Elijah and John recognized the existence of this view. These whites did not see the norms of school as white, so when Elijah and John focus on color, these whites (both teachers and students) assumed that Elijah and John are “anti-white.” These two teachers acknowledged that they go out of their way for students of color and taught curricula that highlight non-white histories and perspectives, and they recognized that this invoked the perception that they are against whites.

John: And kids have a hard time… like a lot of kids maybe perceive my approach as like an affirmative action curriculum. Because black people have been so disenfranchised throughout history, I find it almost necessary to compensate for that. Not to undermine and minimize the effect that I want to have on white kids, but I want to put my net effort into trying to lift up kids who have been disadvantaged. And subsequently I think a lot of white kids have perceived that I don’t like white people.

Elijah made comments that indicated that he had received similar reactions from both students and teachers for focusing on the “disadvantaged.” When I asked them where such attitudes come from, they both had a response.

Elijah: Many forces. [We both laugh.] I think one could be white guilt. Another could be there’s a just an effort to try to correct past wrongs through a kind of affirmative action or affirmative teaching, actions towards trying to include, and they [whites] see it as, “Why aren’t you coming to meet me.” Where the me is an individual. And of course history… because everyone’s selfish. You have to talk about me. If you’re going to talk about somebody else, then why don’t you talk about me, too?

John: And it’s largely new. You think about how long it’s been since civil rights. Taking a stand for African Americans as white people, granted it might be a couple of generations old, but as far as progressive teaching methods have been implemented, it’s still a very new era.

The teachers and students they were referring to clung to an interpretation of the school as an institution that was colorless. Such a view adheres to liberal ideology that claims whites and
non-whites have the same chances in institutions such as schools. So, when these teachers acted in ways that focus on race, it was seen as unfair because it was going against the colorblind structure of schooling. However, both Elijah and John, as I pointed out before, saw the dominant structures of schooling as linked to whiteness. Thus, they knew that whites had an advantage that had to be overcome, and they each tried to overcome this in their pedagogy and curricula, what Elijah termed “affirmative action or affirmative teaching.” Elijah and John’s direction of effectivity was thus anti-liberal and their modes of effectivity came out in their teaching and choices of curricula.

Engaging in such resistant modes of effectivity had an effect on these two teachers. They each discussed the challenge to doing this kind of work, and I asked them about the success of their work. Elijah replied once, “It makes me want to quit.” John was more hopeful in his response. He had been at this school for several years and saw that currently there were more teachers who he could work with, more who “share a lot of the same values” with him as compared to when he started at Central High School. Yet even with his optimism, he believed there was something fundamentally wrong with how school was structured.

John: It’s hard to sustain the importance of something that is positive and progressive when they’re not getting it anywhere else, which is why it’s important, speaking here, to bring allies of teachers who are trying to fight for a lot of these same things together. I think we need, in order to really impress some of these differences, a completely… not just hoping there are a bunch of teachers who are all trying to reach kids in this way, but some more structure to humanistic approach to education, more multiculturalism through collaborative teaching in education, like having a student going through interactive exercises in history, English, and humanities, into science, into math, and having both the content and the process all being centrally grounded in the same humanistic approach, to where it’s sustained throughout their day, so that maybe in hopes even if they are in a racist, classist, sexist context at home that that sustaining voice from school will be the grounding voice in their life.
On the one hand, John believed he had allies to work with and was hopeful about bringing more along to make his approach to education more successful. On the other hand, a widespread approach to humanistic and collaborative multicultural education was still something that did not exist in the school. In other parts of the conversation, he made similar remarks on how insufficient he thought the school’s approach to equity was. Combined with the discussion about the personal comments they have both received, they both portrayed a strong sense of frustration.

The two teachers continued to follow their own approaches, at least to some extent, despite the challenges they faced. They would maybe leave the profession, but they would not change the way they taught or thought.

Elijah: You just kind of move into your conscious and you just kind of move forward with one more thought, and you just strive to do what you’re doing. You try not to offend anybody really. That’s what you’re trying to do.

John: I don’t really care. You know it’s like, if you’re going to take a stand for people who haven’t had an enormous stand taken for them, people are going to see it, they’re going to absorb it, they’re going to be responsive to it, you know. But I’m not going to let my action be controlled by other people’s emotions that can’t really see the entire big picture. And if anything that tells me, it reinforces to me that, “Oh shit, people see what I’m trying to fight for.” Even if they’re seeing it like I’m the wrong side and I don’t like white people, at least they’re seeing that here’s a white person who is trying to fight for equal education for blacks.

There was a sense of isolation that I got from these comments. John especially used the resistance he experienced to make allies and to fight this isolation. Elijah, on the other hand, was more affected by the isolation in the sense that he was not able to stick with teaching as long. For both of these teachers, and even for David to some extent, positioning themselves as against the mainstream was where they saw themselves as social justice educators and this outsider status was a large part of their identities.
OUTSIDER IDENTITY

The sense of being outsiders, or different from most of the people they taught with, extended beyond the school. In talking about how they came to their perspectives on race and equity, we discussed their personal histories. For John, his outsider status was strongly linked to his desire to teach differently, to follow a humanistic approach to education.

John: And I think one of the difficult things for me as a teacher with that is— which is interesting because now that I really think about it—this is a criticism that I used to house much more of the beginning of my teaching at Central High that I don’t know, and part of me wonders if that’s because working with more people like you who share a lot of the same values, but I used to become really frustrated on just sustaining the idea of some of the things that I was trying to impress with my kids. Like, all of the things that we talked about. Like having a more humanistic approach to education… So it used to really frustrate me, but not to toot my horn, but to be like one of the only teachers I would see on a regular basis who was trying to impress this shit into kids, and then you’ve got kids for 55 minutes a day and you’re trying to affect their hearts and minds and enough to the point where they’re going to see some of the value in it, but then they go out and then they get 5 other teachers who are just shoving data down their throats, you know. It’s hard to sustain the importance of something that is positive and progressive when they’re not getting it anywhere else, which is why it’s important, speaking here, to bring allies of teachers who are trying to fight for a lot of these same things together.

Life was better at Central High because there were more teachers who he saw as allies, but there was still some sense of isolation in John’s words. Even with his allies, he was on the outside of a system of education that did not support his humanistic approach. At the same time, he was able to talk about the difficulty in a very positive way. He saw the possibility of bringing more allies on board to his approach.

Similarly, John was very positive in talking about how he was positioned as an outsider in his childhood.
John: I personally grew up all up and down the east coast. I never went to one school for more than a year until I got to high school. I lived in a lot of black areas. I spent a lot of time in Detroit. And I never really knew anybody. And not really knowing anybody I grew up as a child observing human behavior a lot, and I really love my parents for that. You know the fact that I was forced to be put into educational systems where I had to just—constantly every year growing up—watch everybody and just see like who I would really be connected and attached with, and I think I afforded myself an opportunity to see and perceive better, more angelic forms of human nature, and the more shallow forms of human nature, in people as a child through that experience. And… I didn’t really prosper because of class. I didn’t really prosper a whole lot because of grades. And I also just love the underdog as you said. Why are we here if we’re not here to help people who need it?

John articulated his isolation (i.e., his “not knowing anybody”) as a source of learning. He learned how to observe not just human behavior but “angelic” forms of human behavior and, and he was able to learn how to connect himself to such behavior. He also attributed his love of the underdog to his outsider, observer status. Instead of being resentful for such a position, he thanked his parents for it.

He gave the same positive sense of being able to connect to people currently in his personal life. At this time, however, instead of being forced into an outsider position as he was as a child, he chose it by seeking out practices that open him up to new experiences and people. John included art, performance, and nature—which I already discussed to certain extent—in his approach to teaching as ways to connect to his students and to a social justice agenda. They were similarly a part of his personal life. He even mentioned the occasional use of certain drugs to connect him to that sense of openness to people and experiences.

John: I mean, it’s kind of a funny side note you know that psychedelic drugs—LSD, mushrooms, marijuana, whatever have you—historically speaking you find hippy movements centered around social justice. That definitely isn’t the main source of where it comes from but it’s kind of one of those tools that people use that is mind…it expands the mind. It’s an open form of being. It’s a collective kind of being under those influences. They may teach people through experiences that it’s fun to be open, peace-loving,
warm, loving everybody, and then you expand those experiences to the everyday practices of your life.

For John, being open and self-reflexive helped also to lead him to being critical in the sense that he wanted to critique and work against what he called the “shallow forms of human nature.”

Elijah also discussed an openness to people different from himself as being rooted in his upbringing. Like with John, experiences and privileges that gave him contact with people culturally different from himself taught him to see himself as different from other whites.

Elijah: …my experience in New York City, when I was in a school that was probably 90% minorities—Asian, urban Latino, African American—and that became the norm for me. I think that and in college as well and in my reading, I’ve been more attracted to the plight of people, and so here that culminates in rooting for Latinos and African American, those who are underachieving and the achievement gap.

Feagin and O’Brien (2003) talk about how whites have been affected because of having had significant relationships with people of color. For Elijah, he saw those relationships from his childhood as affecting who he is today. He connected these experiences to his sense of racial equity now.

What was somewhat different from John’s experience was that Elijah also had a sense of class privilege that John did not. For one, he had intellectual, academic, progressive parents that taught him more directly about social justice.

Elijah: They were from a very conservative, white, Christian town in Iowa. And so immediately they were kind of “root for the underdog”—they were Jesse Jackson supporters when he came to town—very intellectual. And I think they also took interest in it. And they were just more “shoot for the underdog.” I think that’s where the passion starts. And that just happened to be black Americans.
According to Elijah, his parents always fought for the equity of African Americans, so he learned to do the same. In addition, he had wealthy grandparents that influenced him in a somewhat different way.

Elijah: Along that same question, I also had grandparents who were fairly affluent in southern sections of Chicago. So, I’d go to a country club, and see people of color serving me, and the norm was they had to kiss my ass even at 12 years old or my grandfather wouldn’t tip them. And I asked why is it this way. And some people just turn a blind eye. I can see where it is very easy to grow up always to see people of color serving you. It is very difficult to reverse those who are in positions…and I see this with my girlfriend and coming to her house. She’s an au pair and so…I can at least not be blinded by whiteness.

Instead of turning a blind eye, his influence from his parents and his significant relationships with people of color (including his current girlfriend, who is Brazilian) have helped him not be blinded by his own privilege and whiteness. Elijah positioned himself as different from most whites, who were not able to “not be blinded.”

Elijah also saw himself as an outsider in the sense of not being from the south. Neither John nor David actually grew up in the south, but they had been in North Carolina much longer. For Elijah, it was only his second year, and he spoke about southerners with some disdain.

Elijah: I think when you talk about racism in the past, oppression in the past, some students see that as you are speaking harshly of them as people. You’re saying, “You, white man, you did the wrong.” And, especially kids who grew from the south so to speak, and I say this as an outsider, I don’t use the word “we,” I use the word “white southerners” or “white slave owners” and they know their history and they might literally be in touch with their past, too, and sometimes it comes down on them. So, it can be offensive in the way you say it.

Elijah understood that his remarks about southerners offended his white southern students, and this was one of the instances of when he did not include himself in the “we” that was complicit in the institutional racism he sees. At other times he did put himself in the category
with most whites—such as when he claimed that more African American teachers were needed because there were certain experiences that whites could never understand. However, since this was an instance when Elijah seemed to divert his own responsibility for the re-inscription of discrimination, it was one of the few times in these interviews that I actually tried to challenge one of The Boys. Even with my challenge, Elijah positions himself as different from most white teachers and talks about the “southern pride” he senses from other teachers at his school.

Putting his remarks about southerners aside for a moment, Elijah for the most part did recognize his own racial and class privilege. It enabled him to understand why whites want to maintain their privilege, even if he personally did not want to use it in the same way.

Elijah: It’s interesting people with privilege. If I was rich, and I can see where a parent would say, “Just keep my kid safe. It’s better this way. You’re not going to really change the world, but at least you can be safe, you can be happy, you can be well.” I just can’t blame a parent for that in some ways. But I guess I just don’t see the world in that way.

Elijah was able to distance himself the way he believed most whites maintained their privilege. By being outside of that group of whites, Elijah narrated himself as a socially just, antiracist white teacher. In fact, it is itself a privilege whites have to be able to distance ourselves from our racial categorizations. Similarly, even though John was more positive about finding allies, he like Elijah, also positioned himself on the outside of a mainstream white identity.

What was educative for me from talking to Elijah and John—as a white educator who also has the privilege of positioning himself outside the mainstream of his own racial categorization, in fact a privilege born of whiteness—was how whites could position ourselves as outside the mainstream in order to enact antiracist agendas. At least Elijah and
John used their outsider status to create teaching practices that could work against the institutional racism they saw. Talking with Elijah and John gave me hope for how whites teachers could, rather than deny their racial privilege, instead use an understanding of that privilege to construct potentially antiracist practices. I do not want to overstate how much Elijah and John were able to do or how much I have been able to learn, but talking with them about their outsider identities has helped me think more about how to approach teachers about challenging racism in their practice. I will go more deeply into this point when I discuss the implications for teacher education in the concluding chapter.

**OUTLIER AND COUNTERWEIGHT**

I have so far not said much about David, and that is in part due to that I was unsure of how to include him in this chapter. He was quiet most of the time that Elijah and John spoke in the interviews. He seemed to listen and take the discussion in. In addition, he was in many senses sort of an outlier with the group. Being in his early forties, he was a little older than the other two teachers, and except for when talking about testing he did not position himself as an outsider to mainstream education in the same way. Rather, most of his comments, which came after Elijah and John had left or were at least away from the table, focused on the daily aspects of teaching and in particular his interactions with his students of color. He was the only one of the three who talked extensively about frustrations with his students.

David: The whole part about being engaged. I want them to be engaged in part of the conversation. It’s important to me. Kids, it just doesn’t seem like they care. I think it’s whether black, white, it doesn’t matter. I mean when kids just act like they don’t care, it’s a negative for me.
In addition, where Elijah and John almost never spoke negatively of their students of color—their frustrations came from other teachers or the students they saw as more privileged—David did talk about the difficulty he had in working with some of his African American students.

As I indicated earlier in this chapter, David certainly had a good heart, and he often positioned himself as similar to Elijah and John in his motivation for teaching.

David: You know when I...I’ve made it very clear to them that I hate standardized tests, but I don’t have a standardized test. I’m in a very lucky position. I’m teaching them about the earth. I’m teaching topics that will be valuable to them when they grow up and have to make decisions. You know some of them might be in a position to make major decisions. They happen to have the background. So, I’m motivated by my desire to teach about the earth.

Here, David articulated a similar humanistic agenda for his teaching: e.g., “I’m teaching about the earth.” He was not concerned with tests (and admitted he was lucky that he did not have to be in his course as there was no end-of-course test) and wanted the students to learn something from his course that might contribute to the social good. He shared the same frustration as Elijah and John about the traditional and sanctioned approaches to education. While he was perhaps less articulate about a social justice agenda in his teaching, he still taught from a motivation that goes beyond academics. At the same time, along with his commitment to teach about the environment35 and all of the admiration he had for Elijah and John’s approach to education, David had the views on racial disparity that most adhered to liberal ideology. Most of these views came out when he discussed his African American students. I got the sense that he wanted to do well for his African American students—several times he told me that he had a good rapport with “the black kids”—and that he

35 In addition to what he commented on in the interviews, from other sources I know that David organizes Earth Day festivals and similar community events that have a focus on the environment and social justice.
wanted to resist singling that group out, but he did discuss these students in a way that signaled their actions as contrary to the appropriate norms of the school.

For example, there were a few times in our conversation where David singled out his African American students’ behavior. Perhaps the prime example came when he discussed teaching in an after school program designed to help students who had failed the state mandated end of course tests.

David: I had a huge struggle with that [program]. About two thirds of the class was African American girls, 9th grade. And I don’t teach 9th grade or even 10th graders. It’s usually juniors and seniors, and these girls were loud, very loud, and even if you separated them, they always found each other… This is [their] second chance to get [their] grade raised from an F to a D or whatever, and you know if people are even a minute late, you’re out. There were these rules and you have to have perfect attendance. And I found that I wasn’t really supported in trying to enforce those rules.

David talked about his attempt to strictly follow the rules of attendance and lateness and his frustration with how difficult it was for him to do that. In the conversation he commented on the African American girls that he had in class, that they were the ones who did not follow the rules. He talked about how he understood that these girls might have had a different learning style, but he also talked about how he thought they had to at least sometimes adapt their style for the benefit of his other students. Interestingly, when I asked him how many students he was specifically referring to, he indicated that these girls made up half the class (as opposed to the two-thirds claim he made earlier). So, he wanted these 10 African American girls to adapt to what he perceived the learning style of the remaining 10 students, a combination of African American male and white male and female students.

From a critical race standpoint, David did not acknowledge, and I did not question him on, the whiteness involved in either the rules he wanted to enforce or what he considered to be the appropriate learning style for a high school classroom. I do not want to deny that
these girls may have presented certain challenges, especially since I did not observe the class. Rather, I want to point out that the only time talked about specific students in racial terms was to point out when they did not adhere to a certain notion of appropriate behavior and that in these cases he used in negative terms to describe them. In contrast, when he talked about his good rapport with black students, he never provided specific examples. I am reminded of Guinier and Torres’ (2002) discussion of racial synecdoche. David’s commentary about these girls is an example of how many whites often depict specific blacks as representative of the entire black race, especially when that depiction is negative. David did not narrate his “well behaved” black students as representative of all blacks (rather, they were the exception), nor did he depict “poorly behaved” whites as representative of all whites. Again, I do not want to position David as intentionally promoting racial disparity. The fact that David chose to teach in the after school program is evidence that he wanted to work towards racial equity. I do believe, however, that his adherence to liberal notion of the school practices as culturally neutral (along with my failure to work with him to name the whiteness of those practices) prevented him from possibly realizing some of the equity he wanted to achieve.

David’s comments about these girls and other minority students also influenced Elijah to talk about race in a more problematic way. For example, David’s remarks on students who acted like they did not care sparked a conversation on motivation. At one point, Elijah showed some resistance to how much teachers should be responsible for motivating students.

Elijah: How do you motivate? How long do you motivate until the point where the kid gets it? How many talks do you have with a kid before you inspire him or her and you get back in the classroom and you see no results?
So, while Elijah earlier discussed how school structures get in the way of what is important in education, here he placed the blame on students for not being motivated within such a structure. This somewhat contradicts his desire to “move heart” and adhered more to a liberal interpretation of change and success—i.e., that students have a structure that they can and should utilize in order to succeed. In addition, this conversation only came out when talking about what teachers can do to work more effectively with minority students.

John was the only teacher of the three to resist blaming minority students for the racial disparity they experience throughout the conversations. Rather than placing the blame on a lack of motivation on the students, he stuck with looking at how teachers and the current structure of schooling prevent teachers like himself from motivating students. Even though John resisted placing blame on minority students and looked for structural reasons that may instigate such feelings, David’s discussion of kids not caring caused even John to highlight the difficulty in implementing a humanistic, anti-racist approach to education. So, in those few times David did speak when all three of the teachers were present, he often had the effect of being a counterweight for the hope Elijah and John presented and prompted them to focus on how the realities of the context in which they teach affect their humanistic, anti-racist goals.

An interesting observation I had in transcribing these interviews was how rarely I took up David’s grounding of the conversation to examine more critically the hope and possibility that Elijah and John presented. I think a large part of why I found it difficult to challenge Elijah and John was because their articulations of racial consciousness matched mine. My motivation in the study was so much focused on getting white teachers to name the whiteness of their thoughts and practices that when I was presented with two teachers
who already attempted to do that, I failed to examine how their whiteness and privilege still influenced how they thought and taught. I also realize, however, that other factors may have affected my ability to challenge as well, and I think gender was very important to the tenor of our dialogue.

**GENDER**

I do remember at times in these interviews with The Boys thinking that I should be interrogating them more. After all, my position is that whites carry a racial privilege with us that comes out in ways that we do often see. In addition, my dialogic approach is to involve in a give and take so as we both may learn. Yet, I did not involve myself extensively in that give and take with The Boys and did not delve into the white privilege embedded in their comments, thoughts, and practices. As I mentioned above, part of my lack of examination stemmed from the fact that Elijah and John articulated racially consciousness in way similar to myself. That is not to say that their whiteness did not hinder their approaches to racial equity in any way, but as compared to the other teachers in this study they articulated race and white privilege according to my own version of critically antiracist practice.

As I also stated above, gender may have affected my interaction with The Boys in a few ways. For one, I did not investigate how my personal style of interaction is different based on the gender of people I am talking to in a general sense. In addition, I think I was somewhat jealous of Elijah and John’s approach to education and their ability to articulate it. I will talk a little about how this may have affected me shortly. Before that, however, what I will spend most of my time on in this section is examining how The Boys’ comments
themselves may have been different from the women in the study and how this affected how I interviewed them.

Some research suggests that men and women work from different senses of morality, that women work from an ethic that centers care and men one that centers justice (Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1988). While this work has been heavily critiqued, I will use the construct—along with Connel’s (1987) critique of it—to investigate the difference in the boys’ articulation of social justice and racial equity.

Gilligan (1982) posited that morality for women stemmed from their connections to people. Women adapt concepts (including articulations of right and wrong) to work in the context of the people they know and care about. That does not mean that women have no belief in these concepts but rather that those beliefs and their articulations are highly interrelated to the relationships they have with specific people. Men, on the other hand, even when they talk about their attachments to people, base their senses of morality more directly on the concepts regardless of the how those concepts relate to the specific people in their lives.

I tried to examine this difference between men and women in looking at the way in which the boys talked about social justice in relation to the women in the study. Sarah and Elizabeth certainly did mention specific students much more often than any of The Boys did. Sarah and Elizabeth readily came up with examples involving specific students that supported or challenged statements about race that I would make. The Boys, on the other hand, did speak to a certain extent more about ideas such as a humanistic approach to education, emotions, and seeing with poetic eyes without referencing specific students they

36 David mentioned specific students, but he did so less the sense of being in a relationship with them and more in the sense of the way those students challenged his sense of equity.
know. Even when Elijah talks about “this kid right here” he is talking about a hypothetical rather than actual student.

At the same time, Gilligan’s (1982) hypothesis does not hold up completely with either The Boys or the women in the study. Connell (1987) sees such paradigms as over-deterministic and proposes that several forms of sexual character emerge in the same society at the same time and that “multiple femininities and masculinities are…a central fact about gender and the way its structures are lived” (p. 63-64). Thus, it is a bit too simple to say that Sarah and Elizabeth’s visions of social justice stemmed solely from their relationships with their specific students and that the boys’ versions ignored theirs. For example, Elizabeth did often use hypothetical examples to challenge my assertions. Likewise, John did talk about a few of his students specifically and did so with care. What I find useful about Gilligan’s thesis is that it provides me an entry point into examining the difference between these women’s and men’s formulations of their social justice work and helps shed some light on why I failed to challenge The Boys as much as I did the women generally speaking.

Drawing from Gilligan’s work, Lyons (1988) stated that “a morality of care appears to be a systematic, life-long concern of individuals” (p.42). According to Lyons research, women work more commonly from this care perspective. The women in this study presented social justice educator selves just as much as The Boys did but did so in different ways. The women much more often told stories of specific students when I asked them how they either promote or fail to promote racial equity in the classroom. Thus, it was somewhat easier for me to analyze those examples. The Boys, on the other hand, used a much different language. They spoke of attempts at humanistic education, moving heart, and tapping into people’s emotions. Since they did not use specific examples from their classrooms it was harder for
me to delve into analyses of whether or not their practices promoted racial equity in a critical way or not. When I did ask questions it was more for them to clarify themselves or to ask where they got these concepts from.

This is not all to say that I could not have questioned The Boys more. Certainly their comments could be interpreted more skeptically. As their language was so conceptual, I could have tried to ground it in more specific examples from their daily classroom practice and juxtapose their claims of critically antiracist practice with counterexamples from that practice. Even when David’s comments did move the conversation into the more concrete world of daily practice, I followed the tone set by Elijah and John. As I alluded to above, this may have been in part because of my jealousy of the ways in which Elijah and John were able to pay attention to race in their teaching. So, I was somewhat concerned with also presenting my own antiracist identity to The Boys. I did not feel the need to narrate my own anti-racist identity in the same way with either Sarah or Elizabeth, who were both as outspoken as Elijah and John and who both worked towards racial equity. With these women, the presentation of myself as a social justice, anti-racist educator came out to probe into their thinking. With Elijah and John, on the other hand, I showed that aspect of my identity to position myself as an equal, as someone who could hang with people who I thought were doing good work, who could be me to a certain extent, and who were doing more than me to some extent. I was performing a form of male solidarity, even a white male solidarity. I positioned the group—and myself as part of that group—as “outsider whites” who “get it.” In other words, I positioned us as an exceptional group of whites who, unlike most whites, understood racism and were able to combat it.
**CONCLUSION**

Whether because of gender differences, male solidarity, or for other possible reasons, the conversation with The Boys was filled with a hope not present in the other interviews. That is not to say that racial equity was not seen as an incredibly difficult goal to achieve but rather that at least ways did exist to work towards that goal despite its difficulty. The hope that arose from these interviews has ramifications for teacher education, which I will discuss in the final chapter. Here, what was particularly educative for me about the hope they expressed was that it was evidence that some white teachers do acknowledge the structural forms of racism that exist in schools and do engage in practice that counters liberal interpretations of and solutions to racial disparity. In fact, looking back at my conversations with the women, and especially Melissa and Sarah, I wonder if I could not have also had similar conversations with them. Each of those women also had critical understandings of racial disparity and worked at antiracism in critical ways. At the times of those conversations, and perhaps due to our gendered ways of dialoguing, I was more focused on the liberal remnants of their comments and practices and on using CRT to examine those aspects.

I can only speculate how using CRT in a dialogic fashion would have affected our conversation. I would hope that it would add depth to the explication of racially conscious thought and practice that Elijah and John presented. I could imagine having talked with them about how their pedagogical and curricular decisions affect—both positively and negatively—their minority students’ access to curriculum, resources, and an equal education.

I would also hope that using CRT would help influence David to draw on the similarities he does have with Elijah and John in order to confront some of the liberal aspects
of his racial understanding and develop thinking and practice that counters racism in more
critical ways. Perhaps if I had interviewed David individually in addition to with the other
men, I would have been able to discuss his thinking with him more in the ways I did with
Elizabeth or Stephanie. In fact, had I interviewed each of these men separately, I might
have been able to problematize the “outsider white” identity I helped construct. I do believe
there is value to examining how The Boys’ sense of outsider status helps them envision and
enact critically antiracist practice. However, I also think that status needs to be analyzed
more deeply for its connection to privilege. The Boys and I have the racial and gender
privilege to be outsiders to the cultural groups to which we belong. Even though Elijah and
John got negative reactions from some of the whites they worked with, they also got to claim
a certain amount of clout as whites who “get it,” and I can make a similar claim. A more
thorough analysis—e.g., using CRT to name the whiteness of and the actions that stem from
our privileged claims—could have helped me analyze how our positionality makes us
complicit in institutional racism in our own ways. In essence, I could have better uncovered
the colorblindness that still existed in The Boys’ and my thoughts and actions.

I did not conduct this deeper analysis of our particularly gendered whiteness in the
interviews, but I can at least focus on the fact that, when teachers have beliefs that counter
dominant ideology (i.e., they perform directions of effectivity that are resistive), they can
also articulate ways to enact those beliefs (i.e., they can construct modes of effectivity that
support that resistive direction). The Boys’ astute understanding of the structures that cause
racial disparity and prevent teachers from performing their anti-racist selves was
complimented by their ability to articulate, and even practice, critically antiracist ways of

37 I did speak with David and John on separate occasions but it was still more to clarify their views rather than
challenge them.
being. While I do not want to overstate the extent to which the boys countered the effect of school racism, from a teacher educator perspective their stories do provide examples that I can share with future students as their stories can help me articulate potentially anti-racist practice.
CHAPTER 6
SEEING WITH POETIC EYES: THE PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL OF DIALOGIC PERFORMANCE

To an extent, the interviews and narrative chapters in this study build on each other. As I present the interviews, a certain linear trajectory of what I learned arises. In Chapter 2, I learned the issues central to the study. Namely, colorblindness exists in complex and contradictory ways in teachers’ thinking and practice. In addition, this colorblindness is linked to a liberal ideology that still exists in aspects of schooling. From Stephanie, I both learned to expound on these issues and to begin to understand how CRT can be used to fight the racist aspects of colorblindness and liberalism. With Melissa’s help, I was able to being to see more clearly what a CRT analysis could look like with teachers. So from these two initial interviews, I learned about CRT and was able to find a language to put CRT in the context of teacher practice.

I deepened my understanding of this analysis in the interviews with Sarah in Chapter 3. Her motivation to learn enabled us to delve into specific examples, which were in a sense good practice for me in trying to apply CRT tenets to teacher practice specifically and to begin to articulate a racially conscious pedagogy more broadly. Furthermore, I began to see the potential for CRT as a dialogic practice in educational settings—that is to say that it is not only a theory that researchers can use to analyze teachers but is also one that can be used with teachers not to come to new understandings of race together.
In Chapter 4, Elizabeth’s motivation to challenge, even as a contrast to Stephanie’s to learn, was equally pedagogical. From my conversations with Elizabeth, I gained more insight into my personal ideas of what white educators need to do to combat our complicity in institutional racism. As we got into deep discussions about the definition of racism and the issue of blame, I learned what place responsibility plays in my conceptualization of how whites can overcome our complicity. While the issue of how to get whites to take on such responsibility (for racist outcomes in particular) is still in question, those conversations helped me better articulate my own approach to racially conscious teacher education. So, I had learned *how to articulate* CRT as a dialogical practice from Sarah, but with Elizabeth’s great ability to question I had an opportunity to *engage in* CRT as dialogic practice.

Finally, in chapter 5, the dialogue with The Boys was the most atypical in comparison to that of the rest of the teachers. Yet, it also perhaps gives some insight into how teacher educators can begin to promote racial responsibility. A combination of my own failure to analyze The Boys’ thinking and the hope they were able to convey allowed for us to perform a dialogue of possibility, at least to a certain extent. The fluidity of the conversation did allow me to see how racially conscious white teachers do try to challenge institutional racism in their practice by overcoming to some extent a reliance on built-in structures to fight racial disparity. A humanistic approach to education, the use of art and performance, and an articulation of personal experience as an outside perspective all arose as potentially antiracist practices, and they are all areas that can be further explored to understand more how they might help develop such practice. Even with the different nature of those interviews, by maintaining the same commitment to challenging institutional racism in schools I was able to tap into the performativity of conversations with white teachers about race. More simply put,
I was able to focus on how these teachers perform their fight against the institutional racism they see.

In general, from the teachers I learned how to more fluently articulate a stance against colorblindness and the remnants of liberalism in educational settings and to develop an articulation of critically antiracist practice. I learned to use this language with the teachers in the study through critical engagement in the ideas from CRT, among other sources. Even though writing forces a certain linear presentation, this learning process of course was not so cleanly systematic. Writing in linear form does allow me to present a certain amount of clarity of argument, but I think the reader can also pick apart this systematicity. I can even imagine going back and forth between introduction and narrative chapter, between narrative chapter and conclusion, or between any combination of chapters. A clever reader could pick apart my arguments to point out incongruence, to find what epiphanies (i.e., “aha” moments) I may have missed, or (with some luck) to uncover some pedagogical moments that I may have created.

One particular area of critique that I think could be examined more closely is the influence of gender on my interviewing and analysis. In Chapter 5, I discuss the potentially different ways the women and men in this study articulated their adherence or resistance to liberalism and their approaches to antiracism. In some sense, by not bracketing my interpretations of that difference in articulations, I may have stated too strongly The Boys’ success at critical antiracism and not strongly enough the women’s. The end result is that I may not have not have afforded the women the same co-performer status as the men. Since my intent was to position all the teachers as co-performers, I in particular invite critique of
my approach that might further highlight the antiracist commitments of the women in this study.

**CRITICAL RACE THEORY**

Many theories, fields, and disciplines other than CRT challenge racism, and while this particular study is similar to two of those fields—critical whiteness studies and sociology of education—it is still primarily motivated by CRT. Both critical whiteness studies and sociology of education could be used to extend this work. As whiteness studies is concerned with white identity formation (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998; Rodriguez, 2000), that field could be used to analyze and expound on the narrative of identity that I focus on with The Boys, in particular. As they offer possibilities for antiracist white identities, scholars could draw on that type of investigation to promote further construction of such identities. As much as I encourage such investigation, my goal in this study is to analyze the pedagogical potential of such performance of identity. Specifically, I hope to analyze such performance in the context of teacher education. Analyzing such performances with pre- and in-service teachers, I hope they can expand understanding of how teachers can combat racism in their schools. While antiracist identity formation is worthwhile endeavor, I am more concerned with the creation of critically antiracist practice, and thus I stay more close to the CRT goal of being concerned with positive material changes for those who are put in oppressed positions because of race.

CRT also has similarities with sociology of education, and the latter field has long been concerned with analyzing the construction and reconstruction of whiteness and white dominance. Sociology of education has been very useful in uncovering the links between
white privilege and racism. For example, there have been recent studies that analyze how whites talk about race and how such talk is connected to various forms of racism (e.g.; Feagin and O’Brien; 2003, Myers; 2005). While my study is similar to these in that it also is a study of whites talking about race, there are some key differences as well. Perhaps the most significant difference is in the research approach itself. Feagin and O’Brien (2005) investigate how whites in positions with a certain amount of power either adhere to or work against racist attitudes and practices. Their rationale is that these whites have a certain amount of influence the “social strata” and “social networks” (p. 28) which make up our society and thus uncovering their racial understandings is important to eventually work against racism. Myers (2005) similarly hopes to uncover how people, and not just whites, talk about race, especially in negative ways, which she calls racetalk. Her goal is to highlight such racetalk so as to show how it still exists in society, and that this illumination will help people challenge that practice. My study has the similar objective of highlighting certain discourse with the hope that such exposure will help educators challenge it. However, drawing on the motivation of CRT to challenge racism and on Ladson-Billings’ (1998) call to make this work relevant to teachers and students, I have attempted to use CRT to directly affect the practice of teachers in the study. Rather than only examine the phenomena of racetalk and extract information from my co-performers, I attempted to also challenge the colorblind and liberal views contained in such talk. I do not at all mean to indicate that studies like Feagin and O’Brien’s and Myers’ are less useful than mine. On the contrary, they are fuller articulations of the complicated dynamics of racetalk. The scope of their studies exceeded mine in their examination of how whites talk about race and are especially useful in uncovering the key underlying ideologies that whites employ. Thus, those studies
help me think about how to recognize and analyze the various forms of racetalk. I agree
with those authors that the existence of such talk is significant. The strengths of my study are
that I specifically examine the ideology of colorblindness and that I start to examine how to
challenge racetalk and the colorblind ideology that supports it.

I believe a dialogic approach is necessary for this kind of engagement with teachers
and I also believe that there are aspects of CRT that fit well with this approach. To be an
effective teacher educator, maintaining a commitment to the teachers I work with is
important. Positioning them as co-performers when conducting research helps maintain this
commitment. At the same time, it is my job as a teacher educator of social foundations and
multicultural education to challenge views that do not support equity in education. CRT has
helped me not only form a language with the teachers I work with but has also been the
motivation in both working with and challenging the teachers. Perhaps whiteness studies and
sociology of education can achieve similar goals, but I have found CRT’s tenets and
motivations to be particularly engaging and useful for me. In addition, CRT has been useful
for me in understanding two complicated concepts that arose in the study: whiteness and
identity.

On Whiteness

In this study, whiteness was a border space for the teachers. Sometimes they adhered
to colorblind ideologies and interpretations of whiteness and sometimes they resisted them.
Elizabeth is a prime example. Even when she recognized that whiteness was a construct and
one that included a position of dominance over non-whites, she shifted in and out of what
that meant for white teachers. At times, this whiteness was the way it was. In other words, it
may be unfortunate that whites have the upper hand culturally speaking (i.e., that white
culture is put at the top of a cultural hierarchy giving it a preferred status), but there was really nothing that could be done about it, so all people had to learn to conform to it, at least in institutional setting such as schools. At other times, however, whiteness for Elizabeth was just a narrative, a cultural way of being that was historically dominant in school settings but that did not have the same deterministic power to control everything teachers and students do. In these times, Elizabeth could imagine how to temper white dominance and privilege with her non-white students.

Even if articulated in different ways, other teachers in the study performed equally complicated and contradictory ideas of whiteness. Stephanie and Sarah both understood their white privilege in some instances, yet they distanced themselves from a united white identity in others, claiming to be Italian American or Jewish and not completely recognizing the whiteness of those ethnic identities. David and even Elijah could not always see the how whiteness influences the construction of rules and standards and standards even when they understood its influence in the construction of the institution of education in general.

What was a key aspect of this study was how I attempted to uncover these contradictions to combat what I perceived to be the problematic aspects of the teachers’ thinking and practice. In reflecting back on the study, I find it important to point out that I was able to challenge colorblindness and racism in some ways and unable to in others. When I was more successful, I was able to make the connection between practices of whiteness and complicity in racism. CRT was valuable in offering me a way to name the whiteness that exists in teachers’ actions and in their adherence to school practices. Thus, it offered me ways to communicate the specific ways in which teachers are complicit in institutional racism.
On Identity

Though in the previous chapter I discussed the outsider identity of The Boys, all of the teachers in this study all worked from some sense of outsider position. They each saw themselves, even if only in part, as outside the mainstream of white identity, thus having some sort of marginal white identity. Of course, as whites they had the ability to do so. This privilege was important because it did allow them to perform identities and to move within those identities. So, they could acknowledge their own privilege as whites, yet at least position themselves in opposition to that privilege.

They varied in the ways they performed their outside identities. For some, it was that they had ethnic identities, as mentioned in the previous section. Sarah used her northern Jewishness as a way to claim an understanding of how it feels not to be part of the mainstream identity in the Christian south. Her short height and dark hair also helped her with that claim. Stephanie also used her northern non-Anglo identity—in this case, Italian American—to claim to be different from many people she lived around. In addition her northern identity, along with her experience of growing up with people of many different ethnic and racial backgrounds helped her see herself as different. Elijah and John made similar claims about their experiences growing up. They took their identities even further this way, using the talk of drug use, hippie movements, and art to perform a sort of counter culture.

What is important for my agenda is what I learned about how this positioning as outsider could help fight institutional racism. It allowed the teachers to understand and develop compassion for people they saw as different from themselves. It also allowed them to see and develop critiques for the structures that surround them. It did not always allow
them to see whiteness or challenge racism in the ways I would have liked them to, but it did allow me to attempt to push them to do so. CRT was important in this endeavor. I was able to juxtapose the ideological stances that went with these outsider identities with comments they made that betrayed those stances. When they adhered to what could be considered a more mainstream identity by making comments that adhered to liberal interpretations of racial difference, I could point out the potential contradiction to their more desirable outside identity. For example CRT specifically enabled me to uncover with them how they might have assigned whiteness to certain students or affected the access of other students to equitable curriculum or practice.

So, considering what CRT can do to promote the positive aspects of this identity formation, I must consider if and how the teachers’ thoughts and actions actually helped break down white dominance. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) and Rodriguez (1998) might be concerned with the formation of a positive white identity, from a CRT perspective I am more concerned with how those thoughts and actions can inform teacher education. Naming whiteness and property analysis can help point out how whites are complicit in institutional racism, and the classroom is a prime location to use such modes of examination and analysis. Teacher education, using CRT, can help white teachers see how their practices contradict the positive aspects of their identities. Below, I will explain the value of enacting such an examination with teachers in a dialogic fashion.

**DIALOGIC PERFORMANCE IN TEACHER EDUCATION**

For me, it was very important to use CRT in a dialogic performance approach with the teachers. As Madison (2005) points out, a performance approach also comprises a
critical approach to ethnography. As such, the ethnographer makes an attempt to affect the site in which he or she is conducting the research.

Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular \textit{lived} domain. By “ethical responsibility,” I mean a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being, and hence a compassion for suffering of living beings. The conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they \textit{could} be for specific subjects; as a result, the researcher feels a moral obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity. The critical ethnographer also takes us beneath surface appearance, disrupts the \textit{status quo}, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control. \citep[p. 5, all italics in original]{note}

My study was an attempt to be critical in precisely these ways. The unfairness and injustice I see and am trying to affect in educational settings is racial disparity. Thus, I have a compassion for the students of color who I believe are suffering from the institutional forms of racism that still exist in schools. I believe that challenging white teachers on the negative aspects of colorblindness and liberalism that is part of their practice is, in effect, an effort to unsettle the neutrality and taken-for-granted-ness that such ideologies promote in order to uncover the obscured\footnote{Note, I think using the verb form (and not the adjective) is important because it emphasizes that power is not inherently obscure but hidden by actors, ideologies, and practices.} forms of power that put students of color at a disadvantage.

At the same time, the performative nature of my research approach addresses the complex position in which teachers act. They are not merely power brokers in any traditional sense but more actors within a structure of schooling. As Melissa pointed out, unlike certain types of jobs, teachers do not usually intentionally put themselves in positions of power and they are not often seen as having much power. For this reason, among others, a performance approach is useful as it can both uncover in a critical way the power teachers do wield while simultaneously positioning teachers as subjects order to recognize the structures of power in

\footnote{Note, I think using the verb form (and not the adjective) is important because it emphasizes that power is not inherently obscure but hidden by actors, ideologies, and practices.}
which they operate. One of the prime ways a performance approach can balance these two
agendas in educational research is by positioning teachers as co-performers of that research.
In this role, then, researchers and teachers together can come to understand the dynamics of
power and can together imagine the possibilities for challenging that power. Positioning
teachers as co-performers is an important practice because, to paraphrase Madison (2005), as
educational researchers we cannot assume that teachers do not already attempt to challenge
power and that they do not already do so in ways we cannot see because of our own different
professional and epistemological contexts.

Dialogical performance has been particularly important in my use of performance
ethnography precisely because it both acknowledges the power of the researched and
maintains a critical stance. As I stated in the introduction, dialogic performance encourages
the researchers and the researched to challenge each other so as they may both learn from
each other. For the researched to be able to challenge the researcher, their points of view
must be considered valid. At the same time, the researcher can avoid romanticizing the
participant’s point of view and can maintain his or her own. When each point of view has
equal weight and by bringing these points of view into dialogue with each other, the
performance researcher allows the fissures in the ideologies that back those points of view to
show. In this study, I hoped that the dialogue with teachers would help illuminate the
fissures in colorblindness and liberalism. These ideologies employ means of signification
and categorization, what Conquergood (1998) calls symbols, that I believe mask the nature of
racism in school settings. So, I hoped that I was able to expose those symbols so that the
teachers could see how they actually interfere with the other (more positive aspects) of their
own racial ideologies.
Since dialogical performance offers a way to analyze symbols, as a practice it resonates well with one of the core ideas of CRT. As Delgado and Stefancic (2000) have argued, white dominance is maintained when whites adhere to certain systems of categorization. Conquergood’s (1998) explication of the importance of symbols in cultural politics is in line with that assertion.

Symbols instill belief and shape attitudes that underpin social structures. The binding force of culture, by and large, is a web of symbols that enables people to control and make sense out of experience in patterned ways. (Conquergood, 1998, p. 11)

In this study I have argued that such webs of symbols include how teachers classify students as good students or not and how teachers adhere to only possibilities to racial change that rely on current institutional structures. Racial disparity is one of the results of the patterned ways that then develop from how teachers use these symbols. The process of give and take with teachers positioned as intellectual equals that is involved a dialogical approach allows these patterns to be exposed.

The process of challenging each other, of delving into each other’s thought processes and logics, and of analyzing specific instances of racial disparity allowed me to address the existence of racism on schools in a deeper way than I can normally with pre-service teachers. I did not always move these teachers as much as I would like or in exactly the way I would have liked but I did learn a great deal about the complexity of colorblindness—it’s ties to and breaks from liberalism, for example—and how white teachers can break away from an uncritical adherence to colorblindness.

The oft quoted phrase “Knowledge is power” reflects how narrow perception, limited modes of understanding, and uncritical thinking diminish the capacity to envision alternative life possibilities; domestication will prohibit new forms of addressing conflict, and it will dishonor the foreign and the different. Knowledge is power relative to social justice, because
knowledge guides and equips us to identify, name, question, and act against the unjust; consequently we unsettle another layer of complicity. (Madison, 2005, p. 5-6)

I hope the dialogue I had with the teachers in this study helped them develop an ability to identify and name symbols, categorizations, and practices that are complicit in racism. I also hope it is educative for us in teacher education to imagine how to unsettle all layers and modes of complicity.

In the end, dialogical performance is an approach that can employ critical stances—such as CRT, critical theory, feminism, etc.—in order to better work towards the goals of those stances. In this vein, dialogical performance is an extension of those stances, a way to bring critique to new spaces. For me, dialogical performance has enabled me to bring CRT to teacher education generally speaking and to teachers and future teachers specifically. It has been a way for me to ground the theory in the thoughts and lives of teachers. Rather than only analyze the teachers’ thoughts and actions according to the tenets of CRT, I attempted to communicate CRT’s modes of analysis to the teachers so we both could understand the potential consequences of such thought and action. By having the teachers take part in the process of analysis, I hope that they are able to make CRT part of their praxis. Using CRT in this give-and-take way with teachers, then, has been a attempt for me to create a common language for the conversation on race. One of the goals has been to promote critical reflection with these teachers and to devise a way to promote a mode of critical reflection on race that can be used in teacher education. In that sense dialogic performance is a bridge that can enable two different spaces (with two different ideological biases and two different lexicons) to meet and learn from each other. For me dialogical performance has been a bridge between CRT and the thinking of teachers.
I have also learned to use dialogic performance as a bridge in another way as well. It as enabled me to connect academic analysis with more performative, embodied modes of inquiry. Urrieta (2003) discussed the dissonance between personal experience and the academic voice. He claimed that academic prose can make invisible, mask, discount very important aspects of personal experience that actually support and make stronger our academic work. Some of the work academics do, such as the fight against racism, is highly personal. I think academic work that attempts to address the personal goals we have can be strengthened by looking at our personal experiences. For me, dialogic performance has allowed me to bridge an academic mode of inquiry with a performative one. Specifically, it has helped me, to borrow John’s phrase, “see with poetic eyes” the complexities and contradictions of race work. In addition to giving me an academically theoretical way to examine and challenge racism, the approach I took in this study allowed me to see the wisdom contained in the teachers’ thoughts and words. At time, these thoughts and words were often astute about the complex existence of racism in schools. As such, they taught me how to better analyze that racism. At other times, those thoughts and words contained knowledge about how to combat racism, knowledge I did not have until I spoke with these teachers. In this way, dialogic performance allowed me to envision possibilities for future race work.

CONTRACTION, CLARITY, AND COMMITTING

In Chapter 5, I discussed the deeper analysis that could help temper the claims to effectivity I made about my work with The Boys. There is a white privilege to my claims about the work I have done towards the goals of antiracism. Without having to understand or
feel first hand the effects of racism, and without having talked to any students of color about how these white teachers have affected them, I have made claims that at least some progress towards antiracism has been made. The idea of progress, itself, is a problematic one if it is not contested and contextualized. Progress in specific current material conditions is something to work for in the sense that those conditions can be affected in ways so that certain people no longer continue to be oppressed in the same way. I do not believe that such a context-specific view of progress counters the critical epistemology of CRT. However, if in the context of this study I have envisioned progress a-historically—i.e., that I can achieve some sort of condition of life as better than it has ever been before in history—I have fallen into the liberal ideological trap of both believing that some sort of better world can exist generally speaking and that a study like mine can bring about that better world by addressing school discourse. In this way, oddly enough, my claims of what has been achieved in this study are linked at least partially to the same type of whiteness and liberalism that I critique. By pursing antiracism with these teachers specifically and in the field of teacher education more broadly, I adhere to the assumption that the educational system can provide emancipation from racial oppression. Liberal ideology promotes change via the structures embedded in societal structures. Following that ideology, I have laid at least part of my faith in transformation the current structure(s) of schooling, the very same system I critique. So, my performance as education researcher/race worker contains at least the same level of contradiction as the teachers’ performances as socially just educators. That is a contradiction I will have to sit with until either I can formulate a way to either get away from progress as located in school sites or I do more work to show how this type of inquiry does, indeed, affect material consequences. In the meantime, I hope I can also work against the potentially
negative material consequences I may promote by maintaining a commitment to agenda and epistemology of Critical Race Theory.

Drawing on Noblit’s (1999) work, I have in my own work discussed the importance of committing when whites do work on race (Blaisdell, 2005). Noblit explains the importance of ethnographers to commit to the people they are working with and to the knowledge project they are working within. To make their work ethical, researchers commit to people, and they commit to understanding. As researchers, our own perspectives color how we interpret what we see and here. Therefore, committing to the people with whom we research (i.e., the “participants,” to use more traditional language) can help us honor their intentions. Committing to understanding their point of view as much as possible helps us keep our own understandings in check. “If we do not work against ourselves, work against our values and identities, then they always get in the way of our understanding someone else’s point of view” (Noblit, 1999, p. 7). Therefore, I add that this committing—which Noblit contends must remain a verb so as to emphasize its ongoing, never-completed nature—involves sitting in an ambiguous situation when whites do work on race. Whites have a racial privilege that we always carry with us, so we must be careful not to only be ventriloquists for people of color (Gómez-Peña, 1996), in effect stealing other people’s words and ideas and claiming them to be our own. Much of what has been discussed about race by whites has already been understood and articulated by scholars of color. So, when whites do race work we must continually commit to the people that have had these understandings and articulated them before us. In working within a field such as CRT, this committing is especially important, as it is a theory that originates from scholars of color and a perspective that scholars from “the bottom” (to use Matsuda’s 1995/1987 term) can have a
special understanding of. It is an ethically ambiguous practice for me to use CRT. On the one hand, I hope that it has enabled me to work against racism in the context if teacher education. On the other, in centering CRT in my work I promote myself as an “expert” in the field and somewhat ignore the recommendation to let scholars of color take the forefront in this work. I hope that by committing, I at least mitigate the negative effects of such an appropriation.

In this study, I have attempted to use CRT in a way that honors its commitment to racial change. By taking it to the context of teacher education, I have tried to use the theory in a field where I believe whites can operate to work towards that racial change. What is still important in this agenda, however, is that I do not merely use CRT as a simple means of one-time analysis. To do so would be to miss the epistemological implications of critical race studies. Bell (1995/1976) and Delgado (1995/1984) have pointed out the conflict in agenda that can exist between scholars and activists because of their different contexts and backgrounds. Therefore, in order to uphold CRT’s antiracist agenda in my work as a researcher and teacher educator, I must continue to work towards understanding the theory better and draw from the wisdom of critical race scholars. Among other things, this means I must understand my own privilege and check my own complicity in institutional racism. Rather than believe that I have the answer to how whites can use CRT in practice, I must invite critique of my work from scholars of color, among other scholars who have connections to marginalized groups. I can put my work out in the discourse on race in education but must check my assertions with the understandings of colleagues that have experiences and perspectives different from my own. In this way, I hope I can continue to
engage in critical race theory and practice so as to work towards racial equity at least in some small way.

To honor this same committing, scholars can work in areas not addressed by this study. I have attempted to address some of the ways in which liberalism negatively affects the thought and practice of teachers. Through modes such labeling students and adhering to existing structures of potential change, teachers can limit the access to curriculum for the students of color. There are also many aspects of liberalism I did not address. For example, I did not talk to the students that these teachers work with. I am sure that their voices, understandings, and wisdom would call for a complicated re-working of my articulation of potential racial change. Likewise, as parents are discussed by some of the teachers, those parents’ perspectives would be an important component of constructing antiracist practice. From a theoretical standpoint, there are many perspectives I also leave out or only address in a rudimentary way. One of these is of course a gender studies standpoint. While I briefly discuss the possible differences between the men and women in this study, a more thorough analysis could offer insight into what causes inequity in schools and how teachers can and do address that inequity.

In addition, I have started to develop a language for myself that helps me discuss with in- and pre-service teachers the existence of racism without instilling senses of guilt or blame. This language development in important as language, especially our systems of classification, affects our ways of being (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000; Madison, 2005). The language whites use to describe issues of race and racism can link us to ideologies that make us complicit in institutional forms of oppression. Therefore, being able to use a language with white pre- and in-service teachers that highlights that complicity without prompting
those teachers to retreat from the conversation is an important step. However, as I said above, I have *started* to develop this language, and the analytical tools of CRT have helped me enter these conversations. I have not yet used this language in *extensively* practice. I have used it in one teacher education course I taught and somewhat with the teachers in this study. A more thorough investigation of how this language could work in a myriad of contexts would prove its potential benefits and help develop the contextual nuances that prevent and promote its development. Simply put, this language has to be put into practice to see if it does, indeed, lead to material changes.

Despite its limitations, in many ways this dissertation is what it should be. It has been a means for me to learn how to use methods as a researcher, formulate a theoretical framework for my work, and define myself as a new professional. It has helped me lay out a research agenda for my career as an educational researcher and teacher educator. In this sense, the dissertation is itself a performance. It is performative (i.e., I perform myself as educational researcher) and pedagogical (i.e., I learn some of the methods and theory necessary to be that educational researcher). Laying my performance out in writing is an opportunity for it to be analyzed for its pedagogical aspects with regard to antiracist teacher and researcher practice. As I reflect back on this performance, key phrases stand out for me. Seeing every student as a ten. Being an equal opportunity pusher. Wanting to move heart. Seeing with poetic eyes. These phrases stand out for both their simplicity and their complexity. In each of those phrases lies an epistemological standpoint that can mask a teacher’s complicity in racism. Yet, in each also lies the possibility to engage teachers in the development of antiracist practice. Even though the teachers in this study lie at different places along the racially conscious spectrum, these phrases indicate to me that many white
teachers already carry with them the seeds to enact racially conscious practice. They indicate that while white teachers may still adhere to liberalism in the way they envision the achievement of racial equity, they simultaneously carry motivations that may resist that liberalism. Thus they already have their own levels of committing that scholars of education can draw upon. It is the committing of teachers to racial change that helps give me the motivation to stick with the field of teacher education as a sight for potential social justice, and the “what could be” that the fight against racism may bring.
REFERENCES


