How White Literacy Teachers Committed to Racial Justice Perceive Relationships Between Race, Expectations for Classroom Talk and Behavior, and Student Learning

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How White Literacy Teachers Committed to Racial Justice Perceive Relationships Between Race, Expectations for Classroom Talk and Behavior, and Student Learning

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This dissertation documents the beliefs and practices of four White in-service English Language Arts (ELA) teachers who identified as dedicated to racial justice. Teacher participants were recruited using the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Urban Education Summer Educator Forum's (CUESEF) listserv, as well as word of mouth recruitment. Teachers were asked to complete a pre-study questionnaire and engage in a series of three interviews. The first two interviews asked teachers to describe their schools, classrooms and students, while the third interview asked teachers to respond to four hypothetical classroom scenarios intended to simulate teachers' real-world classroom interactions. Drawing on research about racially inequitable classroom discipline, raciolinguistics, and race-centered teaching practices, I analyzed participants' talk and beliefs about race, racism, literacy teaching and learning, and expectations for classroom talk and behavior. My findings show that teachers were critically aware of broader systemic issues, were developing their race-consciousness through reading and listening practices, encouraged race-talk in their classrooms, diversified their instructional materials, and were engaged in non-punitive classroom management practices. My findings also indicated that White teachers dedicated to racial justice can and do still hold colorblind ideologies and racial biases, including teachers' understanding of dialect diversity, discomfort with critically discussing their own White racial identity, and racialized perceptions of students' talk and behavior. While many studies have investigated the ways in which White teachers can perpetuate racial inequities in

schools, or the ways in which White teachers can and do engage in effective race-conscious practices, this study found that White teachers' race-conscious work is an ongoing and complex process. Ultimately, while the teachers shared critical examinations of race and racism, teachers also indicated areas that might benefit from further critical self-reflection. In other words, the themes in my study show the nuance of this work and how White teachers' race-conscious pedagogy can include critical and race-conscious practice, as well as beliefs and practices linked to structural racism. Implications for this study include professional development and research that considers the complex nature of White teachers' race-conscious development, particularly when engaging with White teachers who identify as dedicated to racial justice.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

1.0 Overview and Purpose

Despite the altruistic motivations common in pursuing careers in education, research has found that teachers are not immune to implicit racial biases, or the automatic and pervasive beliefs about raced groups (Strack et al., 2020; Warikoo et al., 2016). Teachers have been found to perceive students of color, particularly Black students, negatively (Carter et al., 2017; Gregory & Roberts, 2017) and are more likely to expect or anticipate misbehavior from Black students, or view the behaviors of Black children as more serious, more in need of punishment, or more likely to occur again (Goff et al., 2014; Gilliam et al., 2016; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Across intersections of student identity, socio-economic status, and school context, researchers indicate that Black students are disciplined more often than their other race peers and more often for subjective behaviors, or behaviors that require teacher perception (e.g., "defiance" or "disrespect") (Gregory et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2002). Teachers' misperceptions of subjective behaviors enacted by Black students can also be found in teachers' interpretations of, or assumptions about, Black students' classroom talk and language.

In contemporary classrooms, behavioral and linguistic practices enacted by dominant groups continue to be normalized (Delpit, 2006; Godley, 2012; Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Monroe, 2005; de los Ríos et al., 2019; Watson, 2011, 2012), and teachers' perceptions of students' talk, particularly for students of color, multi-lingual, and low-income students, are often filtered through teachers' beliefs about respect and appropriateness (Godley, 2012), as well as assumptions about academic abilities (Heath, 1983). Scholars indicate that Black students can be reprimanded, or even punished, for teachers' (mis)interpretations of tone or volume of voice (Ferguson, 2000; Fordham, 1993; Leander; 2002; Milner, 2015; Morris, 2005, 2007; Morris, 2016;

1

Wortham, 2004). Morris (2005, 2007) found that certain classroom talk strategies enacted by Black girls in his study were often interpreted by teachers as too loud, defiant, and aggressive. These beliefs often led to discipline or reprimand that promoted hegemonic beliefs about race, femininity, and schooling. For Morris (2005), teachers' attempts to impose control over their Black female students' talk could lead to inequitable opportunities to learn, as the behaviors teachers were attempting to curb (e.g., being assertive, speaking loudly) are generally linked to positive outcomes for students' academic success and fortitude in the classroom.

Further, scholars have found that teachers may draw on language ideologies, or beliefs about how students should speak and what languages are considered academic, appropriate, or professional. Standard Language ideologies can devalue students' use of language or dialect that does not adhere to the same rules as Standardized English, particularly Black students use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Baker-Bell, 2020; Godley & Reaser, 2018; Smitherman, 1972). Throughout this paper, I draw on Godley and Reaser's (2018) definition of "Standardized English" to refer to the language variety often associated with institutional prestige and normalized in school academic standardization. African American Vernacular English (AAVE), also called Black Language (Baker-Bell, 2020), Black English, or Ebonics, refers to another language variety (referred to as a "counterlanguage" by Smitherman, 2000) historically and contemporarily spoken mainly by some Black Americans, with its own complex grammatical structures, vocabulary and syntax (Smitherman, 2000). In the US context, speakers of Standardized English, along with the language itself, are often privileged, while speakers of AAVE can and do experience racial discrimination and stigmatization because of their language use (Godley & Reaser, 2018), a phenomenon often referred to as raciolinguistics (Alim, 2016). In many circumstances, these assumptions are inequitably applied to the language use of students of color,

2

and can lead to reprimands, miscommunication, and negative assumptions about students and their academic abilities (Delpit, 2006; Godley et al., 2007; Heath, 1983; Smitherman, 1972).

Teachers' interpretations of Black students' talk may be particularly salient in English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms, as student talk is a necessary and essential component of literacy learning. Although student talk is an important component of classroom learning across content areas, as students are often expected to verbally communicate their understanding or academic knowledge to teachers (Godley, 2012; Godley & Reaser, 2018), in ELA classrooms, teachers are specifically encouraged to incorporate student talk into classroom learning (CCSS ELA, 2010; NCTE/IRA, 1996). Thus, many activities and lessons utilized often in ELA classrooms are shaped around students' verbal participation, including debates, Socratic seminars, literary discussions, presentations, and reading out loud. Scholars who specifically investigate ELA teachers' classroom practice have found that ELA teachers may devalue language practices that do not align with Standardized English. For example, Godley and colleagues (2007) described how one White, ELA teacher's practice, combined with the expectations inherent in her school's literacy curriculum, devalued and corrected students' use of AAVE and created areas of tension and miscommunication with students. Other scholars have also noted these tensions and miscommunications between ELA teachers and Black students who speak AAE (Godley et al., 2007; Rex, 2006). Rex (2006) explored three instances in which teachers and students negotiated race-related tensions in the classroom. In one example, a White male teacher mistook a Black female students' use of signifying, or the playful and skillful verbal sparring commonly utilized in AAVE, for a verbal "put down" of another student. Martin and Beese (2017) argue that ELA teachers may act as "language police," or understand English, broadly, as a language with rigid or

fixed rules that must be applied in writing as opposed to creating classrooms where students' language practices and, thus, identities are welcomed (p. 1225).

Misperceptions of students' talk and behavior in literacy classrooms can further impact perceptions of students' academic abilities or classroom identities (Learned, 2016; Leander, 2002; Wortham, 2004). Leander (2002) and Wortham (2004) both explored two separate instances in which Black female students were positioned by their classmates and literacy teachers as disruptive students based on interpretations of their talk and participation strategies, such as sharing out. Thus, perceptions of Black students' classroom talk can impact students' classroom experiences and learning opportunities. In sum, ELA teachers' perceptions of Black students' talk frequently relies on racialized assumptions about students' behavior and language ideologies that prioritize Standardized English. These assumptions can lead to misinterpretations of Black students' talk as aggressive, disrespectful, or incorrect and, in some cases, may lead to discipline or discriminatory practices.

Many scholars argue that teacher misperceptions of students' talk and behavior can be particularly pervasive when teacher and student race/ethnicity or culture do not align (Dee, 2005; Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Godley, 2012; Monroe, 2006; Staats, 2014; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Nationally representative data for the 2017-2018 school year indicate that, although U.S. schools are becoming increasingly more racially diverse, teacher populations remain predominantly White (approximately 80%) (NCES, 2020). Therefore, it's likely that students of color will interact most often in K-12 classrooms with White teachers. Although White teachers are certainly not the only teachers who can reproduce inequities in schools or hold biased beliefs about Black students, I focus specifically on White teachers in this study as they make up the largest population of K-12 school teachers across the country.

Studies related to Whiteness in schools tend to indicate that White teachers: (1) perceive or evaluate Black students' behaviors and academic abilities negatively (McGrady & Reynolds, 2014), (2) avoid discussions about or acknowledgement of race and racism (Ferguson, 2000; Pollock, 2004), and (3) reproduce or promote oppressive dynamics related to Whiteness and schooling (Hyland, 2005; Picower, 2009; Rivière, 2008; Yoon, 2012). However, other investigations of White teachers' practice also reveal that White teachers can be successful teachers of students of color and can and do engage in interrogations of Whiteness (Boucher, 2016; Harding, 2005), build relationships with students of color (Boucher, 2016), engage in race-talk (Williams et al., 2016), and utilize asset-based or critical pedagogies (Godley & Loretto, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Marcucci & Elmesky, 2020). With these possibilities in mind, my dissertation is framed around White secondary ELA teachers who self-identify as being committed to racial justice.

This study explored intersections of race, student talk/language, classroom discipline, and ELA teaching and learning by analyzing how four White ELA teachers who self-identified as committed to racial justice and taught in schools that served majority students of color approached classroom expectations for behavior and talk, discipline, student learning, as well as race-talk in the classroom. Although ELA teachers are not immune to broader social inequities and implicit racial biases, they have a unique potential to create classroom spaces focused on diverse literacy and language practices. The NCTE/IRA (1996) standards for English Language Arts specifically support the inclusion of diverse literature in ELA classrooms and encourage students to engage in and value a variety of language practices. To meet these expectations, ELA teachers, then, can shape their classrooms to offer students opportunities to value diverse literacy practices and

engagement with literacy learning (Martin & Beese, 2017). This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are White ELA teachers' explicit expectations for ELA classroom talk and behavior?

2. How do White ELA teachers' perceptions of and expectations for student talk and behavior in high school ELA classrooms shape their pedagogical approach to discipline, particularly for Black students?

In this study, I focus on teachers' perceptions of students' *classroom talk*, or talk that occurs within learning activities or in the classroom. This included perceptions of students' tone, volume and use of marginalized dialects during learning activities in ELA classrooms (particularly AAVE).

1.1 Key Terms

The term *race* is used in this study to refer to socially constructed categories with sociopolitical realities (Omi & Winant, 2007) based on physical appearance and upheld by systems of dominant racial ideology (Omi & Winant, 2005). Racial categories are understood to have both historical and contemporary impacts and meaning and are "constantly being transformed by political struggle" and thus, are not static (Omi & Winant, 2007). Race is understood in this context to be: (1) historically shifting (e.g., not fixed), (2) socially constructed, and (3) an identity space that "matters in daily life" (Lewis, 2017, p. 7), meaning, despite its social construction, race has real lived consequences and realities for individuals and groups.

Racism refers to a "system of advantage based on race" enacted to uphold systems of White supremacy (Tatum, 2004, p. 124). Unlike *prejudice*, or interpersonal, oppressive actions, thoughts,

and talk, *racism* integrates power and goes beyond individual dislike or mistreatment (Hoyt, 2012). Understanding racism as only interpersonal dislike or mistreatment based on racial beliefs ignores larger, structural, and systemic issues—like housing discrimination, police violence, racial profiling, the prison industrial complex, gentrification and other systems of Whiteness. Tatum (2004) argues that understanding racism as systemic oppression is difficult for Americans (particularly White Americans) to internalize because of meritocratic thinking, or the illusion that all individuals in the United States have equal access to power, opportunities, resources, and social mobility (p. 128).

1.2 Significance

Like Milner (2017), "I am particularly interested in issues of race as I work to study and support teacher development" (p. 66). Though my study investigates the talk of White teachers, I hope my study can also advocate for underserved and marginalized students by investigating teacher talk that may divest from or reproduce inequities. Given the historical and contemporary inequities Black students continue to face in schools, it is important to note that Black students and families have agency and are not passive victims of systemic racism and in-school oppression. Instead, Black students and their families have found ways to navigate, thrive within, and resist the systemically racist structures and inequities inherent in U.S. schooling. Findings   and implications from this study contribute to research that explores the complex and nuanced relationships between literacy teaching and learning, inequitable school discipline and race, as well as literature related to instructional best practices and professional development designed for anti-racist praxis.

1.3 Theoretical Basis of the Study

In my dissertation, I utilized multiple theoretical perspectives, including tenets and themes within Critical Race theory, specifically Critical Race Theory in Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), the Critical Race tenet of intersectionality (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1995), Whiteness in education, colorblind ideologies, and neutrality in education (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Sleeter, 2017). I also draw on theoretical perspectives related to teacher talk and teacher beliefs (Gee; 2015; Milner, 2017).

1.3.1 Racial Realities & Teacher Talk

This study takes a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective, which asserts that racism is a real, constant, and normalized reality of U.S. society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical Race Theory is an advocacy-centered theory and practice that is grounded in critical legal studies. CRT has also been taken up in other disciplines, such as Critical Race Theory in Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2005) and Critical Race Feminism in Education (Evans-Winters & Espositio, 2010). CRT has also "splintered" into various sub- or spin-off groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 6), including TribalCrit (McKinley & Brayboy, 2005) and LatCrit (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

In this study, I specifically draw on both Critical Race Theory in Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and the long-investigated assertion that race matters in schools and is often a predictor of in-school inequities (Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lewis, 2017; Milner, 2015) across intersections of students' identities. Although students' socioeconomic status (SES), immigration status, ability, and gender identity are also social realities that influence students' educational experiences and in-school inequities, inequities related to race and racism

tend to prevail in schools across identity markers. In other words, inequities related to class and gender alone do not account for the persistent racial inequities inherent in school outcomes, including discipline outcomes (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2015). Instead, scholars and activists have long investigated the intersectional experiences of Black students in schools, or the ways in which students' overlapping or intersecting identity markers (e.g. race, socioeconomic status, ability, and gender) affect the schooling experiences of students of color.

Therefore, I also draw on Crenshaw's (1995) Critical Race tenet of intersectionality and Collins's (2019) paradigmatic use of the tenet. I utilize intersectionality as a paradigm (Collins, 2019) to map the ways in which oppression can exist at the crossroads or intersections of identity and power, specifically for marginalized people and groups. Collins theorizes that intersectionality as a paradigm for critical inquiry is made up of the following constructs: relationality, power, social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice (p. 41). Together, these constructs rely on guiding principles that investigate the inter- and intra- relationships between and among individuals and groups, the complexities of these intersecting identity markers, how power and space complicate experiences and perspectives, how outside forces, not identity markers, reinforce social inequality, and the ways in which social problems may be solved through an intersectional lens.

In schools, scholars note that intersections of gender, socioeconomic status, and race impact Black students, specifically in terms of school discipline, in unique ways. Both Black girls and boys are often perceived as older than their actual age, less innocent, and more in need of punishment (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Epstein et al., 2017; Ferguson, 2000; Goff et al., 2014). Although Black boys tend to represent the majority group of over-disciplined students in schools (Duncan, 2000; Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2008, 2013; Noguera, 2003), Black girls have also been

found to experience inequitable discipline outcomes. Black girls are disciplined at higher rates than girls of other races (Annamma et al., 2019; Crenshaw, et al., 2015; Slate et al., 2016) and, in some cases, at higher rates than boys of other races (Morris & Perry, 2017). Scholars argue that, overall, these disparities are uniquely raced and gendered, and Black girls' behavior is often perceived through implicit, normalized or stereotypical intersecting representations of race and femininity (Annamma et al., 2019; Blake et al., 2011; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Epstein et al., 2017; Haynes et al., 2016; Morris, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2017). This is particularly salient in this study as Black girls are often disciplined for perceptions of their classroom talk. These perceptions are based in anti-Black stereotypes, which situate Black girls' talk as aggressive, un-ladylike, loud and confrontational (Morris, 2005).

Despite these racial realities, practitioners may struggle to engage in meaningful discourse about the impacts of racism on schooling experiences (Alvarez & Milner, 2018; Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2010; Lewis, 2017; Milner, 2017), or claim a colorblind perspective and deny the impacts of race and racism, particularly in their discourse (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Lewis, 2017; Pollock, 2004). For Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), discourse related to racism is often marginalized and one reason for continued racial inequities in schools. Milner (2015) noted that teachers very rarely engaged in "real" discourse about race, or conversations that noted and explored the intersecting impacts of race, racism, and systemic inequality (p. 10). Empirical research has shown that teachers, specifically White teachers, may avoid conversations about race and racism, particularly when discussing how teachers and students get along (e.g., classroom conflict and discipline) (Deckman, 2017; Ferguson, 2000; Pollock, 2004). In other words, even when racial inequities are a reality in a given school, teachers may still enact discursive practices that enlist a colorblind (Bonilla-Silva, 2018) or colormute (Pollock, 2004) mindset that avoids considerations of race,

racism, and implicit racial bias as possible factors that inform teacher discipline decision making. Lewis (2017) found that teachers' attempts to downplay, ignore, or trivialize incidents related to race and school conflict did not address the harm caused by racial bias or bullying and instead may have caused more harm for all students.

From a Critical Race Theory in Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) standpoint, engaging in conversation about race and racism is essential to disrupting racially inequitable school outcomes and experiences, including discipline outcomes. In response, scholars encourage teachers to engage authentically in race talk (Milner, 2017), or talk that recognizes race and racial realities. Carter and colleagues (2017) rightfully claim in their article title, "You Can't Fix What You Don't Look At," and encourage teachers and other practitioners to not just engage more often in discussions about race but, like Milner (2015), also engage in "real," meaningful, and thorough discussions about race and racism in order to disrupt inequitable, harmful practices, specifically those related to school discipline.

Because teacher talk is imbedded with teacher knowledge and beliefs, including racial beliefs (Gee, 2015; Milner, 2017; Pollock, 2004), studying teacher talk is one way to understand both teacher practice and teacher beliefs (Milner, 2017). Therefore, I approach this study with the understanding that teacher talk can convey teachers' beliefs about students, and those beliefs can have direct effects and consequences for students.

1.3.2 White Teachers

In this study, I focus specifically on White teachers. White teachers represent the majority of teachers in the U.S. and are therefore likely to interact with and teach students who do not share their race or ethnicity (NCES, 2020). Broadly, Whiteness has come to be understood as both a

racial category and the unexamined culture of power and privilege of those who are identified as white (Lensmire, 2012).

Whiteness has also been theorized as a commodity, or as property (Harris, 1993). In other words, Whiteness is a racial identification coupled with power and is systemic, or supported by law and other systems of power. In education research, Critical Race theorists argue that "Whiteness and White interests" (Sleeter, 2017, p. 155) are reproduced in schools because of colorblind ideologies that perpetuate the idea that education and educational experiences are "neutral" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Sleeter, 2017; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). For Sleeter (2017), this neutrality can implicitly perpetuate Whiteness in schools and create normalized beliefs and practices, including norms related to language, talk, and behavior (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Delpit, 2006), that are "so normalized that they are usually taken for granted" (p. 163). Neutral or normalized beliefs and practices in schools can implicitly erase the unique schooling experiences of marginalized students and further perpetuate racism in schools.

Lensmire (2012) asserted that White teachers are often positioned in education research as either "the object of our hope or of our disdain" (p. 5). In other words, scholars tend to investigate the ways in which White teachers learn to engage in critical, race-centered (Milner, 2017), or asset-based practices (Ladson-Billings, 2006), or the ways in which White teachers reproduce racism and replicate racial harm in schools (Lensmire, 2012). Thus, scholars have documented how White in- and pre-service teachers may: (1) avoid, silence, or reject discussions about race and racism (Ferguson, 2000; Pollock, 2004) and Whiteness (Picower, 2009), (2) perceive students of color negatively (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013), (3) reproduce Whiteness or hegemony in schools (Hyland, 2005; Rivière, 2008; Picower, 2009; Yoon, 2012), (4) engage in discourse that shields them from recognizing how they have benefited from racism and privilege (McIntyre, 1997), (5)

situate negative in-school outcomes with students (Gregory & Mosley, 2004; Rogers & Brooms, 2020) and/or students' families (Sleeter, 2017; Will, 2019), and (6) anticipate misbehavior from students of color (Goff et al., 2014; Gilliam et al., 2016; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015).

However, scholars have also found that White teachers can successfully utilize race-centered or asset-based practices and adjust their teaching practices to meet the needs of students of color (Milner, 2010), build relationships and solidarity with students of color (Boucher, 2016; Milner, 2010), discuss and disrupt their own Whiteness (Boucher, 2016), divest from colorblind ideologies (Milner, 2010), and engage in asset-based pedagogies with students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006). With this in mind, I focused on the practices of White teachers who have engaged or are currently engaging in work that centers racial justice and advocacy in schools and with their students.

1.4 Methods

In this qualitative study, I investigated: (1) which explicit classroom expectations govern teachers' perceptions of students' talk and behavior in ELA classrooms, (2) what classroom talk is encouraged, negotiated or punished in literacy classrooms, and (3) how teachers' beliefs about student talk and behavior promoted or disrupted students' access to literacy learning, particularly for Black students. I interviewed four White English Language Arts (ELA) teachers who self-identified as committed to racial justice in education and taught in schools that served a majority population of students of color. Teachers' commitment to racial justice was based on their participation in the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Urban Education Summer Educator

Forum (CUESEF), a voluntary summer program for educators focused explicitly on race, racism, and schools. Teachers were recruited from four different secondary schools within two school districts in the same region. The teachers in my study, Cole, Olivia, Katie, and Michelle, aimed to develop their understanding of racism and schooling. I hypothesized that their talk and beliefs might complicate current understandings of White teachers' beliefs and practice.

Drawing on Rubin and Rubin's (2005) qualitative interview process, the responsive interview model, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with teacher participants. I interviewed each teacher three times, for a total of 12 interviews averaging 52 minutes in length. Due to the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was not able to observe teachers in their classes and all interviews were virtual and collected via Zoom. I followed Rubin and Rubin's (2005) qualitative interview analysis strategy, which calls for researchers to cyclically: (1) recognize broad themes and concepts in transcripts, (2) systematically clarify, synthesize, and elaborate on themes, (3) create codes and coding structures, (4) sort and organize the data by codes, looking for nuance, and (5) synthesize codes and themes that align with the purpose of the study.

As a former White secondary literacy educator of majority Black students, I can identify with my participants' efforts to create race-centered classroom communities and learning opportunities. In my teaching practice and now as a researcher, I have worked to continually develop my racial awareness both in and outside of the classroom. As I work to be critical of and disrupt my own racial biases as a teacher, researcher and White woman, I recognize that I am always in process and remain a beneficiary of a racist society. In this study, I focus my attention on the ways White teachers shape their beliefs and classrooms in the hopes of creating equitable learning opportunities for their students, particularly for Black students and other students of color—students who have been historically and contemporarily marginalized in schooling spaces

and literacy learning. Though I am investigating, and thus, centering, the practices of White teachers in this study, my hope is that a focus on White teacher practice might benefit both teacher development and the in-school experiences of marginalized students.

2.0 Literature Review

In the sections that follow, I summarize and synthesize relevant empirical literature about the problem of practice this study investigated. This included studies about racially inequitable classroom discipline, subjective and racialized interpretations of Black students' talk and behavior, and teacher beliefs about language variety in ELA classrooms. Themes include: (1) Racial disparities in office discipline referrals, (2) racialized perceptions of student behavior, (3) discipline experiences for Black girls, (4) student perspectives, (5) effects of school context, (6) racialized perceptions of student talk, (7) punishing student talk, (8) teacher-student racial/ethnic match, and (9) White teachers' anti-racist or racially aware classroom practices.

2.1 Inequitable Discipline Outcomes by Race and Gender

Although Black students account for only 15% of the total U.S. student population, they represent 40% of students who had been suspended and 31% of students who had been referred to law enforcement or arrested on school grounds (CRDC, 2017). Although Black male students represent the majority of over-disciplined students (Duncan, 2000; Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2008, 2013; Noguera, 2003), scholarship has also documented the unique raced and gendered experiences of Black girls in schools, particularly experiences with inequitable discipline or punishment outcomes (Annamma et al., 2019; Blake et al., 2011; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2007; Winn, 2011). Girls, in general, are situated as scapegoats for broader achievement and behavioral issues in schools. In other words, girls may be held responsible for

the achievement and behavior of their male peers, and this responsibility can be imbedded in school rules and other practices, such as dress code (Goodkind & Bey-Cheng, 2019), and may lead to inequitable discipline outcomes. Black girls, in particular, are disciplined at higher rates than girls of other races (Annamma et al., 2019; Crenshaw, et al., 2015; Slate et al., 2016) and, in some cases, at higher rates than boys of other races (Morris & Perry, 2017). Scholars argue that Black girls are over-disciplined for behaviors perceived through implicit, normalized or stereotypical intersecting representations of race and femininity (e.g., alignment with a school's dress code) (Annamma et al., 2019; Blake et al., 2011; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Epstein et al., 2017; Haynes et al., 2016; Morris & Perry, 2017).

Black students are also disproportionately selected for discipline through the distribution of office discipline referrals (Anyon et al., 2014; Rocque, 2010; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011; Skiba et al., 2002), specifically for subjective behaviors (Girvan et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2002). Girvan and colleagues (2016) found that the racially disproportionate distribution of ODRs for subjective behaviors (e.g., disrespect or defiance) accounted for the majority of disproportionality in ODR distribution overall. They theorized that subtler implicit racial biases are likely a large influence on teacher decision making about students' subjective behaviors.

Although some practitioners and policy makers may assume that students who are disciplined more must misbehave more often, scholarship has long proven that student behavior does not account for the racial disparities inherent in school discipline outcomes (Anyon et al., 2014; Huang, 2020; Rocque, 2010; Skiba, et al., 2002). Instead, scholars have found that Black students are disciplined more often and more harshly for the same or similar behaviors as their other raced peers (Ritter & Anderson, 2018) regardless of variations in school context (e.g., school

demographics) or individual student factors (e.g., socioeconomic or ability status) (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Because of these persistent racial inequities, some schools now operate under policies and laws intended to lower rates of punitive punishments (Harper, 2020). These laws differ from state to state and can take many forms, such as banning the use of suspensions for certain age groups, or implementing alternatives to exclusionary punishment, such as a restorative justice approach. However, for Harper (2020), policy changes and lowered rates of suspensions do not equate to school change or racial equity, particularly for Black students. McIntosh et al. (2020) found that simply sharing reports of racially inequitably discipline outcomes with administrators was not enough to encourage change related to discipline and equity which suggests that policy changes that do not address systemic racism will not create sweeping change.

2.2 Impacts of Punitive Discipline

Punitive discipline practices, or punishment-oriented discipline strategies that inequitably impact marginalized students, include suspensions (CRDC, 2016), certain school security measures, such as resource officers (Finn & Servoss, 2014; Nance, 2017; Servoss & Finn, 2014), and zero tolerance policies (Crenshaw et al, 2015; Nance, 2017; Winn, 2011). The use of punitive discipline practices can have negative and lingering impacts on students, including removal from or inequitable access to school (Losen & Whitaker, 2018), negative impacts on developing trust and positive relationships with school adults (Anyon et al., 2016), exposure to law enforcement (Finn & Servoss, 2014; Nance, 2017; Servoss & Finn, 2014), school push out (Morris, 2016), and future incarceration (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017). Although school discipline procedures established

with best intentions for student safety and overall well-being can be a necessary component of schooling, the use of widespread and heavily adopted punitive discipline policies and practices have been found to criminalize students, specifically Black and Brown students, thereby pushing students out of learning environments and toward law enforcement.

This process, often called the school-to-prison pipeline, or the cradle-to-prison pipeline (Milner et al., 2019), shows the ways through which students who experience inequitable punishment in school (sometimes as early as preschool and kindergarten) have a higher chance of being "funneled" or pushed into punitive spaces, such as prisons or jails, in their adolescent and adult lives. Milner and colleagues (2019) explain that both out-of-school and in-school factors contribute to the cradle-to-prison pipeline (CTPP). Out-of-school factors, like access to resources and opportunity, inequitable funding, and experiences of trauma, may occur outside of school but remain impactful to students' in-school experiences. This study focuses specifically on the in-school factors that Milner et al. (2019) list, including: (1) zero-tolerance policies, (2) subjective school adult practices, (3) lack of teacher training or preparation that centers race and class, and (4) the criminalization or hyper-surveillance of schools (p. 36).

Exclusionary discipline and its impacts on student learning are issues of racial equity. Nationally representative data from 2018 showed that K-12 students collectively missed 11 million days of school due to out-of-school suspensions (Losen & Whitaker, 2018). Further, Losen and Whitaker found that, when the data was calculated out of 100 students, Black students lost 66 days of instruction due to out-of-school suspensions, compared to 14 days lost for White students (Losen & Whitaker, 2018). Though some may argue that an increase in the removal of "troublemaking" students from classrooms could curb unwanted school behaviors and promote academic success, scholars often find that the opposite is true (Noguera, 2003; Rausch & Skiba,

2005). At the national level, racial disparities in discipline and achievement increase together (Pearman et al., 2019). In other words, higher increases in racial disparities in discipline outcomes are also reflected in higher racial disparities in achievement results, making learning and school discipline "two sides of the same coin" (Gregory et al., 2010, p. 59). Both exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspensions, and zero tolerance policies can operate to criminalize student behavior and remove students from learning environments, therefore disrupting students' equitable access to classrooms and classroom resources (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Punitive discipline practices also inequitably impact the learning opportunities of Black students with disabilities. In the 2011-2012 U.S. school year, Black male students with disabilities were at the highest risk for receiving a suspension, and Black female students with disabilities were disciplined at higher rates than their White male peers with disabilities (Losen et al., 2015). For Losen and colleagues (2015), because students with disabilities cannot legally be suspended for behaviors caused by their disability, this trend could "suggest that the rights of students with disabilities along the lines of race and gender are being unlawfully violated" (p. 7).

Exposure to law enforcement in schools is also an issue of racial equity. Studies indicate that Black and low-income students are more likely to attend schools that utilize increased security measures, including the presence of a resource officer (Finn & Servoss, 2014; Servoss & Finn, 2015). Increases in security measures are associated with both increased suspension rates as well as increased racial disparities in suspension rates (Finn & Servoss, 2014, p. 2). In these circumstances, school practices, like surveillance cameras, law enforcement on campus, and the overall control of student bodies and movement, can create prison-like conditions (Noguera, 2003), and these conditions can expose students to arrest and possible police violence. Although all students certainly deserve a promise of safety on campus, reports of resource officers mishandling

discipline issues in schools reveal broader systemic issues (Ryan et al., 2018). Ryan and colleagues (2018) explained that not all U.S. states have specific training, certification processes, or specific guidelines/restrictions for resource officers, which can result in the mishandling of student behaviors. And, when school staff call for resource officers to handle classroom behavioral issues, students are exposed to more formal and detrimental punishments, such as arrests or fines. For Black students, this is particularly troubling, as reports of police brutality and racial profiling continue in and out of schools.

Lastly, scholarship has documented how racially inequitable discipline practices can impact students' positive relationships with their peers (Bryan, 2017; O'Connor, 2020) as well as levels of trust with their teachers (Anyon et al., 2016; Gregory & Thompson, 2010; Perry & Morris, 2014; Voight et al., 2015). In a recent lecture, O'Connor (2020) explained,

> The inclination to surveille and to interpret the Black body in threatening or volatile ways is not simply founded in Black distortions. This inclination also reifies these distortions—prospectively carrying the consequences deep into the future. In those repeated moments when teachers, administrators, security officers, or other school staff label Black boys and girls as trouble, there are witnesses to their labeling—namely, the other students in that school or classroom. All these child witnesses will grow into adults and carry with them these vulgar images of who Blacks are and are not (p. 473).

The racial beliefs of school adults, as conveyed through talk and practice, often shape and control the discourse of race within schools (Hooks & Miskovic, 2011; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Watson, 2011; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Thus, teacher beliefs about Black students and behavior have lingering impacts on the school and life experiences for both Black children and their peers (Bryan, 2017). Teachers and administrators are in a unique position to shape classroom dynamics

and race-conscious discourse, as well as disrupt practices that may lead to inequitable treatment of Black students and the reproduction of anti-Blackness in schools.

2.3 Teachers' Racialized Perceptions of Subjective Behaviors

Scholars have investigated how teachers' (mis)perceptions of Black students' behaviors are filtered through racial beliefs and stereotypes and contribute to racial inequities in school discipline. Overall, empirical studies have found that teachers are more likely to expect misbehavior from Black students and view the behaviors of Black children as more serious, more in need of punishment, or more likely to occur again (Gilliam et al., 2016; Kunesh and Noltemeyer, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Through this lens, teachers may interpret subjective behaviors, such as disrespect, defiance, or disruptions, as more sinister, more intentional, and more deserving of punishment when enacted by Black students. In this way, Black students may be "adultified" (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Epstein et al., 2017; Ferguson, 2000; Goff et al., 2014), or perceived by adults to be more adult-like and less innocent and therefore more culpable and more deserving of punishment.

In their pivotal study, Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) provided teachers with two mock vignettes of a classroom misbehavior which included a name that was intended to signal to participants whether the student was White or Black. The description of the misbehavior was left intentionally vague, subjective, and non-violent (e.g., a class disruption). They found that teachers were more likely to: (1) say they would suspend the student for the misbehavior, (2) hypothesize future misbehavior from the student, (3) recommend harsher discipline, and (4) associate the infraction with more serious implications when they identified the student as Black.

22

Similarly, Gilliam and colleagues (2016) provided early education in- and pre-service teachers with a video recording of a preschool classroom and prompted teacher participants to believe that a misbehavior occurred at some point in the video clip. Teachers were asked to indicate when they noted disruptive or otherwise problematic classroom behaviors. The researchers found that preschool teacher participants across race were more likely to observe, or visually track, Black students when they were expecting to see negative in-class student behaviors.

Kunesh and Noltemeyer (2019) also showed teacher participants a vignette of an intentionally vague classroom misbehavior (an act of defiance) associated with a student name intended to signal the student's race. They found teachers who identified the student as Black were more likely to report their belief that the classroom misbehavior would occur again. The researchers theorized that this belief of behavior stability, or the belief that a misbehavior will be repeated, could result in a higher likelihood of teacher differentiated referrals for Black students. Assumptions about behavioral stability can lead to behavioral reputations and may impact teachers' future discipline decision making. Rueda (2015) found that elementary students with behavioral reputations, described by their teachers as "trouble kids" or students with "impulse control issues" (p. 280), were often punished for misbehaviors whereas students without behavioral reputations, or students whose misbehavior might be read as "uncharacteristic" (p. 282), went unpunished for the same or similar misbehaviors. Thus, behavioral reputations, or believing student behavior will occur again, can prove inequitable and can influence discipline choices.

Scholars have often investigated how teachers' (mis)perceptions of Black students' talk may be filtered through racial beliefs and stereotypes and, in some cases, lead to discipline or student reprimand (Ferguson, 2000; Fordham, 1983; Godley, 2012; Morris, 2007). For example, teachers may (mis)interpret Black students' classroom talk, including volume and tone of voice,

as rude (e.g., signifying interpreted as put downs; Rex, 2006), disrespectful (e.g., having an attitude, Koonce, 2012), or disruptive (e.g., loud; Morris, 2005). In these instances, scholars note that teacher perceptions of Black students' talk are often compounded with teachers' racial beliefs and may lead to assumptions about intention and tone (e.g., having an attitude, attempting to take control of the class away from the teacher) (Ferguson, 2000; Morris, 2007).

In Ferguson's (2000) pivotal piece about racial attitudes and school discipline, she found that Black boys were punitively labeled "disruptive" and were sometimes disciplined for how their talk was perceived by teachers. Ferguson argued that the verbal sparring that students engaged in with school adults was interpreted by teachers as disruptive to learning, challenges to authority, or threatening. Thus, Ferguson argued, the speech patterns of Black male students were adultified and seen less as youthful boundary testing and more as a threatening behavior. Similarly, Milner (2015) analyzed three instances in which Black students were punished for teachers' interpretations of their talk and tone. In the selected vignettes, teachers perceived Black students as too loud, disrespectful, and "mouthy" (p.119) and were removed from the classroom, written up, or sent to the office for further punishment because of how their talk was perceived.

Scholars also note that Black girls can be perceived by school adults as loud or verbally demonstrating attitude or disrespect (Koonce, 2012; Lei, 2003; Morris, 2005, 2007; Morris & Perry, 2017; Morris, 2016). Morris (2005, 2007) found that Black girls were often described by their teachers as verbally assertive, aggressive, or too loud and in some cases were punished by teachers because of the volume of their voice and for certain verbal attempts to gain the teachers' attention in class (e.g., saying an answer out loud without first raising a hand). Similarly, Koonce (2012) also argued that negative teacher perceptions of Black students' talk as loud was also compounded with teacher beliefs about attitude or respect. In her study, she found that Black

female adolescents often reported that their schooling environments were hostile. They believed their teachers often created disrespectful environments in which they had to "talk with attitude" in order to resist injustice or disrespect. In classrooms where student talk is part of learning, such as ELA classrooms, Black students may be particularly vulnerable to teachers' perceptions of their classroom talk.

2.4 ELA Classrooms and Perceptions of Students' Talk

Teacher perceptions of students' talk may be particularly salient in English Language Arts classrooms, as exemplary ELA teaching and learning is often guided by student talk. The NCTE/IRA (1996) standards for literacy teaching, as well as the Pennsylvania Common Core State Standards (2020) for English Language Arts both emphasize the importance of incorporating student verbal participation into classroom learning, as well as students' openness to various languages and literacy practices. Hence, ELA teachers are expected to incorporate opportunities for students to verbally engage in discussion, presentations, and arguments as well as expose students to variations in language and literacy. In addition to meeting the standards of literacy teaching, student classroom talk is also linked to student learning and classroom equity (Applebee et al., 2003; Juzwick et al., 2013).

However, scholars note that language and literacy differences between ELA teachers and students can impact classroom dynamics, particularly for students of color, multi-lingual students, and students from low-income households. Variations in student and teacher language can lead to miscommunications that privilege normalized patterns of speaking (i.e., Standardized English) and may lead to assumptions about students' academic abilities, attitudes, and behavior. Scholars that

investigate raciolinguistics, or the racialization of language (Alim, 2016), argue that race, language and culture should be theorized together to explore how raciolinguistic ideologies may perpetuate beliefs about race and language, including assumptions about intelligence, academic appropriateness, and linguistic deviance that can perpetuate racism in schools (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Flores and Rosa theorize that raciolinguistic ideologies further perpetuate notions that certain language patterns can be categorized as "standard" or "academic" and urge practitioners and scholars to reframe these notions as projects of raciolinguistic ideologies and not "objective linguistic categories" (p. 152). In English Language Arts classrooms, raciolinguistic ideologies include the privileging of one language over another, the erasure, surveillance, or control of certain languages or dialects in schools, and negative beliefs about students' academic abilities based on their language preferences.

In Heath's (1983) pivotal study, she found that students from two different communities engaged in literacy and language practices that were not privileged in their schools. In her study, mainstream teachers often held negative assumptions about low-income students and students of color due, in part, to language differences, miscommunication, and beliefs about language and academic abilities. Across multiple decades, scholars continue to find that minoritized students may be redirected or corrected for using languages other than Standardized English in schools (Delpit, 2006; Godley et al., 2007; Rex, 2006; Smitherman, 1972). Though these redirections do not necessarily always lead to formal discipline, teacher language ideologies, or beliefs that compound ideas about language "correctness," can shape classroom dynamics and establish which language practices are acceptable, or academic, and which are not (Delpit, 2006; Godley & Carpenter, 2007; Heath, 1983; Smitherman, 1972).

Relevant to this study, scholars have also noted these linguistic and ideological tensions and miscommunications between ELA teachers and Black students who speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Godley & Carpenter, 2007; Rex, 2006). Godley and Carpenter (2007) examined how one White ELA teacher's language ideologies impacted her classroom. In her classroom, the teacher enforced the use of Standardized English, a language ideology that was reinforced in her school's curriculum, and established rules for speaking, reading, and writing that aligned with her school's standards of "business appropriate" literacy practices (p. 109). The teacher often redirected or corrected Black students' use of AAVE, which promoted a "proper" way of using language (i.e., Standardized English) in her classroom. Her expectation that students' exclusively speak Standardized English allowed for only one way of engaging in literacy learning. In one classroom episode, a Black female student defended her use of AAVE to the teacher, thus indicating her validation that her language practices have value. Martin and Beese (2017) argue that, when ELA teachers believe English to have a fixed set of rules and, thus, promote a Standardized-English-only classroom, students may feel that their language practices and thus, their identities, are not valued in the classroom.

Rex (2006) examined how the "…racial dimensions of culture are negotiated in classroom instructional talk" (p. 277) by examining moment-to-moment classroom interactions related to language use between three teachers and their students. One teacher, a White male language arts teacher, was described as holding explicit expectations for students' classroom talk. The teacher had strictly enforced rules regarding classroom talk which could be punished if broken. In his classroom, Rex noted, students did not speak often with one another, only one conversation was held at a time, and all students were expected to speak Standardized English. In one interaction, the teacher redirected a Black female student's use of "signifying," a discourse

pattern in African American English that relies on quick and clever wordplay. The teacher ultimately classified this type of playful verbal sparring as a "put down" to another student. Though the student was not formally punished in this instance, they were removed from the classroom briefly to speak with the teacher. Rex pointed out the ways in which teachers can establish both implicit and explicit rules around student talk and the ways in which patterns of AAE can be misinterpreted and made punishable by teachers.

Additionally, ELA teachers' perceptions of students' classroom talk or verbal contributions can also shape how students, peers, and teachers understand students as learners. Leander (2002) and Wortham (2004) both explored two separate instances in which Black female students were positioned in literacy classrooms by their classmates and teachers as disruptive, disrespectful or "bad" students based on interpretations of their talk and participation strategies, such as methods for sharing out. In Wortham's study, one Black female student, Tyisha, was slowly positioned as a "disruptive outcast" in class based on perceptions of her verbal classroom participation. This positioning and perception of Tyisha was echoed in her peer's classroom interactions with her and showed up in how teachers responded to Tyisha's classroom contributions. In Leander's study (2002), Latanya, a Black female student, was positioned by her classmates as "ghetto" based on her classroom interactions. During a conversation about racial slurs, Latanya and a White peer disagreed about the impact and harm of certain racial slurs. Her reactions in the argument were perceived negatively by her classmates and, in response, another Black student told Latanya to, "stop acting ghetto" (p. 200). Ultimately, Latanya's verbal participation and behavior during the discussion, despite their relevance to the class discussion topic, were categorized as unwelcome. Both studies showcased the ways in

28

which student verbal participation in literacy classrooms were intricately tied to assumptions about race and gender.

Scholars have offered varied and, in some cases, conflicting solutions to language ideologies in the classroom. While some scholars argue that students should have access to the language, or codes, of power (in this case, Standardized English) alongside of their home languages in order to access systems of power that dominant groups occupy (Delpit, 2006), other scholars push for a more critical (Godley & Reaser, 2018), anti-racist approach to dialect diversity in the classroom (Baker-Bell, 2020). Godley and Reaser (2018) promote a critical language pedagogy for teachers in which literacy teachers unpack their language ideologies, their beliefs about language and identity, and their knowledge for teaching students about language diversity. A critical language pedagogy encourages teachers to understand, respect and incorporate student languages into the classroom alongside of and equal to Standardized English practices. Baker-Bell (2020) promotes an anti-racist approach to language diversity in the classroom. In line with other scholarship about language and dialect diversity (Godley & Reaser, 2018; Smitherman), Baker-Bell stresses the important history and complex rules and intricacies of Black language. Anti-racist Black Language Pedagogy interrogates and rejects "White linguistic hegemony" and centers and promotes the language and literacy practices of Black students. Ultimately, all of these approaches are intended to promote teacher learning and knowledge about language and dialect diversity in the classroom.

Raciolinguistic ideologies continue to inequitably impact students of color in ELA classrooms. For Smitherman (2017) raciolinguistic ideological assumptions about Black students and the use of African American Language (AAL) have remained much the same in ELA classrooms, rendering language arts teachers focused on grammatical "correctness." However, de

29

los Rios and colleagues (2019) argue that ELA scholars and practitioners can imagine another way forward in which ELA teachers (1) recognize the historical and contemporary racial harm inherent in literacy learning, (2) reject hegemonic and racialized understandings of literacy and language, and (3) engage ELA teaching and learning as a tool for justice and equity.

2.5 Overlapping Beliefs about Race, Behavior and Learning

In today's schools, students are more racially segregated than before court-ordered desegregation laws. This process, referred to as "re-segregation," can have broad impacts on students, including their opportunity to learn with, from and alongside their other raced peers (Thompson-Dorsey, 2013). Additionally, re-segregation may impact a school's response to punitive discipline.

Edwards (2016) investigated how school racial composition impacted discipline outcomes. She found that an increase in the number of Black students at a school increased the school's likelihood of utilizing punitive discipline practices. Further, she noted that Black students were particularly vulnerable to inequitable discipline in racially homogenous environments (both Black or White). Black students are disproportionately affected by and more likely to be enrolled in school environments that stress behavioral control, utilize punitive over restorative practices (Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba et al., 2014; Welch & Payne, 2010). In environments like these, schools may be implicitly promoting behavioral compliance and control over or alongside of student learning (Tyre, 2010). For example, Tyson (2003) found that teachers in his study, who taught all Black students, implicitly promoted the belief that being "good," or being well-behaved, came as a precursor to learning. Environments similar to these, as reflected in Graham's (2020)

study in a no-excuses charter school, can cause students to feel as if "the ability to comply with rules and expectations becomes key to success as a 'scholar'" (p. 672). Though students reported both feelings of frustration and safety in the no-excuses charter environment, Graham argues that such restriction on student body movement and voice can impact how students interpret institutions as well as their place within them.

Second, teacher racial bias or beliefs can impact the likelihood of discipline and student learning opportunities. For example, Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair and Shelton (2016) found that instructors' implicit racial bias predicted: (1) instructor levels of anxiety when teaching Black students and (2) "diminished test performance on the part of Black, but not White, learners" (p. 50). They noted that the diminished rate of performance was equal to almost one typical classroom letter grade. Further, scholars have found that teachers often situated disparities of discipline and academics with Black students and their families (Gregory & Mosley, 2004; Rogers & Broom, 2020; Smith & Smith, 2008). For example, Rogers and Broom's (2020), in their case study with two early career White male teachers who taught all Black male students in a charter school, found that both teachers often rationalized disparities in achievement through meritocratic thinking and racial stereotype and further "implicated the identities" of students as barriers to student success (p. 449).

Scholars also note that racial bias or negative racial beliefs can impact student perceptions of classrooms and can also impact schooling experiences. McKown and Weinstein (2008) found that, in classrooms classified by students as high bias classrooms, "teacher expectancy effects accounted for an average of .29 and up to .38 SD of the year-end ethnic achievement gap" (p. 235). Similarly, Mattison and Aber (2007) found that Black students were more likely to report a negative school racial climate than their White peers and perceptions of negative racial climate

were further "associated with lower grades and more detentions and suspensions" (p. 9). In addition to reports of school racial climate, Gregory, Cornell and Fan (2011) found that schools with lower rates of student-reported academic rigor and support had larger suspension outcomes. Schools characterized as academically "indifferent" were more likely to suspend students (p. 921) and had larger suspension disparities by race than schools with higher reports of academic rigor or support. However, Gregory and colleagues also found that, even within schools with reports of lower academic rigor, having a teacher who showed academic support and upheld academic rigor was associated with a school's lower suspension rates.

Racial disparities in schools can also impact student connectedness and trust with school adults (Anyon et al., 2016; Gregory & Thompson, 2010; Perry & Morris, 2014; Voight et al., 2015). For example, Voight, Hanson, O'Malley and Adekanye (2015) found that Black students reported lower (1) feelings of in-school safety, (2) equal opportunities, and (3) connectedness to school adults in schools with nationally reported higher accounts of negative racial climate. Perry and Morris (2014) found that high levels of suspension in a school were associated with decreases in academic achievement among students, even students who had not been suspended. They explained, "punishment is not leveled simply at a single act, or even a single individual, but occurs within a web of social relations, affecting social networks and communicating social messages. Excessive exclusionary discipline may produce social psychological outcomes that endure well after the punishment itself and well beyond the individual who is punished..." (p. 1083). Gregory and Thompson (2010) found that Black students' perceptions of in-class racial discrimination affected student relationships with teachers and student discipline outcomes. Ultimately, if students felt racially discriminated against, they were more likely to have negative discipline experiences with teachers. Further, Anyon, Zhang and Hazel (2016) found that racial disparities

in exclusionary discipline practices affected student feelings of connectedness and trust with adults, even for students who did not experience exclusionary punishment.

Ultimately, implicit racial bias, classroom behavior, talk and language, school discipline and student learning opportunities continue to be intertwined in complex ways.

2.6 Effective White Teacher Practice

Alongside findings that indicate the ways in which Black students experience harm in schools based on teachers' perception of classroom talk and behavior, other scholars have focused on the pedagogical practices of successful teachers of students of color. Though findings often indicate that White teachers can implicitly inform their practice with racial biases, White teachers are also capable of engaging in race-talk (Williams et al., 2016), developing their racial awareness (Skerrett, 2011), and conducting their classroom in anti-racist, racially literate or culturally relevant ways (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2010; Skerrett, 2011).

Scholars note that a commitment to race-talk and the validation of students' knowledge and experiences is essential to anti-racist work. In their study about students' psychological safety during episodes of classroom race-talk, Williams and colleagues (2016) noted the ways in which two White teachers engaged in effective race-talk with their students. In these instances, though bumping up occasionally against "racial blunders," or instances of misspeak or shutting down certain ideas in the classroom, both White teachers validated students' knowledge and experiences and shared power with students during the discussion. Williams and colleagues, along with other scholars (Howard, 2004), note that, though race-talk can and does illicit strong emotions (namely, discomfort), teachers can draw on specific tools (i.e., power sharing) to create classrooms where

33

students' feel psychologically safe to engage in race-talk and work through questions, discomforts and emotions.

Godley and Loretto (2013) also noted the ways in which one White literacy teacher engaged in a critical language unit with students. The teacher did not shy away from issues related to race and racism, validated and centered student knowledge, and co-created counternarratives about language and schooling with her Black students. Similarly, Skerrett (2011) investigated the racial literacy practices of literacy teachers. Though not all teachers in her study were engaged in effective racial literacy practices, she found that a handful of White teachers were engaged in sustained and strategic racial literacy practice, which was defined by teachers' understanding of race as a tool to guide curricular and instructional decisions and a commitment to engaging in race-talk in the classroom. Ultimately, engaging in safe and effective race-talk or recognizing the importance and impacts of race and racism in students' lives is one way for classroom teachers to welcome students' whole selves into the classroom (Howard, 2004; Milner, 2015; Williams et al., 2016).

Scholars also note the importance of relationship building and a rejection of colorblindness as central to being effective teachers of students of color. In her pivotal text on culturally relevant teacher practice, Ladson-Billings (2006) details the beliefs and practices of teachers, in some cases, White teachers, who have developed a culturally relevant approach to teaching and learning. For Ladson-Billings, effective teachers of Black children worked to ensure that "students diverse cultural backgrounds are central" to the classroom and the learning (p. 53). The White teachers in her study were developing deep connections with their Black students and relying on the assets and strengths they believed their Black students brought to the classroom. One White teacher in

the study, Ms. Lewis, promoted classroom community and care with her students. She hoped that student knowledge and selves were represented in the classroom.

In his case study, Boucher (2016) described the ways in which one White male teacher was successful with his students of color. Mark, the teacher participant, developed deep relationships with students that relied on knowledge of students' lives and experiences both in and outside of school, as well as building solidarity with students across cultural differences (Crowley, 2016; Milner, 2010). Mark also actively questioned and interrogated his whiteness in effective ways, a practice that race scholars note is imperative to effectively teaching students of color (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Harding, 2005; Utt & Tochulk, 2020).

Lastly, scholars note that classroom management practices might also be culturally relevant and rely on a knowledge of students and the avoidance of harmful, zero tolerance or punitive measures that inequitably impact Black students (Milner et al., 2019; Weinstein et al., 2003). In their study, Marcucci and Elmesky (2020) noted the effective classroom management practices of two White male teachers engaging in culturally relevant classroom management practices (Weinstein et al, 2003). The teachers engaged in discourse and practice that situated students as learners first (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and learned and incorporated student interest into the classroom environment, sometimes as ways to redirect students in the classroom.

Though scholars note that White teachers can and do enact micro and macro aggressions toward their Black students, the scholarship here offers a hopeful step forward in identifying the effective practices of White teachers of majority students of color. Despite their effective practices in a few of the studies described here, White teachers also engaged in talk or practice that would benefit from further work. Ultimately, Crowley (2016) urged researchers and teacher educators to embrace the messiness of White teachers' racial development.

35

3.0 Methods

In this qualitative study, I investigated: (1) what explicit classroom expectations govern teachers' perceptions of students' talk and behavior in ELA classrooms, (2) what classroom talk is encouraged, negotiated or punished in literacy classrooms, (3) how teachers' beliefs about student talk and behavior promoted or disrupted students' access to literacy learning, particularly for Black students, and (4) teachers' beliefs about the causes of inequity in schools. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are White ELA teachers' explicit expectations for ELA classroom talk and behavior?

2. How do White ELA teachers' perceptions of and expectations for student talk and behavior in high school ELA classrooms shape their pedagogical approach to discipline, particularly for Black students?

I interviewed four White English Language Arts (ELA) teachers who self-identified as committed to racial justice in education and taught in schools that served a majority population of students of color. Three teachers in the study taught in schools that served a majority population of Black students. Teachers' commitment to racial justice was based on their participation in the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Urban Education Summer Educator Forum (CUESEF), a voluntary summer program for educators focused explicitly on race, racism, and schools.

I began this study in 2020, toward the beginnings of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent school closings. At the time of my study's design and implementation (2020-2021), political and social turmoil, including the senseless killings of Black people at the hands of police, the ensuing protests for racial justice, the growing tensions and stark racial inequities brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the insurrection at the Capital, and the recent push back against

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in K-12 schools sparked widespread conversations about systemic racism and White supremacy throughout the U.S. With these issues in mind and a public surge in critical (un)learning, I hypothesized that White teachers' commitment to learning about and engaging in practices that disrupt hegemony and acknowledge and respond to systemic racism in their classrooms have increased. I aimed to analyze how White teachers committed to racial justice were engaging in race-centered practices, or practices that addressed and included conversations related to race, racism, and inequity, I aimed to contribute to scholarship on (1) White teacher practice, (2) patterns in racially inequitable discipline practices, and (3) ELA teaching and learning.

The study was guided by the demographic and racial realities of modern schooling. Although the teacher population remains majority White (approximately 80%), the student population is becoming more racially diverse (NCES, 2020). Studies related to White teacher practice have often shown that White teachers may hold racially biased, or problematic or narrow views of their students of color, particularly related to Black students' talk (Morris, 2016), language (Baker-Bell, 2020; Godley & Reaser, 2018), and behavior (Ferguson, 2000; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). The teachers in my study aimed to develop their understanding of racism and schooling and, therefore, I hypothesized that their perspectives and beliefs about their Black students, ELA instruction and behavior would contribute to research on White teachers' development towards and enactment of anti-racist beliefs and practices in the classroom.

3.1 Researcher Positionality

The responsive interview model (which I draw on) encourages researchers to consistently investigate and reflect on their own biases before engaging in in-depth interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I recognize that unaccounted for researcher bias can influence an interview in many ways, including avoidance of difficult follow-up questions during challenging or uncomfortable conversations as well as guiding an interview or analysis toward a biased outcome.

As a White woman and former secondary literacy teacher of Black students, I have multiple commonalities with my participants. Like my participants, I have also engaged in work that could identify me as a White educator committed to racial justice. I believe these shared commonalities may allow for a shared language and an openness between participants and myself. However, my close identification with participants could also create room for assumptions about language (e.g., do we both have the same definition of "urban school"?) and practice (e.g., would I have done this differently?). I strove to remain open to teacher knowledge and understanding during data collection and analysis.

Lastly, though I am working with White teachers, I hope my work critically investigates racism in schools and promotes equitable learning opportunities for Black students. With this intention in mind, I remained vigilant in the ways I avoided interrogations of Whiteness in my own practice and with participants.

3.2 The Center for Urban Education Summer Educator Forum

The University of Pittsburgh's Center for Urban Education (CUE) annually organizes and moderates a summer forum, The Center for Urban Education Summer Educator Forum (CUESEF), for PK-12 educators, administrators, scholars, students, and community stakeholders. Over an intensive but short period of time, the summer forum exposes participants to a series of expert lecturers and discussions with researchers, activists, scholars, and teacher colleagues. The forums have focused on a variety of advocacy and justice-oriented pedagogies, practices, and frameworks that promote equitable learning opportunities and experiences for marginalized youth, particularly youth of color. CUESEF is typically organized around a central theme, such as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) or the school-to-prison pipeline. The theme for the 2021 forum (the year of this study) focused on community healing and education during a time of political turmoil, systemic racism, anti-blackness, police violence, and a global pandemic.

Though participation in or completion of this program does not automatically render teachers anti-racist or free of racial bias, I hypothesized that participation in this program was indicative of teachers' interest and investment in work that centers best practice for students of color. Additionally, CUESEF requires both a registration fee (waived during the COVID-19 pandemic) and a time commitment during the summer. Therefore, I assumed that most teachers who attended CUESEF did so intentionally and were, at the very least, open to engaging in topics and conversations about systemic racism and schools.

All teachers in the current study had participated in at least one summer forum and had done so on their own accord (i.e., were not required to attend). Most teachers in my study shared that the learning they gained from CUESEF, or similar out-of-school professional development

opportunities, built their confidence, fortified their beliefs, or gave them the tools to think critically about contemporary schooling and their own classroom practice.

3.3 Teacher Participant Recruitment

Through interviews, this qualitative study analyzed the talk of four White veteran (taught for more than 10 years) ELA teachers who self-identified as committed to racial justice in education through their participation in the Center for Urban Education's Summer Educator Forum (CUESEF). I recruited teachers using both purposive sampling (Maxwell, 2013) and later, recruitment through word of mouth. Teachers were initially contacted through the CUESEF listserv via email using purposive sampling methods. However, only two teachers were recruited through the listserv. I then sought and received approval to increase recruitment through word of mouth. Teachers were then contacted through other sources, including professors with knowledge of CUESEF programming, members of my dissertation committee, and other participants.

For recruitment purposes, I created an email script that described the study goals and included a link to a Qualtrics pre-study questionnaire (see Appendix A). The questionnaire acted as a recruitment tool and included questions related to demographic information (e.g., teacher racial identification) and school information (e.g., classes and grades taught) as well as a final prompt that asked teachers to describe their commitment to racial justice. It read as follows: "How would you describe your role and commitment to racial justice as a teacher?"

Teachers were invited to participate in the study if they: (1) identified as White, (2) were ELA teachers, (3) were secondary teachers, (4) taught in a high school that served majority students of color, and (5) expressed a commitment to racial justice in the classroom. Teacher

responses to the final survey prompt ranged in detail, but all promoted a commitment to racial justice. Teachers used phrases like "break the cycle," "dismantle systemic racism," "decolonize the curriculum," "the classroom should be a place for thoughts, questions, concerns and ideas related to race, racial justice and social justice," and "push myself to daily unlearn, learn and reckon with" Whiteness. Phrases like these signaled a knowledge of current and ongoing conversations about race and racism in schools. All four teachers, in various ways, shared that their commitment to racial justice was ongoing, constant, and shaped their careers.

3.4 Teacher Participants

All teacher participants (see Table 1) identified as White, taught at the high school level (9th through 12th grade), taught at least one section of English Language Arts or AP English, and had participated in at least one Center for Urban Education's Summer Educator Forum. Additionally, all four teachers were veteran teachers and had taught for 11 or more years at the time of study. Three teachers taught in the same school district, but no two teachers taught in the same school. To my knowledge, teachers in the study may not have known each other. All teacher and school names included in the study are pseudonyms.

Table 1. Teacher Participants

Name	Race	Gender	District	School	Grades Taught ELA	Years Taught
Cole	White	M	Central School District	Spruce HS	10th	>15
Olivia	White	F	Central School District	Cherry Magnet 6-12	11th &12th	>15
Katie	White	F	Central School District	Oaks 6-12	10th & 12th	>11

| Michelle | White | F | Riverside School District | Grove HS | 12th | ~30 |

3.4.1 Teacher Profiles

3.4.1.1 Cole

Cole was a veteran teacher entering his fifteenth year of teaching at the beginning of the study. He taught 10th grade ELA as well as one section of creative writing that included students from multiple grade levels. Cole had recently received his Ed.D., was the head of the English Language Arts department at Spruce, and was the athletic coach of multiple school sports teams. At the time of study, Cole lived in the neighborhood that his school served and was planning on sending his own children to Spruce High School when they were old enough to attend. Having a strong neighborhood school that was trusted by the surrounding community was very important to Cole. He believed a neighborhood school, like Spruce, was necessary for community development and access to resources. Cole identified as a Christian and shared that his religious beliefs informed his dedication to his students and to racial and social justice. In his response to the final question posed in the intake survey, which asked, "how would you describe your role and commitment to racial justice as a teacher," Cole wrote:

> Racial justice is one of the reasons that I became a teacher. As a White teacher, I see the privilege that I have and I see the privilege that my own kids have. I see my primary role as an educator as helping my students understand the privilege that they have and the hell [*sic*] to use that power to dismantle the systemic racism in the [*sic*] pervades our society. Specifically for my black students I want to empower and equipped [*sic*] them with the tools and knowledge to advocate for themselves.

Cole identified as both White and privileged. Further, Cole voiced an assets-based perspective about his Black students, indicating his belief that they have the power to advocate for themselves. For Cole, his "primary role" as a teacher was to guide students toward empowerment, advocacy, and social change.

3.4.1.2 Olivia

At the time of study, Olivia was entering her sixteenth year of teaching. Before settling into her role as a classroom teacher, Olivia had obtained her principal papers and had been a literacy specialist and instructional coach within and across various schools in Central School District. In her current role as an ELA classroom teacher at Cherry Magnet, she taught an AP English course for 11th grade students and an African American Literature course for 12th grade students. Olivia was working with specialists at a local university to improve the curriculum of her African American Literature course and to register the course for student college credit. For Olivia, independently seeking out professional development and reading texts that focused on the histories of racial injustice in the United States were important features of being a teacher dedicated to racial justice. Olivia shared a recent surge in her own (un)learning and a new confidence in her dedication to racial justice in schools. In her response to the final survey question, Olivia wrote:

> It is something that for my 15 years in teaching has been present from my deep core values but has taken roughly until the past three-four years to really come to the surface; the year before last to become stronger, and this year to finally be unapologetic. My first year teaching, 15 years ago, I was looked at like a crazy person because I allowed students to turn in work late for full credit because it seemed the humane thing to do if I was looking to see what students know and can do. This year, I've helped to lead my school to a policy change on something that I had previously done behind closed doors. Two years ago when

I started teaching the African-American Lit course, I had to reckon with how ignorant I was, how "White" my teaching was and how I would break the cycle in schools of using "culturally relevant" texts, but doing so in a way that continued to be oppressive and dehumanizing. This has led me to help lead my school's equity and anti-racism team. The past year has been literally nothing short of life-changing in me personally and professionally as the two are becoming one, as it must be. The amount of work I put in over the summer and after the school day on webinars and zoom calls and in books is nothing I've done in 15 years- pushing myself to daily unlearn, learn, and reckon with.

Oliva's response notes the presence and impacts of Whiteness on her classroom practice as well as her dedication to putting her learning into action. Here, Olivia reflected on her discomfort with her previous teaching practices, her confidence in leading her school toward positive and informed change, and her own personal growth as an educator and a person. She also described her continued commitment to her own learning and growth through her independent dedication to engaging with texts and webinars.

3.4.1.3 Katie

Katie was also a veteran teacher, having taught for 12 years at the time of study. She taught multiple sections of 10th grade ELA and one Honors ELA course. Compared to the other teacher participants, Katie taught in the most racially segregated school, which served 95% Black students, 3% multi-ethnic students, and 1% White students (A+ Schools, 2020). Katie shared her belief that school districts and policy makers engaged in one-size-fits all, or "blanket," policies and practices that were not equitable for her students and did not recognize her students' strengths or uniqueness. Though she recognized that she could not change systems as a single teacher, she believed showing

up, caring for students, and creating spaces where students felt they belonged was imperative to her work. For Katie, her commitment to racial justice in the classroom was described as follows:

> I have a deep and constant commitment to racial justice as a teacher within the classroom, in the community of the students who I teach, and as a person in general. I believe that the classroom should be a place for thoughts, questions, concerns and ideas related to race, racial justice and social justice, and it is a commitment I take seriously. I also think these conversations are imperative among the adults and staff at school, as well as with the students.

Katie's response offered a holistic understanding of racial justice both in and outside of the classroom and with both students and school adults. Katie shared a commitment to engaging in conversations about race and racial justice in her classroom with her students. Like Olivia, Katie described her commitment to racial justice as constant.

3.4.1.4 Michelle

Michelle was the most veteran teacher of all the teachers included in my study, having taught over 30 years at the time of study. The courses that Michelle taught varied. She taught one section of AP English for 12th grade, two sections of Honors English for 12th grade, one Keystone workshop for 9th, 10th and 11th graders, and one creative writing class for various grade levels. At the time of study, Michelle was the head of the ELA department at Grove. Michelle described herself as a joyful and goofy teacher who used humor in the classroom and "mothers [students] a bit." Michelle had been originally hired at Grove High School as an "anti-bias teacher" during a merger brought on by a court ordered desegregation plan. In her response to the final survey question, Michelle wrote:

45

My goal is to disrupt the notion that White supremacy is the status quo, so I do things like

decolonize the curriculum or dismantle ideas in our culture that can do harm to our children

(of all races). My commitment is ongoing and constant; I am always learning and evolving

as an anti-racist educator.

Michelle's response, like Olivia and Katie, noted her ongoing growth and commitment to

anti-racism in the classroom. Like Cole and Olivia, Michelle also made note of Whiteness.

3.5 Schools and School Districts

Data for the three schools in Central School District (Spruce, Oaks and Cherry Magnet)

were pulled from a public report documenting the 2019-2020 school year (A+ Schools, 2020).

Data from the 2021 school year included large gaps due to issues brought on by the COVID-19

pandemic (e.g., enrollment, suspension records, achievement, etc.), and data from the 2022 school

year had yet to be published. Data for Grove High School was pulled from the most recent reports

from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC, 2017) and a ProPublica report (which utilized data

from the 2015-2016 CRDC survey year). All school and district names used in the study are

pseudonyms.

Table 2. Teachers' Schools and School Districts

School Name	Teacher Race	Student Race	Grade Level	Principal Turnover	Capture Rate	Suspension Rate	School District
Spruce High School	18% Black, 74% White, 3% Multi-thnic, 3% Asian, 3% Hispanic	78% Black, 15% White, 6% Multi-ethnic, 1% Hispanic	9th-12th grade	Three in four years	20%	21% overall; 18% Black, 1% White, 1% Multi-ethnic	Central

Cherry Magnet	95% White, 5% Black	38% Black, 46% White, 9% Multi-etnic, 4%Asian, 2% Hispanic	6th-12th grade	One in four years	N/A	12% overall; 6% Black, 4% White, 1% Multi-ethnic	Central
Oaks 6-12	73% White, 21% Black, 2% Multi-ethnic, 2% Asian, 3% Hispanic	95% Black, 1% White, 3% Multi-ethnic	6th-12th grade	Four in four years	22%	32% overall; 31% Black, 1% Multi-ethnic	Central
Grove High School	Not reported	61%; Black, 30% White, 3% Hispanic, 6% two or more races, <1% Asian and <1% Native students (NCES, 2021-2022).	7th-12th grade	Not provided	Not provided	86% Black, 7.4% White , 3.8% two or more races, 2.0% Hispanic (CRDC, 2017)	Riverside

3.5.1 School Profiles

Despite being in the same school district, Oaks High, Cherry Magnet and Spruce High were all very different schools in design, demographics, grades taught, and access to resources. Oaks, Spruce and Grove all served a majority population of Black students and Cherry Magnet served a majority population of students of color (the majority being Black students). All teachers mentioned that a resource officer was or had, until recently, been a part of school staff. Three teachers mentioned students were required to pass through metal detectors to enter the building. A recent study about suspension rates in the county indicated that both Central and Riverside school

districts had suspension rates above the state average (Huguley et al., 2018). Further, Huguley et al. (2018) found that, for every one non-Black student suspended, 3 to 4 Black students were suspended in Central and Riverside Districts, respectively. The researchers argued that Black students across the entire county "were suspended at a rate of approximately 41.0 students per 100, as compared to only 5.6 suspensions for every 100 non-Black students" (p. 3). Ultimately, the racial disparities in suspension rates across the entire region were above the state average.

3.5.1.1 Spruce High School

Spruce High School served students in grades nine to twelve. Spruce High was a neighborhood school in Central School District, meaning students living in a certain geographical location were enrolled in the school. Spruce is the last neighborhood school in the surrounding area, but student enrollment has dropped in recent years. Cole argued that the decrease in enrollment was due, in part, to Spruce's competition for student enrollment with private and charter school options. According to Cole, the decline in enrollment forced Spruce to downsize their staff. In the 2019-2020 school year, Spruce High School had a 53% decrease in student enrollment from grade nine to grade twelve. This was the largest decline among schools in Central District serving high school aged students. Additionally, Spruce has had a high principal turnover rate, with three different principals in four years. Principal turnover was another concern of Cole's, because of the changes and uncertainties new leadership brought on.

Spruce's course offerings included robust Career and Technical and magnet programs, including JROTC, STEM, health careers, hair and beauty careers, and other career and technical education (A+ Schools, 2020). At the time of study, majority White teachers (74%) served majority students of color (see Table 2) and majority low-income students (77%). Cole shared, however, that, in comparison to other schools in Central District, Spruce had a large percentage of Black

48

teachers on staff. Of the schools in the study, Spruce High and Oaks 6-12 had the largest number of teachers of color, particularly Black teachers.

In 2020, 21% of students had been suspended at least once, 18% of those students were Black, 1% White, and 1% multi-ethnic. Cole argued that their school would most likely have a higher percentage of Black students being disciplined simply because there were more Black students enrolled at Spruce.

3.5.1.2 Cherry Magnet 6-12

Cherry Magnet was one of five schools in Central School District that served students from grades six to twelve. In addition to traditional and required course offerings for secondary students, Cherry advertised a particular focus on STEM learning, meaning the school's curriculum purposefully integrated STEM concepts into their class learning and exposed students to courses focused on an interest in science, engineering, and technology.

Because Cherry was a magnet school, students had to complete an application and enter a lottery in order to be considered for attendance. Though not required, to increase the likelihood of acceptance, students could achieve certain "weights," or program-specific academic or behavioral benchmarks, including attendance rate, family income (i.e., qualified for free and reduced lunch), and scores on state math and reading exams (exempt during COVID). Cherry was unique among schools in my study, as the other schools were neighborhood schools that did not require application.

At Cherry, majority White teachers (95%) served a majority of students of color (see Table 2). Compared to other schools in this study, Cherry had the smallest population of low-income students (39%) and the smallest overall suspension rate. In 2020, 12% of students were suspended at least once, 6% were Black students, 4% were White students, and 1% were multi-ethnic

students. Cherry has had one principal in four years. Of the three Central District schools included in the study, Cherry offered the most AP courses and had the highest rate of student graduation and the highest rate of postsecondary enrollment.

3.5.1.3 Oaks 6-12

Like Spruce High School, Oaks was a neighborhood public school and also offered a broad array of Career and Technical programming (the largest CTE program of the schools in my study from Central District). Oaks served students in grades six to twelve and, compared to other schools in the study, had the largest overall population of Black students (95%; compared to 3% Multi-ethnic, 1% White), the largest percentage of Black teachers on staff (21%; compared to 73% White teachers), and served the largest population of low-income students (84%). Like Spruce, Oaks had a high principal turnover rate, with four principals in the last four years (A+ Schools, 2020). In 2020, 32% of students were suspended at least once, 31% were Black students and 1% were multi-ethnic students.

In 2016, students from a nearby school district were enrolled at Oaks due to school closures. The merger brought changes, including social, academic, and neighborhood tensions and challenges. Students and families had to make decisions about their enrollment at Oaks when their original school, Pine High School, closed. While some students and families enrolled at Oaks, others enrolled in choice schools. At the time of study, Oaks was also on an academic improvement plan. The achievement plan for the 2020-2021 school year was made public and indicated that the improvement plan was implemented because of reports of low achievement scores on standardized state exams.

Despite these challenges and changes, Oaks had a lower but comparable graduation rate to the other Central District schools in my study (75% in 2019, compared to 78% at Spruce and 97% at Cherry Magnet) and a stable enrollment rate (compared to Spruce).

3.5.1.4 Grove High School

Grove High School was the only school in Riverside School District in the study. Grove served students from grades 9-12. In the 2020-2021 school year, Grove High served majority Black students (61% compared to 30% White, 3% Hispanic, 6% two or more races, <1% Asian and <1% Native students) (NCES, 2021-2022). Compared to all schools included in the study, Grove High School served the largest population of low-income students (88%) (classified as students eligible for free and reduced lunch; NCES, 2021-2022).

Approximately two years prior to the study, Grove High School had served students from grades 7-12, and only recently shifted to serving students in grades 9-12. Therefore, CRDC data (used below for suspension rates), collected most recently in 2017, reflects a larger population of students (though the racial demographics, when compared to the most recent NCES data, are quite similar). Of the students who had received out-of-school suspension, 86% were Black students compared to 6% of White students (CRDC, 2017). Expulsion rates were higher, where 89% of students expelled were Black and 7% were White. Though national statistics do not report the racial demographics of teachers or administrators at Grove High School, Michelle shared that four of five administrators were Black and most teachers, save approximately two, were White.

A few years before the time of study, Grove High School had received public scrutiny over publicly released school security footage which showed a principal and a school resource officer using excessive force on a Black student. This was not the only report of school resource officers using excessive force on Black students at Grove High. The school implemented changes to rectify

the issue, such as the removal of resources officers in the school and enrolling in district-wide, race-centered professional development.

Grove High and Riverside District were the product of a court-ordered desegregation merger of the surrounding districts in 1981. The merger dissolved and brought together multiple districts and was aimed at racially desegregating schools. The merger brought with it racially-motivated protests and large changes in student racial demographics. Collectively, the later dissolved districts served a majority population of White students. At the time of study, the then 35-year-integrated Riverside District served a majority Black students and families. Michelle believed that this merger created a lot of "White flight," or an exodus of White families from the district (discussed further in my findings section).

3.6 Data Sources

Data for this study were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with teacher participants, publicly available data, and analytic memos. All data was collected during the summer and fall of the 2021-2022 school year. Due to complications related to COVID-19, all interviews took place over Zoom. Initially, I had planned to observe teachers in their classrooms. However, due to the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the instability it caused in schools and classrooms, I was unsure if I would be able to physically attend teachers' classrooms and observe their teaching. Ultimately, because of the time frame and the complications from the pandemic, I decided to conduct an interview study and include hypothetical classroom scenario questions that would invite teachers to discuss their classroom practices more explicitly. Additionally, I utilized publicly available documents, including school demographic information, publicly accessible

discipline reports, and information related to literacy learning in order to understand school context without physically entering schools.

3.6.1 Teacher Interviews

All four teachers were interviewed three times for a total of twelve interviews. On average, interviews lasted approximately 53 minutes, ranging from 40-69 minutes in length. All interviews took place over Zoom. I utilized Rubin and Rubin's (2005) qualitative interview process, the responsive interview model, to design and implement interview prompts. The responsive interview model is designed for depth and requires researchers to remain flexible and open in their interview approach, allowing for unique interviewee knowledge to guide future prompts and follow-up questions. Alongside structured prompts, Rubin and Rubin also encourage researchers to allow space in the interview for new prompts or follow-up questions that are specific to the flow of the interview and the participant. Further, Rubin and Rubin (2005) call for a "deep understanding of what is being studied, rather than breadth" (p. 35) and interviewer openness to allow interviews to build on one another. Scholarship related to White teachers' practice (Bell, 2020; Cross et al., 2019) as well as school discipline disproportionalities (Nagarajan, 2018) has utilized the responsive model to understand practitioner beliefs about race, racism, and policy.

With this model in mind, I conducted a series of three semi-structured, in-depth interviews with teachers in order to understand individual teacher practice and ideologies about race, student behavior, discipline, and literacy. Interview questions were first piloted with two White ELA teachers of secondary students. The structure, or theme, of each interview was loosely based on Seidman's (2013) three interview process. The first interview asked teachers to describe their professional or career history, their current teaching experiences, and their school context. The

second interview focused on the specific "details of the experience" (Seidman, 2013, p. 21), or teachers' current thinking and lived experience related to the research questions. Lastly, the third interview broke from Seidman's structure and instead asked teachers to respond to five hypothetical classroom scenarios specifically designed to unpack teachers' beliefs about race, student talk, and ELA classroom teaching and learning. The use of hypothetical classroom scenarios (see Appendix B) allowed me to understand teacher practice without directly observing teachers' classrooms. Godley and Reaser (2018) presented preservice teachers with hypothetical classroom scenarios in order to understand teachers' language ideologies, content knowledge, and ELA teaching practices. Similarly, I hoped to use hypothetical classroom scenarios to understand how teachers might "play out" the beliefs and practices they had shared with me interviews one and two.

3.6.1.1 Interview 1

The first interview (see Appendix B) asked teachers to discuss their career and professional histories, their current school's context, and their alignment with school and district discipline practices and curriculum choices. I began the first interview with career and professional history prompts, such as, "Tell me about your career as a teacher. How did you come to be an educator?"

I then asked teachers to describe their current schools in order to better understand school context. Prompts included, "describe the school that you currently teach in," and, "what are your school's broad expectations for student behavior?" These questions allowed me to further understand each teacher's on-the-ground understanding of and experiences within their school's context as well as complicate or fill in any possible gaps in publicly available school documents. Because I was unable to physically observe in schools and classrooms, school context prompts allowed me to understand the school's context, as well as teachers' experiences within the

school's context, to illuminate broader structures that may operate to disrupt or perpetuate inequity.

3.6.1.2 Interview 2

The second interview focused on teacher practice, specifically their ELA teaching, their discipline decision making, and their relationships with and beliefs about their students and race talk. Questions in this interview were guided explicitly by my research questions:

1. What are White ELA teachers' expectations for ELA classroom talk and behavior?
2. How do White ELA teachers' perceptions of and expectations for student talk and behavior in high school ELA classrooms shape their pedagogical approach to discipline, particularly for Black students?

I asked teachers to describe their classroom behavioral expectations as well as their expectations for student talk. For example, I asked, "how does a 'good student' act in your classroom?" And, "what are your general expectations for how students verbally participate in class?" These questions were intended to prompt teachers to elaborate on their explicit expectations for classroom behavior and talk.

Questions about race, race talk, and school discipline, such as, "if at all, how do you think your race impacts discipline in your classroom?" And, "do you believe it is important for you to discuss issues related to race and racism in your classroom," were all guided by previous, impactful studies and protocols used in studies about race, racism, and teacher beliefs (Gregory & Mosley, 2004; Milner et al., 2017). In my pre-dissertation study, I very rarely asked teachers explicitly about race and racism, which made analysis of teacher talk limited. I had asked broadly about "identity categories," which included race, gender, socioeconomic status, and ability status but did not explicitly ask about race, making it difficult to determine if teachers were actively avoiding

discussing race, or were simply not prompted to do so. Therefore, in this study, I included multiple questions that asked explicitly about race and race talk in ELA classrooms.

3.6.1.3 Interview 3

The final interview asked teachers to respond to a series of hypothetical classroom scenarios aimed at understanding teachers' beliefs about English Language Arts teaching and learning, race talk in ELA classrooms, and Black students' talk, language and behavior in literacy classrooms. Most hypothetical scenarios were adapted from relevant literature (Godley & Werner, 2007; Leander, 2002; Morris, 2005, 2007) and one was adapted from my pre-dissertation study.

Broadly, hypothetical classroom scenarios and classroom simulations have been used to successfully understand and elicit in- and pre-service teachers' knowledge and beliefs (Godley & Reaser, 2018; Shaughnessy & Boerst, 2018). Further, hypothetical scenarios, or mock classroom materials (like student grades or behavioral reports), are often used as reliable tools in studies that seek to understand if race and racial stereotypes impact teachers' beliefs about students and discipline decision making (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015).

The first and fourth hypothetical scenarios (see Appendix B) were designed to probe teacher beliefs about student-led conversations about race and racism in the ELA classroom. The first scenario read as follows:

> Today, students in your ninth grade ELA class are discussing *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a text your class has been reading for a few days. This particular class is made up of thirty students, the majority of whom are Black. You have asked students to engage in a whole-class discussion about the text. A small group of both Black and White students in your class are considering the themes of the book out loud and have begun a conversation about the use of the "n-word," its origins, and how it is a derogatory and harmful term. A few

Black students in the small group are actively using the "n-word" out loud and one Black male student is defending his use of the word to his White peers. This starts a broader conversation about racial slurs (adapted from Leander, 2002).

In this example, teachers' anticipated responses might have focused on classroom behavioral expectations (e.g., "appropriate" classroom language), the racial dynamics of the classroom, students' engagement and on-task talk related to the chosen text (Lee's, *To Kill a Mockingbird*), and in-class conversations about race and racism.

The fourth scenario read as follows:

A small group of Black boys enter your classroom from the hallway and are having a conversation about how disappointed they are that there has not been a bigger focus on Black history or literature in their high school ELA classes, overall. They also describe the ways in which their talk and behavior are often assumed to be disrespectful or inappropriate in their classes. One student in the conversation says, "I say anything in class without raising my hand first, they say I'm being disrespectful and write me up." Students continue this discussion in your class after the bell has rung. They are standing near the front of the classroom. Though they are speaking in a small group, it is not a private conversation and they speak loud enough for others to hear and join their conversations. They say that they believe the school and all of their teachers, including you, are racist. You ask them to take a seat so you can begin your lesson. One Black male student says, "See what I mean?" (Adapted from my pilot study data)

In scenario four, teachers were presented with another student-led, in-class discussion about race, racism, and schooling. Teachers may have responded by focusing on the students'

behavior and talk (e.g., they are standing and speaking loudly) and/or the topics in the conversation (e.g., teachers are racist and the curriculum is not diverse).

Scenarios two and three were designed to unpack teachers' beliefs about Black students' talk (e.g., perceptions of tone and volume) and language (e.g., the use of AAVE). In previous research, scholars have found that White teachers may perceive Black students' talk as loud, aggressive, or having a negative tone (e.g., aggressive) (Morris, 2005, 2007). Additionally, scholars of teachers' language ideologies note that White teachers may not be as accepting of the use of AAVE in the classroom or may (implicitly or explicitly) associate Standardized English with "proper" or "professional" talk, thus devaluing diverse dialects in the classroom (Baker-Bell, Daniels, 2018).

Scenario two read as follows:

Your students are working on writing an essay. You have just taught a lesson about introductory paragraphs. Today, you are asking your class (made up of an equal number of Black and White students) to come to the board to revise a thesis sentence for clarity. One Black male student goes to the board and attempts to adjust the sentence, but, after multiple peers tell him his revisions are wrong, he says he is confused and returns to his seat. He asks a Black female student who sits next to him if she would like to try. She says, "I ain't going nowhere." In response, a White male student sitting close by says, "You mean, 'I'm not going anywhere.'" (adapted from Godley & Werner, 2007).

Here, teachers were asked to respond to a scenario that involved a traditional ELA lesson— adjusting thesis statements for clarity. In this scenario, teachers may have responded to the White student's verbal "correction" of the Black student, the Black students' use of AAVE, the nature of the lesson itself, or the classroom culture.

Scenario three read as follows:

You have asked students to engage in a whole-class literary discussion about a short story. Students were asked to read the story the night before, annotate the story and take notes, and come prepared to respond to discussion questions. This class period is smaller with only 15 students, 10 of whom are White and five students are Black. During the discussion, you notice that the three Black girls in class are sharing often about the short story you have assigned. They share their thoughts without raising their hands, speak concurrently with other students or interrupt other students to share their thoughts, and are sharing their arguments or counter points to other students' interpretations of the text. They speak more often than other students during the discussion. (adapted from Morris 2005; 2007).

Here, teachers were asked to reflect on their expectations for student behavior and talk during a whole-class discussion. In Morris's study (2005), teachers reprimanded and disciplined Black female students for their comportment and perceived volume and tone of voice, even during on-task classroom talk. In this scenario, teachers may have responded to the learning goals, the classroom expectations for talk and behavior, and/or the racial and social dynamics of the classroom.

Each classroom scenario was followed by a series of questions about the ways in which teachers might respond to or think about the classroom event. These questions were intended to elicit teacher thinking about: (1) their expectations for classroom behavior and talk, (2) race talk in the ELA classroom, and (3) and their beliefs about students and ELA teaching and learning.

3.6.2 School Level Data

Because I recruited teachers from multiple schools in two different districts, I collected publicly available information which included: (1) racial demographic data for students and, in some cases, teachers, (2) socioeconomic demographic data for students, (3) suspension reports by race, (4) student retention rates, if provided, and (5) leadership stability, if provided. Demographic data for schools in Central District (Spruce High, Oaks 6-12, and Cherry Magnet) were collected from the A+ Schools annual report to the community (2020). Data for Grove High School and Riverside District was collected through recent reports from the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), Civil Rights Data Collection (2017) and a ProPublica report (2016). Public school data was used to understand certain aspects of each teacher's school context and how they differed from one another.

3.6.3 Memos

In line with Rubin and Rubin's (2005) data analysis process, memos were written after teacher interviews and during iterative coding cycles to note themes within the transcriptions, as well as coding decisions and definitions. I conducted rounds of coding alongside of memo writing to build a systematic coding process. I wrote interview summaries and teacher profiles, as well as analytic memos specific to interview prompts that informed my research questions. Analytic memos were also written for each hypothetical classroom scenario. Memos were used iteratively for analysis purposes to understand researcher considerations of teacher talk and broader themes.

3.6.4 Data Management

This study was approved by The University of Pittsburgh's IRB board. All transcribed interviews were anonymized and stored in a dual-login, password protected OneDrive through the University of Pittsburgh, and on a password protected laptop computer. Audio-recorded interviews have been deleted from both Zoom and Panopto, a digital video platform used by the University of Pittsburgh that is automatically synched to Zoom's recording storage. Teacher surveys were collected through Qualtrics, a dual-login, password protected and University operated survey system.

3.7 Data Analysis

I followed Rubin and Rubin's (2005) qualitative interview analysis strategy, which calls for researchers to cyclically: (1) recognize broad themes and concepts in transcripts, (2) systematically clarify, synthesize, and elaborate on themes, (3) create codes and coding structures, (4) sort and organize the data by codes, looking for nuance, and (5) synthesize codes and themes that align with the purpose of the study.

All twelve interviews in this study were audio-recorded over Zoom and transcribed by Zoom's automatic transcription service. The transcriptions were complete but included some inaccuracies, specifically in word choice. Therefore, I listened back to each interview line-by-line and corrected any errors in transcription (e.g., word choice errors, or errors in speaker). During transcription, Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest documenting initial themes, quotes that stand out, and ideas for future interviews with participants. Therefore, after each interview transcription was

completed, I summarized the interviews for analysis and comparison purposes, noting participant pseudonym, main points of the interview, and themes that aligned with my research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

3.7.1 Coding Process

I utilized open coding strategies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), or initial coding strategies (Saldaña, 2016), and thematic coding to address the first step of Rubin and Rubin's (2005) process. Open coding allowed me note relevant themes at the instance, build initial hypotheses about the data, and created opportunities for comparison/clarification of themes between teacher participants' transcripts. After open coding, I themed the data (Saldaña, 2016). In other words, I defined and synthesized clear themes that emerged from open coding. After noting themes, I created a codebook with clear definitions and conducted a final round of coding. During this iterative coding cycle, I synthesized my codebook and re-organized my findings.

I utilized a qualitative analysis process in which I first listened back to each interview while editing transcripts for clarity, word choice, and word corrections. Next, I read back through each transcript one at a time, beginning with each teacher's first interview, then moving to the second and third interviews. During the first reading, I marked each interview and made note of: (1) common themes, (2) common phrases shared by multiple teachers, (3) areas of interest related to my research questions, (4) explicit discussions about systemic issues impacting schools and (5) similarities and differences between participants. Areas of interest were coded at the instance. Some initial themes (see Table 3 for all initial codes) included: teachers noting systemic issues, describing the ELA canon as "dead White guys," and negotiating power and control in the

classroom. After reading through and noting themes, I drafted teacher profiles based on information they shared about themselves and their teaching philosophies.

Table 3. Initial Themes

Code Name
Systemic Impacts
Personal Growth
Race Journey
Other Teachers
Growth in ELA Practice
Curriculum
"Dead White guys"
Student Voice
Student Voice/Race
Literacy Teaching and Learning
Response to Classroom Scenarios
Power/Control in the Classroom
Classroom Behavioral Expectations
School Discipline
Whiteness

I then looked back at all interview transcripts and my initial codes and organized teacher talk into a chart. Each section was organized by an initial code and, under each code, I selected an example of teacher talk that represented that code. Separate analytical memos were written for the following questions:

1. How does a "good student" act in your classroom?

2. What are your general expectations for how students verbally participate in class?

3. What are the general expectations of your classroom in terms of student behavior? If I were to walk in your classroom and things are going great, and everyone is behaving as you would hope, what would it look like? What would it sound like?

4. Do you believe it is important for you to discuss issues related to race and racism in your classroom? Why or why not? (adapted from the Teacher Race Talk Survey, Milner et al., 2017)

5. Do you feel supported or prepared to engage in conversations about race and racism at your school? Please explain. (adapted from the Teacher Race Talk Survey, Milner et al., 2017)

I chose these particular questions because they aligned explicitly with my research questions and would inform my analysis. Questions 1, 2 and 3, as displayed above, informed my first research question, and questions 4 and 5 informed my second. Using these documents, I expanded my analysis and began to draft my initial findings based on overall themes as well as similarities and differences I found in teachers' talk.

For my final round of coding, I used the qualitative data analysis software, NVIVO, in order to organize my data, my codes, and refine my codebook (see Table 4 for final codes). Again, I read through each teacher interview, beginning with each teacher's first interview, then moved to the second then third interview in order to compare teachers' individual responses. Throughout my coding process, I wrote small annotations to characterize teacher talk, describe differences or similarities I noted between teachers, make connections between teacher interviews, and note any texts or scholars that teachers mentioned.

Table 4. Final Codebook

Code Name	Definition	Example
Systemic Impacts	Teacher talk that specifically noted broad, systems impacts on students, teachers and/or schools (e.g., poverty, district or policy decisions, systemic racism).	"Once I was in the urban setting and I realized how different the educational quality is, through no fault of [students'] own, it was simply what area they lived in in many cases, their race—especially in [The City]—what that pre-determined for them, as far as their educational quality" (Katie)
Racial Awareness	Descriptions of teachers' professional or personal knowledge about race and racism in schools or their race	"You have to read and really commit to reading history of the United States and any and all sorts of history that deals with anything

	consciousness development. This often included teachers' descriptions of how scholarship and race-centered professional development helped guide their thinking.	related to race…reading anti-racism books is not going to save you or give you a beacon to follow…When you start reading and going into the history, then you can't un-see things that still exist. Or you can't not write things off. But, things that seem like new problems are not at all new problems. And being able to understand how the problems just have for centuries, has been covered up or morphed" (Olivia)
Other Teachers	Teachers' descriptions of their colleagues, usually comparing themselves to their colleagues or sharing that colleagues were not interested, or as interested, in race centered work.	"I mean, your race journey, it's one thing. As an educator, it's another thing. I have gone through a bunch of trainings and I've read a bunch of stuff and I did my dissertation and I did advanced study, so I feel like I have more experience in that arena than some of the teachers. And I know I get intolerant and impatient for other teachers beginning their own journey and I'm like, how can you teach in [Central School District] and not deal with your own biases?" (Cole)
Race Talk	Teachers' descriptions of how or if they engage in race talk in their classrooms.	"How are you supposed to not talk about race in 2020 or 2021? It's in the news all the time, what are you talking about? And they're like, 'oh, we're not supposed to stir the pot or anything,' and I'm just like, the pot is stirred. It's America" (Michelle)
Curriculum	Teacher talk that described their school's curriculum or the broader ELA canon, their beliefs about both, and their arguments for altering the canon or curriculum.	"I don't think that there needs to be a list of books and authors, specifically the traditional literary canon, because if we're being honest, it's filled with a lot of dead White guys. And so, I think that there is room for not just diverse authors, as far as gender and race

		and ethnicity, but I think that there's room for diversity of thought and genre" (Katie)
Student Talk/Voice	Any teacher talk that described or mentioned broad teacher expectations for student's verbal participation in the classroom. This included talk that compounded beliefs about student talk, language and race, including conversations about dialect diversity or "code switching."	
Literacy Teaching and Learning	Teacher descriptions of what they wanted their students to be able to learn and do in the ELA classroom. This included, goals they had for students' learning, how they structured their classrooms, their practice,	"I think literacy is social capital. So, I do think that the better you are at reading and writing in our society, you will have more social capital to go far in the world…just on a basic level, they need to be able to write and they need to be able to read at a certain level…but also, I just want to broaden their horizons and maybe get into empathy" (Michelle)
Power/Control in the Classroom	Descriptions of how teachers thought about classroom management, student agency, and instructional materials.	"The culture I also want to build in my classroom is of relevance for learning for yourself. I want students to see that this is about your own success…to be able to start building their own agency for themselves" (Katie)
Classroom Expectations	Teachers' descriptions of expected behavior in their classrooms. Descriptions often involved both behavioral expectations and expectations for student talk.	"I never expect my room be completely quiet. I'm impressed with teachers who can do that and also a little concerned with teachers who can do that. Because if kids aren't interacting with each other, then I don't know how much they're learning" (Cole)
The Good Student	Teacher descriptions of how a good student behaved in their classrooms.	"[A good student] is somebody who's really engaged, who has something to say about what we're

		doing, what they say demonstrates understanding, but it also goes further. [A good student] you know, engages the other students. I love when students ask questions about anything, preferably on topic, but when a student is curious. And I also really, I think, a good student is one that that does want to improve…it's the student that's willing to push themselves further" (Katie)
Whiteness	This code was used when teachers noted, mentioned, or considered Whiteness or how their Whiteness impacted their classroom.	"But being a White, middle class guy not from [The City], and not from [Spruce] and from the [Neighborhood], there's an element of, I don't know, caution. Probably, here's another White guy, I've had all these White teachers in my whole academic career, and maybe they had crappy situations with prior White teachers and they've got that kind of in the back of their mind and, you know, maybe another White teacher has made comments and micro-aggressions and they still hold on to that" (Cole)

The hypothetical scenarios in the third interview were coded using a different set of codes. Due to the nature of the hypothetical classroom prompts, I created analytic summaries for teachers' responses to each hypothetical question as well as a separate codebook to unpack teachers' thinking. I organized hypothetical classroom scenarios into two categories by intended theme: student-led race talk and student language/talk in ELA classrooms. After first round open coding, I then organized themes and codes into a master document that allowed for comparison between participants within scenarios. I listened back to teacher interview question by question,

summarized their overall themes, beliefs and takeaways, and compared the responses within

questions and across teachers, noting similarities or differences. Some initial themes included:

teachers responding in non-punitive ways, engagement with student-led race talk, and asking

students to change their way of participating. In NVIVO, I then coded each classroom hypothetical

scenario with final codes developed from initial, emergent themes (see Table 5).

Table 5. Hypothetical Classroom Scenario Codes

Code	Definition	Example
Student Learning	Teacher descriptions of what they believed students were learning in each scenario.	"They're learning how to participate in a democracy where everybody's voice gets heard" (Michelle)
Discipline	Teacher responses to if they would discipline students in each scenario.	"I don't know if it's discipline, but I would have a follow up conversation with the one student. I don't know that discipline is going to solve anything. It's certainly not going to get to the root of—to me it wouldn't change the behavior in a meaningful way in the future" (Katie)
Change Language or Voice	This code was used when teachers explained that they would ask students to change or alter their talk or verbal participation.	"But just letting the students kind of like process through like, "Okay, how did I say this?"…I talk a lot about tone, not only tone in literature, but also tone and how you are speaking to people, and kind of the attitude that you have. It might not be volume, but, think about the attitude that you have and how it could be perceived as being disrespectful and having a conversation with students that way" (Cole)

| Engage or Dismiss | This code was used to decipher if teachers were engaging or dismissing student-led race talk in the classroom. | Dismiss: "We do those readings at the beginning of the year so then we can focus on the book…there's been zero kids in the whole time we've been working on the book that are like, 'Well you know black people can say the N word.' Like, yes, we know that in September, we're done…if we're trying to learn from a book, we can't be trying to debate who can say the N word…nobody's saying that right now." (Olivia)

Engage: "I think you have to give them the space to voice their concerns, I mean if this were happening they're obviously hurt and upset and they're essentially saying they don't feel seen in the curriculum, at least" (Katie) |

In the second half of the third interview, I asked for teachers' advice regarding racial justice for new teachers, administrators, and policy-makers. For these particular questions, I followed the codes and coding scheme used for interviews one and two.

3.7.2 Member Checking

All four teachers were invited to meet with me via Zoom to discuss specific areas of my analysis that would benefit from participant clarification. During each meeting, I shared my screen, which showed participants a document that included sections of their transcribed talk and my analysis of their talk. Each teacher was provided with two to three sections of my analysis,

specifically those areas that needed clarification from participants. Because my study was very much focused on teachers' awareness of and beliefs about race and racism in schools, I did not provide teachers the full scope of my findings in order avoid any responses that might be influenced by social desirability. Teachers were asked to clarify their intended meaning for these particular sections and noted whether or not my analysis was in line with their talk and intentions. Teacher feedback was recorded, transcribed, and incorporated into my both my findings and methods sections.

4.0 Findings

Below, I unpack the major themes in teachers' talk about race, discipline, and ELA teaching and learning. The teachers in my study all recognized the systemic issues that impacted their students of color, mainly their Black students, including racism, poverty, and school governance. Teachers all shared the necessity of race-talk in their classrooms and all teachers shared alternatives to punitive responses to students' classroom behavior. All four White teachers in my study identified themselves as committed to racial justice in schools and shared their practices for their continuing work toward racial awareness.

4.1 Systemic Impacts on Students and Teacher Practice

All four teachers mentioned systemic issues that they believed impacted their students, their practice, and the surrounding school community. In other words, all four teachers recognized in various ways that their schools did not exist in a vacuum. Instead, teachers believed that their students and schools were impacted by issues outside of student and teacher control, such as turnover, district-level decision making, policy, racism and poverty. These beliefs bled into other aspects of their classroom practice—including how they thought about English Language Arts teaching and learning, school discipline, power dynamics in the classroom, and their colleagues. Scholars of racially conscious practice argue that a knowledge of students experiences outside of school, as well as the systemic issues that impact them, is imperative to effective practice with students of color and students living in poverty (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Love, 2019; Milner,

71

2015). In this section, I specifically unpack what systemic issues teachers mentioned and how teachers described the impacts of those issues.

4.1.1 Turnover

Three teachers mentioned the impacts of administrator and teacher turnover. For Cole, administrative turnover was a constant reality. He described a "revolving door of principals" that he had seen in his time at Spruce. He explained, "In my time at Spruce High School, I've had nine principals. I think. I was trying to count the other day, but I couldn't remember. But there are just a ton of principal turnover and nobody has stayed there more than two years." Cole said that he began his career at Spruce in the 2012-2013 school year and has worked with nine principals in his time there, with new leadership coming in every one or two years. In line with Cole's critique, public data from the 2019-2020 school year showed that Spruce had seen three principals in the last four years (A+ Schools, 2020). For Cole, leadership turnover was a reality of his time at Spruce and was one element affecting the school's reputation and declining enrollment.

Michelle also noted leadership turnover, as well as teacher turnover. She believed these changes had broad, negative impacts on students, teachers, and school outcomes. She elaborated:

> We don't have any stability in our leadership. So, the kids don't have a clear notion of what anybody wants of them ever…Nobody knows what to expect, teachers don't know what's expected of them half the time. Because it's just such a rotation of people, the leadership rotates constantly in our district. That is so harmful and stressful for kids that are already in an unstable environment at home or whatever, then they come into school and it's unstable here. But stable people don't want to teach in our school district. They want to go where it's stable, so they're going to go. It stinks. It's like, people are here for a couple years

and they get burned out and they just say, "I just want to go somewhere where it's a little

more calm and I don't have to deal with all this."

Here, Michelle discussed how leadership turnover created an unstable environment for students

and teachers alike. For Michelle, because of the lack of stability and organization in school

leadership, expectations for students and teachers were in flux and thus, "stable" teachers, or

teachers who sought stability in their careers, did not remain at Grove High School. Michelle's

critique evokes a Catch 22 dilemma, where school-wide instability triggers changes in leadership,

but changes in leadership create further instability among teachers and students. Thus, for

Michelle, teacher turnover, in part, was also impacted by leadership stability, or administrative

support, a trend that education researchers have also noted (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond,

2019). Michelle believed that high quality teachers and teachers who were familiar with anti-bias

work were not teaching at Riverside School District. She explained, "If they want to have an urban

experience or whatever, they're good [teachers] and they're good with the anti-bias and all that,

they're not teaching at Riverside School District anymore. It sucks. I mean for lack of a better term,

I've seen the caliber of the teacher change in the past 26 years."

Her critique echoed current research, which indicates that schools that serve majority

students of color and students from low income households (schools like Grove) tend to have

higher rates of teacher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019) and lower rates of

high-quality teachers (Goldhaber et al., 2018; Lankford et al., 2002) and high-quality leadership

(Grissom et al., 2019), which can impact educational equity. Here, Michelle suggested that teacher

quality and anti-bias teaching practices went hand-in-hand, particularly for teachers who "want to

have an urban experience," or teach in an urban district. For Michelle, high quality, anti-bias

teachers who sought teaching experiences in urban schools were essential to Grove but,

unfortunately, were not choosing Riverside School District. For Michelle, teacher and leadership turnover and a lack of high-quality teachers was particularly concerning for her students, as these realities created a "harmful and stressful" environment at their school along with presumed unstable environments outside of school.

Olivia described her experience with administrative and teacher turnover from a different perspective. She explained:

It's probably the most stable staff I've ever experienced or heard about. The school started as a magnet in 2010, and there's probably a third of the teachers still there from 2010 when it opened…Most people don't leave…And the same thing with the principals, have been consistent. The principal now was there six years ago… I think that's pretty rare in [Central School District]. I mean, it's rare from the places I've been in and I have been in a lot— almost every high school, actually.

Unlike other teachers in the study, Olivia had experience with both administrative and teacher stability and retention. She described a "close knit" relationship between teacher colleagues and a school culture that valued teacher and student input. She theorized that some if this stability might be due, in part, to Cherry Magnet's hiring practices, which she described as more selective and more rigorous. At its creation, Central District allowed Cherry Magnet to implement different hiring practices. However, Olivia did not address how the student admissions process might also impact Cherry's teacher and leadership stability. Unlike Grove, Spruce, and Oaks, Cherry was a public magnet school and had an admissions process that required an application of interest, opportunities for added "weights," and a lottery system. Weights were considered academic or behavioral benchmarks or tickets that might increase a students' chances for acceptance. Weights at Cherry Magnet included: (1) a proficient score on state math and reading exams, (2) qualifying

for free and reduced lunch, (3) a 90% or higher attendance record, and (4) scoring in the top 50% on recent state math exams. In addition, students who had attended two specific district middle schools were also given a weight. All students were eligible to apply, though students must have scored at least basic on state exams to enter the lottery system. Thus, Cherry was more selective in both its hiring of teachers and in its student admissions process. Of all the schools in Central School District included in the study, Cherry had the lowest population of low-income students, Black students, students with IEPs and teachers of color (A+ Schools, 2020) and served the most racially diverse student body (see Table 2). Ultimately, Cherry leadership was able to have more control over teacher hiring practices and student enrollment.

All three veteran teachers had experienced the impacts (either positive or negative) of leadership and teacher turnover or stability. They believed that turnover had broader implications for students and teachers, including teacher and student well-being and school quality, as well as implications for expectations for student behavior, and therefore discipline practices and outcomes.

4.1.2 Changes in Enrollment

Changes in student enrollment was another systemic issue that concerned both Cole and Michelle. Cole believed student enrollment had broader impacts on staffing, student well-being, and the surrounding community. He described an ongoing decrease in student enrollment which, he believed, led to the elimination of important support roles in the school, such as additional assistant principals. His concerns were reflected in public data, which showed that Spruce High School had a capture rate of 20% during the 2019-2020 (A+ Schools, 2020). Cole explained, "Because of our declining enrollment, they took a principal away. So now, it's our head principal and then vice principal and that's it for the whole school."

Lowered enrollment and fewer adult supports would lead, Cole believed, to negative impacts on students and student outcomes. He explained, "I think we're going to have a ton of emotional needs that aren't going to be met because we don't have the manpower to do it." For Cole, student enrollment, school resources and markers of school quality (e.g., more trained adults, resources for students with emotional needs) went hand-in-hand. Cole believed that an increase in local charter schools, as well as Spruce's reputation, were reasons families chose to send their students' elsewhere. He explained:

> Our neighbors aren't confident in the school, then kids are going elsewhere. It just creates a really fractured community…you don't have a strong community unless you have strong public schools. And unless the community members are sending their kids to the schools in the neighborhood…there's no hub where everything is connected…Having a strong public school is what makes a community stronger.

Cole believed that a neighborhood school was a pivotal part of a community and investing in public schools was paramount to improving public schools. Cole's hope was that student enrollment would increase and families in the surrounding neighborhood would send their students to Spruce. He explained that his "priority is the 352 kids" at Spruce High School and his second priority is to change the reputation of the school so that neighbors might say, "'Oh, okay they're doing a good job at [Spruce]. I'm going to send my kid there.'" He acknowledged that he was proud of Spruce's current trajectory and shared that the school was "hopefully working on" being better at reaching out to parents and encouraging parental involvement. In addition, Cole said the school was in the process of creating a school-wide improvement plan "with the mind of actually using it to improve." In the ELA classroom specifically, this meant focusing on students' reading comprehension. As an individual teacher, Cole hoped to grow his practice and his school for the

benefit of his students and the surrounding community. Cole's thoughts echoed arguments that public schools unify communities and are central to providing access to education and resources (Lueck, 2018). If students and families continued to choose other schools (e.g., charters and private schools), Spruce's funding, along with other public schools that operate in states where a students' funds travel with them (Jason, 2017), would be impacted and, thus, adjustments might need to be made that impact everyone (i.e., less school staff) .

For Michelle, student enrollment had been impacted by increases in school choice options and the broader, racial history of Grove High School. She explained:

> My current school is a product of a desegregation lawsuit that happened in the mid 80's. So, they merged all these schools together. And we got a lot of White flight. So, when I first came into the school district, I think one out of every three kids had gone to private schools…And now it's probably one out every two kids in our school district goes somewhere else…they're all over the place. So, I think what we're seeing is the White flight has decimated our school.

Like Cole, Michelle noted that a lack of student enrollment in her public school and a surge in enrollment in private and charter schools had altered, or "decimated," the school's student enrollment. However, for Michelle, student enrollment was also complicated by legal intervention, changes in racial demographics, and racism. She described patterns of "White flight," or the mass exodus of White families from neighborhoods or cities, usually in response to increases in Black and Brown families moving into desegregated neighborhoods, that followed a court ordered desegregation lawsuit. Michelle was accurate in her assessment of demographic shifts at Grove. The districts that were dissolved to form Riverside District collectively served a majority population of White students and now, after thirty-five years after integration, Riverside District

served a majority Black students and families. Michelle believed Grove High School had been "decimated" by lowered student enrollment and, particularly, in this instance, White student enrollment. Michelle explained that by her use of "decimated," she specifically meant that White students' and families leaving the district in numbers impacted the school's funding and thus, the school's access to resources. When students left Grove to attend a choice school, the funding allotted for each student also left Grove. Meaning, Grove decreased both in student enrollment and in funding. Scholars note that middle-class families and parents who send their students to urban public schools (schools like Grove) can and do bring more resources and funding, but may also alienate students and families from low-income households by not thinking collectively about the educational experiences of all students, which might lead to resource hoarding (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Godley 2013; Lewis-McCoy, 2014).

Cole also noted a new increase of White students at Spruce. He hypothesized that White families and students, particularly those with resources, might either be giving Spruce a chance or were unable to attend a choice school (e.g., private or charter schools). Cole did not explicitly share how he believed these demographic changes impacted the school.

Cole and Michelle were particularly invested in student enrollment and its broader impacts on students, teachers, and the surrounding community. For Cole, shifting the school's reputation and encouraging local families to send their students to Spruce would change the school and community for the better by strengthening the public school and creating a central hub of resources. For Michelle, changes in student enrollment were also complicated by the effects of White flight brought on after a court-ordered desegregation lawsuit.

4.1.3 School Discipline

Cole believed that changes brought on by turnover and student enrollment also came with changes in time adults could spend with students and the ability to engage in a more student-centered, or "human," approach to school discipline. He shared that his school had undergone recent changes to the code of conduct, specifically involving the use of suspensions. He hoped that suspension could be used as a last resort, but was worried that decreases in student enrollment and thus the number of school adults in the building might negatively impact teacher discipline decision making. Cole explained:

> The discipline is going to be harder because we don't have the manpower to be human about it. We're gonna have to say, "Oh, you cut class. This is the consequence. Here it is." As opposed to, "Okay, why are you coming to school late?" Or, "Why are you cutting up?"…I'm just afraid that we're not going to be able to do that because our staff keeps getting cut more and more and more because of declining enrollment…I think I've said level of humanity in the discipline because—and that was one of my biggest issues with teachers last year—is teachers were like, "Oh this kid never signs in, this kid has never done any work, he's going to fail." And I'm like, let's be human about this… so let's give a little bit of grace to students and just say, "Okay, I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt that you're trying to sign in, you're trying to do [the] assignment." I mean, there's just a level of humanity I think education as a whole is missing. And hopefully after this pandemic, after we get to see students' faces, we can kind of be more human in our response.

Cole shared his belief that changes in student enrollment, leadership turnover, the ongoing pandemic, and the decline in the number of skilled adults at Spruce may lead to "less human"

discipline, or discipline that did not give students the benefit of the doubt and, instead, reflected more of a by-the-book, punitive response to students' behavior. Together, these systemic issues could lead to a lack of humanity, or a lack of understanding, offered from school adults to their students. Cole's response showed a desire for a more student-centered approach to discipline, an approach not focused on punishment but rather on understanding and empathy. Research has long shown that Black children can be dehumanized by school adults and can be seen as older, and therefore less innocent, than they are—a phenomenon called "adultification"—which can lead to less understanding, the criminalization of Black students' behavior and harsher, more punitive discipline (Goff et al., 2008; Morris, 2016). Here, Cole pushed back against punitive, by-the-book responses and instead insisted that teachers humanize their students, even when students are not meeting the expectations of the school or classroom. However, with fewer resources, fewer adults, and more emotional needs following the pandemic, Cole feared discipline would remain the same or may even get worse.

Michelle also discussed school discipline, particularly the impacts of school safety and security measures, including metal detectors and school resource officers (SRO). Though all teachers who participated in the study said they had a resource officer, police officer, or school security on staff, Grove High School's relationship with in-school police was made more public in recent years. Multiple reports and videos of excessive police violence against Black students at Grove High School surfaced in 2017. In response, the school eventually removed the resource officers from school staff and the district implemented restorative justice practices and decreased their suspension rates (Elliot et al., 2020; Huguley et al., 2018). For Michelle, this issue was complicated. She spoke about instances of violence that students experienced both inside and outside of school and shared that she had lost students to gun violence and had witnessed, or heard

about, students enacting violence against one another. These experiences informed her beliefs about school and community safety as well as the presence of school resource officers in the building. Michelle explained:

> We had an incident at our school where a local police officer, our SRO, punched a kid's teeth in. And they were tasing kids, the principal tased some kid. So, when that incident happened, then they brought people in to kind of overhaul…They haven't ever used [resource officers] correctly, in my opinion, but because they're not there to power trip or scare kids they should be there to create—we do have kids who are killing each other in our neighborhoods. That is a fact. I've had kids walk home from school and get shot at outside of my school, I've had kids shot at the bus stop…So when I get into CUE and some of these people are just like, throw the baby out with the bathwater, get rid of all the cops and get rid of—and they don't understand—like, get rid of the metal detectors…you don't understand. Outside the doors, kids are shooting each other…I think what we need is more of a community liaison kind of cop. If they would do community policing and have them kind of touch base with the kids and kind of keep their finger on the pulse of what's going on in the community, then maybe they can prevent some of the actual violence against these kids…I don't think they use the police correctly. I don't think they need to run around sticking guns in people's faces, but I don't think they should be completely absent either.

Here, Michelle described herself in opposition to common opinions about police officers and metal detectors in schools held by other Center for Urban Education (CUE) members and attendees. She believed that school police could be beneficial to students if used correctly and described her vision for a community-liaison police officer who created a safe environment for students both in and outside of the school—the opposite of the "bully cop" she described as "sticking guns in people's

81

faces," and physically assaulting students. For Michelle, a solution meant a broader change in policing and a systemic change in the relationship between the school, the surrounding community, and local police. Despite evidence of SROs at Grove creating violent and unsafe environments for students, particularly Black students (as evidenced by numerous reports of SRO misconduct), Michelle believed that removing all cops from schools or "throwing out the baby with the bathwater" would also create unsafe school and community environments. Her thoughts on this issue are informed by her experiences at Grove and, therefore, were complicated. Michelle's focus was, ultimately, her students' safety and well-being. She offered an informed perspective on the violence that her students and her school community had dealt with both in and outside of school during her time at Grove. However, her argument did not fully account for the violence that the SROs at her school had also enacted against Black students at Grove. For Michelle, police officers that operated in some form in schools could still act as a safety measure, despite previous SROs at Grove creating unsafe environments, particularly for Black students. Research shows that Black students in the surrounding county are seven to ten times (boys and girls, respectively) more likely than their White peers to be referred to law enforcement, or to be arrested in schools (Elliot et al., 2020) These statistics can be exacerbated by the presence of police officers on school staff, because they can make arrests on school grounds. Although Michelle's argument was centered on student safety both in and outside of school, researchers of inequitable discipline have found that school resource officers may not be the solution to school safety measures, particularly for marginalized students.

Despite their differences in approaches and experiences, both Cole and Michelle problematized the current model of punitive discipline at their schools and promoted efforts that centered student safety and wellness. For Cole, a student-centered approach to discipline

considered the needs of students, did not make assumptions about students' behaviors, gave students grace, and humanized students. For Michelle, a student-centered approach to discipline promoted student safety inside and outside of school—even through the use of measures often problematized in research (e.g., SROs, metal detectors).

For Katie, Michelle and Olivia, leadership and teacher decisions about behavioral expectations and consequences were not always clear or equitable. Katie said that Oaks leadership had not established a clear set of expectations, guidelines or consequences for student behavior. She shared her belief that behavioral expectations were "suggestions" at her school, and explained "most of the behavior expectations…fall to individual teachers. So, we are expected to be the first, second, third, fourth, fifth line of defense with any behavior whether, for example, if a student is late to your class, the question is, then, what are you doing within the class to rectify this? Even though, technically, the behavior is outside of your classroom." Here, Katie hoped for more structured behavioral support from her administration that might more evenly distribute responsibility for responding to student misbehavior. Olivia shared a similar observation about consequences left to individual teachers. At Cherry, Olivia believed that leaving behavioral expectations and discipline outcomes up to teachers had both positive and negative outcomes. Although it might be empowering for teachers to have a say in schoolwide behavioral expectations, Olivia also believed that discipline practices left up to individual teachers could lead to inequities in behavioral write-ups. She explained:

> It's good and bad…We did have like a dress code policy we actually just finally got rid of this year too…I never wrote a student up for ripped jeans because they would get like called to the office, out of class to go get a thing and change their pants…But other teachers…did that expectation, they're getting kids pulled out of class to get called to the office for ripped

jeans. So, I think it kind of goes both ways. And the same thing too if teachers are having more strict and less restorative ways of dealing with it, that's because it's left up to them.

Here, Olivia described the ways in which individual teacher perception and approaches to discipline could impact student outcomes. She argued that leaving discipline choices up to classroom teachers could either benefit or hinder students depending on the teachers' inclination toward restorative or punitive practices. Teachers might refer students to the office for non-violent behaviors, which could lead to students missing class time. Olivia believed that write ups for tardiness were not effective, and write ups for dress code ultimately removed students from the classroom and contributed to a loss of academic time. Research supports Olivia's thoughts about dress code referrals, and, although Olivia did not explicitly mention race or gender, research also shows that dress code policies have been found to create inequitable outcomes (like loss of class time) for marginalized students, particularly for Black girls (Blake et al., 2011; Morris & Perry, 2017).

Michelle also shared her concerns about how some school adults do not hold equal behavioral expectations for students. She explained that a few students at her school were given "carte blanche" by administration and other teachers, particularly students she believed may have experienced trauma or hardship. Michelle observed that the principals would allow these students to not attend class and remain in the office or in the hallways. She explained:

[The student] comes in, she talks to principals, she hasn't come to my class. And I'm not making this up, I have not seen her but maybe one time in the last three weeks, but she's in school every day. She just wanders the halls or she's in a principal's office talking about the issues that she has. And she has a lot of trauma, I get that, but you at some point, as the adult you have to say, look, you got to get to class. Like, why don't we work on a

84

plan…Because these kids, they're going to be 18 years old and have five credits and not be

able to graduate and it's because they were trying to make them feel good about their

trauma…in my opinion, there's a little bit of racism in that, almost. Because it's an

underestimating this kid's ability to do things.

For Michelle, giving students permission to not attend class was a racist practice because it

underestimated these particular students' abilities to function in a school or a work place, despite

their past or current experiences or traumas. For Michelle, encouraging students to attend class, as

opposed to "enabling" student behaviors that kept them out of class, was care. Scholars have found

that Michelle's theory may be true for some White teachers who may unconsciously take on a

socially desirable, or race neutral, approach to evaluating marginalized students (Marcucci, 2020).

Marcucci (2020) argued that this approach, which ultimately lowers behavioral standards and

expectations, might create a harmful environment for students of color. Though most of the

administrators at Grove are Black (save one, given Michelle's description), Michelle's description

of this practice as "racist" echoed Marcucci's argument in her study with White teachers, as well

as studies that show that well-meaning school adults of color can also reproduce and hold

normalized assumptions about Black students in schools (Morris, 2016).

Ultimately, teachers were considering varied ways in which systems, policies and

individual teacher practices might impact school discipline decision making and, thus, students,

and how school discipline and discipline policy and practice might be reimagined for student

safety, wellness and equity.

4.1.4 The "One-Size-Fits All" Approach

Similar to Cole's concerns about student-centered approaches to schooling, Katie was critical of the potential impacts of a district-level systemic issue she called a "one-size-fits-all" approach, or an approach that stripped her school community and her students of their uniqueness, and therefore their unique needs. For Katie, schools within Central School District were treated similarly, despite the large differences between schools. Throughout Central School District, there were notable differences between schools, specifically concerning enrollment, access to academic resources, student and family demographics, location, academic achievement, and leadership stability (A+ Schools, 2020). For example, while Katie's school, Oaks, and Olivia's school, Cherry Magnet, were both categorized as 6-12 schools (meaning they served students from grades six to twelve) in Central District, they differed in multiple and important ways. Oaks was a neighborhood school, meaning the school served students who lived in specific neighborhoods in proximity to the school and did not have to apply to attend. Cherry Magnet was a STEM-focused, public magnet school with an application and lottery system that served student applicants from multiple neighborhoods. Oaks served a majority (95%) of Black and multi-ethnic students (4%) and a majority of low-income families (84%), while Cherry Magnet served a more racially diverse (46% White students, 38% Black students, 9% multi-ethnic students, 4% Asian students, 2% Hispanic) and socioeconomically diverse student body (39% low-income students). Cherry Magnet offered significantly more AP courses, had a much larger population of students enrolled in post-secondary schools, and had a higher graduation rate. For Katie, these differences were important for her district leadership to acknowledge. She elaborated:

> The district specifically does a great disservice to our kids through our teachers by very
> much treating the district as a one-size-fits-all when it's not. We have schools that are

magnets that you have to have a certain GPA, you have to have 90% attendance, and you

have to have certain other things. And then you have our school where attendance is a

constant issue. And I try to work really closely with the social worker and my colleagues

as best as we can, but when the district talks about attendance, it's this blanket—blanket

policies, blanket procedures, blanket remedies. And I don't want our students to fall through

the cracks because the contract and the district says you have to do this when maybe that

works over here at this magnet where you can get kicked out if you don't have 90%

attendance, but it's not going to serve our students over here. And so, how do we, how do

I continue to push myself to do the best I can for the kids within the classroom. Because I

don't feel like I'm getting it from a district that in many ways, I daresay, claims

colorblindness, in some ways, if not colorblindness at least school difference blindness.

Katie believed that her students and her school deserved an informed and equitable approach to

policies, procedures and remedies that would work for both students and teachers at Oaks. Similar

to Cole's argument about a humanistic, student-centered approach to school discipline, Katie also

described a student (or school) centered approach to policy. Katie argued that her school and her

students were unique within the district and deserved policies designed to recognize and

incorporate their differences and intentionally meet their needs. A colorblind (or difference blind)

approach, for Katie, meant her district was ignoring the realities of her specific school and her

students' schooling experiences. A race-centered or equitable approach to policy at Oaks might be

informed by the realities of racially inequitable discipline practices in the district and the county

(Elliot et al., 2020; Huguley et al.), relevant pedagogical practices, literature about the education

debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006), and an understanding of the unique challenges that a school closing

and merger (see Oaks 6-12 description in Methods) might have had on students and student

learning. Here, Katie was grappling with colorblindness and its inequitable impacts at a systems level. For Katie, policy that was neutral, particularly race neutral, or equal, was not actually neutral or equal and did not benefit her students or her school. Her thoughts echo Milner's (2015) urgency for immediate, district-level change, which encouraged policy makers to consider equity over equality. In other words, districts should consider the specific needs of students they serve throughout the district and reconsider and disrupt concepts of fairness or, in Katie's words, "blanket policies." In line with critical scholarship, Katie's argument called for an intersectional (Love, 2019) approach to policy based in equity, as opposed to equality or fairness (Gutierreze, 2008; Milner, 2015).

4.1.5 Poverty & Racism

All four teachers made note of the ways in which systemic racism and/or poverty impacted students' in-school experiences. For Katie and Cole, education was not the great equalizer. Instead, Katie believed that educational quality was not equal for all students and that some students' schooling experiences were "pre-determined." This was reflected in both her critique of district-wide colorblind/difference blind, one-size-fits all, policies as described above, and in her recognition that race and poverty impacted students' schooling experiences. She explained:

> Once I was in the urban setting and I realized how different the educational quality is, through no fault of [students'] own, it was simply what area they lived in in many cases, their race—especially in [The City]—what that pre-determined for them, as far as their educational quality.

Here, Katie spoke about the ways in which a student's race, neighborhood, and city impacted their access to quality education and equitable learning spaces. Though Katie does not explicitly

describe these issues collectively as "systemic racism," I argue that Katie was considering the ways in which histories of neighborhood and school segregation, poverty, and racism overlapped and culminated to create inequitable learning spaces for marginalized students. Cole agreed. In his explanation for why he chose to teach exclusively in schools that served majority Black students, he discussed the impacts of systemic racism on schooling:

> [The schools I've taught in] are predominately Black spaces. [Spruce High] is 85% Black, [Cyprus High] was about 92% Black, I guess. So, I think it's seeing—and again, this is still the journey that I'm on—is seeing racial injustice and systemic racism as a huge hindrance to student achievement. And not even just student achievement as far as test scores, but success in schools. Is seeing race—like the racial tensions and the racism within [The City] that affect schools and just feeling really called to that.

Like Katie, Cole described the ways in which systemic racism had impacted students' access to equitable learning opportunities and outcomes. Additionally, both teachers also mentioned the racial realities and impacts of the city itself. The surrounding city in which both Katie and Cole taught was, historically and contemporarily, a racially segregated city and had seen a large increase in gentrification, the subsequent displacement of low-income, Black and Brown families, and racially and economically segregated neighborhoods and schools (Dickinson, 2021). Further, schools in the city remain largely racially segregated, with 22% of Black students attending public schools that serve majority (90%) populations of Black and Brown students (A+ Schools, 2020-2021). Additionally, both Katie and Cole taught in schools that had once been part of two separate school closures and subsequent student population mergers. In both cases, students and families from two nearby, closing public schools were enrolled at Oaks and Spruce, respectively. Both Katie's and Cole's reflections combined multiple and overlapping systemic issues and noted the

ways race, income, neighborhood location, school funding, school quality and academics were intertwined and inequitably impacted Black and low-income students and families.

In addition to her view that systemic racism had an impact on her students' educational opportunities, Katie also discussed the impacts of poverty on student learning. She elaborated:

> One of the big realizations for me was, poverty affects how you show up in the classroom…And of course, you can't control a student's socio-economic background, or the racial background, or the neighborhood demographics with crime, but you also can't ignore it…I really want students to bring themselves to the classroom and not to say, let's separate who you are and this academic learning, but how do we merge it so that you actually feel like you're learning and you're taking something away from this.

For Katie, ignoring the unique realities of students' lives, as she believed her district leadership was prone to do, would separate students' lived experiences and identities from their learning. Instead, Katie believed that students should show up as their whole selves. Her thinking, again, echoed Milner's (2015) advice for teachers to teach at the intersection of an informed understanding of students' lived realities both in and outside of school (p. 68). Bettina Love (2019) argued that educators must engage with intersectionality, or the fullness and full selves of their students. I argue that Katie is drawing on the language of intersectionality to invite students' whole selves into her classroom.

Michelle also reflected on the impacts that systemic racism and poverty had on her students and families. She coupled her above argument about school and community violence, resource officers, and student safety with larger systemic issues—namely, systemic racism and poverty. Michelle described one physical altercation she had witnessed between a parent and another student at a school bus during dismissal. She used this example as an opportunity to reflect on her

90

beliefs about broader community issues. She explained, "It's unfortunate, but again, that's, like wow. We have to unpack systemic racism and generational poverty and all these other things. Like, why are people in that mindset? Like, where's the supports in the community for folks?"

Here, Michelle shared her belief that people acted in certain ways, or adopted certain "mindsets" because of their circumstances. Instead of blaming the individuals in this example for violent acts, she reflected on the lack of community resources and supports available to families that she served. Michelle's beliefs about student safety were informed by acts of violence she had witnessed or had been made privy to. Her reflection on the ways that broader systemic issues, like a lack of community resources, systemic racism and generational poverty, needed to be addressed in order for her students and their families to be safe complicated her beliefs about school resource officers and community policing as possible solutions to disrupting school and community violence. Arguments for defunding police often promote the redistribution of funds away from policing and toward community or school resources, including mental health resources, social workers and access to basic necessities, like housing and grocery stores (Kaba, 2021). Here, Michelle's considerations of supports for families experiencing the impacts of systemic racism and generational poverty did not seem to include policing or punishment.

Olivia also mentioned numerous systemic issues, such as the low numbers of Black teachers in schools, increases in school racial segregation, and the historical impacts of Brown versus the Board of Education as challenges for teachers and students. For Olivia, school leadership and fellow teachers who hoped to enact positive changes at their school were "talking around the issue" instead of confronting the ways a history of racism has contemporarily impacted modern schooling. She explained:

91

Teachers now…just look at modern day schools in a vacuum, like they just showed up racist…without understanding how public schools were built and why they were built and looking at the history of schooling… So, teachers thinking that these problems are just by chance…you don't know how to solve them because you don't know the history of how schooling even started…And so, when teachers like talk about solutions like you know for improving schools, which we do at our school, but again you're kind of talking around the issue.

Olivia believed that teachers should educate themselves about the history of schooling as it related to race and racism. For Olivia, a gap in teacher learning and understanding of systemic issues would create a gap in their approach to designing useful school improvements. She later used the Brown versus the Board of Education ruling as an example to explain her point. She believed that some teachers only understood Brown versus the Board as a progressive ruling that desegregated schools. For Olivia, it was also essential for teachers to understand that this ruling also led to Black principals and teachers losing their jobs and the closing of Black community schools. For Olivia, this was not a matter of changing teachers' minds, but "about unseeing things—you can't stop seeing things once, you know, like, why are there no black teachers? There's one black teacher in our school. Like, that's not an accident." Olivia wanted her fellow teachers to make connections between the past and the present and to see that systemic issues were no "accident," but were instead the results of a long history of racism in schools. Olivia believed teacher understanding of the history of schooling might better inform future school improvements because teachers might understand issues in a new way, and might see that schools did not "show up racist," but instead were built on a long history of racism in the U.S. Olivia's talk echoed Tatum's (2001) argument, that White, pre-service teachers need to move past surface level, white-washed understandings of

historical and contemporary events and learn the ways in which White resistance and policy, created mainly to appease White families, have shaped outcomes for schools.

4.1.6 Tracking

Both Michelle and Olivia noted their schools' use of academic tracking and the racial demographics of their courses. Olivia mentioned that her school was working to not track at the AP level. Her principal wanted all students to take an AP course at Cherry Magnet. Olivia shared that the racial demographics of her course enrollment matched up with the school's overall racial demographics, aside from her African American Literature course, which she said hosted a larger number of Black students.

At Grove, however, academic tracking negatively impacted Black students' access to higher-level coursework. Michelle was critical of this policy choice. She explained:

I have AP classes, and they're the inverted statistic…Say our school's 70% Black and 30% White. I have 70% White and 30% Black in my AP class…And in the low track classes, it's like 90% Black. It's bad. The Honors is probably about split, still it's higher White in the upper classes. And they have not done anything to mitigate that I don't think. There's been a lot of talk about it and there have been a lot of Black administrators that have had these conversations, that we need to do something with the tracking, and they haven't…I've been speaking to people even recently that are in positions of power…But I don't have the power. I'm the head of my English department, I'm not head of the English department for the district. I only have so much power…I just constantly am putting that out there, even in my department. I try to tell them, no gate keeping. Some people think that only certain

kids should be in honors classes or AP classes…Let [students] figure it out for themselves

if they want to take honors or AP. And if it's too much for them, they can bow out.

Here, Michelle described multiple systemic issues she believed were brought on by academic tracking. First, she noted the racial inequities exasperated by academic gatekeeping (i.e., tracking), or the process through which teachers (mostly White) or school leadership (mostly Black) decided if students should have access to advanced subject matter. Michelle explained that her AP class was an "inverted statistic." In other words, despite her school serving majority Black students, her AP class served majority White students. She also described racial segregation in lower tracked classrooms, in which Black students represented an overwhelming majority. These trends are certainly not unique to Grove or to Michelle's classroom. Across the U.S., Black students are underrepresented in Honors and AP courses and gifted programs (Ford & King, 2014). Similar to the other veteran teachers in this study, Michelle was knowledgeable about broad, systemic issues that negatively impacted her students, school, and district. With this knowledge and her (limited) power, she hoped to disrupt the tracking practices at Grove that had created an "inverted statistic" and kept marginalized students from high-level academic courses.

Throughout this section, teachers were critically reflecting on numerous systemic issues that impacted their students, their schools, their districts and their practice. For all four teachers, schooling did not exist in a vacuum but was, instead, informed by students' lived experiences both in and outside of school, including systemic racism, poverty, school governance, and the history of the United States. Here, teachers were grappling with various systemic issues and revealed areas where more intentional work might be done at the school and district level.

4.2 White Teachers' Racial Awareness

All four teachers discussed or mentioned their own personal growth as White ELA practitioners developing their racial awareness. Most teachers mentioned that their engagement in this type of work was constant and ongoing. Cole explained, "It's a process. Your racial awareness journey, you have to engage with it constantly, especially as a White person. You've got to be thinking and reading and listening and trying to learn different perspectives to make you more prepared." In the sections that follow, I unpack themes that emerged when teachers described or mentioned their development as White teachers who identified as dedicated to racial justice. Teachers' mentioned reading and interacting with critical scholarship, scholars, and professional development, and/or reflecting on their own lived experiences. Topics about racial or critical awareness were often coupled with discussions of texts that were impactful to their ideologies and the necessities of intentional reading, listening and perspective-taking.

4.2.1 Reading

For most teachers, reading was an imperative step in their growing racial awareness. For Michelle, being well read or diversifying your reading practices was imperative to personal growth and self-reflection. Put another way, Michelle believed that reading diverse work made you a more empathetic person. She explained, "I've read so much, so many books, and I find that people that have less empathy for the work or less desire for the work, they're not well read." For Michelle, immersing in a variety of texts written by a variety of people could help educators build empathy and desire for critical classroom work. She explained, "I think the more you read, the more you get to view the human experience. And I think it's helped me with my advocacy in the classroom."

During our interviews, Michelle mentioned her familiarity with the works of James Banks and Geneva Smitherman. Michelle identified as a multiculturalist and shared that her master's program was very focused on the works of James Banks. She also shared that, when she was engaged in the hiring process at Grove, she was expected to teach lessons about African American English and her knowledge of Geneva Smitherman helped guide her teaching.

As discussed above, Olivia believed it was imperative for teachers to read race-centered, historical texts that critically showcased a history of race, racism and schooling that informed current schooling practices (e.g., *Fugitive Pedagogy)* in addition to or instead of popular, contemporary, anti-racist texts (e.g., *White Fragility*). When asked what advice she would give new teachers, she elaborated on this point:

> You have to read and really commit to reading history of the United States and any and all sorts of history that deals with anything related to race…reading anti-racism books is not going to save you or give you a beacon to follow…When you start reading and going into the history, then you can't un-see things that still exist. Or you can't not write things off. But, things that seem like new problems are not at all new problems. And being able to understand how the problems…has been covered up or morphed…I've read books like *White Fragility* and some of those other ones and I'm like, this is nothing…it's not focusing on Black people, which is what you're trying to do for racial justice. And if you're not looking at what they're saying about their personal experiences and the stories they're writing, then you're just thinking about yourself. Which, I know it's kind of hard to say, because you have to change yourself, but there's no end goal if you're just reading those books to do racial justice, then you still don't even know what it is because you're not reading the history or the actual stories.

For Olivia, reading historical texts about race and racism meant centering Black people and Black American history, as opposed to work that centered a White audience, or work that focused specifically on White people's (un)learning. In other words, Olivia saw "anti-racist" texts as written for a White audience, particularly a White audience focused less on a history of systemic racism and more on individual prejudice, or how to be a better White person. Without a deep dive into historical, race-centered texts, Oliva argued, modern texts about anti-racist work would not be as useful but act, instead, as only one piece of an unfinished puzzle. For Olivia, historical texts about race and racism mattered more for understanding racism in contemporary schooling because they exposed historical decision-making that impacted current systems. She believed, once you read and heard the racial history of the U.S., there were certain things you could not "un-see," or continue to ignore. Olivia believed this route was more effective in her own racial awareness and would therefore be more beneficial for her (hypothetical) new colleagues. For Olivia, exposure to these particular texts gave her more confidence as an educator and allowed her to see, "what schools should be doing…drawing connections from chattel slavery to school," and that, "if you center Blackness and that human experience, we'll all be better off." Olivia mentioned numerous texts and scholars that had guided her practice and study, including: Duncan-Andre's *The Art of Critical Pedagogy*, Yolanda Sealy-Ruiz, Marc Lamont Hill, Michelle Alexander's, *The New Jim Crow*, Nichole Hannah Jones, Jamila Lynne Scott, Jarvis Givens's *Fugitive Pedagogy*, and Mariam Kaba's, *We Do This Til' We Free Us*. For Olivia, books like Mariam Kaba's, *We Do This Til' We Free Us*, "really pointed out to me how much I was still clinging to things that could be harmful" and shifted her awareness toward more liberatory classroom practice.

Cole also discussed how his practice had been influenced by reading the work of Black scholars and attending race-centered teaching forums, like CUESEF:

I think it helps me think critically about what I am looking at. So, as opposed to just teaching the curriculum as it is, I'm like looking at it, I'm like, "Okay here's a bunch of dead White dudes, why are we studying dead White dudes so much?" And then, as opposed to embracing the canon or embracing Standard American English, like Standard American English and how kids communicate, I've had to decolonize my own well of information…and that has happened because of my experiences through CUESEF, through my Ed.D. program, through reading Tyrone Howard or Richard Miller and whoever. Just continuing to understand the opportunity that is there for my students and helping them see it as, that's reflective of them as opposed to reflective of me.

For Cole, reading the work of scholars like Tyrone Howard and Richard Milner allowed him to pose critical questions about his own practice and beliefs, including questions about the English Literature canon, the authors included in the canon, as well as his understandings of and beliefs about student dialect and Standardized English. Although Cole does not directly disclose his previous beliefs and understandings about canon and language, he was reflective, broadly, of how his previous thinking has changed due, in part, to his investment in critical texts. Throughout our interviews, Cole mentioned relying heavily on the work of Tyrone Howard and his familiarity with the work of Richard Milner, Chris Emdin, as well as Monique Morris's, *Push Out*.

For Olivia, Michelle and Cole, being well read, diversifying (and, in Cole's words, "decolonizing") their own "well of information" was essential to their racial awareness in the classroom. Some teachers mentioned how their reading practices had influenced their classroom practices. Olivia spoke about recognizing the harmful practices she had clung to in the past, and mentioned feeling motivated to write a letter to school leadership seeking positive change. Cole discussed how the texts he read encouraged him to rethink his relationship to the traditional ELA

canon, Standardized English, and more traditional ELA teaching practices. They also encouraged him to start actively listening to his students (discussed in more detail below). For Michelle, reading broadly and seeking out diverse texts encouraged a joy for classroom work and empathy for human beings. Matias and Mackey (2015) deliberately selected counter narratives to common ideologies and texts to elicit emotions and empathy from their White teacher candidates in order for them to "self discover" their own Whiteness and understand race for the benefit of all students. Thus, reading texts that engage readers in emotional work, or those that center counter narratives, can be beneficial for teachers' racial awareness development. Teachers described how their practices and outlooks had changed or been supplemented by texts, including texts and scholarship about racial justice in schools, as well as diverse texts that offered new perspectives.

4.2.2 Listening

In addition to reading critical scholarship about race, racism, and schooling, most teachers also discussed the ways in which listening (to race scholars and, especially, their own students) and perspective taking were important practices in developing their racial awareness. Michelle believed that classroom community building began with listening. She explained, "if they hear how I think about things and I hear how they think about things, that makes us more of a community. Even though I'm White and [they're] Black, I can build community that way also, just to listen." Michelle described herself as a relational teacher. She relied on relationships with students for classroom management purposes and for classroom community building. She also shared her belief that it is important to talk about race and racism in her classroom because it is a safe space for students to share their thinking, as opposed to working through their thoughts (or

having their thoughts silenced) in the outside world. For Michelle, listening to various perspectives was one way to have difficult conversations and to build relationships with students.

Cole agreed and argued that listening was imperative, particularly for White educators. When asked what advice he would give new teachers, Cole explained:

White people often insert themselves into the conversation without listening. And trying to impose what we've always known in an educational system on—without listening. And educational systems were created for White people and the reality is, our education system is not even predominately White anymore. So, we need to do a better job of listening.

Like Michelle, Cole believed that listening was one way to engage in building community. In Cole's case, "listening" could be used as a way to tackle more systemic issues, specifically the history of schooling. For Cole, White people as a whole needed to do a better job at listening, particularly to the ways in which the education system was structured around and maintained by systems of Whiteness. He continued:

I think as an English teacher, I taught how I was taught. I taught how I was trained as opposed to listening. And I think the Chris Emdin book really had me start thinking about listening to students and hearing their experience. Because I was good in school, because I could sit and listen and take notes. And that is a White culture thing is being able to just sit and listen. So—and I'm not even saying that that was good…But just being able to see how different cultures and different students in different neighborhoods, different families, different kids within the same family, how they learn and how they process school and how they experience school. Being receptive and being able to listen to students is huge and more than anything else that's what I've taken away from that experience. Just be willing to listen, be critical of yourself so that you can help all the students have a good experience.

Here, Cole acknowledged the ways in which Whiteness shows up in schools (e.g., "educational systems were created for White people" and "that is a White culture thing, is being able to just sit and listen") and is normalized. Cole reflected on the ways in which his success in school was shaped by his Whiteness, his privilege and his alignment with White, cultural understandings of learning and behavior, and how that success and those expectations shaped his own teaching style—a teaching style he was critically reflecting on. One way, Cole argued, to subvert his normalized thinking was to observe diversity in learning practices and to listen to his students. Cole expanded on his above thinking with an example from his own classroom:

> There are some days I feel completely prepared and able to kind of roll with it, and other days I'm like, I'm just another White guy who's trying to have the same conversation. So last year, during…maybe it was Breonna Taylor, but I remember putting together this big lesson, where I was like, I'm going to give kids a chance to talk and give kids a chance to respond. They're probably really upset…And the kids are like, "[Mr. Cole], we don't need to talk about this." I'm like, "Well, what do you mean? It's a big deal." [They're] like, "Yeah, but it's going to happen again. It's happened before, it's going to happen again, this is just another one." And I'm like, "Oh." I mean, this the reality of their life. They're like, "This isn't anything new, police have been doing this forever. The system is set up to let this happen." So, they're like, "It's going to happen again. We're not going to get all out of sorts because of this one." So that was kind of eye opening to me. Kids are like, this is the reality of it. So, that kind of took me a little bit of like, oh yeah.

In this example, Cole explained that he had come to class assuming that his students would want to engage in a guided conversation about the murder of Breonna Taylor, but instead learned that some of his Black students thought about the issue differently than he did. The students in Cole's

example explained to Cole that this was a reality they engaged with often as Black teenagers in America. Although Cole did not explicitly share the ways in which his perspective or teaching had changed after this experience with his students, he ultimately recognized that, despite his intentional reading and listening practices, as a White teacher, he would continue to have blind spots and a different or limited perspective. Cochran-Smith (2003) argues that sharing stories like the one Cole shared above is one way for White educators (and researchers) to re-shape racial awareness work around continued growth that pushes through potentially debilitating feelings of guilt and shame and moves toward critical self-reflection, growth and effective practice with students of color.

Teacher language in this section was reflective, particularly Cole's investigations of his own practice and thinking about the ways Whiteness impacted schooling practices, and indicated an ongoing critical and race-centered practice. Teachers showcased their knowledge about the benefits of reading diverse or historical texts, race-centered professional development opportunities, and listening to their students of color. Researchers argue that listening, particularly to colleagues and students of color, it essential to anti-racist White teacher practice (Utt & Tochluk, 2020). Further, Milner (2015) lists "listening to the voices of students" as a useful tool to guide teacher practice and co-create learning with their students.

Given that I could not observe the teachers' classes due to the COVID pandemic, I wonder what listening to students and sharing perspectives looked like in these teachers' classrooms. Were issues students shared being disrupted or only heard? Further, although teachers mentioned listening to their Black students' perspectives, reading race-centered literature, and attending events that featured critical race scholars, they did not specifically discuss working or speaking directly with colleagues, specifically Black colleagues or colleagues of color, about these

particular issues – a practice that might have informed the teachers' understanding of Black adults' views on contemporary racism and education. This might be due, in part, to the White teachers in my study wanting to avoid burdening their Black colleagues with the responsibility of (re)educating their White peers. Additionally, some teachers may not have had a large number of Black colleagues to speak with. Michelle shared that there was one teacher of color at her school and the other three teachers taught in schools with a large majority of White teachers. Despite these obstacles, Utt and Tochluck (2020) argue that a developing racial awareness must happen in a community where critical feedback is provided. This critical community might be created alongside of other White teachers working to develop their anti-racist practices but, argue Utt and Tochluck, critical feedback about anti-racist practices are best informed by Black adults and colleagues who hold a unique knowledge and perspective about race and racism in schools and are best suited to identify both racism and allyship.

4.2.3 Distinguishing Themselves from Other White Teachers

Teachers' developing racial awareness also shaped their beliefs about their colleagues. All four teachers, in various ways, described a frustration with what seemed to be White colleagues whom they believed were not willing to grow their practice or were at a different (perhaps delayed) stage of their racial awareness. Cole explained,

> It's a journey. I mean, your race journey, it's one thing. As an educator, it's another thing. I have gone through a bunch of trainings and I've read a bunch of stuff and I did my dissertation and I did advanced study, so I feel like I have more experience in that arena than some of the teachers. And I know I get intolerant and impatient for other teachers

beginning their own journey and I'm like, how can you teach in [Central School District] and not deal with your own biases?

Although Cole understood that his own process of (un)learning had been more privileged than his colleagues because of his access to coursework and academic libraries during his graduate study, he still believed that there was little excuse for teachers in his district to not be actively engaged in anti-bias, self-reflective work. Cole suggested that being aware of your bias as a person is important, but being aware of your bias as a *teacher* was essential, especially a teacher of students of color. He explained that part of a teacher's job, particularly teachers who teach predominantly students of color, was to teach, empower and equip students with the skills to navigate a racist society. For Cole, teachers who did not address their biases were not as effective and might perpetuate conflict and racist behavior in their classrooms. Cole described himself multiple times as a White, cis-hetero, Christian man and, in doing so, made note of his privileges. In this instance, Cole saw himself as separate from his other, less progressed, White colleagues in terms of their developing racial awareness and was frustrated with their lack of reflective work about their own biases.

All four teachers in the study shared a frustration with their seemingly White colleagues, particularly with how their colleagues responded to race-centered professional development. Michelle believed a lot of teachers at her school were resentful of and resistant to both the district's anti-bias training/professional development and the historic merger. Michelle described a difference between teachers who were brought in purposefully during and after the merger (herself included) and had been vetted for culturally relevant and race-centered work, and teachers who had followed students from their previous school during the court ordered merger. Her description established an opposing dynamic between teachers like her, who were on board and open to

discussions about race, and teachers who had merged and were not open to discussions. This dynamic was not unique in this study, as most teacher participants also described themselves in opposition to or very different from teachers who either were at different stages of their racial awareness or were resentful and resistant to change.

Despite this dynamic, Michelle was also critical of the ways in which race-centered professional development was delivered. She explained:

> The repository of information I have in my head, it's decades of reading and researching and understanding things…So, you're in a different headspace than the audience that you're talking to, you have to kind of spoon feed them the stuff that you spent decades learning. Sometimes I think [professional development leaders] just come right out and they expect everybody to do an about face.

Though Michelle was critical of her colleagues' resentment of anti-bias training, Michelle argued that professional development leaders should meet resistant teachers where they are and ease them into the conversation and not expect an instant change. This approach, she believed, would benefit students, particularly Black students, because current approaches may be encouraging certain teachers to double down on their problematic thinking. However, in addition to describing some colleagues as resentful to race-centered PD, Michelle also described some of her colleagues as extremely racist. She explained, "people that I know are just flaming racists at my school, like horrible." Despite this belief, she argued that the best way forward was for professional development leaders to approach anti-bias training in a way that did not ostracize resistant teachers. She continued:

> You have to have to wear the same shoes. We're all learning, people are making mistakes…People are vulnerable…But pushing them off the ledge or pissing them off,

that's not going to help these kids either. It is not going to help the Black kids in our school for a bunch of White teachers to be resentful and angry that they have the anti-bias training and then they have to go back and teach Black kids. And it just, it's not good for the kids.

Similar to her critique of schools being quick to remove resource officers from staff, Michelle was balancing the realities of her school with her desire for student safety. Here, Michelle shared her belief that the current professional development model was making her resentful colleagues angry, and those angry teachers, having been made uncomfortable and vulnerable during an anti-bias professional development training, would return to classrooms with Black students and possibly act in harmful ways. Despite her concern with White teachers who were angry or hostile towards Black students, Michelle did not acknowledge that her colleagues (whom she described as resentful and racist) may have already caused harm to their Black students. Ultimately, Michelle believed that professional development educators should find a way to effectively reach resistant teachers. However, centering Black students' and other marginalized students' well-being in the classroom may require White teacher discomfort and vulnerability during professional development focused on anti-bias training and racism in schools.

Cole, Katie and Olivia also spoke about colleagues' resistance to or discomfort with race-centered professional development. For Katie, teachers who were resistant to this type of professional development dominated the conversation and made it difficult for other teachers to fully participate. Cole was similarly critical of his colleagues' resistance to race-centered professional development or training. For Cole, resistant colleagues were too emotional, or centered their own experiences instead of their students. He explained:

I wish people could get to a non-emotional spot…we've done courageous conversations and that training and people get really emotional and I'm like, let's focus on students and

think about their perspective…There's an element of guilt, whether it's assumed or, you

know, like you have to experience it. So, there's that element of guilt and there's the

element of changing a status quo that you have experienced your whole life. And the

challenge to what we have been used to, and kind of rethinking and relearning things that

we have perceived to always work. I think that's what the emotional part of it is, just that

idea of change.

Cole brought up common challenges that White educators and pre-service educators invested in

racial development report, such as guilt and shame (Matias & Mackey, 2016). Here, Cole aligned

himself with other White teachers by using words like "we" to describe the discomfort that can

come along with engagement in race-centered work. Cole hoped his colleagues would be able to

get to a point where they set emotional responses (like shame and guilt) aside and worked toward

centering the positive educational experiences of their students.

Olivia expressed frustration with her colleagues' unwillingness to actively and

independently seek out race-centered learning, like she had, and described a frustration that her

own learning about race and racism in professional development settings was stifled because other

colleagues were struggling. She explained, "I didn't learn anything from what our school was doing

like, at all. If anything, I was getting frustrated with different things…it was more about me having

to really try to understand why some people were struggling with it, that kind of learning." Here,

Olivia distinguished or distanced herself from her White colleagues, a response Utt and Tochluk

(2020) described as brought on by the tensions of being a White teacher who is (1) dedicated to

anti-racist practice but (2) benefits from a racist society. Utt and Tochluk argue that, in these

circumstances, White teachers may distance themselves from other White colleagues. However,

they also argue that efforts to engage resistant White teachers might create communities of

accountability that ultimately operate to shift practice and create better learning environments for students.

All four teachers portrayed, to varying degrees, a contrast between themselves and their resistant colleagues. All four teachers described pushing back against White colleagues who were resistant to race-centered work and school change, and to some extent held those colleagues responsible for not being willing to learn about and acknowledge the role of systemic racism in their students' lives and education. Michelle and Cole were also critical of the ways in which professional development centered on race at their schools was not designed to anticipate White teachers' resistance and emotions and suggested that the professional development would be more effective if it addressed these issues more deliberately. Resistance to race-centered professional development, or even teacher education coursework, has been found to be common among White in-service and pre-service teachers (Picower, 2009). Shifting our perspectives, recognizing that we benefit from a racist society, critically examining our own beliefs and linguistic practices, and analyzing our privilege can cause feelings of discomfort, guilt and shame for White people engaged in critical (un)learning. However, certain responses to these feelings (like avoidance or resistance) can shut down or disrupt White teachers' access to anti-bias or anti-racist learning, and the potential for personal and professional growth.

Scholars argue that critical communities of practice that meet deliberately and often and are led by a knowledgeable teacher or expert can be beneficial for teacher racial awareness (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Utt & Tochluk, 2020). Despite teachers' frustrations with their more resistant and seemingly White colleagues, collaboration might be key.

4.2.4 Being White

When asked specifically how or if they believed their racial identity as White impacted discipline in the classroom, three teachers described current or past tensions in the classroom related to Black students' feelings or interpretations of teachers' Whiteness. Cole shared his belief that he had to work hard to build relationships with his Black students. He explained:

> I think I have to do a better job and work harder at building the relationship so the kids are like, "Okay, he is here and he cares about me"…But being a White, middle class guy not from [The City], and not from [Spruce] and from the [Neighborhood], there's an element of, I don't know, caution. Probably, here's another White guy, I've had all these White teachers in my whole academic career, and maybe they had crappy situations with prior White teachers and they've got that kind of in the back of their mind and, you know, maybe another White teacher has made comments and micro-aggressions and they still hold on to that.

Cole believed that his Black students viewed him with caution because they had had prior, negative experiences with White teachers. To combat this, Cole shared that he worked hard to be a trusted presence in his Black students' lives by continuing to work at Spruce, living in the neighborhood, and acting as a sports coach. Although Cole did not expand upon how this might impact discipline dynamics in the classroom, he did understand this dynamic to be his responsibility to rectify.

Both Olivia and Michelle, when asked how they believed their race impacted discipline, brought up specific interactions with Black students and classroom discipline. Olivia described an ongoing issue in her classroom in which students questioned her redirections:

> What has come up before and came up once this year, but definitely used to come up more, is that a Black student would say, "But there's other people talking and you called me out

on it." And I'm very conscious of not saying, "It's because you were loud." But phrasing it like, "That volume level is preventing me from hearing other students. And other students are talking, but I can still hear myself and hear the other student when I'm talking to them"… And that is definitely a statement that comes from Black students. Like, "There were other people talking." Or, "But there were other people on their phones."

Here, Olivia described a common classroom occurrence in which: (1) she redirected a student for the volume of their voice or for having their phone out, and (2) Black students questioned her decision-making, often by commenting that they were not the only ones engaged in that particular behavior (e.g., other people are talking, other people are on their cell phones). Though Olivia shared that her students never explicitly said they believed they were being targeted because of their race, Olivia explained that, when students questioned her redirections, it felt that way to her. Olivia believed that her redirections were straightforward and explainable (e.g., students are not allowed to have cell phones out in class, students' volume of voice should not disrupt the ability for the teacher to hear other students) and had been discussed numerous times in her classroom. She hoped to justify her decision-making to students. She explained: "I don't know how to differentiate or make a statement to them and it's like, this is the behavior we've talked about." Olivia seemed to be working toward finding a way to verbally redirect her Black students in particular so that unwanted behaviors would cease and Black students would no longer consider being redirected as an issue of race. For Olivia, students were misinterpreting her redirections. For Olivia's Black students, Olivia was targeting them. Therefore, Olivia, as a White teacher, struggled to reconcile this difference in perspective.

Similarly, Michelle described an interaction with a Black female student that she believed was interpreted incorrectly by the student. She explained:

I think there are kids that don't know me at all that assume things about me because I'm a White woman…they recognize that I'm White and I have certain, you know, probably have a certain experience that they don't have, and I don't think they hold it against me too much, but there are kids that do that don't know me…I had a kid come in one time and talked about… something nasty about White people, White people this that, and the other. And I'm like, what? Like, I'm right here…She ended up calling me a White B or something, because she left the room and didn't have a pass and it wasn't allowed. I said something to her about it, and she called me the White B-word and I'm like, "You're leaving and I don't know where you're going, I don't know what you're doing"…Like, yeah I'm White, that has nothing to do with this situation. When you walked out of the in-school room, that has nothing to do with anything in this situation…I just wanted her to know, you can't just call people out like that, assuming that they're racist. You walked out of the school room without a pass and just do whatever you wanted, that has nothing to do with racism…plus I just was like, "It's disrespectful to call me that, call me and White B anyway."

Michelle's description and reflection on this interaction with a Black student in the in-school suspension room reflected her belief that this situation had nothing to do with race or racism and was straightforward—this student broke a rule and was being redirected for it. From Michelle's perspective, she told the student that she should not call people racist, or assume that they are racist, because they are White. Like Cole, Michelle believed that once students got to know her and re-thought their (assumed) pre-formed assumptions about White teachers, they would think of her differently.

Cole, Michelle and Olivia spoke about Whiteness and discipline in similar ways. For all three teachers, Whiteness impacted their relationships with students. All three teachers also

expressed that their Black students were making incorrect assumptions or misreading interactions with them because they were White and did not acknowledge any possibility of implicit bias or microaggressions in their interactions with students. Though the examples and circumstances teachers discussed varied in their intensity and frequency, Michelle and Olivia seemed to believe that their Black students were seeing bias and racism in their actions where it did not exist. Cole expressed more empathy towards his students' assumption that he would enact racial bias towards them because he was White, acknowledging that he was an outsider to their community and that they likely had negative interactions with other White teachers in the past.

Katie grappled with this question and seemed to be continuing in her considerations of the ways in which she saw her White identity as impacting her discipline practices. Ultimately, Katie shared that her Whiteness might have informed her approach to discipline the classroom. She explained:

> I don't like the idea of raising my voice to the students, not just because I'm a White teacher and most of my students are Black, but also because I just don't like to raise my voice…I don't know if it's my personality, or if it's because I'm White, or if it's probably both but, I don't rule with an iron fist. I'm not a super stern person. And so that ultimately leads to me building a classroom of respect, which is what keeps my class disciplined…it's not that…the consequences are raining down on you, it's more of just, we've built this culture. And again, I'm sure being White plays into that, but I also think that it's also me, just who I am.

For Katie, unpacking the ways in which her racial identity impacted her classroom discipline or her approach to discipline was difficult. She shared that her race did, perhaps, inform her approach

112

as a soft spoken person in the classroom, but that she also might just be a soft spoken person, race aside.

Utt and Tochulk (2020) argue that it is important for White teachers to "turn the racialized lens of education around to focus on White teacher identity" (p. 129). In other words, examining the ways in which White racial identity impacts classroom practices can seek to better and develop further ways for White educators to step further into anti-racist practice (Deutschman, 2022; Utt & Tochulk, 2020). The scholars argue that developing an identity as an anti-racist teacher and a White person who continues to benefit from a racist society is a complicated identity space and can lead to the rejection of anti-racist work and deep self-reflective practices. The teachers in my study certainly were not rejecting anti-racist work, but did grapple with understanding the ways in which their White racial identity might impact classroom discipline practices and students' experiences in the classroom.

4.3 Power and Control in the ELA Classroom

When I first came into this study, I was focused mainly on racial inequities of classroom discipline. Past research has shown that teachers tend to over-discipline or misinterpret their Black students' behavior and talk and may hold racialized perceptions of students' talk (Morris, 2005; Morris, 2016) and language (Baker-Bell, 2020). Because ELA classrooms tend to rely on student talk and language, I hypothesized that Black students may be particularly vulnerable to punishment based on teacher perceptions of their talk (e.g., volume of voice, perceived tone) in ELA classrooms. However, one of my biggest findings was that this small group of White ELA teachers shared that they tried to avoid disciplining students. Instead, teachers described classrooms that

focused on student learning, student relationships, academic risk taking, safety and joy. In this section, I unpack common themes teachers discussed regarding control and power in the ELA classroom. Themes include conversations about classroom management, instructional materials, and student agency.

4.3.1 Classroom Management

Three teachers explicitly said that they rarely removed students from class for misbehaviors. Cole shared that he had not removed a student from class for misbehaviors in years. All four teachers said they only wrote office discipline referrals (or removed students from class) for physical fights, bullying other students, or other violent behaviors (both physical and verbal). Olivia and Katie both said they had written office discipline referrals (or would in future) if students were verbally abusive to them (e.g., swearing and yelling at them), and Michelle said she was required to document student class cuts (as a paper trail necessity).

Ultimately, punitive discipline did not seem to be used for classroom management, organization or control. Instead, teachers shared other methods of classroom management. Michelle shared that she utilized her relationships with students to manage behaviors and encourage class productivity. She spoke about "mothering students" and about trust, joy and being "goofy" with students. Katie, Michelle, and Cole all shared that they preferred to speak one-on-one with students about misbehaviors, as opposed to punitive discipline or involving other school adults. For Cole, keeping students in school and increasing attendance was important. He said he utilized his athletic coaching as a way to encourage students to attend school and stay in class. These three veteran teachers explicitly shared their varying approaches to classroom management

that ultimately centered learning and relationship-building. Michelle elaborated on her relationship-based approach to classroom management and work completion:

> The way I deal with kids is pretty much the same, a little bit of humor, a lot of joy…I want a joyful classroom myself, because it makes the day go faster…If the kids trust me and I have good trust with the kids, I can get more out of them. I do leverage that to get more work or get them to complete things…It's all about leveraging the relationships to get the best work out of the kids.

For Michelle, "leveraging the relationship," meant relying on the trust she had established with the students, as well as a quid pro quo dynamic. Michelle explained that leveraging, or relying on, relationships created a more joyful classroom where she did not rely on punitive practices, but instead might encourage students to complete work using humor and a quid pro quo, or a "meet you halfway," approach to trust and relationships (e.g., finish this section of the assignment first, then you can go to the restroom).

Three teachers explicitly shared that their classroom practice did not include removing students from the learning environment. For Cole and Katie, managing student behaviors happened "in house." Cole explained that involving a principal or other authority figure in the classroom would be giving up his power up in the classroom. In other words, students might see Cole as in need of other school adults to manage his classroom. Katie believed that removing students from the classroom or putting classroom discipline "in other people's hands" might make students feel as if you are "wiping your hands" of them. Michelle shared her critique of some teachers who she believed were "obsessed" with control, particularly controlling where students can go (e.g., bathrooms) and controlling student movement (e.g., standing up to get a tissue). For Michelle, this controlling behavior from other teachers was confusing. Instead, she opted to lean into her

relationships with students for classroom management purposes and engage in a "quid pro quo" approach. For example, if a student asked the use the restroom, she might ask them to wait to hear directions before leaving. She explained:

> It was a lot of defiance and stuff like that where kids are just, they want the power in the room. And the teacher wants it. There are some teachers that, they want the power in the room, they want it, they want the full control. And some of the kids are like I want the control…I don't get in pissing matches with kids…I'm the master of compromise… sometimes I lose battles to win the war too. Like I'm not so proud that I'm just gonna have to fight them. Like, why? For whatever reason, this kid needs this right now. They need to win this…Some of my colleagues are just, this is my classroom, you do it my way or the highway…I have a little more levity and I give a little more leverage to them to let them kind of try to correct their behavior.

Here, Michelle distinguished the ways she understood and navigated classroom power compared to her colleagues. She believed that tension in the classroom or, more specifically, tension defined by student "defiance," was due, in part, to students and teachers mutual desire for classroom control. Michelle explained that she does not find these arguments productive (i.e., "I don't get into pissing matches with kids"). Instead, she allowed students to "win," or to have a bit more freedom within acceptable classroom behavior.

Cole also described other teachers' response to students' behaviors and a need for classroom control, particularly how teachers responded inequitably to their perceptions of Black girls' classroom talk. For Cole, making biased or racialized assumptions about Black female students' volume of voice was a dangerous stereotype that could lead to heightened and unnecessary discipline:

People take a loud voice and equate it with certain things. And then, whenever you throw race on top of that, then there are things that are presumed that are incorrect and dangerous…Elements of systemic racism, where we tolerate some behaviors from some students and don't tolerate behaviors of others. So, you know, I think, Black girls are louder, and whenever—I mean certain teachers don't tolerate that and use that as, they feel kind of offended or challenged or disrespected or belittled. So, the consequences are not always aligned with the behaviors.

Cole's description of the negative consequences of this racial stereotype, particularly for Black girls when teachers perceived their talk as loud and therefore disrespectful or aggressive, parallels research showing that Black girls are reprimanded or punished for teachers' misperceptions of their volume of voice, tone and intention (Koonce, 2012; Morris, 2005; Morris, 2016). Morris (2016) argued that these racial stereotypes are not new and are, in fact, re-shaped, age-old racial stereotypes created and weaponized during slavery about Black women and girls. Cole's talk thus indicated a race-conscious reflection about the ways in which White teachers' racial biases about Black girls' talk may lead to negative and "dangerous" misperceptions about their tone and volume of voice. However, although Cole critiqued this racial stereotype, as well as the "incorrect and dangerous" presumptions that can create misaligned, negative outcomes when that racial stereotype is applied, he also said that he too believed Black girls were inherently louder. For Cole, the issue was not teachers perceiving Black girls to be louder in the first place, but how teachers were less likely to tolerate loudness in Black girls and more likely to interpret Black girls' loudness as disrespectful. Perhaps the Black girls in Cole's classroom spoke louder than their peers. Perhaps the Black female students at Spruce felt that they had to speak louder in order to feel heard (Morris, 2016), or to gain their teachers' attention. However, racializing behavior, in this case, the belief

that Black girls, overall, speak louder, may itself be a perspective or belief informed by racial bias or the impacts of a racist society (Kendi, 2019). While Cole critically recognized the ways in which teacher racial bias about Black girls' volume can lead to inequitable, racist outcomes, his belief that Black girls are louder might be an area for continued work in Cole's developing racial awareness as a White teacher.

Ultimately, teachers in my study did not lean on or utilize punitive discipline often in their classrooms. Teachers shared that they typically only wrote students up for physical violence or heightened verbal altercations, and most teachers said that they preferred to handle misbehaviors in their classrooms and with students. Both Cole and Michelle talked about other teachers' concerns with classroom control, specifically how other teachers may not tolerate misbehaviors from students or may perceive students' behaviors as a means to challenge or take control of the classroom.

Scholarship has found that students of color are often disproportionately enrolled in schools that focus on behavioral control or utilize punitive over restorative practices (Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba et al., 2014; Welch & Payne, 2010). In some studies, scholars have found that schools like these may be promoting behavioral compliance over or alongside of academic learning (Tyre, 2010) or suggesting that behavioral compliance is necessary for or a pre-cursor to academic learning (Tyson, 2003). Tatum (2001) described schools like these as "joyless places where oppressive conditions exist and where learning is defined as conformity and teaching as control" (p. 72). While I am unsure of how each teachers' school context may have shaped expectations for student behavioral conformity and control, the teachers in my study described classrooms that were non-punitive and based in relationship-building, trust and joy. Further, Milner and colleagues (2019) wrote that an insistence on controlling students, and controlling anyone, is harmful and

counterintuitive and teachers may be over-relying on office discipline referrals for issues they can rectify in the classroom. Teachers in my study were certainly engaged in management practices that kept students in the classroom, took responsibility for handling or rectifying issues in the classroom, and were not overly invested in controlling students or referring students for office discipline.

Of note, the teachers still believed that structure, management, and discipline were important to the flow of a classroom or the safety of students. Even critical scholars that investigate punitive discipline practices note that classroom management guided by clear boundaries and expectations is a necessary part of schooling (Milner et al., 2019). Marcucci and Elmesky (2020) found that culturally relevant classroom management strategies could be utilized and developed by White teachers of students of color and, through the use of culturally relevant classroom management practices, discipline (or redirection) could actually facilitate learning. Instead, this group of teachers sought to create classrooms that were not punitive. It is important to reiterate that each of these teachers is a veteran teacher and have been teaching for at least one, almost two, and even three decades. It is likely that many of these classroom management styles and classroom practices had been developed through years of practice and working with students.

4.3.2 Student Agency

Student agency was also an essential component to teachers' practice. Most teachers discussed the importance of students' being able to advocate for themselves and their learning. Olivia shared that Cherry Magnet promoted student advocacy through student-led groups and clubs where students were able to collaborate with their teachers and with one another. Though Michelle said her classroom was not "100% democratic," she wanted students to feel agentic in

their learning, "I feel like if they have more agency in the classroom, I'll get more results from them that way." Michelle believed that including students in classroom decisions, particularly about instructional materials, would lead to more learning and productivity. She explained that she sometimes asked her students what they wanted to learn and read: "I like to empower them in their learning experience by trying to choose things and I like to ask them, 'What do you guys want to read about?' And I try to gear things towards them...I just do a lot of stuff around what their interest is to try to keep them going." For Michelle, material and content geared toward students' choice and interest was one way to empower students and encourage engagement. Katie also described wanting students to be agents of their own learning in the classroom:

> The culture I also want to build in my classroom is of relevance for learning for yourself. I want students to see that this is about your own success…to be able to start building their own agency for themselves…There's this culture of, "I did my work." And what I tell them is, did you learn anything though? Because it's not about doing your work, it's about learning and engaging and getting better…I think that so often my students are…marginalized in so many areas of their own lives, in their own communities and in their own schools and I don't want to promote that in my classroom. I want them to feel their own agency in there.

Katie hoped that students would engage in learning beyond task completion and instead, take up opportunities to grow their skills. Here, Katie understood student agency as an antithesis to student marginalization and disempowerment. In previous sections, Katie shared her belief that school is not the great equalizer and that educational spaces were not equitable and therefore not designed to meet the needs of marginalized students. Her argument echoed an "uneven playing field" understanding of privilege, in which marginalized students are encouraged to work harder than

120

their White peers because they are competing on an uneven playing field. Katie wanted to create a classroom that made the playing field more equal and she also wanted her students to compete (i.e., be agentic in their learning). Additionally, Katie later argued that student agency would create a classroom culture that valued student voice and ultimately, create a space of belonging and mutual ownership over the learning.

Both Cole and Katie discussed the importance of being transparent about learning goals with students. Cole explained, "One thing that I've really been working on…in my practice is being really clear about what I want kids to learn…My objectives say, 'what, how and why.' What are you going to learn, how are you going to show me you've learned it, and why do you need to learn it?" Cole also shared that he enjoyed when students challenged him to explain why certain learning was important, "I appreciate pushback…as far as like, 'Well, why are we learning this, why is this important to me?' I expect that and I enjoy that because it makes me kind of rethink what I'm doing and makes my teaching better." Studies show that setting clear, meaningful learning objectives with students is beneficial to their learning, particularly when teachers explain why students are engaging in learning activities (Grossman et al., 2013; Shernoff et al., 2016). Additionally, Cole shared his enjoyment with student "push back," or when students questioned him and their learning. Students asked that Cole explain his classroom instructional choices and topics and, in doing so, allowed Cole to better his practice.

Transparency of learning goals, openness to student feedback/pushback, and flexibility with classroom learning materials were some significant ways in which teachers in the study rethought control, power, behavior and agency in the ELA classroom. Ultimately, a rethinking of power and control in the classroom allowed teachers to co-create learning environments and opportunities with and alongside of their students.

4.4 Literacy Teaching, Learning and Expectations

In order to respond to my first research question, I asked teachers a series of questions specifically about literacy teaching and learning, as well as their classroom expectations. Below, I unpack teachers' goals for students as literacy learners and teachers' explicit classroom expectations for students' talk and behavior. Later, I consider the ways in which teacher beliefs about race, racism and race talk in the literacy classroom may impact student outcomes and classroom dynamics.

4.4.1 Goals for Student Literacy Learning

All four teachers' goals for student literacy learning were similar. Teachers wanted first for students to have a functional set of literacy skills, which included text comprehension and the ability to convey themselves effectively in writing. The teachers also mentioned wanting students to develop critical thinking skills, empathy and multiple perspectives, and to read for enjoyment.

Overall, most teachers wanted students to have functional literacy skills that would benefit them in the future (e.g., in postsecondary learning or future careers) and for students to be engaged with literature beyond functional skills (e.g., critical thinking and enjoyment). Katie explained,

When I think of English Language Arts, I think of transferable skills that you're going to need no matter what path you take out of high school or what career you pursue. And so, that to me is the crux of what I do, is teaching students how to not just comprehend what they're reading, but to critically think, to be able to acquire new vocabulary and use it correctly and to be able to write. That has been really my passion these past few years, is

to really develop students as writers, so that they can take the thoughts that they have and clearly articulate them.

For Katie, ELA learning was about "transferable skills," or broader skills that could be translated into other areas of students' lives, both in and outside of school. Katie shared her belief that ELA skills were also functional skills and would benefit students' future career paths. These literacy skills, for Katie, included vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, critical thinking, and effective written communication.

Like Katie, some of Michelle's goals for students included functional literacy skills coupled with a critical, empathetic world view. She said, "just on a basic level, they need to be able to write and they need to be able to read at a certain level…But also, I just want to broaden their horizons and maybe get into empathy. I want them to see themselves in the literature." Michelle also shared her belief that literacy was "social capital." She explained:

> I think literacy is social capital. So, I do think that the better you are at reading and writing in our society, you will have more social capital to go far in the world.…I think my overarching goal is to give them the same social capital I have and in negotiating the world…We have a lot of poverty, we're 100% free and reduced lunch. So, I think that I just want to give them enough skills to go out into the world and be able to advocate for themselves, or write something, or go into a job interview and sound the role or whatever, I guess. And I tell them all the time, the society is judging you and you have to, it sucks, but you gotta code switch. You gotta be able to do this this type of writing and this type of speaking in the world.

Here, Michelle referenced theories of education that argue that knowledge and academic experiences can ultimately be one path toward social mobility. In other words, the theory posits

that marginalized students can gain access to historically and contemporarily gatekept spaces (universities, employment opportunities, neighborhoods) if they are exposed to certain academic learning and cultural experiences in schools (Bourdieu, 2022). For Michelle, codeswitching, or adapting speech and language to meet the rules of Standardized English, or to "sound the part," was necessary for students to access this social capital. Though Michelle does not specifically name race in this instance, the term "codeswitching" has racial connotations and usually suggests that Black students who speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE) should adapt their language to fit certain situations (Godley & Reaser, 2018). Usually, codeswitching is often suggested as a way to engage in "professional" spaces, thus marginalizing various dialects and languages that do not align with Standardized English (Smitherman, 1973). Michelle was not the only teacher in the study to describe, if not directly name, code-switching as an expectation for students (discussed further in later sections). While some scholars (Delpit, 2006) might agree with Michelle's take—that Standardized English holds social capital and may be beneficial for all students to learn in order to engage with the normalized expectations of dominant language ideologies and the codes of power—other scholars, such as April Baker-Bell (2019), would disagree. For Baker-Bell, among other scholars (Smitherman, 1973), language pedagogy in ELA classrooms that promotes the dominance of Standardized English (or "White Mainstream English," Baker-Bell, 2019), promotes "anti-Black linguistic racism" (Baker-Bell, 2019, p. 2) in schools and can negatively impact Black students' racial and linguistic identities. Michelle saying, "it sucks" to be judged on your language use echoed Daniels' (2018) findings. In her study, a group of White teachers were able to identify the discriminatory undertones of ELA curriculum that required Black students to code-switch. However, teachers in her study continued to utilize and support the practice, namely in line with studies that align the ability to speak Standardize English

with access to power (Delpit, 2006). Ultimately, Michelle was arguing for literacy instruction that included code-switching, or included instruction about Standardized English, in order to socially promote her students. While many view education, particularly literacy education, as a means to disrupt systems of poverty, scholarship about code-switching is mixed.

Like Katie and Michelle, Cole also shared that he wanted his students to develop both functional and critical literacy skills. Cole argued that critical thinking was necessary for this particular day and age in which students were asked to constantly engage with a barrage of (mis)information about current events on news platforms and social media:

> As I keep learning about how to be a better teacher, I see the importance of reading and writing to just to being a functional member of society and then, especially the last couple years, just being able to critically think about what kids are reading, what kids are seeing, and what kids are consuming. I tell my students all the time, "I need you to be critical thinkers because right now adults are not. So, I need you to look at what you're reading and whether it's online, whether it's Facebook, whether it's wherever, whether it's a book, I need you to read it and critically think about it. Is what you are reading true and where's this truth coming from?"…As proliferation of misinformation and lack of trust of institutions, like all those things, just getting kids to critically think about what they are reading and be able to write, develop a claim and support it.

Cole's goals for students' literacy practices complicated typical understandings of "functional" literacy skills. Typical, functional literacy skills might include clear, concise writing and reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. For Cole, the realities of the current political climate combined with untrustworthy media influences impacted the need for his students to develop

critical literacy skills—namely, to be able to determine the quality and reliability of sources, a skill students (and adults alike) may struggle with (Spector, 2019).

For Cole and Olivia, students simply engaging in reading that they enjoyed was also an important goal they held for their students. Olivia shared, "I really wanted to like get to a place where a standard is, you're going to read a book and can you not think it's miserable? Can we get to a place where we realize reading is good for us as people?" Here, Olivia echoed Michelle's previous statement: that reading is "good for us as people." Olivia also described how her approach to literacy teaching had shifted due to a change her school had recently implemented, in which teachers no longer were asked to grade class work. This shift in policy required teachers to rethink classroom engagement and encourage participation without the typical "reward" of a grade. In other words, Olivia's classroom had to shift more toward developing relevant learning opportunities for learning's sake. She explained, "This was the first time that I actually was like, wait a second. I really, really, really need to know what I'm asking them to do because that has to be my reason for saying, 'Do all this class work.'" Olivia found success with this pedagogical change and noted that students were still engaged and willing to consider and apply teacher feedback. She said, "It took sixteen years and a pandemic to realize they're all working at a really high level and it's not for a grade." Ultimately, a change in policy shifted Olivia's classroom goals for her students. Instead of encouraging students to complete work for a grade, Olivia had to promote engagement, enjoyment, and learning for learning's sake.

All four teachers promoted literacy goals that included traditional, functional literacy practices as well as practices that included critical thinking, enjoyment, and empathy. For some scholars, liberatory literacy practices move past students' rote, standardized skills and encourage rigorous and critical literacy practices (Winn, et al., 2011). Scholars also note that schools or

classrooms that serve majority low-income students and students of color, and classrooms that are lower tracked, tend to focus on less rigorous literacy practices, such as comprehension, or focus on test-preparation and standardized, academic drills and skills (Applebee et al., 2003). However, I argue that teachers in my study, though focused in some ways on traditional or less-rigorous skills, were also invested in pushing students toward more rigorous literacy practices, such as critical engagement with texts and topics. Further, teachers' promotion of traditional, or less rigorous, literacy skills, like comprehension, was considered a way to promote student access and agency, particularly in future careers.

Winn et al. (2011) explained, "to achieve academic rigor in literacy, students need a literacy education that is social, contextualized, and values multiple literacies" (p. 151). In the current study, teachers described promoting a social learning environment, critical thinking, a diversified curriculum and learning centered on students' interest. While most of the teachers' goals were focused on student agency and opportunities for deeper learning, which included critical thinking and enjoyment, others upheld often debated notions of literacy learning and language ideologies (like the use of Standardized English and practices of code-switching).

In the sections that follow, I unpack the specific expectations that teachers had for students' classroom behavior and talk related to literacy learning.

4.4.2 The "Good Student"

Teachers were asked to describe their idea of a "good student" and how that student would behave in their literacy classrooms. For three teachers, good students would first and foremost be on task. In various ways, Michelle, Cole and Olivia said that a good student would enter class prepared and on time, gather necessary materials for the day's learning, and begin class work. For

Olivia, a good student was also a self-directed and self-monitoring learner who had their phone away and their classroom talk would be (for the most part) related to the learning goals.

Three teachers also described good (or in Cole's case, "great") students as going above and beyond the learning. For Cole, "a great student would listen and ask questions, participate and then help his classmates out throughout the period." In addition to timeliness and being task-oriented, Cole believed a great student would engage in critical thinking and question their learning. He encouraged students not to take his word as truth, but instead to question both the texts and the learning itself. Similarly, both Michelle and Katie described good students as interacting positively with their peers and asking questions or, in Michelle's case, remaining engaged when and if they disagreed with the subject matter. She said she welcomed varied student opinions and enjoyed hearing what students had to say. Katie and Michelle also described a good student as "engaged."

For Katie, "good is getting better each day." Katie was the only teacher who did not describe a good student as timely or on task. Instead, Katie was more focused on curiosity, question asking, and engagement. She explained:

> [A good student] is somebody who's really engaged, who has something to say about what we're doing, what they say demonstrates understanding, but it also goes further. [A good student] you know, engages the other students. I love when students ask questions about anything, preferably on topic, but when a student is curious. And I also really, I think, a good student is one that that does want to improve…it's the student that's willing to push themselves further.

For Katie, a good student would work beyond task completion and apply teacher feedback to their work. A good student "pushes themselves further" and "has something to say" about the learning.

While most of the teachers not only expected that "good students" would be prepared, timely, and engaged, they also hoped that students would be curious, would push back or question their learning effectively, would accept and apply teacher feedback, or would assist or work closely with their peers. No teacher in this section discussed the concept of student intelligence or grade point average as being a requirement for being considered a good student. Further, "good students," as described by teachers in the study, were not necessarily students with "good" grades. Additionally, good students were not described as quiet or well-behaved students. Instead, good students spoke up, asked questions, worked with peers, and were genuinely engaged in the learning.

4.4.3 Intersections of Learning and Behavior

Although none of the teachers described good students as students with good grades, or good students as quiet and well-behaved, teachers did note the impacts of student behavior on learning. When asked about their beliefs about the intersections of behavior and grades, teachers shared various perspectives. For Katie and Olivia, certain behaviors (e.g., skipping class, being on your phone, playing computer games, or generally being off task) disrupted students' learning and her ability to teach. Olivia and Michelle shared what Olivia called the "chicken or the egg" issue and Michelle called a "stereotype," or the assumption that students who avoided completing work in class were doing so because they did not understand the learning. For Michelle, this was an issue of confidence that worked both ways. Students who were receiving good grades and positive praise would feel more confident in their work and take more risks, whereas learners who struggled with content may avoid engagement and not complete work.

Like other teacher participants, Cole believed that behavior and grades often went hand in hand and, if students were skipping class and missing instruction, they were missing the opportunity to learn. However, Cole complicated the overlap of student learning and compliant behavior. He explained,

> If a kid sits and is quiet in the classroom, oftentimes they'll get good grades, whether they're completing work or not, or whether they are actually learning anything or not, just because they are quiet and compliant. And sometimes teachers don't even realize that the quiet and compliant kid is in the classroom. And, I mean, that's a fault of the teacher…Because a kid is quiet and compliant, they get kind of passed along from grade to grade to grade, even if they can't read…We're dealing with that with a couple kids. Now again, super nice, super sweet kids, but just can't read and have gotten decent grades, but nobody has gone and figured out, how is this kid in ninth grade and can't read past the first-grade level? And, what are we going to do to solve that problem?... the kid has developed coping mechanisms to figure out how to get by in school…and game the system essentially because he's quiet and compliant in school every day.

Here, Cole grappled with the intersections of student behavioral compliance (which included being "quiet") and passing grades. For Cole, teachers may pass along a quiet and compliant student simply because they are quiet and compliant. In these instances, Cole believed the student had decoded the schooling system and had revealed that some teachers may value compliance over ability or assume compliance equates to understanding. Passing quiet and compliant students along, Cole explained, was harmful to this particular group of students. He believed they went unnoticed in the classroom and, therefore, may be passed along so often that they cannot effectively engage academically at their current grade level. Again, in schools that serve majority

Black and Brown students, practitioners may stress compliance over or alongside of academic learning (Tyre, 2010). In environments like these, it might be plausible to consider that compliant students are academically promoted.

Ultimately, all four teachers believed that certain misbehaviors impacted student learning. Mainly, teachers were concerned that classroom distractions, like cell phones, or students not attending class would interrupt students' academic time. Olivia, Michelle and Cole also interpreted some student classroom behavior as a signal for student learning and understanding. In other words, Olivia and Michelle believed that some students misbehaved because they did not understand the material. For Cole, student behavioral compliance might be misread as academic understanding.

4.5 Expectations for Student Talk and Behavior in ELA Classrooms

In many ways, the teachers' expectations for students' classroom talk and behavior overlapped. In other words, when asked what expectations teachers had for student behavior, teachers would also describe how they expected students to engage (or not engage) verbally. For most of the teachers, student talk was a behavior in itself that was considered when unpacking classroom expectations.

Overall, teachers wanted students to be engaged in the learning, to listen for instruction, or to have their phones away (as this was a common rule within some teachers' schools). For Cole, student engagement with in-class instruction was important. He explained, "a pen is on paper, kids are probably cognitively engaged in the assignment, and that's what I would like to see as far as behaviors." Olivia said she had high behavioral expectations for students and spoke about

behaviors she did not want students to engage in, particularly having their cell phones out and speaking loudly about off-task topics. Katie described her expectations as "simple and consistent." She expected students to have their phones away, to not speak when the teacher or another student was speaking, and to be awake in class. All teachers said that they did not expect (nor encourage) a completely silent classroom. Instead, most teachers asked explicitly that students listen during teacher instruction, but then would allow students to chat with one another. Though Olivia also shared that she did not expect her classroom to be completely silent or for all classroom talk to be on task, she did struggle to make her expectations for off-topic talk clear with a small group of students. Olivia described a reoccurring situation in her class related to student talk that warranted a teacher behavioral "correction." Olivia brought this example up more than once in our interviews. She explained:

> I have four girls in the class…for them [the class] is like the place to be social and do friends stuff…they're four Black girls and I am always asking them like, stop. Like, enough. Like, you've been not doing your thing for fifteen minutes now because you've been talking about a million other things and talking at a volume level that is like, when I'm trying to help someone, I can't hear them. And these are things that I said when I start the year. When we're in here, we're focused. Am I going to tell you no talking ever? No. Am I going to ever tell you don't get off topic with your conversation? No. But there is a point where I'm going to say, this is not working…That's probably the main thing. And that's true for all the classes. The corrections I give are when I'm trying to help students and I can't think because the conversations about not school are loud and have been going on long enough.

Olivia's expectations for students, in this instance, were to be focused and to speak on topic (mostly) at a volume that was low enough for Olivia to hear other students. Ultimately, Olivia wanted students to be engaged and not interfere with other students' learning or ability to access teacher assistance. Olivia said that she had explained to this small group of Black girls why it was imperative that they focus their talk and attention on class work and speak at a volume that allowed her to effectively communicate with other students. Olivia also shared that she believed that loud, off topic talk was a behavior she did not have to address with White students. She explained:

> The White students definitely…I wanna say, playing the game…I don't have to correct them for being off topic at a volume that is preventing me from hearing other students …But even, and in all three classes, I would say, that's the one that is definitely the behavior that affects the Black students, that I'm correcting Black students for…Talking about not the assignment a lot for extended periods of time and at a level, like a volume level, that is disruptive to me when I'm trying to have a conversation with another student.

Although Olivia's reasoning for why she wanted students to engage in on-task talk was clear and seemed to be shared explicitly with students, she also racialized this particular behavior (e.g., loud, off-task talk), suggesting that, in her experience, White students do not need to be corrected for loud, off-task talk and Black students do. Perceiving Black students as louder and more likely to engage in off-task talk than their White peers may impact who Olivia reprimands, redirects or corrects for their behavior in her classroom. This perception could lead to a racially biased vigilance and inequitable disciplinary outcomes (Morris, 2016).

When teachers were asked specifically about their expectations for students' *verbal* participation in class, all four teachers described students who were typically silent during discussions or were nervous to share. Teachers discussed their attempts to encourage quieter

students to engage in discussion through various means. Cole said he tried to give students writing/wait time to jot their ideas down first, then share out. Similarly, Olivia encouraged students to unpack their thinking further and gave discussion options for students where they could share a few times during class or take a short quiz after the discussion. For Olivia, students did not have to verbally participate in order to show their learning because she had established other means for students to be heard. Olivia shared that she often pushed students to engage deeper in their responses about the literature learning. If students provided surface level or one-word responses, either verbal or written, she would encourage them to dig deeper and consider her feedback.

Three teachers also made note of other aspects of student talk. Katie noted that she corrected students who used "inappropriate language," or swore, in class. Katie was the only teacher, when asked about verbal classroom participation, who explicitly mentioned that students were expected to censor their language in class. Cole and Michelle discussed student tone and student use of curse words. However, instead of focusing on censoring student language, they discussed an anticipated occurrence in their schools and classrooms where students may verbally take out frustrations on their teachers. For both Cole and Michelle, these occurrences were part of the job. Michelle said, "I do have bad days, though. I will have kids that snap out, they take stuff out on me, or take stuff out on other kids…We have kids that are dealing with a lot of trauma. So, I do have to deal with that. And that's whatever. That's life, too." Cole shared a similar sentiment:

> 99% of the time, it's probably not anything like a deliberate misbehavior. It's probably just, again, and I was telling another teacher about this, 90% of times that teachers get cussed out or yelled at or whatever, it has nothing to do with what the teacher is doing. We just happen to be caught in the crossfire of whatever that kid is experiencing in life…He came to school with an edge, we just happen to catch the brunt of it. And that's part of teaching

where we teach…You're gonna catch some crap sometimes. And 99% of the time, it's not

your fault.

For both Cole and Michelle, students yelling at or "cussing out" their teachers was understood as a response to issues students were presumably dealing with outside of class. Cole understood these interactions to be mainly the fault of outside of school issues that students may have experienced and not actual frustrations with teachers. Though it can certainly be beneficial to have an informed perspective of what students are experiencing outside of school, it may also be beneficial to unpack the ways in which students might be reacting to their frustrations with their teachers. Of note, for both Katie and Olivia, students yelling or cursing at them in class would warrant an office discipline referral.

Overall, three of the four teachers spoke specifically about valuing student voice. Michelle said she enjoyed hearing what students had to say and how they felt about topics. Cole said he hoped to hear every student's voice at least once per day, "As far as your verbal participation, I don't expect it on the whole group level. But on a personal level, I look forward to hearing their voice." And Katie shared her belief that student voice was more important than her own in the classroom setting. She reflected on a typically expected and enforced classroom expectation: students raising their hands if they would like to speak. She explained:

I'm really bad about enforcing raising hands. I'm always thinking that I should, but I just don't think my classroom culture is raising hands so much. I see it as, it's permissive. And in my view, the classroom is, it belongs to all of us. And [student] voice is more, is just as, actually more, important than my voice. I don't necessarily even love the idea that I have to grant you permission to speak in our classroom.

Though Katie wrestled with the idea of asking students to raise their hands before they spoke, she ultimately found it not in line with the type of classroom culture she wanted to promote. Katie shared that students' voices were more important than her own in the classroom and, therefore, she struggled with the idea that she, as the teacher, was expected to give students permission to speak.

Additionally, Cole, Katie and Michelle all believed that there were important social aspects for students when they were speaking, listening and responding to one another in class. For these teachers, speaking was just as important as listening. Cole explained, "I never expect my room be completely quiet. I'm impressed with teachers who can do that and also a little concerned with teachers who can do that. Because if kids aren't interacting with each other, then I don't know how much they're learning." Michelle agreed:

> [Students] don't have to be silent in the class. They're not sitting like little soldiers in a row silent, that's not my idea. My idea is that, they're kids and they need to learn and talk and bounce things off each other and be in conversation with one another…I believe that classrooms where you shut it down and shut down communication with the kids, you're actually shutting down learning.

Both Michelle and Cole discussed their belief that student talk in the classroom is essential for learning, particularly when students are able to speak with one another about their ideas. Scholars of classroom discourse have found that social learning talk is beneficial for students (Winn et al., 2011). Similarly, in this study, the teachers encouraged their students to speak with one another and not just toward the teacher. Additionally, both Cole and Michelle included a small critique about other teacher colleagues who may have promoted a more silent classroom. For Michelle, classrooms that cut off student-to-student talk were cutting off student learning. And Cole shared

his "concern" for teachers who had silent classrooms. Like Michelle, Cole believed that if students were not able to interact with one another, they may not be learning as much as they could be. Michelle reflected on changes in her expectations for student talk and behavior:

I'm mothering them a little bit sometimes…Maybe it's my age…When I was younger, I had a lot more difficult time with classroom management…Maybe I felt like the young person on the block, I had to show a real rigid stance when it comes to discipline…I felt like they would be judging me as a teacher if I didn't have a pencil in everybody's hand and everybody was quiet and working. And I think I've learned to just be like, whatever, who cares? The kids are learning even if they're not silent. So, it's taken me a couple of years to get to that point. To trust myself and be like, you know this is fine. You don't have to feel like you're a failure if your class isn't silent.

Michelle noted that as she has grown in her teaching, she recognized that a busy or loud classroom could also be a space where students were learning and engaged. Michelle also brought up a reflection on perceived pressure from leadership and classroom optics. If students were silent and all holding pencils, she might be seen as an effective teacher by leadership. More recently, Michelle seemed to have shifted her focus away from the optics of good behavior (e.g., sitting silently with pencils in hand) and more toward student learning.

The themes that emerged in teachers' talk about behavior and learning in their classrooms (i.e., student-to-student talk, seeing student voice as important, grappling with granting students' permission to speak) reflected ways in which teachers were reimagining power and control in the classroom. For three of the teachers, student-to-student talk was essential to learning and three teachers linked the power dynamics of their classrooms with the value they placed on student voice. When asked explicitly about their expectations for verbal participation, teachers focused on

encouraging students who did not speak often, were nervous to speak, or provided surface-level responses to teacher questions. All four teachers described navigating this issue in the hopes of encouraging more (on topic) student talk. These expectations, coupled with teachers' beliefs (and possible actions), seemed to create classrooms in which student talk was encouraged, engagement was valued over volume or conformity, and (on-task) student-to-student talk was not silenced.

4.6 Talking About Race and Racism in the ELA Classroom

Teachers were asked if they believed it was important to engage in talk about race and racism in their classrooms (Milner, 2017). All four teachers shared that they believed it was important and they engaged in discussions about race and racism in their classrooms. All four teachers shared their belief that ignoring discussions about race and racism was impossible, if not ridiculous, especially considering the racial dynamics of their classrooms and the realities of race and racism in society.

Cole and Olivia connected conversations about race and racism specifically to their subject area. In other words, Cole and Olivia believed that ELA as a content area, or the specific ELA course they taught, invited discussions about race and racism. Olivia said, "we just don't not," when asked if she engaged in talk about race and racism in her classroom. For Olivia, an African American Literature course, which she had taught and restructured, would, of course, spark conversations about race and racism. Additionally, she believed her in-school reputation would signal to students who signed up for her AP course that they would be discussing race and racism in class; "If [students] know I teach that AP class, they kind of know what's going to come up

because I just don't not." Cole explained his thinking about ELA course content and race talk in class:

> It's part of society. Part of—especially teaching literature. To ignore the cultural context of whatever we're reading is not healthy…I was just reading an article about some Republican lawmaker going through 840 books saying, "You can't teach these books because they make people feel—" I mean, literature's supposed to be uncomfortable and there are always racial, you know, whether it's a theme in the book or cultural context of the text itself, and it's real life. To ignore the things going on in society is—kids are experiencing them outside of school and to ignore them in the classroom, it is trying to ignore reality and ignore part of who kids are.

For both Cole and Olivia, ELA and race talk in the classroom went hand in hand. For Cole, ignoring conversations about race and racism in the literacy classroom was "not healthy" because race and racism were a reality of people's lives, including his students lives, and were relevant themes and context of the texts he chose for his classroom. For Cole, discomfort was a key part of literature learning and race talk. Cole's talk also challenged a colorblind mindset in schools. In other words, Cole believed that ignoring race and racism, banning certain books, and ignoring the realities of "real life" would "ignore part of who kids are." Here, Cole engaged with Milner's (2017) argument that teachers of students of color should engage with the realities of race and racism in the classroom curriculum, as it may be the curriculum of many students lives.

Like Cole, Katie challenged a colorblind mindset in her classroom:

It's the first thing you see when you walk into a classroom. You see a White, female teacher teaching a classroom full of Black children. And I think that, in order to value where the students come into the space, their lived experiences, their culture, their families, I think

that to ignore it is to say, you don't matter. Is to say, I don't see you, and I don't hear you, and you're just a body. I think that that is just not an option… I just think that it's a reality that has to be discussed. I want my students to know that I value them as a whole and not in spite of their race, but I value all of it together.

Here, Katie first described the dynamics of her classroom—a White teacher teaching a class of Black students. For her, one reason that race and racism was impossible to avoid as a conversational topic in her classroom was because of this dynamic. In other words, race existed in the classroom and impacted the classroom. Katie believed that an attempt to erase race from the classroom (i.e., a colorblind mindset) would dim an understanding of students' full-selves and lived experiences and may, instead, make room for dehumanizing perceptions of students (e.g., "you're just a body"). For Katie, recognizing students' race meant recognizing and valuing her students holistically. Again, Katie touched on the belief that that educators must engage with the fullness and full selves of their students (Love, 2019). For Love (2019), social justice work cannot happen in schools without an intersectional approach to seeing and understanding students.

Michelle shared that she too did not avoid conversations about race and racism in her classroom. The school itself, she argued, was created because of a desegregation lawsuit and, therefore, was created out of conversations about race and racism:

Of course…our school is the product of a desegregation lawsuit. And everything I do is try—I'm trying to mitigate the outcomes for our Black students. Because to me, education is one way to get out of tough circumstances. Not that all of our students are in tough circumstances…But we do have a very—like I said, we're 100% free and reduced lunch and 70% of our students are Black. So, there is a lot of overlap between race and class. And

I am not gonna do anybody any favors by hiding behind—hiding the issue of race and not

discussing the elephant in the room. That's just nonsense.

For Michelle, ignoring the realities of race and structural inequality was "nonsense" and could

stand in the way of her attempts to use her teaching as one way to mitigate systemic impacts on

her students living in poverty and her Black students (and the intersections of both).

Compared to the findings of Alvarez and Milner (2018), the teachers in my study did not

mention fear as a barrier to their engagement in race-talk with students. This may be due, in part,

to all teachers feeling supported by their administrators to engage in race-talk in the classroom, or

might also be due to the knowledge base teachers had accrued in their own racial awareness

development, or the powerful positions some of the teachers held in their schools (i.e., department

heads). In some instances, the teachers even challenged current political attempts to censor or ban

texts that were deemed too radical by conservative lawmakers. Howard (2004) found that students

in a middle school social studies classroom were actively seeking out meaningful discussions about

race and racism in their classrooms. Diminishing or ignoring the implications of race and racism

in schools existing in a racist society may in turn ignore the racial realities of students' lives,

particularly students of color (Howard, 2004). The four teachers in my study echoed Howard and

other scholars' (Milner, 2015) call to engage in authentic classroom race-talk that recognizes

students' racial realities and the ways in which race-talk can benefit student learning.

Additionally, all four teachers believed the curriculum their schools used, and/or the

traditional ELA canon needed to be adjusted and made more relevant for their students. Some

teachers had more control over the texts they taught in the classroom, while others supplemented

a more rigid school-wide or district-wide curriculum. Three of four teachers used the phrase "dead

White guys" to describe and explain their critiques of the traditional ELA canon. The phrase "dead

White guys" was used to refer to the authors and subject-matter typically associated with traditional ELA reading lists. and portray the canon as presenting an arguably singular, outdated perspective. Though Olivia did not use this exact phrase (i.e., "dead White guys"), she did describe her district's African American Literature course curriculum as "very horrible" and a "White curriculum with Black authors," or a curriculum that included Black authors but was designed for a White audience.

Katie explained that the canon needed to change or expand and consider diversity in "gender and race and ethnicity" and in "thought and genre." Similar to her thoughts above regarding the "one-size-fits-all" approach she believed her district employed when enacting policy changes, Katie was critical of a one-size-fits-all curriculum, "When you're getting these texts from high above, from people who have not met your students or been to your school, maybe even been to your district…there can just be a disconnect." For Katie, and for all teachers in the study, the canon had not caught up to students' needs, realities, or interests. Specifically, both Cole and Michelle believed that great literature existed, but, in Cole's words, "people just aren't willing to relinquish the canon." Michelle agreed, and reflected on the ways in which she selected diverse texts for students, echoing her previous point about the importance of being a well-read ELA teacher:

> Everything I do, it's not about exoticizing things. I don't do—my own children call it "trauma porn"—when I teach Black literature. It's not about the Black experience and how bad they had it and how—it's not slavery narratives, it's not White savior narratives. I hate *To Kill a Mockingbird.* I'm really trying to get my 10th grade teacher to drop that book because I feel it's damaging to children. I think it had its place, I know it was important, it

was important text in the 60's…I feel like we have so much good stuff out there and to get

back to my point, if you're well read, you're going to find really good stuff.

For Michelle, the task of making the curriculum relevant for her classroom also required a

reflection on choosing texts that did not "exoticize" Black people, focus exclusively on Black pain,

and did not promote White saviorism. Michelle's talk reflects current arguments, particularly about

contemporary film genres, that portray (mis)representations, narrow, or stereotypical

representations of Black history, experiences, and life. Critics argue that, although representation

is important in both film and film writing and production, the excessive inclusion of Black pain

and death as entertainment, a sub-genre referred to commonly as "Black trauma porn," can be

harmful, particularly to Black consumers and audiences (Giorgis, 2021). Critics also call attention

to the ways in which the reproduction, or sharing, of virtual videos of Black people being killed

by police can also fall into this trope and may re-traumatize Black individuals (Morrison, 2020).

Michelle also made note of white saviorism. Films like *The Blindside*, *The Help* and *The*

Greenbook, a few popular films from the 2010's, depict examples of White saviorism, a cinematic

trope in which a White character operates to "save" often low-income characters of color from

troubling circumstances (sometimes, racism itself). The White savior trope is wide reaching and

potentially harmful, as it can create the interpretation that "nonWhite characters and cultures are

essentially broken, marginalized and pathological, while Whites can emerge as messianic

characters" (Hughey, 2016, p. 2). Slavery narratives and *To Kill a Mockingbird* were, Michelle

believed, examples of traditional canonical texts that engaged in and promoted these problematic,

broader themes (e.g., "trauma porn" and White saviorism). For Michelle, however, the "damage"

was not due to discussions about race and racism in the texts (which she said she actively pursued

in her classroom), but was instead due to the potential harm that the inclusion of texts that promoted White saviorism and a narrow focus on Black pain may have on her students.

In response to their critiques, all four teachers supplemented their curriculum with texts they believed their students would connect to. All four teachers believed that the texts in a classroom should reflect student interest, skill level, and reflect who students are. For example, Michelle shared that she specifically asked students what they would like to read and discussed her active and invested reading in new and interesting materials, and Olivia described a recent partnership with a local University to re-create her school's African American Literature course in hopes of making it more relevant. Though teachers described supplementing their curriculum with relevant texts, they also discussed teaching from the canon, as well. Katie said she had success with the works of Shakespeare, Michelle shared that she taught *Beowulf* and the *Canterbury Tales*, and Cole had just completed a unit about *Edgar Allan Poe*. Ultimately, teachers were not abandoning the traditional ELA canon completely.

In line with Alvarez and Milner (2018), all four teachers in the study believed it was important, valuable and necessary to discuss race and racism in their ELA classrooms. In fact, all four teachers, in varied ways, thought it was nonsensical to avoid conversations about race and racism. Additionally, all four teachers pushed back against the "dead White guy" trope of the traditional ELA canon and deliberately chose texts that might be more relevant to their students. Teachers in my study shared that conversations about race and racism were happening in their classrooms and were vital to classroom learning and acknowledging the realities of their students' lives. Both of these practices—diversifying the traditional canon for student interest and actively engaging in race-talk in the classrooms—are essential to effective classroom teaching (Milner, 2015).

4.7 Teacher Responses to Hypothetical Classroom Scenarios

In this section, I unpack teachers' responses to hypothetical classroom scenarios posed during our third and final interview (see Appendix B). Teachers were asked to describe their imagined responses to situations that involved conversations about race, racism, and ELA teaching and learning. Each hypothetical scenario was designed to specifically respond to my second research question, which sought to understand how teachers' expectations for classroom talk and behavior might impact teachers' classroom practice, including discipline, particularly for Black students.

4.7.1 Race Talk and Classroom Learning

First, I unpack teacher responses to two hypothetical classroom scenarios, scenarios (1) and (4) (see Appendix B), which asked teachers to consider two classroom scenarios in which students were leading discussions about race and racism in their ELA classrooms. Engaging in affirming and informed race-talk in the classroom can be beneficial to the learning of students of color (Howard, 2004). Therefore, I investigated teachers' responses to student-led race-talk in the classroom.

In the first hypothetical classroom scenario, teachers were asked to share their thinking about a situation in which a group of 9th grade, Black and White students, who were engaged in a group discussion about Harper Lee's, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (TKAMB)*,* discussed the use of the "n-word," particularly, "its origins, and how it is a derogatory and harmful term when used by people who are not Black." In the scenario, a Black male student defended his use of the "n-word" to a White peer. Their conversation sparked a wider discussion about racial slurs. I adapted this

scenario from a chapter by Godley (2012), in which a classroom teacher attempted to redirect the ways in which students were engaged in discussion (e.g., students talking to each other instead of the teacher and Black students using the n-word).

Overall, Cole, Michelle and Katie said they would allow or encourage this conversation in their classroom. For them, this hypothetical student conversation presented an important learning opportunity. Michelle explained, "Discussing race and racial issues and racialized language is absolutely an appropriate…in a learning environment, so I would not shut down that kind of talk because it doesn't make me uncomfortable to talk about it…I like it to be out in the open and have discussions about it and learn from each other and understand."

Although Cole and Katie shared that they would welcome this conversation and believed it was an important topic for students to engage in, they both said that the "n-word" was not an appropriate word to use in the classroom. Cole was concerned that the term might be offensive to other students:

> It's not a word that I believe should be used in a school context. I am offended when I hear that word, so you may not be offended because of all the reasons that some students give about like, "Oh, we've changed it, or we've made it this." It doesn't matter, it's still an offensive word and somebody might be offended by it. So, we don't need to use that word…we should not be using it in class…I would not change the topic, because kids are talking about a book and thinking critically about it. I would just make sure they're using language that's appropriate and respectful of all the people who are, you know, who are in the conversation or who are hearing it. But I would not, you know, end the conversation.

Here, Cole believed that this discussion was relevant to the themes of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and that students were engaged in a critical and important conversation. However,

146

despite the novel's use of the term, he believed no student, "Black, White, or whatever," should use the term in class for fear it might offend someone else, including himself. Despite Cole's considerations of Black students' arguments about the reclaimed nature of the term, Cole believed that did not matter and that the term remained offensive in a classroom environment, even when used by Black students. Ultimately, Cole said he welcomed this discussion, but wanted students to censor out the term itself. Cole defined respectful talk as talk that did not offend and ultimately had the goal of respecting classmates, which included respecting their ideas. Respectful talk included *how* students spoke with others (i.e., tone and volume) and the actual words students used (i.e., censoring out swear words). Cole thought it was important for students to learn appropriate ways to engage with classmates in dialogue, especially if students disagreed.

Katie agreed and said, "I don't have an opinion, one way or the other, on if the students use it with their friends or family or community members outside of the classroom. My position on the classroom is just a time and place position." Of note, Katie shared that the hypothetical classroom scenario, as a whole, was foreign to her because she had little experience with White and Black students interacting together in class. When conversations such as the one from the hypothetical scenario occurred in her classroom, she shared that she was usually the only White person in the room. Therefore, when she said that she did not have an opinion about whether students used the n-word with friends or family, she was referring to Black students. Ultimately, Katie did not have an opinion about students' use of the n-word outside of class, but did expect students not to use the term in class.

Both Cole and Katie shared that, though they would not disrupt the conversation itself, they would ask students (of any race) to censor their language while engaged in this classroom discussion. Though neither teacher said they would discipline students in the scenario for voicing

the n-word, Cole did share that he would discipline students if they continued using the n-word after he had asked them not to.

Olivia was the only teacher who stated that she would not encourage this conversation in class. She shared that she would have already have had this conversation with students (specifically prior to reading a book that used the n-word) as a way to mitigate this conversation. Additionally, she saw this conversation as disparate from the topics of the book or the class activities. She elaborated, "we do those readings at the beginning of the year so then we can focus on the book…there's been zero kids in the whole time we've been working on the book that are like, 'Well you know black people can say the N word.' Like, yes, we know that in September, we're done…if we're trying to learn from a book, we can't be trying to debate who can say the N word…nobody's saying that right now." For Olivia, this conversation would not have been encouraged because (1) she saw it as outside of the scope of TKAMB's themes or the topic of the day's lesson, (2) she imagined that she would have already covered this conversation prior to starting the book, and (3) "nobody's saying that right now," or, she saw this debate as outdated or resolved. Olivia also shared that Black students in their classes use the term all the time and are not disciplined for using the term.

Olivia, Cole and Katie, described various ways in which they might navigate or control how students engaged in an episode of race-talk during a discussion about a class text. Williams and colleagues (2016) argue that classroom race-talk can be cultivated for student psychological safety in the classroom when teachers' share classroom power with their students, are attuned to students' racial identities, and situate student experiences as relevant and truthful. In Olivia's classroom, though she explained that this conversation would have already occurred prior to reading the text, student race-talk was limited. Olivia expressed a discomfort with the topic being

brought up in this particular scenario because she believed the the author's use of the n-word in the text was not thematically relevant. Cole and Katie, though both open to and encouraging of the discussion itself, wanted students to censor their use of the n-word during the discussion. Though censoring language is common in secondary classrooms, and Katie and Cole both expressed that they wanted students to not feel offended and ultimately safe in the classroom, Williams and colleagues argue that one way for teachers to share power in the classroom is to allow students to shape how they engage authentically in classroom race talk.

For most teachers, and more explicitly for both Olivia and Michelle, White people should not have opinions about Black people's use of the n-word. Olivia said, "I cannot tell you say it, not say it, I'm going to shut my mouth now. This is not for me to participate in, but I can give you other writers who have spoken on it." Similarly, Michelle said,

It's not my culture to say, 'Oh that words derogatory, I don't want you to use it my class,' or, 'you don't know the history of that word.' It's not my place to say that as a White teacher…I've grown up with Black friends. Some of my friends, they never use that word ever, other friends who use it all the time. I'm not the one that can say whether it's appropriate or not. It's not for me to say.

For both Michelle and Olivia, telling Black students that they could or could not use the n-word was inappropriate because they were White teachers. For Michelle, this stance was further informed by her Black friends' varied opinions about the use of the term. Michelle was the only teacher in my study to note discussions about race and racism with Black adults (in this case, Michelle's friends). Both teachers shared that they might suggest a class activity, readings, or an individual student project for students who wanted to learn more about this particular issue.

149

Overall, three teachers found the conversation to be worthwhile and beneficial to student learning. However, three teachers, in varied ways, expressed a discomfort with at least one aspect of the conversation. In response, these teachers enacted certain levels of control over the discussion which included whether students, including Black students, could use the N-word or not, or if the discussion could take place within the topics and goals of the day's learning.

In another scenario about student-led race-talk (see Scenario 4 in Appendix B), teachers were asked to respond to a situation in which a group of Black boys entered class and continued to have a conversation they had started in the hallway. The group spoke loud enough for the other members of the class to hear and continued their conversation from the hallway, despite their current class having already begun. In the scenario, the students were airing their concerns and frustrations about racially inequitable discipline, a lack of diversity in the ELA curriculum, and their belief that all of their teachers (including the teacher participant being interviewed) were racist (see Scenario 4, Appendix B). I adapted this scenario from my field notes taken during a pilot study I conducted in 2018.

All four teachers believed that this conversation was important and three teachers believed this conversation was worthy of class time, except Olivia who felt that the conversation would disrupt her classroom's routine. She explained that she would encourage the group to pause the conversation, focus on their class routine and possibly take up the conversation later or have the conversation quickly, then re-focus on the day's learning.

Both Cole and Katie believed the conversation was worthy of class time and said they would speak with students about the issues they raised. Although Cole welcomed the conversation, he also wanted students to understand how their actions might have been read as disrespectful to their teachers. He said he would ask students:

"What exactly did you say?"...And saying like, "Well, you know, could it be seen as being disrespectful?" And hopefully allowing students to see both sides. Now, the student might be completely in the right and the teacher might be completely wrong…that happens all the time. But just letting the students kind of like process through like, "Okay, how did I say this?"…I talk a lot about tone, not only tone in literature, but also tone and how you are speaking to people, and kind of the attitude that you have. It might not be volume, but, think about the attitude that you have and how it could be perceived as being disrespectful and having a conversation with students that way.

Research shows that White teachers may perceive Black students' talk as having a disrespectful tone, or an attitude (Ferguson, 2000; Morris, 2017) and may discipline students for these perceptions (Milner, 2015). These subjective perceptions can be harmful to Black students, particularly when it comes to racially inequitable discipline practices. In this instance, Cole believed it was possible for this group of Black boys to have come across as disrespectful to their teachers and wanted this group of students to understand that as well. In other words, Cole wanted the students in the scenario to understand that they may have been written up justifiably. In a previous section, Cole noted the racially inequitable outcomes that can occur in classrooms where teachers incorrectly perceive Black girls' volume of voice as aggressive or challenging. In this instance, however, Cole instead wanted students to consider the ways in which their tone may have been disrespectful, as opposed to teachers' investigating their racial bias about Black students' classroom talk.

Cole also believed the actual problem the students were addressing was the lack of diversity in the ELA curriculum. For Cole, the real focus was the curriculum and the discussion of that issue was clouded with students' "emotions." He explained,

It seems like there's a lot of emotion involved, and I think you've got to address that emotion before you start to have a conversation about the focus that they would rather have. Because I think it is kind of evolved from a literature base to an emotional base...Kind of guide it into the conversation about what is being studied in literature, in the ELA class. And so, okay, let's talk about this. Because I think it's a good point. A lot of stuff we read is old dead White men, and having that conversation. But I think you got to address the emotional aspect of it first and the social. Because that could escalate pretty quickly if emotions are involved and kids are standing up and there's a social aspect to it. So sitting down, and then addressing the emotion, and then getting to the actual literature part, I think, is the direction I will go.

Cole believed that the real issue in this scenario was the lack of diversity in the ELA curriculum, which Cole agreed with and thought was "a good point." He hoped to steer students away from an "emotionally based" conversation and toward a discussion about literature. He also sought to navigate students' movement and voice, encouraging students to sit down, calm down and not involve their peers. Cole's main focus seemed to be calming student emotions. Despite Cole's previous unpacking of the varied ways in which racism impacts schooling and the ways in which other teachers may draw on problematic misperceptions of their Black students, Cole did not describe engaging these students in a conversation about the ways in which their teachers may have acted in biased, racist or harmful ways.

Like Cole, Katie also believed this conversation was worthy of class time and a worthy conversation to have, overall. She explained,

I think you have to give them the space to voice their concerns, I mean if this were happening they're obviously hurt and upset and they're essentially saying they don't feel

seen in the curriculum, at least. They don't really feel seen as people and as individual people…and I think this is a case where perception is reality. [I] could say, "Your teachers aren't racist, come on let's just have class," but that's going to just make them feel even more dismissed.

Similar to Cole, Katie focused more on the lack of representation in the curriculum and less on a discussion about how her hypothetical colleagues may have racially profiled the students in the scenario. However, Katie did echo the students' concerns about their teachers being racist. For Katie, students' perception had created a reality, or a truth about her colleagues that was accurate for her Black students and that needed to be acknowledged by her as a White teacher.

Michelle started her response by saying that this scenario must be happening at the beginning of the year because "kids must not know her yet." In other words, Michelle believed her reputation for having a diverse curriculum (as evidenced through an open house in which she explicitly shared her curriculum choices) would most likely make this hypothetical scenario a reach. Michelle's response to the issues students brought up was to encourage them to advocate for themselves:

> Honestly, I'd be like, "are you guys involved in like student government or anything?" I would ask them, "Do you want to talk to the leadership in the school?" I would ask them, "What are things you want to see in the curriculum? Because I can make that happen"…I would put a lot on them to advocate for themselves, sit down with the adults in the school, air their grievances, and if I could any way help facilitate that.

Michelle noted that she would offer her students a space to talk about the issues they brought up and provided action steps. As the teacher, and the head of the ELA Department at Grove, she was transparent about her knowledge of the school system and how to facilitate change.

Though she did not mention that she would directly address the issues the students raised about inequitable discipline, she also would not steer students away from it. Additionally, Michelle also said that this conversation might create a new class assignment, "that would not be probably the key lesson that we were trying to do that day, but we would shift to that and it would end up maybe being a writing assignment for, I don't know, civil activism." She explained that "sometimes life is more than English class." Michelle situated this episode of student-led race-talk as worthy of class time and transparency about the systems of power in her school. She shared avenues through which students might be agentic, though back by her support, take action and seek change in their school.

Michelle and Katie hoped that students learned from this interaction that they would be listened to and that their concerns were valid. Michelle hoped to show students how to advocate for themselves effectively and navigate the school system for change. Cole hoped that students would learn how to have respectful conversations with adults, consider their teachers' perspectives (including how their tone might have been perceived by teachers), and have hard conversations when "emotional." Olivia was focused more on ELA classroom learning and shared, instead, that students in this scenario might not actually be learning because they are upset about the issues they brought to the classroom.

Although three teachers welcomed this hypothetical conversation and shared that they, overall, invited conversations about race and racism into their actual classrooms, none of the teachers explicitly engaged in a discussion about their (hypothetical) colleagues potentially racially profiling their (hypothetical) Black students. Though Cole believed the conversation was worthy of class time, he shifted their focus away from teachers possibly being racist, and toward the other issue the group of Black boys brought up: the lack of diversity in the ELA curriculum. Though

Michelle and Katie did not explicitly engage in conversation about racially inequitable discipline practices, they offered different responses. Michelle's response was geared toward furthering student agency and Katie's response suggested that she believed students or, at least, that students' perception of teachers' racial bias was true for them.

In both hypothetical classroom scenarios (1 and 4), students were actively and explicitly engaged in and leading conversations about race and racism. The majority of teachers, for each scenario, shared that they believed both topics, or conversations were worthy of class time and should be welcomed in the classroom space. However, for Olivia, neither student-led discussion should be taken up as a topic of conversation during class time. Olivia's focus, in each scenario, was on the classroom learning that she had planned or the context of the book the class was engaged in. In the previous section, Olivia shared that discussions of race and racism were common in her classroom ("we just don't not") because of the nature of her subject matter (i.e., an African American literature course she re-designed). Olivia saw both hypothetical classroom scenarios as outside of the scope of the learning she had planned for students that day or outside of the scope of the novel being taught, and therefore would not have been fostered or sustained.

4.7.2 Student Language, Voice and ELA Learning

In addition to perceptions of student-led race talk, I also asked teachers to consider hypothetical classroom scenarios about student voice and language. Hypothetical classroom scenarios 2 and 3 (Appendix B) asked teachers to respond to situations related to student language and talk in the ELA classroom. Both scenarios included Black students engaged in talk that research shows can be misinterpreted and perceived negatively by teachers, including volume of voice, perceived tone (Morris, 2005; Morris, 2016), and the use of AAVE (Godley et al., 2007).

In hypothetical classroom scenario 3, teachers responded to a scenario in which a small group of Black female students, "share their thoughts without raising their hands, speak concurrently with other students or interrupt other students to share their thoughts, and are sharing their arguments or counter points to other students' interpretations of the text. They speak more often than other students during the discussion." I adapted this particular classroom scenario from Morris's (2005; 2007) work. In both studies, he found that teachers perceived the classroom talk of Black female students negatively and made assumptions about students' attitudes based on tone and volume of voice.

In the current study, each teacher explained, in various ways, that they wanted to be sure that they, and the entire class, got to hear from all students (or as many students as possible) during discussion. In other words, teachers were concerned about equality of student voice. Teachers promoted equality in student voice in various ways. Cole had students write down their ideas first and share out if they felt comfortable, Olivia kept track of students' who had spoken and gave points for students participating a certain number of times, and Michelle and Katie said they facilitated or organized student voice so students knew when it was their turn to speak. No teacher in this small group said they would discipline the students in the scenario, and all teachers said that they perceived the group of Black female students in the scenario as excited about or engaged in the learning. For all four teachers, students' listening to other students and verbally engaging was a key part of literacy learning. Therefore, redirections of students who were more vocal were done so that other students had the opportunity to share and be heard, not to dismiss or silence more vocal students' participation. Unlike other studies that explore the ways in which White teachers perceive Black girls' classroom talk (Morris, 2005), the teachers in my study did not criticize students for being too loud or aggressive. Instead, teachers were more concerned with promoting

156

a whole-class discussion that incorporated the Black girls' talk into a conversation with their quieter peers.

Three teachers said explicitly they would not discipline students in this scenario because there was nothing to discipline. Cole, however, focused again on potential escalation. When asked if he would discipline students in the scenario, he said, "only if it continues to escalate, be not productive. So I mean, if their conversation and their engagement is keeping other students from learning and they're not following my direction as far as like, one person is talking at a time or whatever it is, then…I could see it becoming a discipline issue but, just in this scenario, I would not." Unlike the other teachers in the study, for Cole, student talk could be disciplined if it became (hypothetically) escalated or not productive. Cole created a new scenario in his response about discipline—one in which students were talking over each other and were keeping other students from learning—and so was not specifically responding to the original hypothetical classroom scenario.

In the second hypothetical classroom scenario, teachers were told that students were working on revising a thesis statement for clarity. In the scenario, a Black male student attempted to make a correction at the board, but multiple peers told him his revisions were wrong. He returned to his seat confused and asked a Black female peer if she would like to try. In response to the invitation to go to the board, she said, "I ain't going nowhere." To which a White male student replied, "You mean, 'I'm not going anywhere.'" This scenario was adapted from a similar situation in Godley et al.'s study (2007), in which a teacher, during a lesson on grammar and language, indicated to a Black female student that her use of "I ain't going nowhere," was grammatically "incorrect," to which the Black female student said, she would "speak in proper slang" when she was at her seat and not engaged in a grammar lesson at the board (p. 120). This scenario was

intended to engage teacher participants in conversation about their beliefs about dialect diversity in the ELA classroom, specifically Black students' use of AAVE.

Three teachers shared that they would tell the White student not to correct his Black female peer, and some teachers shared that they would follow up with the White student, or both students, after class. And, while three teachers mentioned issues related to dichotomies often associated with dialect diversity and ELA teaching and learning, like informal versus formal, or correct versus incorrect speaking and writing, the teachers did not explicitly mention to me how race or racialized language ideologies played a part in this scenario (outside of their initial reaction to a White student had "corrected" the language of a Black student).

Olivia shared that she does not, "place any character judgment on the way people speak" and students cannot learn effectively if they are, "worried about how [they're] speaking." Godley and Reaser (2018) found that White pre-service teachers tended to frame dialect diversity in colorblind ways, or in ways that did not grapple with the lived consequences students of color may face when engaging in language practices not aligned with Standardized English. Despite Olivia's openness to dialect diversity in her classroom, she did not grapple with the ways in which White teachers can and do negatively judge the language practices of Black students who speak AAVE. She explained that audience, purpose, and clarity were more important to consider in a writing assignment:

> If they want to write their thesis statement like, "something, something, something, ain't going nowhere," that might be a perfectly awesome thesis statement if what your actual—who your audience is for what you're writing and what's the purpose of your assignment. So, even if it's a formal assignment, chatting about register might be appropriate. Just making sure they understand whether you're in that assignment that we're

talking about revising our writing that you understand who's your audience and what's the purpose of it.

Olivia shared her overall acceptance of student language diversity in both speaking and writing and said that she would accept different dialects in students' written assignments, "even if it's a formal assignment," because effective writing was about clarity and addressing the audience and purpose of the assignment, not adhering to a specific language or dialect. However, Olivia did not specify who her students' real or imagined audience might be and did not address the implicit racial power dynamics often associated with Standardized English that undergirded this scenario.

Katie was concerned with the implications for the culture of the classroom. She was concerned for both of the Black students who had been made to feel as if their responses or talk were wrong. She grappled with how she might respond to students in the scenario:

> This could be a moment to talk about…speaking how we feel comfortable, speaking more casually within the context versus a more formal writing setting. But, again, there's limited context. I just feel like my gut is just telling me in this context to just put a pin in it for in that moment and then revisit it…I'm very sensitive to students feeling embarrassed and then everything that comes along with them when they're quote unquote wrong in the class.

Here, Katie situated the language practices of students as "formal" and "informal," or more casual in some circumstances than others. Like Olivia's response, and similar to other teachers in the study, Katie welcomed dialect diversity in the classroom and wanted to shield students from being "corrected" by their peers, but did not explicitly engage with the underlying racial dynamics at play in this example.

159

Cole was the only teacher who responded to this scenario with an explicit reflection on how race and racism impact linguistic dynamics in the classroom. For Cole, the Black female student in the scenario was simply trying to communicate with a classmate and therefore should not have been "corrected" by her White peer, particularly because of the racial dynamics:

I've had this conversation before about the different modes of communication, like essentially code switching, and the different codes you use in different contexts and talking about situations and saying, in this situation, all she's trying to do is communicate. So, it doesn't matter the form of English that you use whenever you're just trying to communicate, especially to a classmate in a classroom situation like that. Now, if you're talking to the principal or you're talking to the superintendent, you're talking to the president, you're going to use a different form of language. I feel like I've gotten on my soapbox about this this week, but whenever I'm talking to my four-year-old I use a different form of language than I do whenever I'm talking to my five my 12-year-old, talking to my wife, talking my students, talking to my basketball players. We use different language all the time and different forms of English, so it's just figuring out the context for when you use different codes in English. And, I don't think I would get into this with that student at that point, but the idea of a White person correcting a Black person is just like that whole like White savior, you know, or White is right kind of, or White equals correct grammar whenever it's all about communication and I'm sure that student uses different forms of communication whenever he's communicating with other people too.

Cole interpreted the White student's "correction" of AAVE in this scenario with the ways in which Whiteness impacts perceptions of language and power in schooling spaces. However, Cole also expressed a view of codeswitching that situate dialects, like AAVE, as appropriate only

160

in informal or unprofessional environments, and as somewhat colorblind or not shaped by assumptions about "appropriate" language grounded in racist social structures (Godley & Reaser, 2018). For Cole, the Black students' use of AAVE should not be corrected by a peer in an informal classroom setting, but should change, or switch, if that Black student were speaking to someone in power. Cole also gave examples in which he described how he was expected to speak differently in various settings (e.g., with his family versus with this students) as similar to, or the same as, code switching. Michelle also shared similar examples of how she "codeswitches":

> I think we know that there's dialect shifts. We code switch all the time. And I tell them all the time, "Look the way I'm talking to you right now is not the way I'd speak when I go into an interview… if I have to go speak in front my peers, I'm nervous too, just like you guys are and I have to worry about my words and calculate how, because yinzer [Michelle] has different vocabulary than Masters of English [Michelle]." So, we talked about all that. Like, in an informal discussion, it's okay to not have good grammar in my class. I don't sit around and correct them all the time like that.

Like Cole, Michelle described the ways in which everyone is expected to shift their speech in professional settings. Thus, both teachers engaged in colorblind notions of code-switching that did not consider the ways in which code-switching in and of itself is a raced term and has real consequences for people of color (Godley & Reaser, 2018). Michelle also used codifying language, like "good grammar" to describe student talk that was acceptable during informal discussions. Though she did not "correct" students use of dialect, particularly in inform settings, Michelle's talk did reflect beliefs about dialect diversity and professionalism, a relationship often problematized in studies about critical language pedagogy (Godley & Reaser, 2018). Michelle's example of her own code-switching did, however, include a brief reflection on the intersections of

161

culture, identity and language (e.g., yinzer Michelle versus Masters of English Michelle). In the region where Michelle taught and, presumably grew up, the term "yinzer" is used to describe locals born and raised in the region and typically those who engage in a specific linguistic dialect or accent. The term yinzer and its accompanying dialect are often associated with working-class individuals (Johnston & Kiesling, 2008). For Michelle, these two versions of herself, or these two different identity spaces, were defined by concepts and perceptions of status and professionalism. However, White, Standardized English speaking teachers may not experience the same pressures, impacts on identity, and negative perceptions as their Black students who speak AAVE and are expected to adopt Standardized English practices in settings deemed professional or formal (Godley & Reaser, 2018).

Teachers' responses indicate the ways in which teacher beliefs about language might shape curriculum and classroom interactions. In other words, teachers' encouragement for students to code-switch, for example, can shape the ways in which students view their language practices.

Most teachers said they would not discipline students in the scenario, but instead speak with students directly about the issue. Most teachers said that they would initially tell the White student in the scenario that it is not appropriate nor his responsibility to correct other students. Teachers said they would most likely follow up with the White student after to explain why his corrections were inappropriate, and they would follow up with the Black students who were corrected to be sure that they were not shamed by the interaction. Cole said he would only discipline students if the issue escalated into a fight or a bullying situation:

> I would only discipline if it escalates…if the student feels offended and kind of
>
> comes back at the correcting student, then I would address it. But I would only discipline
>
> if it escalates to something more than just that conversation…Even just a response by the

Black student to the White student, and then the White student responded back. I mean, if it went back and forth twice, I would intervene and discipline…the confrontational aspect of it, and then probably just go and talk a long time about code switching and the importance of it just to quash the issue.

Although Cole would tell the White student that their comment was inappropriate, he would also use this as a lesson in how the Black student needed to switch their language and dialects for different situations. Cole believed that this would mend the issue between the two students, but did not grapple with the racial realities and connotations inherent in discussions about code-switching in literacy classrooms.

Overall, in their responses to this scenario, all the teachers shared their acceptance of dialect diversity in the classroom, though teachers described both dialect diversity and code-switching practices in colorblind ways (Godley & Reaser, 2018). Two teachers noted that they would use this scenario as an opportunity to teach students, particularly Black students, to codeswitch, or change their ways of speaking in order to meet preconceived notions about professionalism or appropriate speech. Scholarship about the uses of code-switching is mixed. Though some scholars argue that all students should have access to normalized codes and languages associated with privilege and power in order to prepare them for literacy learning and assessments (Delpit, 2006), other scholars argue that pedagogy that encourages code-switching or situates Black Language as informal purports a deficit perspective (Flores & Rosa, 2015) that can implicitly devalue dialects outside of Standardized English and inform how Black students feel about their own linguistic practices (Baker-Bell, 2019).

4.8 Summary of Findings

All four White teachers in my study identified as dedicated to racial justice in their ELA classrooms and were engaged in conversations about systemic issues that impacted their schools and students. Further, all four teachers were aware of the implications of dialect prejudice, were engaged in non-punitive classroom management practices, and shared their dedication to developing their racial awareness through reading and/or listening practices. All teachers shared that it was essential and expected that race and racism be discussed in their classrooms, and most teachers felt supported by their administration to do so. All four teachers also described their avoidance of punitive and exclusionary classroom management practices and instead shared alternative approaches to classroom management strategies, which often relied on relationship-building and speaking with students one-on-one.

Together, these practices and beliefs may disrupt inequitable outcomes for students of color in schools and classrooms. Teachers' avoidance of punitive and exclusionary discipline combined with their commitment to developing racial literacy and the recognition that systemic issues are real and impact their students, may disrupt, at an individual and classroom level, racialized perceptions of Black students' behavior and, thus, racially inequitable approaches to discipline, particularly for Black students. Further, teachers' engagement in race-talk is in line with Milner's (2017) hopes that teachers might integrate race-talk into the classroom curriculum as it is "the curriculum" of students' lives (p. 90) both in and outside of the classroom. In other words, engaging in race-talk and acknowledging systemic racism can disrupt colorblind and normalized approaches to schooling.

In addition to sharing practices in line with critical scholarship for culturally relevant and anti-racist practices that benefit the learning of students of color (as indicated above) (Ladson-

Billings, 2006; Milner, 2015; Howard, 2008), the teachers also shared areas in which they might continue their work as White teachers dedicated to racial justice. Although the teachers recognized the value of language variety in the classroom, three teachers described the complexities of language diversity and code-switching practices in colorblind ways (Godley & Reaser, 2018). Further, while teachers all shared their dedication to engaging in race-talk in the classroom, some teachers described their responses to student-led classroom race-talk in ways that did not always share power with students, a discursive practice that can benefit students' authentic engagement in race-talk (Williams et al., 2016). In these scenarios, teachers also indicated remaining discomfort with certain aspects of hypothetical race-centered classroom discussions (i.e., avoiding explicitly discussing hypothetical teachers racially profiling their hypothetical students).

Scholars note that White teachers who are developing anti-racist practices may feel discomfort in explicitly unpacking a White racial identity (Utt & Tochulk, 2020) and the ways Whiteness operates in schools (Picower, 2011). Though the teachers in my study were engaged in race-centered work and talk, most teachers did express a discomfort in describing the ways in which their White identity impacted classroom practice. Three teachers believed that their Black students were seeing issues of racism or racial bias where it did not exist. For example, Michelle shared an interaction in which a Black female student brought up issues of race and racism would not have occurred if the student had known her better. Thus, though the teachers in my study were aware of systemic issues and described those impacts on their schools and students effectively, most did not critically discuss their own Whiteness or engage in discussion about how they may still hold racial biases.

Below, I describe the nuances between each teachers' talk, practice and beliefs. My findings show that being a White teacher dedicated to racial justice is an ongoing process—

165

teachers shared both beliefs and practices that aligned with critical scholarship and beliefs and practices that called for continued reflection.

4.8.1 Teacher Profiles

Cole was discussed his White racial identity and how it impacted his classroom. He critically reflected on his upbringing and previous schooling experiences and was self-reflective about his practice and his possible blind spots as a White teacher serving Black students. He was also very aware of systemic issues that impacted his students, his school and his practice and shared his belief that his racial awareness process was a journey, specifically one without a final end point. Cole also expressed certain areas that might benefit from further critical self-reflection, specifically an investigation into colorblind understandings of code-switching practices and beliefs about Black students' volume and perceived tone.

Olivia was very open about her critical reading practices. She was adamant that reading the history of race and racism in schools had impacted her practice for the better and she hoped to encourage her colleagues to do the same. Olivia seemed to be the most involved in (or at least, the most vocal about) out-of-school teacher forums, professional development opportunities, and personal reading practices. She was also working with a local University to improve her school's African American Literature course curriculum. Olivia described the ways in which her teaching had changed for the better and how practices she understood as equitable (e.g., accepting late work) were being taken up by her leadership and applied in the classroom. Like Cole, Olivia also shared areas that might deserve further reflection. Though she explained that race-talk did occur in her classroom, Olivia was the only teacher who did not encourage two examples of hypothetical, student-led race-talk to take place in her classroom. Olivia also described uncertainty in how

166

authentically take up language diversity in the classroom, particularly in student writing practices, an issue that scholars grapple with and might be taken up further in ELA professional development.

Katie expressed a lot of care for her students and shared her beliefs that her students were impacted by colorblind and difference-blind district-level policies and practices. She believed that race-talk was important in the classroom and wanted students to feel agentic and engage in learning for learning's sake. Katie grappled with the question about how her Whiteness impacted discipline in her classroom. Based on her response, I was unsure if she had considered this question before or if she had unpacked her own racial identity and its impacts on classroom discipline in this particular way. Additionally, Katie did not always explicitly consider the racial dynamics of the hypothetical classroom scenarios. For example, in hypothetical scenario 3, despite the implications of a White student "correcting" a Black student's use of AAVE, Katie was mostly worried about the potential for academic bullying, or for students to feel like they were not able to make mistakes in the classroom.

Michelle was the most veteran teacher of all the teachers in my study. She described wanting a joyful classroom led by humor and care. Michelle believed that race-talk was a critical component of classroom learning, as was students' being able to speak with one another. Though she said she benefited from her experiences in race-centered professional development opportunities, she also pushed back against certain ideas and common share opinions—specifically the use of school resource officers and other school security measures, as well as the ways in which race-centered professional development was conducted. Both criticisms were based in her desire for student safety. However, she did not grapple with the other implications of these critiques— that the colleagues she described as "racist" and the resource officers at her school may have (and in some cases, had) already caused harm to her Black students. Additionally, Michelle also

codified language (e.g., good grammar) and, similar to other teachers in the study, discussed code-switching in colorblind ways. She believed education was social capital and argued, like some scholars, that teaching Standardized English would benefit students' futures. Scholars of language diversity in schools continue to grapple with this particular argument, as well.

4.8.2 Conclusion

My study did not lead to the categorization of White teachers as "good" or "bad," a practice that scholars argue is arbitrary (Lensmire, 2012; Trainor, 2002). Instead, this study, like others before (Crowley, 2016; Daniels, 2018; Godley & Reaser, 2018; Lensmire, 2012; Utt & Tochluk, 2020), revealed the complexities of the work required in being a White teacher dedicated to racial justice in the classroom. Crowley (2016) urges researchers and practitioners to de-homogenize White teachers' racial awareness development and stress the "messiness" inherent in such work (p.1016). The results of my study show that teachers were actively engaged in this messy work.

In this study, "messy" work is seen in the instances where the teachers shared critical beliefs and practices that aligned with race-conscious work, while also simultaneously expressing views that seemed based in color-blindness, implicit bias, and other racial ideologies. For instance, although all four teachers were committed to engaging in race-talk in the classroom, teachers also responded with discomfort to certain aspects of hypothetical classroom race-talk. Further, though all four teachers valued student voice and dialect diversity in the ELA classroom, some teachers also shared colorblind understandings of code-switching and grappled with racialized perceptions of Black students' talk (i.e., believing that Black female students are louder). Lastly, though the teachers were dedicated to racial justice, most teachers grappled with understanding or discussing how their own race impacted their classroom discipline, such as by

suggesting that Black students are seeing issues of race where it does not exist). Understanding the complex and "messy" nature of this work, I argue, is essential to anti-racist professional development and working effectively with White teachers dedicated to racial justice. For instance, though the teachers recognized structural inequalities that impacted their students, colorblind approaches and understandings of language diversity and code-switching might negate the systemic racism that speakers of AAVE face. Further, though the teachers were critical of their White colleagues who were not willing to engage in critical race-conscious work, teachers' own racial biases and race were discussed very little. And, though race-talk was a common and encouraged practice in the teachers' classrooms, some of the teachers also shared beliefs that suggested that their Black students were seeing issues of race or racism where it did not exist. Together, the themes that emerged in my study show how nuanced this work is and how White teachers' race-conscious pedagogy can include critical and race-conscious practice, as well as practices linked to structural racism.

White teachers make up the majority of teachers in the United States (NCES, 2020) and, therefore, teach and care for Black and Brown students. While numerous studies have shown that teachers can hold negative and subjective assumptions about Black students' talk and behavior (Girvan et al., 2016; Morris, 2005; Morris, 2016; Skiba et al., 2002) that can and do lead to inequitable discipline, scholars have also found that teachers, including White teachers, can and do engage in practices that are beneficial to their students of color. Scholars of anti-racist pedagogy urge all teachers, including White teachers, to grow (or continue to grow) their racial awareness and create classrooms for liberation for their students of color.

I argue that the teachers in my study were developing and bolstering a critical racial awareness that aided in the creation of non-punitive classrooms in which students were encouraged

to learn, engage in race-talk, think critically, share out, ask questions, and engage with their peers. As a former White teacher and researcher, I relate very much to my participants and recognize that we, as White practitioners engaged in anti-racist learning and practice, are always in process.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Purpose of the Study

Research shows that White teachers enact both micro- and macro-aggressions towards their Black students, particularly for issues related to subjective perceptions of classroom behavior (Girvan et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2002) and talk, including perceptions of Black students' volume and tone of voice (Morris, 2005; Morris, 2016), as well as the use of AAVE in literacy classrooms (Godley et al., 2007; Godley & Reaser, 2018). Scholars argue that these outcomes are influenced by anti-Black stereotypes, such as adultification, or age compression, (Ferguson, 2000; Goff et al., year; Morris, 2016), as well as larger systemic issues, such as leadership quality and teacher education gaps (Milner, 2015), and can inform how teachers interpret Black students' classroom talk (Morris, 2005; Morris, 2016) and behavior (Ferguson, 2000). Black students are particularly vulnerable to teachers' subjective perceptions of their classroom talk in ELA classrooms, because literacy learning often relies on and requires student talk (CCSS ELA, 2010; NCTE/IRA, 1996) to showcase learning (Godley & Reaser, 2018). Given that White teachers represent the majority of teachers in the US (80%) and student demographics are growing increasingly more racially diverse (NCES, 2020), this study focused specifically on the ways in which White ELA teachers committed to racial justice thought about classroom talk and behavior, learning, and discipline and enacted or disrupted common micro- and macro-aggressions toward their Black students.

Although many studies have showcased the problematic and deficit views that White teachers can and do hold about their students of color, I came into this study hopeful (Lensmire, 2012) that White teachers who identified as dedicated to racial justice, indicated by their individual

participation in race-centered professional development (i.e., CUESEF), might be engaged in practices that disrupt harmful, racist, and punitive outcomes for Black students, particularly in literacy classrooms. My findings demonstrated that the four White teachers in my study thought carefully about systemic issues impacting schools in the US and their effects on their Black students (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Milner, 2015), their interactions with students and expectations for behavior in the learning environment, creating a classroom climate that would discourage behavior issues, and their racial literacy, or "the understanding of the powerful and complex ways in which race influences the social, economic, political and educational experiences of individual groups" (Skerrett, 2011, p. 314) as White teachers.

My study also demonstrated that the teachers' descriptions of their developing racial literacy was not linear but rather was iterative, imperfect, and ever-developing. Ultimately, scholars argue that this work requires constant critical self-reflection that responds to difficult questions whose answers may be hard to acknowledge (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003; Matias & Mackey, 2015; Milner, 2003) and should be bolstered by critical communities of practice (Utt & Tochluk, 2020). Howard argues that this type of critical self-reflection is never ending, and that even the most seasoned and effective teachers of culturally relevant pedagogy will have missteps that require further reflection and improvement. Similarly, Milner (2003) argued that teachers (namely, pre-service teachers) are "pursuant" of racial competence and awareness, but never fully "competent." In other words, the work is not linear, is always in process, and requires constant critical check-ins with self and scholarship.

At the center of this study is (1) the urgency for White teachers to take up race-centered and racially conscious work to best serve Black students, as well as (2) the complexities of White teachers' engagement with racial awareness and race-centered work, particularly in ELA

172

classrooms. In many ways, teachers' commitments and actions aligned with current suggestions for White, anti-racist teachers, including the recognition of the impacts of systemic issues, an active engagement with critical texts and scholarship, listening to their Black students, diversifying and critiquing curriculum, and engaging in race-talk in their classrooms. At the same time, the teachers revealed areas that required a continuation and deepening of their race consciousness work, particularly teachers' struggle to interrogate or investigate their own White racial identity. My findings also point to tensions in current scholarship on effective White teachers of Black students, particularly research that focuses on practices of code-switching.

5.2 Researcher Positionality

As a White woman and a former ELA teacher of majority Black students, I can certainly relate to the teachers in my study. I too identify as a White person, researcher and practitioner dedicated to racial justice in schools and classrooms, and I have engaged in similar practices to develop my own racial awareness and (un)learn normalized understandings of teaching and learning. This study is a product of my own developing racial awareness, as I have recently shifted my understanding of race-centered work away from focusing solely on the experiences of students of color in schools and have now complicated those considerations with the impacts of Whiteness and systems of power in schools (Levine-Rasky, 2000; Sleeter, 2017; Utt & Tochulk, 2020). Like me, and like many White people who are working to grow their anti-racist practice, the teachers in my study were grappling with their current practice and relationships alongside of an unlearning process that required important shifts in thought and action.

Cole explained that his "race journey" was ongoing and he recognized that he would never be completely rid of his own bias. This is true for me and for all White people engaged in race-centered thought and practice. I believe that as a White person dedicated to racial justice and developing racial literacy, it is imperative to balance the recognition that you continue to benefit from a racist society and hold racial biases, despite your efforts to (un)learn and disrupt racism at the systems level and the individual level. Scholars who investigate the practices of White teachers argue it is also imperative for White teachers to disrupt the socially prescribed notion that Whiteness is neutral and, instead problematize the impacts of Whiteness in schools (Sleeter, 2017) and claim a White racial identity that encompasses the notion that we are all racist (Kendi, 2019) and our (un)learning process is never complete (Howard, 2003; Milner, 2003), but we are capable of working toward racial justice. Despite the work effective White practitioners have done, we still have work to do.

5.3 Contributions to the Implications for Policy and Practice

This study has the potential to contribute in multiples ways to understanding and developing individual White teachers' race-centered practices, as well as critical professional development and school policy. The personal and professional (un)learning that the White teachers in my study were engaged in is urgent for teacher practice. White teachers make up an overwhelming majority of teachers in the United States and, therefore, will teach and interact often with students of color. Despite the altruism commonly associated with choosing a career in education, all teachers can hold racially biased or racist beliefs about their students of color, particularly their Black students (George, 2015). If White teachers are resistant to or refuse to

disrupt hegemonic understandings of Black children and interrogate the ways in which systems of White supremacy intersect with schooling practices (Sleeter, 2017), they could cause harm to their students of color (Picower, 2009) who are in their care. Below, I unpack implications for professional development focused on developing White teachers' racial literacy and implications for policy-makers.

5.3.1 Professional Development and Teacher Practice

5.3.1.1 Confronting Whiteness

Bettina Love (2019) argued that one step toward abolitionist practices in schools is designing professional development (PD) that moves away from quick fixes or slogans (e.g., "grit") that tend to ignore broader, systemic issues, such as racism, and moves toward truly understanding the systemic issues marginalized students face, including systems of Whiteness (Sleeter, 2017). Scholars of race-centered, abolitionist and social justice-oriented teacher practice note that a holistic understanding of students' lives, including and understanding of systemic issues impacting students in and outside of school, is essential to teacher practice (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Love, 2019; Milner, 2015).

Based on my findings, understanding and critically assessing the systemic issues (both in and outside of school) that impacted their Black students seemed be at the forefront of the teachers' minds. The teachers noted systemic racism and poverty as well as school-specific issues, such as tracking, colorblind policy, turnover and inequitable discipline practices. However, scholars also argue that naming racism and other systemic issues, though important, may require a further push toward (re)framing and understanding Whiteness and White racial ideologies is a central systemic issue to unpack (Matias & Mackey, 2015). Scholars argue that previous reforms, programs or

175

learning opportunities, specifically aimed at White teachers, may be contextualizing problems of practice with marginalized students and their families (Sleeter, 2017), instead of framing Whiteness as the systemic issue challenged and problematized in reform and teacher education efforts (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Picower, 2009).

In line with critical investigations of the impacts of Whiteness on students and schools, my findings may also help shape professional development that is focused on White teachers' reflections on and understandings of their own White identity (Matias & Mackey, 2015). Specifically, professional development that integrates scholarship about White teachers developing an anti-racist White racial identity that simultaneously recognizes the ways in which White people benefit from a racist society and hold racial biases, even while engaging in anti-racist work (Utt & Tochluk, 2020). Although the teachers in my study were actively engaged in race-centered work and racial justice in the classroom, they did not explicitly discuss the ways in which their own Whiteness may have impacted classroom practices (save, perhaps, for Cole). Whiteness may be hard to unpack and problematize because of the nature of Whiteness itself—normalized, neutral, and relying on meritocratic and colorblind thinking—and the emotions, like shame and guilt, that often arise for White people engaging in the work (Matias & Mackey, 2015). My findings support a professional development geared specifically toward helping teachers interrogate their own Whiteness and develop anti-racist White identities that humanize students of color and disrupt hegemonic ideologies.

5.3.1.2 Critical Communities of Practice

Scholars argue that race-centered learning and teacher racial awareness development occurs best in professional communities where teachers can share their learning with and among colleagues, hold each other accountable, and provide critical feedback on implementing theory

into practice (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Picower, 2011; Utt and Tochluk, 2020). Outside of participating in CUESEF, teachers in my study did not describe working with other teachers in critical community to grow their racial awareness. The teachers described their frustration with other White teacher colleagues who they believed were resistant to change, or less progressed in their racial awareness. Additionally, none of the teachers described working with Black teachers or other teachers of color. Though there may have been obstacles to this, wherein some teachers may have worked in schools with very few Black teachers on staff (a systemic issue in itself) or did not wish to burden Black colleagues with the reeducation of their White peers, scholars argue that Black teachers (and Black people in general) are best suited to identify both racism and allyship.

Though the four teachers in my study did not teach in the same school and may not be familiar with one another, they often shared similar perspectives. The teachers in my study were very knowledgeable about the current systems that impacted their students, particularly those about school policy and practiced that led to in-school instability and inequities. As a community of practice established and sustained by a built-in curriculum or expectation for continued critical work, these four teachers might share ideas, readings, and connections across schools and within their districts. My findings call for professional development opportunities that leverage teacher knowledge and operate to create and sustain critical communities of teacher professionals that work together continually for the benefit of their students (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Picower, 2011).

5.3.1.3 Culturally Relevant Classroom Management

Because teachers are typically responsible for distributing office discipline referrals in their classrooms and therefore decide which student behaviors are punishable (Ferguson, 2000; Milner,

2015), scholars often turn their attention to teachers' classroom discipline practices. Punitive classroom management practices and underlying issues that promote the distribution of some office discipline referrals may be ways that even the most well-meaning teachers might be contributing to the school or cradle-to-prison pipeline (Milner et al., 2018).

My findings show that the teachers in my study were more concerned with student engagement than behavioral control. The teachers described classrooms that were not based on punitive or controlling classroom management strategies and did not describe their "good students" as silent, well-behaved or high academic achievers. Instead, good students were described as critical, socially and academically engaged, and curious. The teachers questioned practices they believed were too controlling or permissive, such as raising hands before speaking or students being required to sit silently while they work. Most teachers believed that learning was social and encouraged students to engage with one another and not just the teacher. Though these teachers were veteran teachers and therefore have had many years to develop their craft and outlook on classroom management, I argue that their talk disrupts traditional understandings of behavior and learning and leaves room for future teacher practice to promote culturally responsive classroom management practices (Weinstein et al., 2003).

One step toward disrupting classroom discrimination and inequitable discipline practices may be to adopt culturally responsive classroom management practices (CRCM) in the classroom. CRCM acknowledges the ways in which teachers may perceive students through "mainstream sociocultural norms" (Weinstein et al., 2003) and, despite their intentions, may utilize these perspectives to discriminate against their students in class. Weinstein et al. (2003) established prerequisites to CRCM, which include: (1) the recognition "that we are all cultural beings with our own beliefs, biases and assumptions about human behavior," (2) an acknowledgement of "the

cultural, racial, ethnic and class differences that exist among people," and (3) an understanding of "the ways that schools reflect and perpetuate discriminatory practices of the larger society" (p. 270). One way to engage in these practices is to shape these pre-requisites into critical self-reflective prompts for teachers to unpack their assumptions about learning and behavior (Milner et al., 2018). Milner and colleagues (2018) argue that classrooms that stress engagement with rigorous content and effective teaching, coupled with consistent critical teacher self-reflection, can help educators reshape their classroom management strategies to best serve students of color. Teachers might take up these strategies in their own classrooms and perhaps in critical communities of practice and hold themselves and each other accountable for disrupting systems and practices that racialize behavior and lead to discriminatory discipline practices.

5.3.1.4 Considerations of Teachers' Knowledge About Dialect Diversity

My findings also call for continued and contextualized professional development focused on language (Godley & Reaser, 2018) and raciolinguistic ideologies (Alim, 2016), particularly for ELA teachers. The teachers in my study often shared colorblind understandings of dialect diversity and code-switching practices (Godley & Reaser, 2018) which did not contend with the racialized discrimination Black speakers of AAVE are exposed to in and out of schools. Some teachers in my study offered examples of their own language practices that they understood to be code-switching. However, code-switching is a racialized term and is often used to describe the expectations that Black speakers of AAVE shift in and out of their language practices based on the setting that they are in—expectations typically rooted in racist and normalized expectations of professionalism and decorum. The examples teachers gave of their own code-switching, which often included differences in how teachers spoke with their students versus their friends, did not problematize the long history of racism affecting Black speakers of AAVE.

179

Teachers also implicitly associated the use of AAVE as something that needed to be code-switched or altered in classroom settings and in imagined "professional" settings. In these instances, teachers may have been relying on literature that argues that all students should learn the codes and language of power in order to achieve equality (Delpit, 2006). Approaches to teaching teachers about language variation in ELA classrooms that encourage a colorblind approach to code-switching practices (e.g, "we all code-switch") may create an implicit hierarchy of languages and dialects, where Standardized English is "correct" and "academic," and other dialects are not. My findings indicate that teachers might benefit from more direct critical language pedagogies (Godley & Reaser, 2018) supported by scholarship that promotes a reinvestigation of language ideologies, particularly for White teachers who serve Black students who speak AAVE. Such a curriculum might include critical examinations of the link between language and culture and engage in sociocritical understandings of student language that "decenters traditional discourses, languages, ideologies and texts" and engages with students' diverse and rich language practices to promote learning (Gutierrez, 2008; p. 179).

5.3.1.5 The Center for Urban Education Summer Educator Forum

Though I did not ask teachers to disclose all of the ways in which they had developed their racial awareness, all teachers in my study had previously engaged in race-centered professional development through the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Urban Education Summer Educator Forum (CUESEF). Throughout the study, teachers described texts, practices and concepts that resonated with the praxis and ideas common in a forum like CUESEF, such as dialect diversity, histories of systemic racism, and police violence toward Black people. Teachers and other school stakeholders who enroll in CUESEF are exposed to relevant and critical scholarship, research and community that center the experiences of students of color in and outside of schools.

Further, CUESEF creates and supports communities of practice, exposes teacher participants to diverse scholars and practitioners, incorporates critical race scholarship and research, and offers opportunities for teacher reflection. Future professional development might investigate the design of and the knowledges and pedagogies shared at forums like CUESEF to inform district-specific professional development that is ongoing, evolving and intentional, especially for teachers, schools and districts that may not be in an economic position to enroll in university-oriented forums.

5.3.2 School District Policies and Practice

5.3.2.1 Intersectional Policy Approaches

All four teachers in my study were knowledgeable about systemic issues that impacted their students and their classrooms. Most of these issues were directly related to district policy and school governance, including tracking practices, enrollment, teacher and leadership turnover, and "one-size-fits-all" approaches to policy. I draw on Katie's critique of the one-size-fits all approach to policy and practice that she believed her district had administered which ignored the uniqueness and unique needs of her students and, instead, treated all schools and students the same. Central School District serves a diverse student body and is made up of schools that differ in many ways. Katie's argument was that not all students and schools are the same and students deserve policy and practice that directly meets their needs. Similarly, Love (2019) explained that, "policy agendas devoid of intersectionality do not allow questions and dialogues that reflect the lives of the people who will be impacted by policy" (p. 6). My findings call for a reimagining of school policy and reform practices that are intersectional (Love, 2019) and based in equity, as opposed to equality (Milner, 2015) and reject a meritocratic, "sameness is fairness" mentality that is "grounded in

ahistorical, incomplete, racialized, and classed understandings of underachievement of nondominant communities (Gutierrez, 2008, p. 172).

5.3.2.2 Teachers of Color

Though scholars and theorists argue that all teachers can be effective educators of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006), teachers of color have been found to benefit the social and emotional well-being of students of color (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019). All four teachers in my study taught in schools that had very few, if any, Black teachers or teachers of color, broadly, on staff. Alongside an abundance of scholars and studies, my findings call for inclusive teacher hiring practices that dismantle inequitable barriers to Black teachers' application, hiring and retention.

5.3.3 Contributions to and Implications for Research

5.3.3.1 Content-Specific Investigations

My study calls for further content-specific investigations into inequitable discipline and White teachers' classroom expectations and practice. Firstly, the ELA classroom is a space that deserves in-depth investigations into the ways in which race, racism, and classroom management are enacted. Scholars argue that literacy is a civil right (Greene, 2008; Gutierrez, 2008) and literacy classrooms have the potential to be conduits for liberatory practice (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). Literacy classrooms are a unique space for liberatory practice because students can be exposed to diverse texts and diverse literacy and language practices.

My findings in this study show that ELA teachers had multiple opportunities to disrupt the status quo in their classrooms through their critical examinations of curriculum and canon,

considerations of student dialect diversity, and engaging in conversations about race and racism alongside of their chosen instructional materials. Further, the literacy teachers in my classroom did not utilize punitive practices and worked to keep students in their literacy classrooms. Research shows that Black students are suspended, and therefore miss classroom learning opportunities, at higher rates than their White peers. Missing out on literacy instruction, according to scholars that understand literacy to be a civil right, is missing out on opportunities for liberatory practices (Winn & Behizadeh, 2011). Future research might further investigate the ways in which literacy teachers disrupt or promote discipline practices that remove students from literacy learning opportunities. Further, future research might conduct research with students who are suspended often to explore the ways in which they understand literacy teaching and learning. Lastly, more work is needed to unpack the discipline and classroom management practices of White literacy teachers, particularly in schools where students may not be achieving or falling behind in their literacy classrooms.

5.3.3.2 Methodology

The use of hypothetical classroom scenarios was very informative to my study and have been found to be beneficial for other studies of teachers' classroom practice, knowledge, and racial ideologies (Godley & Reaser, 2018; Shaughnessy & Boerst, 2018; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). The teachers in my study responded in varied and complex ways to hypothetical scenarios and, on occasion, contradicted or complicated their previous talk. For example, despite Olivia's persistent pursuit of critical race scholarship and her insistence that race was a central theme in her classroom topics and talk, she did not want to engage with Black student-led discussions about race and racism. Of course, Olivia's talk was most likely compounded by other aspects of her classroom—including prioritizing student learning, her imagined previous lesson topics, and the social dynamics of the classroom. Ultimately, the

hypothetical classroom scenarios were an informative way for teachers to self-reflect on their practice and their understandings and beliefs about race-talk in the classroom and dialect diversity. Future research might draw on these findings to support further use of hypothetical classroom scenarios for teacher critical reflective talk.

In line with research cited above about the importance of critical communities of practice for developing anti-racist White teacher practice, my findings call for future research that utilizes focus group interviews. Though the four teachers in my study did not teach in the same school and may not be familiar with one another, they often shared similar perspectives or perspectives that might have benefited from feedback from one another. Future research might investigate the ideas shared by White teachers invested in developing their racial awareness together.

5.3.3.3 White Teachers and Antiracist Work

My findings indicate that White teachers are capable of engaging in race-talk in the classroom and developing their race-centered practice. It has been long established in research that White teachers can and do enact micro and macro aggressions toward their Black students which can result in discriminatory classroom practices, including discipline inequities and racialized perceptions of Black students' behavior, talk and learning. Scholars have found White teachers can: (1) avoid, silence, or reject discussions about race and racism (Ferguson, 2000; Pollock, 2004), (2) perceive students of color negatively (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013), (3) reproduce Whiteness or hegemony in schools (Hyland, 2005; Rivière, 2008; Picower, 2009; Yoon, 2012), (4) engage in discourse that shields them from recognizing how they have benefited from racism and privilege (McIntyre, 1997), (5) situate negative in-school outcomes with students (Gregory & Mosley, 2004; Rogers & Brooms, 2020) and/or students' families (Sleeter, 2017; Will, 2019), and

(6) anticipate misbehavior from students of color (Goff et al., 2014; Gilliam et al., 2016; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015).

Comparatively, my findings portray four White, ELA teachers who were dedicated to racial justice work but may have benefited from continued critical work. In other words, while teachers shared critical examinations of certain aspects of teaching marginalized students, such as considerations of systemic issues and promoting relevant and diverse instructional materials and texts, teachers also indicated areas that might benefit from critical self-reflection that requires teachers to circle back and reinvestigate beliefs. This was particularly salient in how teachers engaged with dialect diversity and code-switching practices. Therefore, future research might approach studies with White teachers dedicated to racial justice with an understanding that this work is not linear. My findings might inform more studies that focus on this non-linear trajectory of White teachers developing racial literacy as a way to unpack the ways in which this work is never complete but the continued effort is essential. White teachers on their "race journey" might identify with this work and locate areas in which participants, the researchers, and they as the reader might re-investigate certain aspects of their practice. Cochran-Smith (2003) argued that race work requires "getting personal" about the "roots of our own attitudes" of race and racism while being supported in a supportive classroom environment. Work that "gets personal" or real about the continued and iterative and never-ending process of White teachers' racial awareness may operate as one way to create critical communities of practice.

Numerous studies have been done to showcase the ways in which White teachers are stepping into anti-racist work. Scholars have found that White teachers can successfully utilize race-centered or asset-based practices and adjust their teaching practices to meet the needs of students of color (Milner, 2010), build relationships and solidarity with students of color (Boucher,

2016; Milner, 2010), discuss and disrupt their own Whiteness (Boucher, 2016), divest from colorblind ideologies (Milner, 2010), and engage in asset-based pedagogies with students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006). These studies take care to note that this work is imperfect though imperative. In line with their thinking and work, future research might engage teachers who identify as progressed in their racial awareness but might benefit from another critical push, specifically one that focuses on Whiteness in schools. Scholarship that identifies where further progress is needed and engages with the non-linear nature of this work might benefit teachers as well as their students.

5.4 Limitations

Due to the nature of and schools' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to observe teacher classroom practice in person. Additionally, I began this study during the summer of 2021, which was the summer following a completely virtual schoolyear at Central School District. Teachers were unaware of what their 2021-2022 school year might look like with students or if district decision making for instruction would remain stable. Therefore, I relied mainly on interviews with teachers and, specifically, the hypothetical classroom scenario prompts to unpack the ways in which teacher descriptions of their classroom might play out in real time. Numerous critical and robust studies about teacher knowledge, beliefs and practice have utilized or been based on hypothetical classroom vignettes or mock samples of classroom materials (Godley & Reaser, 2018; Shaughnessy & Boerst, 2018; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). However, in-person observations of teacher classroom would have given me a more robust perspective of day-to-day interactions with the teachers' actual students. Often times while

responding to hypothetical scenarios, teachers would ask for more information, particularly about their relationships with the students in the scenario. In-person observations would have been one way to observe more authentic interactions with students that teachers already had established a dynamic and relationship with. Additionally, observations would have benefited my understanding of teachers' classroom expectations in a more holistic way. In other words, though teachers described their expectations for their classroom in a broad sense, I may have found more nuanced or specific ways in which expectations shifted to different activities.

5.5 Conclusion

Lensmire (2012) wrote, in her interview study with practicing White teachers, that educational researchers "figure White teachers in either one of two ways: as the object of our hope or of our disdain" (p. 5). Like Lensmire, I too, "share in the hopes that…not only is it possible or White teachers to teach students of color well, it is necessary" (p. 5). White teachers make up the overwhelming majority of teachers in the United States, while students are becoming more racially diverse (NCES, 2020). With this single consideration alone, it is imperative for researchers and practitioners of anti-racist teaching and learning to continue to investigate the ways Whiteness impacts contemporary classrooms and students, particularly the ways in which Whiteness can go unexamined by White teachers and be incorrectly perceived as neutral or normalized.

An abundance of literature focuses on the ways in which White teachers can and must do better in developing their racial awareness in order to best serve their students of color, while other literature focuses on the practices exceptional in-service White teachers engage in that are beneficial to students of color. My study revealed a complicated hopefulness, wherein four White

veteran ELA teachers described their racial literacy development and their classroom practices with predominately students of color, as well as common areas for continued work. My study revealed the complex, non-linear nature of White teachers' developing racial awareness and race-consciousness, particularly in ELA classrooms and in schools that serve majority students of color. In other words, though the White teachers in my study were actively engaged in developing their racial literacy and awareness and had, up to the point of study, participated in race-centered professional development, in some instances they signaled areas where continued work might be done. Milner (2003) and Howard (2003) argue that this work is never complete—it is iterative and requires a persistent back and forth between self-reflection and action. The teachers in my study, along with all teachers engaged in this type of race work, are not walking a straightforward path but are asked to persistently look back at their own histories, as well as the history of the US, to inform and examine their current beliefs and practices. Ultimately, developing an anti-racist approach can be un-easy and messy (Crowley, 2016) work. Teachers were grappling with concepts that research itself continues to grapple with, such as the implications of codeswitching and access to the language and culture of power.

There may never be an end point to White teachers' racial literacy development, though it is imperative that White teachers continue to (un)learn our own racial biases, develop a White racial identity that is not stalled with feelings of guilt and shame, and create critical communities for feedback and accountability. This work is never complete (Milner, 2003). We are all cultural beings who hold racial biases (Weinstein et al., 2003) and racist beliefs (Kendi, 2019) living in a racist society. Those concepts are difficult but imperative to consider for equity work in schools.

Appendix A Pre-Questionnaire Qualtrics Survey

1. Please include your name:

2. Please include the name of the school where you currently teach:

3. Please include your preferred email address:

4. Please indicate your racial identification(s) – choose as many as you'd like:

5. What subject are you currently teaching?

6. What grade level(s) are you currently teaching?

7. How would you describe your role and commitment to racial justice as a teacher?

Appendix B Interview Prompts

Appendix B.1 Interview 1: Career History and School Context

Appendix B.1.1 Career History

1. Tell me about your career as a teacher. How did you come to be an educator?

    a. What made you want to be a teacher?

2. Tell me about your interest in being an English Language Arts teacher. Why this content area?

3. What are your overarching goals as a literacy teacher? What do you want your students to learn or be able to do?

    a. Why do you believe these skills or concepts are important?

Appendix B.1.2 School Context

4. Describe the school that you currently teach in.

    a. How would you classify the school?

5. What are your current school's overarching goals and expectations for literacy teaching and learning?

    a. Do you follow a specific curriculum? Tell me about that.

    b. Do you align your teaching with your school's approach or expectations for literacy learning? Why or why not?

        i.   If no, how do you adapt your classroom teaching to account for or work within these boundaries?

6.   What are your school's broad expectations for student behavior?

    a.   What methods (if any) of school security does your school utilize?

    b.   What are some consequences students can receive, generally, if expectations for behavior aren't met (adapted from pilot study)?

    c.   Do you believe these behavioral expectations and consequences benefit or work well for all students (adapted from Gregory & Mosely, 2004)?

    d.   Are certain students disciplined more in your school?

        i.   For what behaviors?

7.   Have you had many opportunities in your current school to engage in professional development around culturally relevant pedagogy, critical literacy, implicit bias training, or a similar PD topic related to race, culture, and education?

    a.   (If yes) What did you take away from those courses?

    b.   (If no) Would that be an opportunity that you would value? Please explain.

8.   Have you pursued opportunities on your own to engage in professional development around culturally relevant pedagogy, critical literacy, implicit bias training, or a similar PD topic related to race, culture, and education?

    a.   (If yes) What did you take away from those courses?

        i.   In what ways have you been able to use those resources to inform your instruction?

    b.   (If no) Would that be an opportunity that you would value? Please explain.

Appendix B.2 Interview 2: Individual Teacher Experience

1. Tell me about your current students and your relationships with them. (Adapted from pilot study)

2. How do you typically structure your lessons? What activities do you utilize the most? Do you find them effective for students? Why?

3. What are the general expectations of your classroom in terms of student behavior? If I were to walk in your classroom and things are going great, and everyone is behaving as you would hope, what would it look like? What would it sound like?

   a. How are these conveyed to students?

4. What are your general expectations for how students verbally participate in class?

   a. How are these conveyed to students?

   b. What does expected verbal participation look like? Sound like?

   c. Tell me about a time when a student did not meet your expectations for verbal participation.

5. How does a "good student" act in your classroom?

6. In your classroom, what behaviors would warrant an office discipline referral?

   a. What category of referral do you utilize the most?

7. Do you see student learning and behavior as intersecting? If so, how?

8. "Do different issues of discipline arise for different groups of students…?" (Gregory & Mosley, 2004)

9. "If at all, how do you think your race impacts discipline in your classroom?" (Gregory & Mosley, 2004)

10. Do you believe it is important for you to discuss issues related to race and racism in your classroom? (adapted from the Teacher Race Talk Survey, Milner et al., 2017)

    a. Why or why not?

11. Do you feel supported or prepared to engage in conversations about race and racism at your school? (adapted from the Teacher Race Talk Survey, Milner et al., 2017)

    a. Please explain.

Appendix B.3 Hypothetical Classroom Scenarios

Teachers will be able to read the scenarios (sent through the Zoom's chat feature).

1. Today, students in your ninth grade ELA class are discussing *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a text your class has been reading for a few days. This particular class is made up of thirty students, the majority of whom are Black. You have asked students to engage in a whole-class discussion about the text. A small group of both Black and White students in your class are considering the themes of the book out loud and have begun a conversation about the use of the "n-word" (which the book uses often), its origins, and how it is a derogatory and harmful term when used by people who are not Black. A few Black students in the small group are actively using the "n-word" out loud and one Black male student is defending his use of the word to his White peers. This starts a broader conversation about racial slurs (adapted from Leander, 2002).

    a. How would you respond to the students, if at all?

    b. Would you discipline any students in this scenario? Why or why not?

    c. Would you ask that they change their conversation or topic in any way?

d. What do you think students are learning?

2. Your students are working on writing an essay. You have just taught a lesson about introductory paragraphs. Today, you are asking your class (made up of an equal number of Black and White students) to come to the board to revise a thesis sentence for clarity. One Black male student goes to the board and attempts to adjust the sentence, but after multiple peers tell him his revisions are wrong, he says he is confused and returns to his seat. He asks a Black female student who sits next to him if she would like to try. She says, "I ain't going nowhere." In response, a White male student sitting close by says, "You mean, 'I'm not going anywhere.'" (adapted from Godley & Werner, 2007).

a. How would you respond to the students, if at all?

b. Would you discipline students in this scenario? Why or why not?

c. Would you ask that they change their conversation or topic in any way?

d. What do you think students are learning?

3. You have asked students to engage in a whole-class literary discussion about a short story. Students were asked to read the story the night before, annotate the story and take notes, and come prepared to respond to discussion questions. This class period is smaller with only 15 students, ten of whom are White and five students are Black. During the discussion, you notice that the three Black girls in class are sharing often about the short story you have assigned. They share their thoughts without raising their hands, speak concurrently with other students or interrupt other students to share their thoughts, and are sharing their arguments or counter points to other students' interpretations of the text. They speak more often than other students during the discussion (adapted from Morris 2005; 2007).

a. How would you respond to the students, if at all?

b. Would you discipline students in this scenario? Why or why not?

c. Would you ask them to change how they are participating in any way? Why or why not?

d. What do you think students are learning?

4. A small group of Black boys enter your classroom from the hallway and are having a conversation about how disappointed they are that there has not been a bigger focus on Black history or literature in their high school ELA classes, overall. They also describe the ways in which their talk and behavior are often assumed to be disrespectful or inappropriate in their classes. One student in the conversation says, "I say anything in class without raising my hand first, they say I'm being disrespectful and write me up." Students continue this discussion in your class after the bell has rung. They are standing near the front of the classroom. Though they are speaking in a small group, it is not a private conversation and they speak loud enough for others to hear and join their conversations. They say that they believe the school and all of their teachers, including you, are racist. You ask them to take a seat so you can being your lesson. One Black male student says, "See what I mean?" (Adapted from my pilot study data)

a. How would you respond, if at all, to the students' conversation?

b. Would you discipline students in this scenario? Why or why not?

c. Would you ask that they change the topic of conversation in any way?

What do you think students are learning?

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