Developing Critical Consciousness of 'Nice' Dysconscious Racism: An Analytic Autoethnography of a K-5 General Music Specialist at a High-Needs Title I School

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this analytic autoethnography was to explore how enacting critical consciousness (CC) through critical reflection, inquiry, discourse, and action developed my critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism and has supported my disinvestment from whiteness over time in the various facets of my professional identity as a White female general music specialist at a high-needs, Title I school. The study was guided by the following central research question: How are the principles of an enacted CC—critical reflection, inquiry, discourse, and action—operationalized through analytic autoethnographic inquiry to develop my critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism and support my disinvestment from whiteness over time? This dissertation found three major themes of dysconscious racism that formed the overall identity of the 'nice' White lady: (a) uncritical habits of mind, (b) institutionalized cultural scripts, and (c) tools of whiteness for maintaining White comfort. Disinvestment from the 'nice' White lady identity was a rigorous critically reflexive process that involved: (a) an evolving worldview in which I learned to sit with my own discomfort in order to grow; (b) the deliberate and critically conscious disruption of institutionalized cultural scripts and; (c) resistance to the ideological, emotional, and performative tools of whiteness through enacted critical consciousness.

Dedication

To my East Pine (pseudonym) Super Scholars.

Thank you for teaching me how to teach you.

Acknowledgements

I would be remiss if I did not first and foremost acknowledge my former principal by her pseudonym, Ja'Niyah Miller. Thank you for encouraging outside-the-box thinking and advocating always for marginalized children. You covered East Pine (pseudonym) in prayer even before a building existed to physically pray over and anchored East Pine to your vision in spite of the external pressures to conform. Your steadfast mentorship made all the difference for me, and I am better for having known you.

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me to transform my thinking and encouraged me to pursue excellence in all aspects of my professional life. The sense of community you cultivate within this distance degree program is rare and special. Dr. William Powell, your joy of choral music is contagious. Thank you for teaching your graduate choral music students to conduct with joy, artistry, and excellence. I carry your musical (and life) advice with me always. Dr. Hannah Baggett, it has been a wild and unforgettable journey down this rabbit hole of qualitative research. Thank you for showing your graduate students that 'counting things' is not the only way to engage in rigorous and worthwhile research. Because of you, I found a research path that is as creative as it is fulfilling and meaningful. Your critical questions pushed me to stretch and grow in my scholarship, in my writing, and in my humanity. I can never thank you enough for teaching me to search for meaning in the mundane; my brain works differently now. Dr. Jason Bryant, thank you for your detailed eye and willingness to pick through all 200-something pages of this manuscript with a fine-toothed-comb. Your suggestions elevated the writing to its full potential and supported my telling of this series of autoethnographic tales.

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List of Abbreviations and Useful Terms

CC	Critical Consciousness
CLD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CWS	Critical Whiteness Studies
CRP	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
CSP	Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
EPES	East Pine Elementary School
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SWPBIS / PBIS	Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Hegemonic	Ruling, leading, supreme; acting as a hegemon; (now esp.) of, relating to, or assuming political or social hegemony, hegemonistic (Oxford University Press, 2023)

Chapter 1

Introduction

4-H Field Trip, A Vignette

Our fourth graders didn't get to go on their 4-H field trip. Not because of weather, behavior, lack of supervision, or funding. They just didn't get to *go.* The buses were parked in the front lot for over an hour, waiting. Eventually they drove off empty. The 4-H trip, always highly anticipated, was to be the pinnacle of the fourth-grade year after two long years of COVID-19 restrictions, cancellations, and protocols. These students hadn't been on a field trip since second grade (heck, they've hardly been allowed to leave their assigned seats in the classroom), and man, were they buzzing:

"We get to go hiking, on our *field trip!*"

"Mrs. Bell, I won't be in Music today. We have a *field trip!*"

"We're coming back after the school day ends from our *field trip!*"

"I didn't even have to bring my backpack because of the *field trip!*"

Lined up in the front hallway the morning of the trip, students waited to board the buses. An hour passed, then two. Slowly the buzz fizzled and around ten o'clock, teachers escorted their classes back to the classroom. Canceled.

The district personnel responsible for the 'clerical error' was unreachable at the critical moment that morning when the error had been detected by the school bookkeeper and could have been fixed. Under a cloud of confusion and disappointment, the teachers scrambled to throw together games and activities that might reflect some semblance of the experiences they would have had at the camp. The adults were outraged! Indignant! "How could this have happened!" "It's so unfair!" However, among the students there was a grim acceptance, as if to say, "This is

how it always goes," follow through is the exception, disappointment is the norm. Apologies were uttered, refunds promised, but the words left unsaid were deafening, "Don't trust them to keep their promises, they will only ever let you down."

****

We write and talk and make plans about equity in education. Well-meaning educators with good intentions quote Martin Luther King Jr., publish books and journal articles, and lead professional development seminars on inclusion, diversity, equity, and access. Yet, scenarios like the canceled 4-H field trip are happening in our schools every day. Educators excel at writing and talking about all of their well-intended initiatives that will close the opportunity gap, the achievement gap, or whatever other deficiency language is fashionable at the time. We spend the money to make fancy blueprints, hire contractors, buy supplies, but when it comes to picking up the proverbial hatchet to chop wood for a bridge, suddenly we are unreachable. Hammond (2015) argued,

> The reality is that [students of color, English learners, and students living in poverty] struggle not because of their race, language, or poverty. They struggle because we don't offer them sufficient opportunities in the classroom to develop the cognitive skills and habits of mind that would prepare them to take on more advanced academic tasks (p. 14).

I offer this vignette of the canceled field trip not to incite your pity or even your outrage. Instead, it is a snapshot summary of the vast literature on educational inequity that has brought me to this study. Dysconscious racism (King, 1991) is rarely visible with such blatant transparency. We see it brought to bear beneath an undercurrent of niceness (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Orozco, 2019): "We're so sorry this happened," "You'll get a full refund." We see students bury their disappointment in grim acceptance of the 'polite' role they are expected to play in the business-

as-usual bureaucracy of educational injustice. We see the dysconsciousness of young White teachers who are dismayed that the same system from which they benefited—and most likely excelled—could fail their Black and Brown students in such spectacular and obviously inequitable ways. These same teachers shoulder the brunt of the fallout while those responsible remain utterly oblivious of their harmful inaction.

In later retellings, we see well-meaning educators attempt to resolve their cognitive dissonance by engaging in discourse around the "culture of poverty" (Ladson-Billings, 2017a, p. 80) using language coded for racial meaning to justify the last-minute decision to cancel the field trip: "*These* parents were depending on the buses, they never could have arranged 5 o'clock transportation for their kids." Ultimately, we see the students walk away with yet another core memory of a system that has failed them because it was not built for them. As I hope you will soon see, this study is deeply personal.

Need for the Study

Schools in the United States (U.S.) sustain inequity on a daily basis, despite "good intentions and the general niceness among educators" (Castagno, 2014, p. 1). Deficit language such 'underachieving,' 'low performing,' 'failing,' 'at risk,' and 'disadvantaged,' drives policy, reform, research, action, and pedagogical practice through "limited and distorted understandings" (King, 1991, p. 133) that are uncritical, ahistorical (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017), and "inherently racist" (Waite, 2021, p. 66). The purpose of education has been to "forward the largely assimilationist and often violent White imperial project, with students and families being asked to lose or deny their languages, literacies, cultures, and histories in order to achieve in schools" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1). Educators continue to operate under the assimilationist notion that teaching is a technical and "objectifiable craft" (Gay & Kirkland,

2003, p. 182). This illusion of objectivity contradicts decades of research showing that the process of teaching is highly contextualized (Alim & Paris, 2017; Baptiste, 2008; Bissonnette, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Hammond, 2015; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1990; 1995; 2014; 2017a; Thompson, 2015; Ware, 2006). Teaching is "as much a personal performance, moral endeavor, and a cultural script, as it is a technical craft" (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, p. 182).

The Culture of Nice

Under the guise of objectivity, educators with good intentions produce systems, structures, and policies that harm children (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009; Tatum, 2017). Such decisions are not altogether implicit; research has shown that White educators enact a "culture of nice" (Castagno, 2014, p. 2) to strategically, purposefully, and deliberately displace responsibility and evade or silence social issues that threaten White supremacy (Annamma et al., 2017; Baptiste, 2008; Bissonnette, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Bradley, 2006; Carmichael-Murphy, 2017; Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Clauhs, 2021; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Fillion Wilson, Gray Yull, & Massey, 2020; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Hess, 2015; 2018; 2019; Lea, 2001; Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013; Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, & Galindo, 2014; Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009; Tatum, 2017; Tefera, Seigel-Hawley, & Sjorgen, 2022; Wozolek & Aneema, 2022).

Niceness efficiently and decisively mutes critical reflection and promotes uncritical habits of mind, particularly as it is used to sidestep discourse about race, racism, and racial oppression (Baptiste, 2008; Bissonnette, 2016; Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009; Wozolek & Aneema, 2022). Ultimately, niceness reframes oppression and diverts attention away from inequity in order to uphold and strengthen whiteness (Baptiste, 2008;

Bissonnette, 2016; Castagno, 2014; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; DiAngelo, 2011; Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009, Solomona, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005; Wozolek & Aneema, 2022).

Dysconscious Racism

Whiteness works through a strategic, purposeful, and deliberate miseducation agenda to distort and misinform understandings of race issues to uphold and strengthen the racial hierarchy of hegemonic whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Brandon, 2006; DiAngelo, 2011; Kendi, 2019; King, 1991). King (1991) defined dysconsciousness as "an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p. 135). Whiteness works through dysconsciousness to sustain dysconscious racism; that is, "limited and distorted understandings … about inequity and cultural diversity—understandings that make it difficult … to act in favor of truly equitable education" (King, 1991, p. 134). 'Nice' dysconscious racism, then, is a combination of internal and external interlocking factors that serve as sources of 'funding' for the collective investment in whiteness; these sources of 'funding' include:

- color evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2017),
- individualism (Hammond, 2015; Hess, 2014; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Ware, 2006);
- assimilationism (Abril, 2009; Ballantyne & Mills, 2008; Bradley, 2006; 2007; Clauhs, 2021; Hess, 2018; Jorgensen, 2007; Kendi, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1990);
- institutionalized 'othering' and Eurocentrism (Abril, 2009; Bradley, 2007; Campbell & Clements, 2006; Campbell et al., 2007; Clauhs, 2021; Hess, 2015; 2018; Hoffman & Carter, 2013; Jorgensen, 2007; Kelly-McHale, 2013; Kruse, 2016);

- cultural incompetency (Abramo, 2015; Behm Cross et al., 2019; Ballantyne & Mills, 2008; Behm Cross et al., 2019; Crawford-Garrett, 2016; Kindall-Smith, McCoy, & Mills, 2011; Matias & Zembylas, 2014);
- distorted asset pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; 2017b; Paris, 2012; 2021; Paris & Alim, 2014);
- White comfort (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; DiAngelo, 2011; Hess, 2019; Lewis & Christophersen, 2021; Orozco, 2019); and
- deficit views (Crawford-Garrett, 2016; Fillion Wilson et al., 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2006b; 2017a; 2018; Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Tefera et al., 2022).

Critical Consciousness

Freire (1974/2021) defined *conscientização*, or critical consciousness (CC), as "the development of the awakening of critical awareness" (p. 15) that leads to transformative action (Sleeter, Torres, & Laughlin, 2004). Enacting CC is characterized by critical reflection, inquiry, discourse, and action involving: (a) critical reflexive work on identity, (b) analysis of power and privilege in macro and micro contexts, and (c) the problematization of taken-for-granted assumptions (Behm Cross, Behizadeh, & Holihan, 2018; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; McDonough, 2009; Friere, 1974/2021; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Jennings & Potter Smith, 2002; Kohli, Lin, Ha, Jose, & Shini, 2019; Sleeter et al., 2004; Waite, 2021). Critically conscious educators demonstrate "an overall ability to think critically about a variety of issues of power" (McDonough, 2009, p. 529) and embrace "a critical edge in their work" (McDonough, 2015, p. 23) that is characterized by reflexivity of their identities, subjectivities, relationships with others, and social structures (Behm-Cross et al., 2018; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Jennings & Potter Smith, 2002; Kohli et al., 2019; McDonough, 2009; 2015; Waite, 2021).

Present Study

Kindall-Smith et al. (2011) suggested that "critical consciousness is enhanced by an ethnographic study of one's own musical development" (p. 382). This analytic autoethnography explored the ongoing development of my CC over time as I have become incrementally more critically aware of 'nice' dysconscious racism within the context of pedagogy and practice as a White, middle-class female K-5 music educator. Five basic ideas characterize autoethnography as a methodology: (a) critical reflexivity, (b) an in-depth view of the researcher's lifelong educative experiences, (c) privilege-penalty experiences centered on deception, contradiction, ignorance, and denial of interlocking oppressive systems, (d) critical self-examination of relational ethics, and(e) the assemblage and sharing of salient experiences for in-depth exploration and critique (Hughes & Pennington, 2017).

These five tenets of autoethnography (Hughes & Pennington, 2017) served as the analytic framework for data collection. I generated data using internal and external sources including reflective journaling, field observations, and the collection of relevant artifacts. This study explicitly focused on the significant milestones in the development of a critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism and gradual disinvestment from whiteness. Specifically, I aimed to critically analyze and self-reflect on the development of my CC in—and through—the various facets of my professional identity. This study positioned analytic autoethnography as a "catalyst for change" (Abril, 2009, p. 87).

Unpacking my own dysconscious racism was a slow, arduous, and humbling journey; one with multiple moments of enlightenment, clarity, and progress, and many more moments of grief, deflection, anger, and shame (McDonough, 2009; 2015). Through analytic autoethnography, I engaged in self-reflection of the progress, setbacks, 'bright,' and 'dark'

moments in the ongoing development of my CC of 'nice' dysconscious racism over the course of my career. Generating data and critically analyzing the 'bright' moments was joyful, encouraging, and relatively easy work. From the 'dark' moments I learned to see a developing critical awareness and disinvestment from whiteness as a lifelong endeavor.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this analytic autoethnography was to explore how the principles of enacting CC—critical reflection, inquiry, discourse, and action—developed my critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism and supported my disinvestment from whiteness over time in the various facets of my professional identity as a White female general music specialist at a high-needs, Title I school. The study was guided by the following central research question: How are the principles of enacting CC—critical reflection, inquiry, discourse, and action—operationalized through analytic autoethnographic inquiry to develop my critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism and support my disinvestment from whiteness over time?

Theoretical Framework

CC formed the theoretical framing for this analytic autoethnography. That is, the development of critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism that evolved my worldview, as characterized by a gradual disinvestment from whiteness through critical reflection, inquiry, discourse, and action (Friere, 2021; Friere Institute, 2022; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003; Jennings & Potter Smith, 2002; Kohli et al., 2019; Mernick, 2021; McDonough, 2009; 2015; Sleeter et al., 2004; Waite, 2021). Enacting CC was operationally defined for this study as critical reflection, inquiry discourse, and action involving: (a) critical reflexive work on identity, (b) analysis of power and privilege in macro and micro contexts, and (c) the problematization of

tacit knowledge and assumptions (Friere, 1974/2021; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Kohli et al., 2019; McDonough, 2009; 2015; Sleeter et al., 2004; Waite, 2021).

Research Context

The timing, setting, and context of this analytic autoethnography presented a unique opportunity to explore the central research question. East Pine Elementary School (EPES) (pseudonym) is a Title I school in the southeastern United States. East Pine meets the criteria for enrollment in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which provides free meals to all students regardless of socioeconomic status (SES). EPES has been recognized in the district as a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Gold Status school. The school population exceeds the district average in Black or African American and Hispanic populations and students receiving English Language (EL) and Special Education services. The school population is below the district average in White and Asian populations.

EPES has experienced high staff turnover every year since its opening in 2016. Approximately eleven current certified staff members, including the researcher, are members of the 2016-17 opening school staff. In addition to annual teacher attrition, EPES had an entirely new administration team—including a new principal, assistant principal, PBIS behavior coach, and Professional Growth and Evaluation System (PGES) coach—at the time of the research study. The onboarding principal and assistant principal were new to the school in 2022. There was also a new district-level K-12 Director of Fine Arts. This analytic autoethnography presented a unique opportunity to narrate the apprehensions I navigated during a time of considerable change in leadership in my school and district.

Chapter 2

Related Literature

When examining the body of literature on critical consciousness (CC), I focused on two aspects of hegemonic whiteness that are salient to teacher practice in elementary schools: niceness (Bissonnette, 2016; Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014) and dysconscious racism (King, 1991). The literature on the "culture of nice" (Castagno, 2014, p. 2) informed my understanding of hegemonic whiteness as a force driving the dominant culture in the United States (U.S.; Alim & Paris, 2017; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2014; 2017).

Niceness is both, (a) universally understood as a broad social construct (Baptiste, 2008; Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Orozco, 2019; Wozolek & Atif, 2022), and (b) individually enacted as a gendered and racialized performance (Bissonnette, 2016; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Picower, 2009; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). The literature on dysconscious racism (King, 1991) informed my understanding of the 'curriculum of whiteness' (Wozolek & Atif, 2022) that forms and sustains uncritical habits of mind in schools and classrooms (King, 1991). The strategic, purposeful, and deliberate use of the 'institutionalized cultural scripts' (Lea, 2001) distort understandings of race issues to uphold and strengthen the racial hierarchy of hegemonic whiteness (Castagno, 2014; Brandon, 2006; Kendi, 2019; King, 1991; Picower, 2009).

I utilized Ladson-Billings's (2006a) theoretical concept of the "education debt" (p. 5) and Castagno's (2014) descriptions of the "possessive investment in whiteness" (p. 45) as a sustained metaphor for the interlocking factors that 'fund' whiteness in educational contexts. The sources of 'funding' addressed in this study included:

- color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2017); individualism (Hammond, 2015; Hess, 2014; Hofstede et al., 2010; Ware, 2006);

- assimilationism (Abril, 2009; Ballantyne & Mills, 2008; Bradley, 2006; 2007; Clauhs, 2021; Hess, 2018; Jorgensen, 2007; Kendi, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1990);
- institutionalized 'othering' and Eurocentrism (Abril, 2009; Bradley, 2007; Campbell & Clements, 2006; Campbell et al., 2007; Clauhs, 2021; Hess, 2015; 2018; Hoffman & Carter, 2013; Jorgensen, 2007; Kelly-McHale, 2013; Kruse, 2016);
- cultural incompetency (Abramo, 2015; Ballantyne & Mills, 2008; Behm Cross et al., 2019; Crawford-Garrett, 2016; Kindall-Smith et al., 2011; Matias & Zembylas, 2014);
- distorted asset pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2017b; Paris & Alim, 2014);
- White comfort (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; DiAngelo, 2011; Hess, 2019; Lewis & Christophersen, 2021; Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009);
- deficit views (Crawford-Garrett, 2016; Fillion Wilson et al., 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2006b; 2017a; 2018; Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Tefera et al., 2022);
- politeness (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Orozco, 2019); meritocracy (Annamma et al., 2017; Behm Cross et al., 2019; Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Hess, 2014; Kenyon, 2022; Kohli et al., 2019; Miller & Harris, 2018); and
- equality (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; King, 1991).

These sources of funding converge to form a gendered and racialized identity researchers have called 'the nice White lady' (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Irby, 2014; Wozolek & Atif, 2022).

The literature on CC informed my understandings of the pathways for disrupting and resisting hegemonic whiteness in education (Friere, 1974/2021; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard,

2003; McDonough, 2009; Sleeter et al., 2004). Enacting CC through critical reflection, inquiry, discourse, and action increases one's critical awareness of the sources that 'fund' whiteness and supports the critical action of individuals to disinvest from whiteness (Behm Cross et al., 2018; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Friere, 1974/2021; Friere Institute, 2022; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003; Jennings & Potter Smith, 2002; Kohli et al., 2019; Mernick, 2021; McDonough, 2009; 2015; Sleeter et al., 2004; Waite, 2021). I concluded this chapter by addressing gaps in the CC music education literature which informed the present study.

Foundational Understandings of Culture

Definition of Culture

Culture shapes the way the human brain assigns meaning to information (Hammond, 2015). Three levels of culture—surface level (observable elements), shallow level (nonverbal norms and expectations), and deep level (schema of subconscious worldviews, tacit knowledge, and cultural archetypes)—inform the way individuals engage with others and experience the world (Hammond, 2015). Hammond (2015) described culture as "software for the brain's hardware" (p. 22); the brain uses the three levels of culture to assign meaning to daily experiences. Culture is the lens through which we interpret social life (Hammond, 2015). Challenges at each level trigger responses in the brain that increase in severity from a low emotional charge at the surface level, heightened hostility, mistrust, or outrage at the shallow level, to a complete sympathetic nervous system response—fight, flight, or freeze—at the deep level (Hammond, 2015).

Cultural Archetypes

A community's orientation toward individualism or collectivism is an important archetype of deep culture (Hammond, 2015; Hofstede et al., 2010). Eighty percent of world

cultures practice collectivism, in which relationships, interdependence, and cooperative learning are prioritized (Hofstede et al., 2010). The dominant culture of patriarchal whiteness in the United States is highly individualistic with cultural norms and messages centering on self-sufficiency, competition, and individual responsibility (Hammond, 2015; Hofstede et al., 2010). All U.S. institutions communicate White notions of individualism, including schooling (Hammond, 2015; Hofstede et al., 2010; Ware, 2006). Learning in the White patriarchal individualistic society is an individual endeavor and responsibility (Hammond, 2015; Hofstede et al., 2010; Ware, 2006). Individualistic cultural messages and norms often directly contradict a child's deep culture, and thus the way their brain is wired to learn information (Hammond, 2015; Hofstede et al., 2010; Ware, 2006). Ware (2006) noted, "students who tend to be successful in school bring to school those values the school deems appropriate. … students who fail to assimilate, code switch, or culture switch … are at a greater risk for failing" (p. 429).

Critical Whiteness Studies

Critical whiteness studies (CWS) informed this autoethnographer's understandings about relationships among interlocking systems of oppression; specifically, as these systems shape schema and influence the conceptualizations and behaviors of White teachers (Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Castagno, 2014; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; DiAngelo, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2018; Matias et al., 2014; Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). Bonilla-Silva (2012) argued that "racial domination, like all forms of domination, works best when it becomes hegemonic, that is, when it accomplishes its goal without much fanfare" (p. 173). "Structural hierarchies of domination" (Castagno, 2014, p. 6) are constructed through social discourse to give significance to skin color in ubiquitous and patterned ways that privilege whiteness (Orozco, 2019). "Race comes to matter through our language, our relationships, the places we

visit, the things we do, the institutions we inhabit, the policies we enact, and the knowledge we share" (Castagno, 2014, p. 6), all of which have implications for the public institution of schooling.

White Normality

Whiteness is salient in K-12 education, given the sustained homogeneity of White middle-class, mono-lingual, female U.S. public school teachers and the increasing heterogeneity of public school students (Bissonnette, 2016; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Cochran-Smith, 1995; DiAngelo, 2011; Gordon, 2005; Matias et al., 2014; Miller & Howard, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020; Picower, 2009; Solomona et al., 2005; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). CWS scholars have critically examined the normalizing force and racialized identity of whiteness as it is reinscribed by teachers (Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Castagno, 2014; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Gordon, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2018; Lea, 2001; Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013; Matias et al., 2014; Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 2001; Solomona et al., 2005; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). The normality of hegemonic whiteness allows White educators to "deflect, ignore, or dismiss their role, racialization, and privilege in race dynamics" (Matias et al., 2014, p. 291) because White people "are taught to see their perspectives as objective and representative of reality" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 59). Solomona et al. (2005) identified the following privileges that are specific to whiteness:

- Positive representation in school curriculum materials, media, contribution to civilization, positions of authority;
- Representation and availability of 'white' related goods and services;
- Freedom of association, residential choice, and the granting of insider status in organizations;

- Unquestioned acceptance of financial reliability and employment credibility;
- Freedom from the burden of representing the 'white race' (p. 151).

Picower (2009) found that when their reality was challenged, White preservice educators responded "by relying on a set of 'tools of whiteness' designed to protect and maintain dominant and stereotypical understandings of race – tools that were emotional, ideological, and performative" (p. 197). The "tools of whiteness" (Picower, 2009, p. 204) are taught through a "curriculum of whiteness" (Wozolek & Atif, 2022, p. 761) that shapes the gendered and racialized performance of whiteness on the individual level (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Picower, 2009; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). This gendered and racialized performance includes "institutionalized cultural scripts" (Lea, 2001, p. 116) that maintain the racial hierarchy of hegemonic whiteness through social norms and expectations.

Matias et al. (2014) further argued that the theoretical framing of CWS examines "why whites believe they are not a part of race when they actively invest in white racial production" (p. 291). In this way, Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) found that whiteness projects "itself as its own alibi" (p. 151), such that White people "have built anti-racist understandings that construct the racist as always someone else, the problem residing elsewhere" (p. 151). Additionally, Castagno (2014) found that White people performed a "hyperreluctance to see race" (p. 72) that Annamma et al. (2017) called "color-evasiveness" (p. 148). CWS positions whiteness as "the underlying mechanism that maintains a racist system, and not acknowledging whiteness contributes to the permanence of race and racism" (Matias et al., 2014, p. 291). Castagno (2014) argued, "we all need to be educated *about* whiteness so that we do not continue to educate *for* whiteness" (p. 166); or as Ladson-Billings (2018) stated, "we have to talk about race in order to redefine it" (p. 103).

Investment in Whiteness

Ladson-Billings (2018) argued that race is "fully funded by the society" (p. 92). The social funding of race guarantees: (a) a lack of critical awareness of whiteness (Howard, 2022); (b) a miseducation that limits and distorts understandings of race (King, 1991); and (c) the uncritical acceptance of the status quo of hegemonic whiteness as "just the way things are" (Ladson-Billings, 2018, p. 103). The portfolio of whiteness is diverse, with 'nice' notions such as:

- color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2017);
- individualism (Hammond, 2015; Hess, 2014; Hofstede et al., 2010; Ware, 2006);
- assimilationism (Abril, 2009; Ballantyne & Mills, 2008; Bradley, 2006; 2007; Clauhs, 2021; Hess, 2018; Jorgensen, 2007; Kendi, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1990);
- institutionalized 'othering' and Eurocentrism (Abril, 2009; Bradley, 2007; Campbell & Clements, 2006; Campbell et al., 2007; Clauhs, 2021; Hess, 2015; 2018; Hoffman & Carter, 2013; Jorgensen, 2007; Kelly-McHale, 2013; Kruse, 2016);
- cultural incompetency (Abramo, 2015; Ballantyne & Mills, 2008; Behm Cross et al., 2019; Crawford-Garrett, 2016; Kindall-Smith et al., 2011; Matias & Zembylas, 2014);
- distorted asset pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2017b; Paris & Alim, 2014);
- White comfort (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; DiAngelo, 2011; Hess, 2019; Lewis & Christophersen, 2021; Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009);
- deficit views (Fillion Wilson et al., 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2006b; 2017a; 2018; Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Tefera et al., 2022); politeness (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Orozco, 2019);

- meritocracy (Annamma et al., 2017; Behm Cross et al., 2019; Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Hess, 2014; Kenyon, 2022; Kohli et al., 2019; Miller & Harris, 2018); and
- equality (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; King, 1991).

Each of these ideologies contribute to the status quo of the dominant U.S. culture and ensure the continuance of a social structure built on a racial hierarchy of hegemonic whiteness (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2018).

The Education Debt. Castagno (2014) argued that "the allegiance to these ideologies is indicative of the ways we invest in whiteness, diversify our portfolio to ensure the overall investment is strong, and cash in on those investments at strategic times" (p. 45). Such an investment consistently produces a high yield return that "makes sense, feels good, and hopefully helps students succeed" (Castagno, 2014, p. 171) within the social structure of hegemonic whiteness. However, the substantial costs incurred over time for the continued investment in whiteness have accumulated an "education debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006a, p. 5) with a high interest rate of "perpetual, pervasive, and widening inequity" (Castagno, 2014, p. 45).

Interest Convergence. There are significant structural financial, ideological, psychological, and relational costs associated with "undoing whiteness" (Castagno, 2014, p. 28) and rectifying the "education debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006a, p. 5). As such, equity is pursued only in instances of "interest convergence" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9), when the interests of whiteness align with racial equity. Progress is halted when the structural financial, ideological, psychological, or relational "price of such racial remedies becomes too high or costly for Whites" (Castagno, 2014, p. 28). Critical race theorists have argued that the dominant group "racializes different minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 10). This "differential racialization" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9)—or

what Kendi (2019) called “ethnic racism” (p. 57)—means that the social construction of race is constantly evolving to uphold and strengthen whiteness (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Kendi, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The Culture of Nice

Research has shown that White people enact a “culture of nice” (Castagno, 2014, p. 2) to strategically, purposefully, and deliberately displace responsibility and evade or silence any issues of race that threaten White supremacy (Bradley, 2006; 2007; Carmichael-Murphy, 2017; Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Clauhs, 2021; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Fillion Wilson et al., 2020; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Hess, 2014; 2015; 2018; 2019; Matias et al., 2014; Miller & Harris, 2018; Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009; Sleeter et al., 2004; Tatum, 2017; Tefera et al., 2022; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). Niceness efficiently mutes critical reflection and promotes uncritical habits of mind to (a) sidestep discourse about race, racism, and racial oppression, (b) protect White comfort, and (c) absolve any potential harm imposed (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; DiAngelo, 2011; Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). Being nice insinuates good intentions while avoiding upsetting knowledge, uncomfortable interactions and experiences, or “disquieting discourses” (Orozco, 2019, p. 131). “As long as one means well, the actual impact of one’s behavior, discourse, and action is often meaningless” (Castagno, 2014, p. 9).

Niceness is both, (a) universally understood as a broad social contract in the ways that we come to understand cultural norms and expectations of politeness, etiquette, professionalism, neutrality, and equality (Baptiste, 2008; Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Orozco, 2019; Wozolek & Atif, 2022) and; (b) individually enacted as a gendered and racialized performance through the tools of whiteness, curriculum of whiteness, and institutionalized cultural scripts (Bissonnette,

2016; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Lea, 2001; Picower, 2009; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). Ultimately, niceness reframes oppression and diverts attention away from inequity in order to uphold and strengthen patriarchal whiteness (Castagno, 2014; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; DiAngelo, 2011; Orozco, 2019).

The 'Nice' White Lady

Niceness shapes daily social life by defining the "appropriate—and even good" (Castagno, 2014, p. 4) social behaviors, policies, norms, expectations, and interactions that constitute what it means to be a 'nice' person (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009). Gender and whiteness intersect to form an identity that researchers have called the 'nice White lady' (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Irby, 2014; Wozolek & Atif, 2022).

Institutionalized Cultural Scripts. The identity of the 'nice' White lady is partially informed by social messages about femininity within a patriarchal White supremacist society, in which White women are perceived as, and socially conditioned to be accommodating, nurturing, nonthreatening, and innocent (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Irby, 2014; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). These social messages about White women contribute to White political and socioeconomic privilege in the existing hierarchy, the preservation of which is contingent on the 'nice' White lady's uncritical acceptance of "institutionalized cultural scripts" (Lea, 2001, p. 116). In this way, the 'nice' White lady has been taught to see her perspective "as objective and representative of reality" (DiAngelo, 2001, p. 57) and teaches others to do the same.

Morality and Niceness. Research has shown that friendliness, politeness, and comfortability are three essential components of the cultural script of the 'nice' White lady that "wield tremendous power" (Bissonnette, 2016; p. 13) in the continued normality of patriarchal hegemonic whiteness. The social etiquette of the dominant culture is deeply intertwined with a

moral code of 'being nice' such that niceness is directly associated with morality yet "disconnected from justice" (Castagno, 2014, p. 13). Bissonnette (2016) argued that many White people "cling to" (p. 13) the culture of nice, "believing that their allegiance to the construct highlights their humanity" (p. 13). White women do not want to be perceived by others as 'not nice,' therefore, performing niceness is morally essential to the individual and collective investment in whiteness (Castagno, 2014; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2018; Lea, 2001; Picower, 2009; Wozolek & Atif, 2022).

White Comfort. The 'nice' White lady uses her social conditioning to avoid race-based stress and maintain the status quo of hegemonic whiteness (DiAngelo, 2011). Researchers have characterized the 'nice' White lady as one who makes others comfortable, particularly other White people (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Kenyon, 2022; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). Several studies have shown that the performance the 'nice' White lady is predicated on White comfort such that others expect to feel comfortable in her presence (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Kenyon, 2022; Orozco, 2019). The 'nice' White lady maintains uncritical habits of mind regarding the ways in which her social conditioning has been shaped by patriarchal structures of White supremacy and her role in a racialized society (Castagno, 2014; Orozco, 2019). Additionally, Kenyon (2022) indicated that being a 'nice' White lady "is a passive task" (p. 34), that is, an uncritical habit of mind is a key characteristic in the performance of the 'nice' White lady.

Dysconsciousness. The 'nice' White lady functions through distorted and misinformed understandings of race issues (Castagno, 2014; Brandon, 2006; Kendi, 2019; King, 1991). Lea (2001) argued that "for most White people, whiteness is not a conscious matter" (p. 117). King (1991) described these cognitive distortions as dysconsciousness or, "an uncritical habit of mind

(including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p. 135). Dysconsciousness is "not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race" (King, 1991, p. 135). Through dysconsciousness, there is no personal responsibility for justifying one's thinking because it is affirmed in their "social experience" (Brandon, 2006, p. 198) and therefore representative of "reality" (Brandon, 2006, p. 197).

Dysconscious Racism. Niceness works through dysconsciousness to sustain dysconscious racism (King, 1991); that is, "limited and distorted understandings … about inequity and cultural diversity—understandings that make it difficult for them to act in favor of truly equitable education" (King, 1991, p. 134). 'Nice' White ladies use these "internalized ideologies" (King, 1991, p. 134) to "justify the racial status quo and devalue cultural diversity" (King, 1991, p. 134) in ways that strengthen their own distorted understandings about race.

The Nice White Teacher

The cultural script of the 'nice' White lady is salient in classrooms, where White, middle-class, monocultural, monolingual women make up the overwhelming majority of the workforce (NCES, 2020). Wozolek and Atif (2022) found that teacher educators and teacher candidates "held tight to ingrained racist actions and ideologies in their everyday ways of being, knowing, and doing" (p. 761) that were informed by gendered and racialized performances of niceness. Dewhurst (2019) described the ways in which teachers adhere to a "code of composed niceness" (p. 153) in which "we greet each other, we smile, we cheer each other on, we compliment, and we make small talk" (p. 153) that maintains friendliness, comfortability, and politeness. In this

way, Orozco (2019) argued that "schools are complicit in maintaining a niceness that upholds status quo whiteness" (p. 131).

Dysconsciousness in Education. Dysconscious educators demonstrate an uncritical stance on "the social realities of classrooms" (Behm Cross et al., 2018, p. 129). King (1991) found that teacher education programs "do not address the cognitive distortions of dysconsciousness" (p. 140) in conventional analyses but rather, "conceptualize racism at the institutional, cultural, or individual level" (p. 140). Such analyses "cannot help students distinguish between racist justifications of the status quo (which limit their thought, self-identity, and responsibility to take action) and socially unacceptable individual prejudice or bigotry (which students often disavow)" (King, 1991, p. 140). Dysconscious racism is enacted by White educators in both (a) the explicit displacement of blame for racial inequity based on "the presumed cultural deficits" (King, 1991, p. 138) of people of color, and (b) the tacit acceptance of meritocracy and individualism that serves to promote the "myth of equal opportunity" (King, 1991, p. 138).

The Myth of Neutrality. Dysconsciousness of 'nice' White educators is predicated on an apolitical orientation (Baptiste, 2008; Bissonnette, 2016; Picower, 2009). Research has shown that White educators "endorse" (Bissonnette, 2016, p. 12) the notion that classrooms are neutral spaces (Picower, 2009). Under the guise of neutrality, whiteness remains a curriculum that is hidden in "plain sight" (Bradley, 2015, p. 1) within the formal and enacted curricula (Bradley, 2015; Bissonnette, 2016; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). Castagno (2014) found that "central to making whiteness work is the way niceness connects to neutrality, equality, and compassion" (p. 10). These "key qualities of whiteness … appeal to our sense of fairness" (Castagno, 2014, p. 10).

Further, Castagno (2014) found that compassion, neutrality, and equality are difficult to problematize because they are qualities that "most of us would ascribe to good teachers" (p. 10).

Color-Evasiveness. Color-evasiveness is a trait of 'nice' White teachers that functions through dysconsciousness to sustain the myth of neutrality (Annamma et al., 2017; Castagno, 2014). White people feign neutrality by claiming not to 'see' race (Annamma et al., 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014). However, research has shown that White people strategically, purposefully, and deliberately 'avert their eyes,' so to speak, to maintain this illusion of neutrality (Annamma et al., 2017). As such, Annamma et al. (2017) suggested the term "*color-evasiveness*" (p. 148) to describe the purposive "hyperreluctance to see race" (Castagno, 2014, p. 72) and the subsequent consequences of a racialized society. While many scholars have defined this phenomenon as colorblindness (e.g. Bonilla-Silva, 2012), Annamma et al. (2017) troubled the ableism of the term *colorblindness*, arguing that it "implies passivity. Here, blindness is imagined as something one is struck with or victim to – something that happens to them. Yet, that ignores the power of white supremacy, and whiteness situated within it, to actively evade discussions on race" (p. 154). Ladson-Billings (2018) argued that "by pretending that the structural and symbolic instruments are not in place (or that they are inconsequential), color-evasion rhetoric can claim the high moral ground while instantiating the status quo and rolling back any progressive movement toward racial justice" (p. 102).

Silence and Silencing. Silence and silencing are two primary color-evasion tactics used by 'nice' White educators to feign neutrality and avoid critical discourses that threaten White comfort (Bradley, 2006; 2007; 2020; Carmichael-Murphy, 2017; Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Clauhs, 2021; DiAngelo, 2011; Fillion Wilson et al., 2020; Gordon, 2005; Hess, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2017a; Picower, 2009; Reno, Friend, Caruthers, and Smith, 2017; Tatum, 2017; Tefera

et al., 2022). Bradley (2006) explained that "our use of coded language hinders our ability to talk about race directly" (p. 2). The 'nice' White teacher avoids agitation by framing race talk—particularly the naming of whiteness—as taboo, impolite, or shameful (Castagno, 2014; Orozco, 2019; Sleeter et al., 2004).

Orozco (2019) argued that agitating interactions are required to effectively "confront the racially oppressive nature of whiteness socially and in schooling" (p. 131). To this point, Castagno (2014) argued that being nice "encourages us to gloss over ugly, tense, or otherwise hurtful things—and to do so carefully and precisely" (Castagno, 2014, p. 9) in service of uncritical habits of mind and White comfort (Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009). By framing silence as polite and race-talk as impolite, Castagno (2014) found that silence around race was "part of teacher practice" (p. 85) in maintaining the illusion of classrooms as apolitical spaces.

White educators use silence to avoid revealing their own "complicity to racism" (Gordon, 2005, p. 142). For example, Carmichael-Murphy (2017) found that a White principal used narrative shaping, silence, and silencing to avoid and deflect equity issues in interviews and official school documents. Comparably, in an ethnographic study on the politics of educational exclusion, Fillion Wilson et al. (2020) found that school administrators enacted silencing to deny the pattern of racial disciplinary practices and uphold whiteness with actions that effectively halted "the conversation about the problem before it could even begin" (Fillion Wilson et al., 2020, p. 144).

Deficit Discourse. Castagno (2014) found that 'nice' White educators were "willing to see and name" (p. 61) particular identity categories in their difference discourse but evaded direct race-talk through language coded for racial meaning. The purposive denial of racial difference while recognizing other forms of difference is a strategic tactic of color-evasiveness

(Annamma et al., 2017). Salvador and Kelly-McHale (2017) surveyed 356 music teacher educators and found that about half of the respondents defined social justice through a difference-evasion frame. Ten percent of participants indicated that issues of social justice did not interest them or felt that it was "not their job" (Salvador & Kelly-McHale, 2017, p. 14) as a music teacher educator to address social justice in the music education curriculum.

Ladson-Billings (2017a) found that 'nice' White educators communicated deficit beliefs through two main types of deficit discourse: "culture of poverty" (Ladson-Billings, 2017a, p. 80) and "poverty of culture" (Ladson-Billings, 2006b, p. 105). "Culture of poverty" (Ladson-Billings, 2017a, p. 80) discourse suggests that "children, their families, and their communities are so dysfunctional that they do not know how to operate in mainstream society. Thus, the major responsibility of teachers and the school is to discipline and bring order to their chaotic lives" (Ladson-Billings, 2017a, pp. 81-82). Studies have shown that educators use deficit discourse to frame culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students' home lives, families, and communities as barriers to academic progress (Clauhs, 2021; Crawford-Garrett, 2016).

In addition to discipline and order, research has shown that White educators pathologize poverty as a way of evading race-talk (Ladson-Billings, 2006b). Ladson-Billings (2006b) found that White preservice educators demonstrated dysconsciousness through distorted understandings of 'culture.' Ladson-Billings (2006b) observed a pattern of White preservice educators claiming 'culture' as a "catchall" (Ladson-Billings, 2006b, p. 105) for "all manner of [student] behavior" (Ladson-Billings, 2006b, p. 105) to which they could not understand, explain, nor relate. Further, Ladson-Billings (2006b) observed that "at the same moment teacher education students learn nothing about culture, they use it with authority as one of the primary explanations for everything from school failure to problems with behavior management and discipline" (p. 104).

Kuehne (2020) argued that White music educators generalize certain behavior traits to all students of a given culture rather than accepting accountability for building individual relationships with CLD students.

The Curriculum of Whiteness. Several studies have examined the contribution of teacher education programs in preparing teacher candidates to be uncritically nice within the curriculum of whiteness (Bissonnette, 2016; King, 1991; Picower, 2009; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). Picower (2009) found that a "just be nice" (p. 208) policy was an ideological tool of whiteness that created "an individual response to institutional and societal issues" (p. 208). That is, White preservice educators enacted niceness to invalidate the need for "anti-racist action or multicultural education because, as long as they acted as good people, they could maintain their position of innocence in the cycle of racism" (Picower, 2009, p. 208).

Orozco (2019) found that Chicanx high school students communicated classroom tensions in which teachers sought to protect the emotions of White students by establishing and maintaining order based on White comfort. These efforts were "predicated on being nice [and] not creating agitation" (Orozco, 2019, p. 141). 'Nice' White teachers create "safe spaces" (Orozco, 2019, p. 141) for White students by filtering politeness and morality through the "White gaze" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 2; Morrison, 1998). Bissonette (2016) argued that 'nice' safe spaces allow "White students to control their social environments and defend their privilege" (p. 13). Castagno (2014) found that morality and politeness were motivating factors for 'nice' White teachers, who believed it was their responsibility to teach "the social etiquette of the dominant culture" (p. 84).

Avoiding Offense. The curriculum of whiteness includes underlying beliefs about morality that are filtered through the culture of nice (Castagno, 2014; Goodman, 2001). Early

primary classroom norms and rules communicate niceness in terms that Goodman (2001) categorized as a "do not offend" (p. 353) social contract. Goodman (2001) found that early primary children defined 'being nice' in terms of avoiding offense (e.g. sharing, helping, taking turns, and "not being mean" [p. 349]); being mean, then, was characterized as offensive words and actions such as bullying, fighting, and rejecting or hurting others. The social contract of avoiding offense was reinforced by classroom adults (Goodman, 2001). Further, Goodman (2001) found that rules centered on niceness represented one-sidedness in which there is a victim and an oppressor, and the former is the "sole proprietor of the hurt" (p. 353). Assigning blame in this manner positions the oppressor as "stepping on someone's toes" (Goodman, 2001, p. 353) and absolves the victim of any "responsibility to develop calluses" (Goodman, 2001, p. 353). Goodman (2001) found that classroom adults responded to breaches of "do not offend" (p. 353) rules by reinscribing the social contract and 'protecting' the perceived victim in 'nice' ways that were harmful to the perceived oppressor.

Assimilationism. At the same time that 'nice' White teachers create 'safe spaces' (Orozco, 2019) for White students, they expect assimilation from CLD students (Emdin, 2016; 2021). The apolitical orientations and Do Not Offend rules that benefit White students actively harm students of color (Alim & Paris, 2017; Emdin, 2016; 2021; Goodman, 2001; Lea, 2001). Kendi (2019) defined assimilationist beliefs as a collection of 'nice' racist ideas "rooted in the notion that certain racial groups are culturally or behaviorally inferior" (p. 25) and in need of development. Assimilationism requires that students deny their authentic selves in order to succeed in school (Emdin, 2021; Howard, 2013). Ladson-Billings (1990) found that assimilationist teachers conceptualize themselves and others, their relationships with students, and the nature of knowledge through a deficit framework.

Institutionalized Othering. The 'nice' White music educator embraces with uncritical acceptance a Eurocentric approach to music education (Abril, 2009; Bradley, 2007; Campbell & Clements, 2006; Campbell et al., 2007; Clauhs, 2021; Hoffman & Carter, 2013; Howard, 2022; Jorgensen, 2007; Kelly-McHale, 2013; Kruse, 2016). Leonardo (2002) argued that,

> Enslavement, discrimination, and marginalization of the Other work most efficiently when they are constructed as an idea rather than a people. They can be more easily controlled, aggregated as the same, or marked as unchanging and constant when textbooks idealize them as inconsequential to the history and evolution of humankind. In effect, whiteness eggs us on to yoke together different peoples around the globe under the sign of sameness (p. 41).

Research has shown that White preservice and inservice music educators engage in 'othering' of curricula and repertoire beyond the scope of the Western European classical tradition (Abril, 2009; Bradley, 2007; Campbell & Clements, 2006; Campbell et al., 2007; Clauhs, 2021; Hoffman & Carter, 2013; Howard, 2022; Jorgensen, 2007; Kelly-McHale, 2013; Kruse, 2016). Howard (2022) found themes of "dysconscious racism with episodes of white fragility" (p. 340) in a phenomenological study of choral directors' experiences in selecting choral repertoire.

Clauhs (2021) argued that institutionalized 'othering' by White music educators sustains hegemonic structures in music education through "curricular choices, evaluations, auditions, college admissions, and job interviews" (p. 2). Bradley (2007) argued that dysconscious racism in music education is pervasive and patterned. Music education preparedness programs consistently reproduce "cohorts of music educators that do not represent the racial diversity of the students they serve" (Clauhs, 2021, p. 2). Music curricula will "continue to validate and

recognize particular bodies, to give passing nods to a token few 'others,' and to invalidate many more through omission" (Bradley, 2007, p. 134).

Costs of Disinvesting from Whiteness

DiAngelo (2011) argued that "in the dominant position, whites are almost always racially comfortable and thus have developed unchallenged expectations to remain so" (p. 60). As such, there is a high cost for engaging in agitating discourse or action (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Orozco, 2019). When White comfort is threatened, individuals may react with "socially-sanctioned" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 61) counter-moves such as: ostracization, penalization, isolation, retaliation, and refusal to continue engagement (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; DiAngelo, 2011); these are the costs of disinvesting from whiteness. Kenyon (2022) found that students had certain expectations of her as a White woman and feared the consequences of "stepping out of the nice white lady box" (p. 32).

Through duo-autoethnography, Clements and Stutelberg (2021) illustrated the public punishment one author experienced by creating agitation when one student expected the author "to maintain and reproduce a performance of whiteness that made her feel safe, not uncomfortable, in the classroom" (p. 149) and sought penalization and retaliation to reconcile her White discomfort. Clements and Stutelberg (2021) concluded that a sense of belonging within patriarchal whiteness is "always conditional" (p. 149) within a 'nice' paradigm and thus, rejecting niceness is socially risky.

Critical Consciousness

Friere (1974/2021) defined critical consciousness (CC), or *conscientização*, as "the development of the awakening of critical awareness" (p. 15) that ultimately leads to

transformative action (Sleeter et al., 2004). The "critically transitive consciousness" (Friere, 1974/2021, p. 15) is characterized in the following ways:

> by depth in the interpretation of problems; … by the attempt to avoid disruption when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive notions; … by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics (Friere, 1974/2021, p. 15).

Critically conscious educators demonstrate "an overall ability to think critically about a variety of issues of power" (McDonough, 2009, p. 529) and embrace "a critical edge in their work" (McDonough, 2015, p. 23). CC is characterized by reflexivity of identities, subjectivities, relationships with others, and social structures (Behm-Cross et al., 2018; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Kohli et al., 2019; McDonough, 2015; Sleeter et al., 2004). Further, in a qualitative study of teachers of color, Kohli et al. (2019) found that "teacher development for critical consciousness must involve cultivating teachers with capacities to recognize, interrogate, and transform injustice" (Kohli et al., 2019, p. 25). In this way, enacting CC influences the way critical educators move through the world and act upon it (Kohli et al., 2019). Kohli et al. (2019) argued that CC should not be limited to the classroom but "must be a fundamental part to their ways of understanding and being in the world" (Kohli et al., 2019, p. 25).

Critical Reflection

Howard (2003) defined critical reflection as intentionally attending to the meanings and interpretations of one's behaviors and experiences within the moral, political, ethical, and social contexts of teaching in order to inform and guide future decision-making with an explicit focus on issues of equity, access, and social justice. Hammond (2015) added that "engaging in reflection helps culturally responsive teachers recognize the beliefs, behaviors, and practices that

get in the way of their ability to respond constructively and positively to students" (p. 53). Such critical self-reflection enhances critical awareness and inquiry, increases critical discourse, and prompts critical action (Jennings & Potter Smith, 2002). Thus, CC is the development of critical awareness of a given social phenomena through critical reflection, critical discourse, and critical action (Behm Cross et al., 2018; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Friere, 1974/2021; Friere Institute, 2022; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003; Jennings & Potter Smith, 2002; Kohli et al., 2019; Mernick, 2021; McDonough, 2009; 2015; Sleeter et al., 2004; Waite, 2021).

Enacting CC is "an ongoing social process of multiple insightful moments" (McDonough, 2009, p. 530) as well as "difficult times of denial and pain" (Sleeter et al., 2004, p. 83). Enacting CC is characterized by critical reflection, discourse, and action involving: (a) critical reflexive work on identity, (b) analysis of power and privilege in macro and micro contexts, and (c) the problematization of taken-for-granted assumptions (Behm Cross et al., 2018; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Friere, 1974/2021; Friere Institute, 2022; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003; Jennings & Potter Smith, 2002; Kohli et al., 2019; McDonough, 2009; 2015; Sleeter et al., 2004; Waite, 2021).

Critical Awareness of Whiteness

Picower (2009) asked, "how do White, middle class, prospective teachers make the transition from being unaware of their culture to a critical understanding of the role of culture, power, and oppression?" (p. 199). The literature shows that disinvesting from whiteness requires deep personal commitment to the gradual development of critical awareness of whiteness through critical reflexivity (Behm Cross et al., 2018; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Friere, 1974/2021; Friere Institute, 2022; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003; Jennings & Potter Smith, 2002; Kohli et al., 2019; Mernick, 2021; McDonough, 2009; 2015; Sleeter et al., 2004; Waite, 2021).

Disinvestment from whiteness through critical reflexivity is characterized by an evolving worldview—from dysconsciousness to critical consciousness—that prompts critical action (Behm Cross et al., 2018; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Friere, 1974/2021; Gay, 2002; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003; King, 1991; Kohli et al., 2019; McDonough, 2009; 2015; Sleeter et al., 2004). Gordon (2005) argued that "our White skin continues to furnish us with advantages" (p. 138) therefore developing CC is a "lifelong commitment" (p. 138). White educators must resist the inclination to disengage from the work in thinking, "this is not about me" (Gordon, 2005, p. 138). In this way, disinvesting from whiteness has connections to the work of antiracism in which Kendi (2019) explained,

> Racist and antiracist are not fixed identities. We can be a racist one minute and antiracist the next … the movement from racist to antiracist is always ongoing—it requires understanding and snubbing racism based on biology, ethnicity, body, culture, behavior, color, space, and class. … No one becomes racist or antiracist. We can only strive to be one or the other (pp. 10 & 23).

In practice, the development of a critical awareness of whiteness through critical reflection requires "persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination" (Kendi, 2019, p. 23). Further, "by focusing on ways that schooling, including their own miseducation, contributes to unequal educational outcomes that reinforce societal inequity and oppression, [individuals] broaden their knowledge of how society works" (King, 1991, p. 134). This knowledge becomes a powerful "catalyst for change" (Abril, 2009, p. 87), prompting critical discourse and action that disinvests from whiteness and funds a transformative and equitable education (Kendi, 2019; King, 1991).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

Cultural Critical Consciousness. CC also has important implications for cultural competency. Cultural CC is a subcategory of CC that emphasizes education experiences that are relevant to the cultural identities and lived experiences of students (Behm Cross et al., 2018; Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Flores, 2008; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Jennings & Potter Smith, 2002; Kohli et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1990; 1995; 2000; 2014). Gay and Kirkland (2003) argued that teachers should know "who they are as people" (p. 181), understand the culturally specific contexts in which they teach, and question tacit knowledge and assumptions about marginalized cultural groups. Duncan-Andrade (2004) argued that educators should be "encouraged to create, nurture and sustain professional environments where their intellectualism is focused on normalizing a critical, culturally conscious curriculum" (p. 2004). Behm Cross et al. (2018) further indicated that cultural CC includes an openness to acknowledging errors in one's beliefs; a critical mindset to question structures in school and problematize the "expressed beliefs and ideologies of others" (p. 129); and critical action to engage culturally relevant practices and asset pedagogies.

Flores (2008) developed a critical multicultural approach to a four-year Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program that involved developing the following capacities:

- Awareness of cultural identity and how it influences beliefs and actions;
- Cultural historical understanding of the role of language and culture in learning;
- Critical understanding of how poverty and linguistic and cultural differences affect student achievement via mechanisms at interpersonal, institutional, and societal levels;
- General knowledge of cultural processes, language, and cultural groups

- Desire and ability to learn from students, understanding them in the constructed context of their lives;
- Ability to translate knowledge of cultural groups and individual students into curricular and instructional strategies (including features of ethnic identity development, discourse, pedagogy, and curriculum);
- Ability to advocate for and work collaboratively with professionals, families, and communities to share knowledge, resources, and support for the student;
- Ability to critically reflect and rethink attitudes, beliefs, and actions (p. 382).

Flores (2008) found that by "inspiring enduring ideals and images of practice, as well as building the foundation of knowledge, skills, and dispositions" (p. 401) the program supported teacher candidates' ongoing CC development "in the long run" (p. 401).

Asset Pedagogies as Critical Action. Culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) resist "policies and practices with the explicit goal of creating a monocultural and monolingual society" (Paris, 2012, p. 93). The rejection of 'nice' dysconscious racism through rigorous critical reflexivity, inquiry, discourse, and action is a central tenet of CSP (Alim & Paris, 2017; Bondy et al., 2012; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; 2015; Griffin, 1988; as cited in Morris & Morris, 2000; Hammond, 2015; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2014; 2017b; Paris, 2012; 2021; Paris & Alim, 2014). Enacting CSP within the social context of teaching is a form of transformative critical action in educational spaces (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2014). This work asks, 'What happens in classrooms where teachers are successful with African American students?'" (Ladson-Billings, 2017a, p. 87) and "What if the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms?" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 3).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. CSP is an iteration of the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1990) found that culturally relevant teachers conceptualize themselves and others, their relationships with students, and the nature of knowledge through an asset-based framework. These findings led to the grounded theory of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Within a critical paradigm, Ladson-Billings (1995; 2014) generated a theory of CRP with three domains: (a) academic achievement—intellectual growth of students as a result of their learning experiences in the classroom; (b) cultural competencies—the ability of students to negotiate cultural conflicts and demonstrate multiple cultural competencies and; (c) sociopolitical (or critical) consciousness—the ability to use classroom skills and knowledge to solve real-world problems. The theoretical underpinnings of CRP include three broad characteristics of culturally relevant teachers that further the three domains of CRP (see Table 1).

Table 1

CRP Theoretical Underpinnings (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 478)

Conceptions of Self and Others	*Social Relations*	*Conceptions of Knowledge*
• Teachers believe that all the students are capable of academic success.	• Teachers maintain fluid student-teacher relationships.	• Knowledge is not static; it is shared, recycled, and constructed.
• Teachers see their pedagogy as art—unpredictable, always in the process of becoming.	• Teachers demonstrate a connectedness with all students.	• Knowledge must be viewed critically.
• Teachers see themselves as members of the community.	• Teachers develop a community of learners.	• Teachers must be passionate about knowledge and learning.
• Teachers see teaching as a way to give back to the community.	• Teachers encourage students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for another.	• Teachers must scaffold, or build bridges, to facilitate learning.
• Teachers believe in a Freirean notion of "teaching as mining" (1974, p. 76) or pulling knowledge out.		• Assessment must be multifaceted, incorporating multiple forms of excellence.

Culturally Responsive Teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is a related asset pedagogy with increased focus on the teacher as an actor in the scene (Gay, 2002; 2015). Gay (2002; 2015) argued that teachers should be competent in, and responsive to, multiple cultural values, learning styles, traditions, communication styles, contributions, and relational patterns in order to effectively *respond* to cultural displays of learning. As such, Gay (2002) summarized these understandings into three overarching understandings: (a) cultural archetypes—"which ethnic groups give priority to communal living and cooperative problem solving and how these preferences affect educational motivation, aspiration, and task performance" (p. 107); (b) power dynamics—"how different ethnic groups' protocols of appropriate ways for children to interact with adults are exhibited in instructional settings" (p. 107) and; (c) relational patterns—"the implications of gender role socialization in different ethnic groups for implementing equity initiatives in classroom instruction" (p. 107).

Culturally responsive teaching is defined as the intentional use of "the heritages, experiences, and perspectives of different ethnic and racial groups to teach students who are members of them more effectively" (Gay, 2015, p. 124). Additionally, Gay (2002) identified five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching: (a) building cultural competencies, awareness, and knowledge about cultural diversity in relationships and curriculum; (b) building effective learning communities; (c) demonstrating critical care; (d) communicating effectively with CLD students; and (e) responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction.

Teacher critical reflexivity, or "inside-out work" (Hammond, 2015, p. 53), is a major tenet of culturally responsive teaching. The purpose of which is to (a) identify one's cultural frame of reference, (b) widen one's cultural aperture, and (c) identify one's key triggers that act on the learning environment (Hammond, 2015). This exercise serves to facilitate a new way of

"looking at the world" Hammond, 2015, p. 52) through critical reflection of "the beliefs, behaviors, and practices that get in the way of [the] ability to respond constructively and positively to students" (Hammond, 2015, p. 53).

Conceptual Shift in Asset Pedagogies. There is considerable debate among researchers about the strength of the terms relevant and responsive to enact CC and disinvest from whiteness (Alim & Paris, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2017b; Paris & Alim, 2014). Increasingly superficial and 'nice' implementations have "corrupted" (Ladson-Billings, 2017b, p. 142) CRP and culturally responsive teaching in ways that reinvest in whiteness (Castagno, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2014; 2017b; Paris, 2012; 2021). Castagno (2014) found that whiteness "compels us to embrace diversity-related policy and practice uncritically and praise any effort tagged with words like multicultural, diversity, and equality" (p. 4).

When CRP is employed as a tool for whiteness, CC is "either distorted … at best, or conveniently left out altogether at worst" (Ladson-Billings, 2015b, p. 142). Further, when equality and equity are "collapsed into the same idea" (Castagno, 2014, p. 30), they become "synonymous, so that fairness and justice (equity) is equated with sameness (equality)" (Castagno, 2014, p. 30) and "diversity-related efforts" (Castagno, 2014, p. 31) are limited to discourse of culture at the surface level in ways that do not disrupt the dominant ideologies, institutions, and cultures that would otherwise disinvest from whiteness (Castagno, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2018). Paris (2012) argued, "It is quite possible to be relevant to something or responsive to it without ensuring its continuing presence … presence in our classrooms and communities" (p. 95). Therefore, CRP and culturally responsive teaching are reduced to surface level strategies that do little to raise CC and disinvest from whiteness.

CC and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies. Paris (2012) problematized the terms relevant and responsive, arguing that this language does not "go far enough" (p. 94) to value and maintain "our increasingly multiethnic and multilingual society" (p. 94). Further, "we must ask ourselves if the very terms 'relevant' and 'responsive' are descriptive of what we are after in teaching and learning in a pluralistic society" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Ladson-Billings (2014) has described CRP as "the place where the beat drops" (p. 76) and CSP as "the remix" (p. 75). In this way, the goal is to effectively sustain cultural, ethnic, and linguistic pluralism in the classroom by "critiquing the White gaze itself that sees, hears, and frames students of color in everywhichway as marginal and deficient" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 3).

CSP builds on earlier work through an explicit pedagogical focus of shifting the "culture of power" (Delpit, 1995, p. 24) and decentering the "White gaze" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 2; Morrison, 1998) and is "highly informed" (Kinloch, 2017, p. 39) by critically conscious research. CSP "seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Although relevant, responsive, and sustaining are used somewhat interchangeably in the literature and in practice, it is important to attend to the "usefulness" (Paris, 2012, p. 95) of such language as it supports critical reflexivity, inquiry, discourse, and action in ways that disinvest from hegemonic whiteness.

Developing Critically Conscious Music Educators

Ballantyne and Mills (2008) found that music educators tend to gloss over professional development that does not seem directly tied to music. "It is almost as though music teachers view their teacher education courses through music-coloured lenses" (Ballantyne & Mills, 2008, p. 86). Several studies explored the process of developing CC with preservice music educators (Escalante, 2020; Hess, 2019; Robinson, 2017; Shaw; 2015; VanDuesen, 2019). Abril (2009)

observed a sustained pattern of teacher-student cultural conflict within the Mariachi ensemble. Specifically, when the White novice Mariachi ensemble director struggled to reconcile the cognitive dissonance between her self-perception and the negative feedback from the students in her classroom, she took a critically reflexive approach which ultimately "served as a catalyst for change" (p. 87). Abril (2009) found that "the confluence of experiences seemed to lead her to become more aware and empathetic, later more knowledgeable, and finally resolute in implementing a culturally responsive curriculum" (p. 87).

Robinson (2017) designed a three-session professional development seminar to support the development of CC in preservice music educators in which the participants experienced activities oriented to three aspects of critical consciousness: understanding access, understanding intersectionality, and understanding myths, misconceptions, and misdirections. Robinson (2017) found that the workshop "yielded a positive, and possibly long-term, imprint on their development as future music teachers" (p. 21). A replica study by Escalante (2020) yielded similar findings. Escalante (2020) indicated that "exploring sociological concepts such as access, intersectionality, and privilege through interactive activities and allowing students safe methods for expressing themselves, such as journaling, may facilitate the adoption of such dispositions among preservice music teachers" (p. 34). VanDuesen (2019) found that preservice music educators in a cultural immersion study had not previously considered the influence of "their own cultural, ethnic, and racial identities" (p. 54); however, after the cultural immersion experience, participants began to engage in the critical reflexive work of questioning "their own assumptions and perceptions about cultural differences in music teaching and learning and began

to broaden their understanding of culture's role in education and within a larger sociopolitical context" (p. 54).

Salvador, Paetz, and Tippetts (2020) found four interdependent categories of transformative learning processes in a constructivist grounded theory study in which participants changed their mindsets and actions as a result of, (a) course structures; (b) emotional intensity; (c) opportunities to grapple with difficult material and; (d) building *Gemütlichkeit*—"a space or state of warmth … which includes qualities of coziness, peace of mind, belonging, well-being, and social acceptance" (p. 200). Shaw (2015) suggested, "Rather than attempting to prepare preservice teachers for every conceivable context in which they ultimately might become employed, teacher education programs might strive to equip candidates with skills and dispositions necessary to cultivate their own contextual knowledge" (p. 217). Shaw (2018) found the following practices were supportive to novice music educators in high-needs settings: collaborative communities of practice, professional development tailored to urban settings, mentoring, and school-university partnerships.

A curricular shift away from content-centered teaching and learning environments toward student-centered teaching and learning supports pluralism in music education programs (Kuehne, 2020). Kuehne (2020) added that the focus of music education preparedness programs is not "how to teach music" (p. 210) but rather, "how to teach children" (p. 210). These studies illustrate the need for increased opportunities in preservice music education programs to: (a) engage in critical reflexive work prior to student teaching (Ballantyne & Mills, 2008; Escalante, 2020; Robinson, 2017; Shaw, 2015; 2018; VanDuesen, 2019) and, (b) practice

teaching music in high-needs settings before entering the field as an inservice music educator (Abramo, 2015; Clauhs, 2021; Shaw, 2018).

In a teacher education program, Sleeter et al. (2004) found that CC could be scaffolded through inquiry. Specifically, teacher educators scaffolded CC by facilitating direct conversations about race that included asking direct racial questions, modeling enacting CC, and providing supporting systems that challenged students beyond their comfort zone. Kohli et al. (2019) found that CC "was not something that the social justice teacher leaders in the study developed in their teacher education programs alone" (p. 27); critical educators "continued to pursue their development beyond those years" (Kohli et al., 2019, p. 27). In addition, "critical consciousness was not a position they took professionally; rather, it was a positionality they continuously developed across multiple facets of their lives embedded in their epistemologies and ontologies" (Kohli et al., 2019, p. 27).

Critical Autoethnographic Inquiry in Music Education

Hess (2019) modeled critical reflexivity in an autoethnography for undergraduate music students. Through autoethnography, Hess (2019) used writing to make sense of an intense emotional reaction to a presentation from a guest speaker of a music education organization in an African country in which Hess (2019) observed "salvationist narratives and stereotypes … the negation of youth agency and lack of interrogation of power dynamics" (p. 2). Hess (2019) assigned a reflection prompt and found that some preservice music educators engaged in critical reflection on salvationism in music education and others analyzed the presentation "at face value" (p. 15). Hess (2019) acknowledged that "in music education, while many scholars engage with critical pedagogy, we have fewer examples of practical enactments of critical pedagogy" (p.

5). Hess's (2019) autoethnography about uncritical salvationism in music education demonstrated "both the messiness of equity work and the intense emotion connected intrinsically to injustice" (p. 25).

Lewis and Christophersen (2021) found that enacting CC is complex in a duo-ethnography in which one author was both critically conscious of and complicit in issues of power in classroom spaces and the second author experienced "inbetweenness" (p. 97) as a member of the tenured faculty and critically conscious music educator. Lewis and Christophersen (2021) found that language "wields [power] in pedagogical interactions with students and colleagues" (p. 99) and the authors were "forced to acknowledge the multiple and often contradictory positionalities that the social justice educator occupies" (pp. 99-100).

Thompson (2015) conducted an autoethnography with incarcerated youth in which the author found that autoethnography supported his developing CC. Thompson (2015) used socially conscious rap to engage in critical discussions about "social ills" (p. 431) that directly affected incarcerated youth. The students' extensive knowledge of the subgenres of hip hop challenged Thompson (2015) to learn more about the genre and the social issues addressed in the lyrics. Thompson (2015) found that the components of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002) supported his music teaching.

Addressing the Literature Gap

While a considerable body of literature has explored the developing CC through critical reflection, inquiry, discourse, and action, the field of music education has "less practical enactments" (Hess, 2019; p. 5) of CC in daily professional life (Lewis & Christophersen, 2021; Thompson, 2015). Throughout this analytic autoethnography, I have used the phrase 'nice' dysconscious racism to describe a combination of interlocking factors that serve as sources of

‘funding’ for the individual and collective educational investment in whiteness that converge to form the culture of nice and the identity of the ‘nice’ White lady.

Music education scholars have explored dysconscious racism in music teaching (Abril, 2009, Ballantyne & Mills, 2008; Bradley, 2006; 2007; Clauhs, 2021; Hess, 2015; 2018; Jorgensen, 2007; Kelly-McHale, 2013; Kruse, 2016). However, there is a considerable gap in the music education literature on niceness. Further, there is a gap in the music education literature on the critical awareness of the culture of nice and disinvestment from the identity of the ‘nice’ White lady. Autoethnography offered a methodology for exploring my own developing critical awareness of ‘nice’ dysconscious racism within the theoretical framework of CC.

Chapter 3

Methods

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this analytic autoethnography was to explore how the principles of enacting CC—critical reflection, inquiry, discourse, and action—developed my critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism and supported my disinvestment from whiteness over time in the various facets of my professional identity as a White female general music specialist at a high-needs, Title I school. The study was guided by the following central research question: How are the principles of enacting CC—critical reflection, inquiry, discourse, and action—operationalized through analytic autoethnographic inquiry to develop my critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism and support my disinvestment from whiteness over time?

Autoethnographic Methodology

According to Hughes and Pennington (2017) autoethnography is, "a form of critical reflexive narrative inquiry, critical reflexive self-study, or critical reflexive action research in which the researcher takes an active, scientific, and systematic view of personal experience in relation to cultural groups" (p. 11). Five basic ideas characterize autoethnography as a methodology: (a) critical reflexivity, (b) an in-depth view of the researcher's lifelong educative experiences, (c) privilege-penalty experiences centered on deception, contradiction, ignorance, and denial of interlocking oppressive systems, (d) critical self-examination of relational ethics, and (e) the assemblage and sharing of salient experiences for in-depth exploration and critique (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). An autoethnography is further defined as an analytic autoethnography if the researcher is,

1. A full member in the research group or setting,

2. Visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and
3. Committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena (Anderson, 2006, p. 375).

"One of the most important rationales for doing autoethnography is precisely to help reveal power, domination, privilege, and penalty in both the extraordinary and the mundane social issues of our larger cultural contexts" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 59). The use of empirical data to problematize the self within the broader social phenomena is a defining feature of autoethnography as a methodology (Le Roux, 2017).

Positionality and Subjectivity

Researcher identity is central to autoethnographic work (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). I am a White, middle-class, monolingual female music educator. As a child, I attended predominantly White middle class K-12 public schools in the school district of the present study. I was identified for the Gifted and Talented program in elementary school and thereafter tracked into advanced placement (AP) coursework in which the overwhelming majority of my classmates and educators were also White, middle-class, monolingual, monocultural, and 'gifted.' My family regularly attended a predominantly White, upper-middle class, monolingual United Methodist church.

Being nice was understood by my community as caring for others, showing respect—particularly, respect for authority—showing good sportsmanship, maintaining emotional composure, and being polite, pleasant, and friendly. My community often modeled niceness in passive ways, through communal prayer and platitudes. Castagno (2014) reflected that "there is something ironic about being in an overtly Christian space … where niceness is expected and yet disconnected from justice" (pp. 12-13).

My views on power and privilege in the classroom were shaped by my community's understanding of the relationship between morality and niceness, particularly early in my career. As the teacher—the authority figure—I expected a certain degree of deference from students. I further believed that my voice ought to be privileged over the students, given my position of 'power' ("When I speak, you listen"). I expected classroom interactions to be polite, pleasant, and friendly; impolite, unpleasant, and unfriendly interactions often upset me or took me by surprise.

I was quick to silence impoliteness, particularly impoliteness around topics I believed to be taboo. I believed my Music Room was a neutral space in which we could 'all get along' if we avoided strong emotions, polarizing opinions, politics, and social issues. As such, I subscribed to a 'leave it at the door' policy. I defined 'being nice' in terms of avoiding offense: sharing (without exception), asking nicely (and with just the 'right' tone), and saying "I'm sorry" (even if only to make someone else feel better). Being 'nice' was always the top priority to which learning music came second. And finally, the following caveats applied: (a) at the same time that I expected these things from students, I did not believe it was my job to teach them, and (b) by and large, I believed that my position as the authority figure afforded *me* an exemption from any expectation, at any time, for any reason, and further believed it was my prerogative to do so.

At the time of the present study, I have been engaging in critical reflection, inquiry, discourse, and action through graduate study for approximately seven years. I believe critically conscious educators make more informed pedagogical and professional decisions. My research interests converge on questions related to equity in the context of high-needs schools. I believe music education research should be humanizing and transformative for teachers, marginalized students, and their communities. As such, I am deeply concerned for students. Students are

communicating the harm they are experiencing and have experienced in the classroom. Schools are maintaining the culture of nice at the expense of students of color. These concerns are especially salient in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Context

The timing, setting, and context of this analytic autoethnography presented a unique opportunity to explore the central research question. East Pine Elementary School (EPES) (pseudonym) is a Title I school in the southeastern United States. East Pine meets the criteria for enrollment in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which provides free meals to all students regardless of socioeconomic status (SES). EPES has been recognized in the district as a PBIS Gold Status school. The 2017 state assessment placed EPES in the bottom five percent of test scores in the state, resulting in a 3-year turnaround plan. The plan provided wraparound district- and state-level support that included increased oversight, curricular resources, and staff training. The plan was extended through 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

East Pine Students

The selected elementary school for the autoethnography is one of 37 elementary schools in the district. This district has a population of 18,467 elementary age students and a total student enrollment of 41,529, from preschool to 12th grade. The district demographics are as follows: 45.9 percent of students are White, 23.4 percent Black, 19.1 percent Hispanic, and 4.9 percent Asian, 6,007 receive English Language services (EL), and 4,877 are classified for Special Education.

According to the school report card, the school had a total enrollment of 674 in 2022. Enrollment increased significantly during the time of the research study. EPES added approximately 80 students during the Spring semester. The school's racial demographics are as

follows: 39 percent Hispanic, 32 percent Black, 22 percent White, 7 percent two or more races, and 1 percent Asian. Approximately 78 percent of students are identified as economically disadvantaged and 17 students are homeless. Nearly 40 percent of students receive English Language (EL) services, 96 students are classified for Special Education, and 114 students are enrolled in the Gifted and Talented (GT) program. The school population exceeds the district average in Black and Hispanic populations, and students who receive EL and Special Education services. The school population is below the district average in White and Asian populations.

The COVID-19 Pandemic. The students and teachers of East Pine have overcome considerable obstacles due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, including periods of widespread societal shutdown and nine months of fully remote, synchronous, and asynchronous learning. Strict in-person learning health and safety protocols were in effect throughout the 2021-2022 school year including mask mandates, cadre and cohort policies for classrooms and common areas, and seven- to ten-day isolation and exposure quarantines to mitigate the spread of the virus. All health and safety mandates were reduced or eliminated as of August 2022. However, the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges brought about due to pandemic continue to impact EPES staff, students, and families.

East Pine Staff

EPES has experienced high staff turnover every year since its opening in 2016. In 2020-2021, 15 of 24 K-5 classroom teachers were new to the school; in 2019-2020, more than 20 certified positions were filled. Each year, East Pine has had multiple classroom teachers leave in the middle of the school year. In 2022, approximately 11 certified staff members including the researcher, were members of the 2016-2017 opening school staff.

The 2022-2023 Staff. The 2022-2023 staff included a high percentage of novice teachers with less than three years of experience, and teachers who have been at the school for one year or less. In addition to annual teacher attrition, EPES had an entirely new 2022-2023 administration team—including a new principal, assistant principal, PBIS behavior coach, and Professional Growth and Evaluation System (PGES) coach. The founding principal was promoted to a district level position at the end of the 2021-2022 school year and a principal, new to the role and new to the school, was hired in July 2022. There was also a new district-level Director of K-12 Fine Arts. Such sweeping turnover in a short amount of time raises questions about consistency, transparency, teacher autonomy, and the continuation of previously established structures, systems, protocols, routines, schedules, and traditions.

East Pine Special Area Classes

EPES includes five 50-minute Special Area classes on a rotating schedule: STEM, Art, Music, Library, and Physical Education (P.E.). Kindergarten through fifth grade students attend one Special Area class per day, for an average of five classes per week. The Special Area teacher-team includes three members of the 2016-17 opening school staff, one educator with two years of experience, and one educator who joined the team in the middle of the 2021-22 school year. The former administrative team granted the Special Area team considerable autonomy in planning and scheduling. For example, the continuation of Special Area classes remained a priority as the CSI plan was being carried out in other subject areas.

The Room of Requirement, a.k.a. the Music Room. My general music classroom might as well be the 'Room of Requirement' (Rowling, 2000). Both because it is physically difficult to find in the building—the door is not quite where one would expect—and because it has been a sovereign learning space in the day-to-day curricular life of the school. The autonomy

and protected instructional time I have experienced as the general music specialist at East Pine can be attributed, in part, to culturally sustaining school leaders who remained committed to the continuation of high-quality arts instruction despite the mounting pressures of high-stakes testing, even after the CSI plan was implemented.

My music classroom isn't only a 'Room of Requirement' (Rowling, 2000), it is also something of a unicorn on the eastside of the district. Neighboring eastside schools with comparable student populations implemented CSI plans that increased instructional time spent in mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) blocks, thereby decreasing arts instruction, and leaving most without music programs or significantly reduced schedules. This analytic autoethnography presented a unique opportunity to narrate the apprehensions I navigated during this time of considerable change in leadership in my school and district.

The Music Specialist

I have held many roles and responsibilities during my tenure as the general music specialist of EPES. I was a member of the 2016-2017 opening staff which involved planning and ordering the instruments, curricular resources, furniture, technology, and equipment for the music classroom prior to the building opening. As a fourth-year teacher in the school's inaugural year, I took on multiple leadership positions and responsibilities beyond music teaching including PBIS team Special Area representative, social committee treasurer, Visual and Performing Arts Program Review chair, and director of extracurricular activities. These early career experiences, particularly my involvement with the PBIS team, afforded me regular opportunities to engage in CWS with educators and administrators who consistently modeled critical reflection, discourse, and action.

During this study, I was in my tenth year in music education and my seventh year at EPES. I have maintained my membership on the PBIS team throughout my tenure at EPES. I partnered with the community's universities as a cooperating teacher for student teachers and undergraduate practicum students. At the time of the present study, I had one student teacher and three undergraduate practicum students. I also served as an NTIP mentor for a novice teacher on the Special Area team.

Data Generation

Internal Data

I generated internal data through critical auto-interviewing and reflective journaling with a specific focus on critical reflexivity, an in-depth view of my lifelong educative experiences with 'nice' dysconscious racism, privilege-penalty experiences centered on deception, contradiction, ignorance, and denial of whiteness, critical self-examination of relational ethics in which I enacted CC or dysconsciousness, and the assemblage and sharing of salient experiences for in-depth exploration and critique.

Critical Auto-Interviewing. Critical auto-interviewing is a process by which the autoethnographer can "use their reconstructed life histories to explore and facilitate insight into their evolving worldviews" (Hughes & Pennington, p. 65). Generating data through critical auto-interviewing can "help autoethnographers discover and problematize assumptions that give meaning to their thoughts about what cultural conditions are, the way cultural conditions are, and why cultural conditions are interpreted in certain ways" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, pp. 65-66). Critical auto-interviewing is an emic process with two steps: (a) memory recollection used to gather baseline data and (b) thick, rich description of memories through transcription (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). I recorded a series of live critical auto-interviews in which I

operationalized Hammond's (2015) three internal tasks for critical reflection, with a specific focus on my evolving worldview as indicated by the development of my critical awareness 'nice' dysconscious racism. Hammond's (2015) internal tasks for critical reflection include: (a) identifying one's cultural frame of reference, (b) widening one's cultural aperture, (c) identifying one's key triggers.

I selected questions from Hammond's (2015) list of surface, shallow, and deep level critical reflection questions with specific focus on questions that would "facilitate insight into [my] evolving worldview" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 65) of 'nice' dysconscious racism. To this end, I leveraged the five tenets of autoethnography to select questions for reflection that were germane to the present study (see Figure 1).

I used Hammond's (2015) "Mindful Reflection protocol" (pp. 61-62) to address the second internal task: widening one's cultural aperture. Hammond's (2015) Mindful Reflection protocol is a cyclical process involving six critically reflexive exercises:

1. **Spend some time viewing the replay in your mind.** Try to review what happened without judgment. Describe it almost like stage directions.
2. **Make a list of your assumptions, reactions, and interpretations of behaviors as the scenario replays.** What specific thing did you react to? How did you interpret it? Based on what belief or assumption?
3. **Try on alternate explanations.** Select one or two student reactions or interactions (what [they] said or did) and try to offer alternative explanations for the student's behavior based on what you are learning about [their] deep cultural beliefs, norms, or practices.

4. **Check your explanations.** Share your alternative explanations with other culturally responsive teachers … to get more input and insight.
5. **Build your cross-cultural background knowledge.** Recognize that understanding alternative explanations for student behavior is an ongoing process.
6. **Leverage technology … that will allow you to virtually step into another cultural experience.** … Watch (don't judge) and study communication styles, nonverbal communication cues and gestures, or how core values are expressed in daily life. Begin to see the patterns that cut across the cultural archetypes of individualism and collectivism (pp. 61-62).

Figure 1

Map Your Cultural Reference Points (Hammond, 2015, pp. 57-58)

Question for surface culture:

- How did your family identify ethnically or racially?
- Where did you live—urban, suburban, or rural community?
- How would you describe your family's economic status—middle class, upper class, working class, or low income? What did that mean in terms of quality of life?
- What family folklore or stories did you regularly hear growing up?
- What are some of your family traditions—holidays, foods, or rituals?
- Who were the heroes celebrated in your family and/or community? Why? Who were the antiheroes? Who were the "bad guys"?

Questions for shallow culture:

- What metaphors, analogies, parables, or "witty" sayings do you remember hearing from members of the community?
- What family stories are regularly told or referenced? What message do they communicate about core values?
- Review primary messages from your upbringing: What did authority figures in your community tell you respect looked like? Disrespect?
- How were you trained to respond to different emotional displays—crying, anger, and happiness?
- What physical, social, or cultural attributes were praised in your community? Which ones were you taught to avoid?
- What earned you praise as a child?
- What is your community's relationship with time?

Questions for deep culture:

- List learning behaviors you believe every child should exhibit:
    - Talk and discourse patterns
    - Volume of interaction
    - Time on task
    - Collaboration or individual work
    - Seat time versus interaction
    - How did you come to believe this?
- What messages did you get about why other racial or ethnic groups succeeded or not?
- What did your culture teach you about intelligence?
    - Did you grow up believing it was set at birth?
    - Did you believe it was genetic?
    - Did you believe some groups were smarter than others?

Responding to the third internal task—identifying one's key triggers—involved critical reflection on the five elements of social interaction that "activate strong threats and rewards in the brain, thus influencing how we react in given situations" (Hammond, 2015, p. 65). These elements are standing, certainty, control, connection, and equity (Hammond, 2015). I reflected on the extent to which these key triggers were shaped by 'nice' dysconscious racism.

The decision to record live critical auto-interviews served to explore how I critically reflect on and verbally communicate my responses to each of Hammond's (2015) internal tasks for critical reflection in real time. I transcribed each auto-interview verbatim, including speech pattern, tone of voice, hesitancies, long pauses, and "sounds that indicate feelings" (Josselson, 2013, p. 176) such as laughter, crying, and speech markers. Memo writing was a useful strategy for documenting my initial thoughts about and reactions to the critical auto-interview during the transcription process.

Reflective Journaling. I utilized reflective journaling to (a) unpack significant milestones and salient memories in the development of my critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism not addressed through critical auto-interviewing; and (b) further expand on the concepts addressed in the critical auto-interviews and observation field notes. The reflective journal also served as a space to generate internal data grounded in the five tenets of autoethnography that represented: (a) emotionally charged confrontations with whiteness; (b) investments in whiteness through 'nice' dysconscious racism; and (c) moments of clarity in which critical reflection, discourse, or action led to professional growth.

External Data

In addition to the internal data generated by critical auto-interviewing and critical reflective journaling, external data increased opportunities for assemblage (Hughes &

Pennington, 2017). The purpose of external data was to explore the ongoing development of my critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism and gradual disinvestment from whiteness through Hammond's (2015) three internal tasks for critical reflection. Specifically, external data served to unpack how I understood and enacted CC or dysconsciousness in the various facets of my professional identity at the time of data collection. External data included jottings and expanded field notes from observations and relevant artifacts from the research site. The external data comprised significant observations and artifacts that represented: (a) emotionally charged confrontations with whiteness; (b) investments in whiteness through 'nice' dysconscious racism; and (c) moments of clarity in which critical reflection, discourse, or action led to professional growth.

Observations. Data generation included field notes from observations in the typical contexts, interactions, experiences, and responsibilities that characterize my day-to-day professional life. Observational data was limited to observations of myself as the actor in the scene. Observational data included experiences with whiteness that prompted: (a) an internal emotional response, reaction, or internal dialogue; (b) thoughts connecting the observed to the relevant literature; (c) the recollection of a salient memory; (d) immediate critical discourse or action; (e) reflexive work or later retelling; or (f) future decision-making.

Observational data comprised past and present professional experiences in the research site: the music classroom, school common areas, individual and group lesson planning and preparation, community partnerships, teacher lunchtime, faculty meetings, Special Area professional learning community (PLC) meetings, district K-5 general music PLC meetings, PBIS team meetings, extracurricular activities, NTIP meetings, teacher happy hour, professional

development trainings, and special school events (e.g. assemblies, Title I family nights, special performances, etc.). Observations in these settings varied in frequency and length.

Artifacts. Relevant artifacts from my professional portfolio (e.g. shared and individual planning documents, e-mail correspondence, audio-visual recordings, repertoire, curriculum resources, etc.) were collected for data assemblage. An artifact was determined relevant if it provided an opportunity to explore one or more of Hammond's (2015) three internal tasks for critical reflection. Relevant artifacts represented: (a) 'nice' dysconscious racism, or (b) critical reflection, discourse, or action. Relevant artifacts produced a "personal-professional history" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 63) of the development of my critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism that has supported my gradual disinvestment from whiteness.

Data Assemblage

Hughes and Pennington (2017) encouraged the rigorous use of assemblage, rather than triangulation, in autoethnographic work. "In contrast with triangulation, assemblage involves a collection of multiple items that fit together to provide multiple perspectives and a rich multilayered account of a particular time, place, or moment in the history of the autoethnographer and his or her profession" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 61). Further, assemblage is a data collection strategy in which the autoethnographer "purposefully [exposes] the type of gaps, inconsistencies, and associations that may emerge" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 27). Eight tasks are involved in assemblage: (a) selecting relevant literature, (b) producing a set of retold narratives from multiple perspectives, (c) writing across multiple temporalities, (d) producing a personal-professional history, (e) crafting [non]fictions which convey a partial accounting, (f) autoethnographic writing about practice, (g) commenting back to

the profession through a critical or analytical lens and, (h) reinscribing aspects of practice (Hughes & Pennington, 2017).

Data assemblage took place from August 2022 to April 2023 and included the following internal and external data generation sources: reflective journaling, observations, and the collection of relevant artifacts. The data corpus comprised significant milestones in the development of my critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism. These experiences represent a gradual disinvestment from whiteness over the course of my career. I generated data based on salient memories and experiences that represented: (a) emotionally charged confrontations with whiteness; (b) investments in whiteness through 'nice' dysconscious racism; and (c) moments of clarity in which critical reflection, discourse, or action led to professional growth. As I assembled the internal data, I found that my critical reflexivity was much more rigorous and thorough in the reflective journaling entries and therefore opted not to include the critical auto-interviews in the findings.

Selecting Relevant Literature

The relevant literature from Chapter Two served as the basis of my assemblage strategy for the present autoethnography. From the body of relevant literature, I selected theoretical, conceptual, and analytic frameworks through which to explore 'nice' dysconscious racism in my past and present professional life.

Theoretical Framework. The theoretical framework of CC in this analytic autoethnography was characterized by a developing critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism (King, 1991) through critical reflection, discourse, and action (Behm Cross et al., 2018; Friere, 2021; Friere Institute, 2022; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003; Jennings & Potter Smith, 2002; Kohli et al., 2019; McDonough, 2009; 2015; Sleeter et al., 2004). Enacting CC was

operationally defined for this study as critical reflection, discourse, and action involving: (a) critical reflexive work on identity, (b) analysis of power and privilege in macro and micro contexts, and (c) the problematization of tacit knowledge and assumptions (Friere, 1974/2021; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Kohli et al., 2019; McDonough, 2009; 2015; Sleeter et al., 2004; Waite, 2021).

Conceptual Framework. Throughout this analytic autoethnography, I have used the conceptual framework of 'nice' dysconscious racism to describe the ways in which dysconscious racism intersects with the culture of nice through a combination of interlocking factors that serve as sources of 'funding' for the educational investment in whiteness. The sources of 'funding' under study in this autoethnography have been identified from the relevant literature and were operationally defined thus:

- Color-evasiveness—the purposive "hyperreluctance to see race" (Castagno, 2014, p. 72);
- Assimilationism—a collection of 'nice' racist ideas "rooted in the notion that certain racial groups are culturally or behaviorally inferior" (Kendi, 2019, p. 25) and in need of development; "The goal of assimilation can be represented as A+B+C=A, where A is the dominant group and all other groups lose their uniqueness and 'melt' into the mainstream, hegemonic culture" (Castagno, 2006, p. 27);
- Institutionalized 'othering' / Eurocentrism—centering the Western European canon in music curricula and pedagogy (Bradley, 2007);
- Cultural incompetency—dysconsciousness around culture (Behm Cross et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006b);

- White comfort—a priority of niceness in which the emotions of White people are protected (Orozco, 2019);
- Deficit views—a set of beliefs based on "the presumed cultural deficits of African Americans" (King, 1991, p. 138);
- Politeness— "showing good manners; being courteous, gracious, and poised; and not being rude" (Castagno, p. 2014, p. 83);
- Equality—sameness (Castagno, 2014; Emdin, 2021).

These sources of 'funding' serve to avoid upsetting knowledge, uncomfortable interactions and experiences, or "disquieting discourses" (Orozco, 2019, p. 131) and are therefore 'nice' enactments of dysconsciousness. Niceness efficiently and decisively mutes critical reflection and promotes uncritical habits of mind, particularly as it is used to sidestep critical discourses about race, racism, and racial oppression in schools (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; Orozco, 2019). Niceness supports dysconscious racism by contributing to the limited and distorted understandings that constitute a miseducation in race, racism, and oppression (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; King, 1991; Orozco, 2019; Picower, 2009).

'Nice' dysconscious racism functions through the shallow level of culture with the explicit and implicit purpose of (a) displacing blame for racial inequity based on "the presumed cultural deficits" (King, 1991, p. 138) of people of color, and (b) tacitly accepting meritocracy and individualism that serves to promote the "myth of equal opportunity" (King, 1991, p. 138). 'Nice' dysconscious racism was operationally defined for this study as the miseducation of race based on uncritical habits of mind, limited and distorted understandings, presumed deficits, and taken-for-granted assumptions that sustain a strategic, purposeful, and deliberate

dysconsciousness about race, racism, and oppression in schools (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014; King, 1991; Orozco, 2019).

Analytic Framework. The five tenets of autoethnography (Hughes & Pennington, 2017) served as the analytic framework for the present study: (a) critical reflexivity, (b) an in-depth view of the researcher's lifelong educative experiences, (c) privilege-penalty experiences centered on deception, contradiction, ignorance, and denial of interlocking oppressive systems, (d) critical self-examination of relational ethics and, (e) the assemblage and sharing of salient experiences for in-depth exploration and critique (Hughes & Pennington, 2017).

I operationalized CC to generate data for assemblage of my developing critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism, evolving worldview, and gradual disinvestment from whiteness. I analyzed the data for indicators of 'nice' dysconscious racism that constituted strategic, purposeful, and deliberate dysconsciousness. Additionally, the data corpus comprised significant milestones in the development of my critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism and gradual disinvestment from whiteness through reflective journaling, field observations, and relevant artifacts that represented: (a) emotionally charged confrontations with whiteness; (b) investments in whiteness through 'nice' dysconscious racism; and (c) moments of clarity in which critical reflection, discourse, or action led to professional growth.

Producing a Set of Retold Narratives from Multiple Perspectives

I produced a set of fictive narratives from my reflective journaling and observation field notes "each drawing out key ideas from the practices being written about in the published articles" (Denshire & Lee, 2013, p. 225). The fictive narratives reconstructed the events reported through the theoretical framework of CC and "told twice from the point of view of different actors" (Denshire & Lee, 2013, p. 225), supported an analysis through which I was able to "open

up and re-write the original account" (Denshire & Lee, 2013, pp. 225-226) beyond the limitations of my own perspective.

Writing Across Multiple Temporalities and Personal-Professional History

I utilized the assemblage strategy of writing across multiple temporalities from my reflective journaling, observations, and relevant artifacts to "re-craft a history" (Denshire & Lee, 2013, p. 226) of a piece of my professional music teaching practice, both, "as it occurred then" (Denshire & Lee, 2013, p. 226) and as it was "remembered and re-told" (Denshire & Lee, 2013, p. 226) at the time of the present study. These instances of writing across multiple temporalities are labeled "Vignettes" in the findings and have been marked by four asterisks to indicate the temporal change in voice. Writing across multiple temporalities produced a personal-professional history of my developing critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism. Additionally, this strategy served to identify significant milestones in my professional disinvestment from whiteness.

Crafting [Non]fictions and Autoethnographic Writing about Practice

I crafted [non]fictions in which each tale dramatized 'paradigmatic scenes' (Van Maanen, 1988) of a developing critical awareness of 'nice' dysconscious racism from my past and present professional life as a general music specialist. I assembled these lived experiences into written representations of my music teaching practice. This data assemblage strategy has been indicated in the findings as "Storied Analysis" and serves to provide additional background and context to the narrative.

Commenting Back to the Profession through an Analytical Lens

This autoethnography explicitly focused on niceness in my evolving practice as a general music specialist. My larger aim was to contribute to the study of CC in music education and to

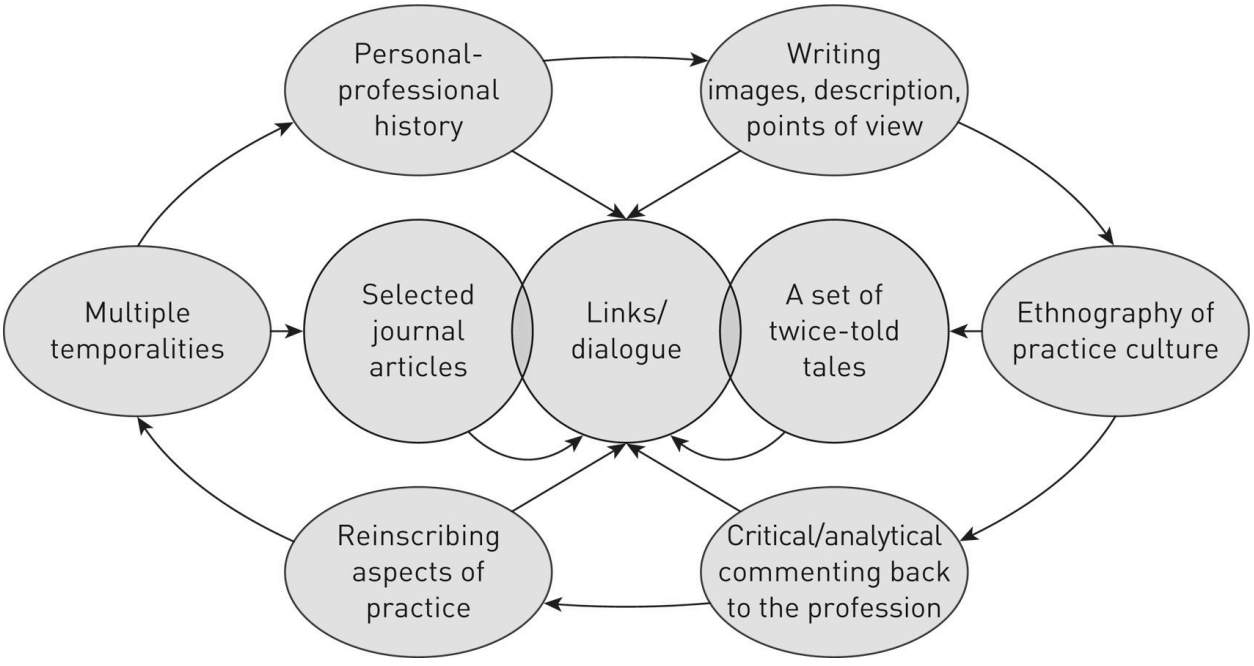
argue for the disinvestment from whiteness in pursuit of more equitable K-12 music learning environments. The major headings of the findings are labeled "Mindful Reflections" and offer an analytical lens through which to comment back to the profession.

Reinscribing Aspects of Practice

Denshire and Lee (2013) argued that "the everyday processes of professionals are often overlooked as 'under the radar,' relegated with no pause for reflection to what too easily can become the 'back rooms and corridors' of our working lives. Autoethnography enables the 'writing in' of these everyday experiences, re- inscribing the everyday world of practice" (p. 226). Autoethnographic inquiry supported my critical reflexivity of 'nice' dysconscious racism and future decision-making through critical action (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Denshire and Lee (2013) found that "within the sanitized representation of this project, the messy, difficult process of assembling an autoethnography is elusive" (p. 226; see Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Autoethnographic Assemblage Tasks (Denshire & Lee, 2013, p. 227)



Data Analysis

My thinking and writing process consisted of research-based narrative writing, coding with emic and etic approaches, and assemblage with multiple perspectives (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). I subjected the emic narratives to an "etic exploratory analysis" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 66), which required me to "deliberately separate the emotionally loaded reporting from the interpretive analytical reporting" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 66). The data analysis process was "cyclical rather than linear" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 68). Throughout the coding process I remained open to "unexpected possibilities, processes, and issues that become apparent as one immerses oneself in the written data" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 198).

Research-Based Narrative Deconstruction

Research-based narrative deconstruction is an assemblage task in which the data corpus is analyzed through the theoretical framework of the study (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Lewis and Christophersen (2021) argued that "the autoethnographic researcher is charged with situating her story within and against current scholarship" (p. 93). I deconstructed my narrative thinking and writing according to the analytic framework of autoethnography and the operational definition of CC to analyze the data corpus for evidences of educational niceness and disinvestment from whiteness. The act of analyzing the data through research-based narrative deconstruction continued to support the ongoing development of my CC (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). I engaged in memo writing during narrative deconstruction to document connections between the data and the relevant literature.

Coding

Emic Coding. I collected emic narratives and separated "the emotionally loaded reporting from the interpretive analytical reporting" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 66). The

emic approach codes prompted an emotional response, reaction, or internal dialogue as experienced in the moment from a participant-orientation (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). I organized the emic approach codes into categories of dysconscious racism (see Figure 15) and critical consciousness (see Figure 16).

Etic Coding. I divided the etic approach coding process into "two main sections" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 68) with an overarching movement from general codes to specific codes. I used memo writing throughout the etic coding process to clarify my thinking and separate my emotional reactions from the etic analysis (Denshire & Lee, 2013). The etic approach codes reflected a researcher-orientation through the theoretical framing of CC (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). First, I engaged in open coding in which anything and everything was valued more or less equally (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 2011). Then, I engaged in a more "fine-grained analysis" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 172) through focused coding. The etic approach codes led to the development of data categories, patterns, and themes (see Figures 13 & 14; Saldaña, 2016).

Assemblage with Multiple Perspectives

The assemblage of internal and external data sources through reflective journaling, observations, and relevant artifacts supports a "rich multilayered account" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 61). The internal and external data sources represented in the analysis revealed inconsistencies which served to strengthen the analysis. The relevant literature on CC and 'nice' dysconscious racism informed the processes of data collection and analysis. I crafted a set of twice-told narratives from observational data in which I compared and contrasted my past and present perspectives and the perspectives of others in the setting, as indicated by four asterisk marks in each vignette. I used relevant artifacts to produce a "personal-professional history" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 63) of the development of my critical awareness of

'nice' dysconscious racism and gradual disinvestment from whiteness over time. The overall analysis and forthcoming Discussion informed my critical and analytical conclusions about developing CC, which related back to the field of critical music education (Hughes & Pennington, 2017).

Rigor for Analytic Autoethnography

I applied Feldman's (2003) four criteria in the construction of this autoethnography through the autoethnographer's lens:

1. Provide clear and detailed description of how [the autoethnographer] collected the data and make explicit what counts as data in [the] work.
2. Provide clear and detailed descriptions of how [the autoethnographer] constructed the representation from [the] data. What specifics about the data led [the autoethnographer] to make this assumption?
3. Extend triangulation beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the same self-study.
4. Provide evidence that the research changed or evolved the educator and summarize its value to the profession (pp. 27-28).

Further, I was mindful of the audiences' lens in attending to Richardson's (2000) five criteria for personal narrative:

1. *Substantive contribution:* Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life?
2. *Aesthetic merit:* Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?

3. *Reflexivity:* How did the author come to write this text? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text?
4. *Impactfulness:* Does this affect me emotionally and/or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to action?
5. *Expresses a reality:* Does this text embody a fleshed out sense of lived experience? (pp. 15-16)

Delimitations

The events described and the content of the words expressed in the present study represent a vulnerable and honest account of the development of my CC of 'nice' dysconscious racism (Le Roux, 2017). Throughout data collection and analysis, I maintained a reflexive journal of the research project in which I documented my thoughts, feelings, and experiences in each step of the research project. I also maintained an audit trail of the research project from the proposal stage through the dissertation defense and final revisions. I utilized memo writing during data analysis to document the thoughts, feelings, reactions, and connections in real time. Due to the nature of autoethnography, generalization was not an intended outcome of the study.

Chapter 4

Findings

Problematizing Niceness

As I generated data for this study, I came to find that being nice and ideas about good teaching are inexplicably linked (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014). Teachers are 'nice' people, or at the very least presumed to be. I drew on my most salient experiences with niceness to investigate how my lived experiences are in conversation with the literature on educational niceness (Baptiste, 2013). This chapter is organized more or less chronologically and divided into ten mindful reflections that narrate the development of my critical consciousness through vignettes, field notes, storied analyses, and relevant artifacts.

My own developing critical consciousness as a White teacher of Black and Brown students reveals what I have come to know and understand about whiteness in elementary schools over time. I worry that my critiques of the individuals in the narrative below will be misconstrued (Castagno, 2006). My intention is not to villainize others in the writing of this dissertation, neither is it to offload my own guilt or shame as a path in some kind of imagined absolution. Rather, I hope to illustrate the ways in which niceness is internalized by individuals and operates through the dysconsciousness to create and sustain systemic societal inequities for marginalized students.

The breadth of this data corpus indicates the ubiquity of educational niceness in my own lived experiences as a White, middle-class, monolingual, female educator. As Castagno (2006) reflected, "Much of what I observed, however, reflects the larger society in which we all live and in most instances, my critiques should be read as being critical of that *system* and those

structures rather than of the *individual teachers*" (p. 20). Additionally, this dissertation shows the messiness of disinvesting from whiteness through CWS (Castagno, 2014).

Mindful Reflection 1: The "Private-Public School"

I taught my first three years at an overwhelmingly White school in an affluent neighborhood close to the community's flagship university. The school's standardized test scores were within the top three highest scores in the district and top tier in the state; I was proud of this and brought it up often in conversations (as if it had anything to do with me). There were spoken and unspoken assumptions about teaching and learning in an environment of 'excellence.' It was superciliously nicknamed "the Private-Public School" by those inside the community. Parents took their children on lavish vacations in the middle of the school year, sometimes missing two or more weeks of school at a time, with no threat of truancy.

The school was teeming with parent volunteers. Teachers were encouraged to select a "Class Mom" to act as something of a teaching assistant (e.g. making copies, organizing materials, throwing class parties, etc.). The thriving, fully funded PTA purchased extravagant platters for every staff meeting and PTA volunteers ran every special evening event at the school. Teachers received piles of Christmas presents in December and again during the themed Teacher Appreciation days each May.

Teachers (especially the youngest teachers) were consistently reminded how *"blessed"* we were to teach there and warned that *"not all schools are like this."* We pitied Title I schools whose teachers had to deal with a host of *"problems"* we could only imagine (Emdin, 2016). Often during my time there I heard teachers say, *"You don't leave this school, you are asked to leave this school."* It was something of an unofficial school motto.

A Portrait of the 'Nice,' 'Preppy,' White Teacher, A Storied Analysis

There were assumptions about what high quality teaching should look like and those assumptions were deeply intertwined with elitism and classism and were expressed through niceness and 'preppiness.' For example, clothing brands were perceived to be an important part of 'looking the part.' One young third grade teacher was also a full-time manager at J. Crew ®, working 40 or more hours per week outside of school hours, for the employee discount. Many young teachers were living beyond their means and pretending they weren't, all in service to their 'nice,' 'preppy,' White teacher performance. My mom and I went on a massive shopping trip in September of my first year because I didn't have "good" teaching clothes (I barely made rent that first month). I found a Brooks Brothers ® seersucker blazer at Goodwill ® and wore it until it was threadbare just to feel like I belonged (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021).

Teachers weren't the only ones leveraging status through their appearance. On picture day I overheard a conversation between kindergarteners. A child of color told her White classmate that she liked the "bright colors" of her dress and the classmate scoffed, "It's Lilly Pulitzer ®, obviously." This type of communication was actually quite commonplace. Students frequently leveraged their status—about their vacations, clothing brands, house size and location, and the careers of their parents—in attempts to one-up each other in ways that continually reaffirmed their conditional acceptance within whiteness (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021).

The clothes were second only to the Pinterest ®-worthy classroom. There was immense pressure to spare-no-expense on classroom decor. The school gave each classroom an excessive $300 decorating budget, though many teachers went well beyond that, dipping deep into their personal summer finances in pursuit of the 'perfect' classroom theme. What's more, many teachers threw out their theme at the end of the school year and redecorated every summer in an

unnecessary display of extravagance. Orientation Night—which was scheduled the week before our contractual in-service days—was the subliminal deadline for classroom decorating. Staff received multiple emails to have all hallways bulletin boards "ready to welcome parents" in the days leading up to Orientation Night. If you weren't in the building by the last week of July your classroom would likely not be ready in time. Teacher vacations or personal time away from school in the weeks leading up to the First Day of School were subtly frowned upon. This was such a major focus among the school's staff that for the first several years of my career, I thought decorating the classroom was the sole purpose of August in-service days.

Preppiness was not just a matter of looking the part or decorating for the part, but performing it too (Bissonette, 2016; Wozolek & Atif, 2022; Lea, 2001). There was a specific type of niceness that was accepted by the Private-Public school community. Being bubbly, social, energetic, perky, approachable, generous (with time and resources), and a perfectionist were synonymous with good teaching (Castagno, 2006; 2008; 2014).

It was expected that these attributes be performed in a genuine way and to be "seen" doing so—not just inside the school building, but in one's personal life as well. Teachers at this school were expected to be "seen" performing their role in the "right" social circles at the "right" social events, an unofficial job requirement that was explained to me by a coworker the summer before my first year. Between working two part time jobs, I took great pains to find the time and resources to participate in local "society," where I was likely to be seen by parents and colleagues. And yet, at the same time that young teachers were unofficially obligated to be out-and-about, it was also expected that they work well beyond contractual hours. The same coworker who encouraged me to "be seen" in the "right" places with the "right" people at the "right" times also suggested I: (a) "pick one day a week to stay late or come in on the weekend"

and (b) park in the front lot so that anyone driving by would "see" my car. I walked to the building in the middle of a snowstorm and posted a picture on social media to honor this advice (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.

The Snowstorm Social Media Post

We Don't 'See' Color, A Storied Analysis

Ideas about race were communicated between the lines at the Private-Public School. One staff member adopted two children while on a summer church mission trip in Haiti. The overwhelmingly White staff applauded her for taking the children out of such a "horrible" situation and into her home (Miller & Harris, 2018). Her children received differential treatment from staff; African American children, on the other hand, did not. It was a joke throughout the school that the S.A.F.E. teacher "didn't have enough to do" during the school day unless he was

called to one of a few token classrooms. I learned quickly and subconsciously that most students pulled from classrooms for 'adverse behaviors' were students of color. Issues of race were avoided and silenced (Annamma et al., 2017; Gordon, 2005; Matias et al., 2014). We embraced diversity because we 'didn't see color,' and always, always, discussions of equity were predicated on keeping the White folks in the room comfortable (Annamma et al., 2017; Bissonnette, 2016; Orozco, 2019).

Once, in my first year I went to my principal because I was struggling with an affluent White intermediate student throwing temper tantrums (rolling on the floor, kicking and screaming, etc.) when she didn't get her way in the Music Room. Upon hearing the student's name, the principal cut me off and said, "We don't have behavior problems here, not all schools are like this," promptly ending the conversation before it could begin (*"You don't leave this school, you are asked to leave this school"*). I felt bewildered, inadequate, and fearful that I might end up in a school with 'real' behavior problems if my teaching didn't improve (Ladson-Billings, 2018).

Don't Take Everything at Face Value, A Storied Analysis

At that time there were three staff members of color—Mrs. Tanner, a special education paraeducator, Mr. Martin, the gym teacher, and the Family Resource Center (FRC) coordinator. Lord knows why, but Mr. Martin and Mrs. Tanner both took me under their wing, as naive and uncritical as I was. They became my most significant connections during my time there. The experiences they shared with me and the advice they gave didn't fit the dominant school narrative. Mr. Martin was frequently portrayed by White teachers, administrators, and parents as lazy, uncaring, and burned out. Multiple teachers warned me not to get too close to him—that his attitude might 'rub off' on me. However, I came to see him as a trusted mentor, someone who

was unfairly ostracized by the school community (DiAngelo, 2011). Mrs. Tanner, on the other hand, was beloved by the community because she performed a version of Blackness that was embraced by the community and celebrated as proof of the community's diversity (Vaught, 2008). She was seen as gregariously warm and friendly, someone that could be an 'enforcer,' when needed. To this end, one teacher told me every school needs someone who can "speak Ghetto." Unfortunately, Mrs. Tanner was that token individual.

I can see now that Mr. Martin and Mrs. Tanner were modeling critical action. From them I learned that the school administration had a reputation for discrimination ("Look at who they hire every year, see how they all look alike and act alike?" "She sure has a type, doesn't she?"). Shortly after one such conversation, a substitute filed a complaint with the district for — racial discrimination. The staff was aghast! I remember when the principal addressed it in a staff meeting, she made sure to discredit the substitute with the implication that she was mentally unstable. I began to see how teachers, parents, and administrators interacted with Mr. Martin, how they wrote him off in meetings and spoke about him in a dismissive sort of way. I saw how they leveraged Mrs. Tanner's race in the service of whiteness, though I wouldn't have the vocabulary to describe what I was seeing until years later. These constitute some of my earliest critical reflections of education.

I made a lot of mistakes at "the Private-Public School." A lot of mistakes. I had no idea what I was doing most of the time. Mostly, I approached music teaching with a naive and uncritical habit of mind. The vignettes, storied analyses, and artifacts in the "Private-Public School" mindful reflection draw on the literature of CWS and dysconscious racism to illustrate distorted understandings of race, uncritical habits of mind, White comfort, and White

emotionality in three of my early career experiences as a novice White music educator (King, 1991; Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013; Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Picower, 2009).

Blackface, A Vignette

I was teaching an instructional unit on the instrument families of the symphony orchestra: Brass, Strings, Woodwind, Percussion. Planning instructional units took me ages because, again, I had no idea what I was doing and was mostly just guessing which resources would work. I found a YouTube ® video of a 1953 Disney ® cartoon called "Toot, Whistle, Plunk, and Boom." I was thrilled! It was silly, fun, and addressed the exact standard I needed it to. It was even the perfect length at about 10 minutes. I started using it in my instructional unit the very next day. The kids loved it and sang along with the video! I thought I had struck gold.

A few days later, after the majority of the grade level had viewed the cartoon, my friend, Mr. Martin, knocked on my door, "You got a second?" Something was off. Usually easy-going, today Mr. Martin's words were clipped. His daughter had loved the song and was excited to show it to her mother, he told me, but they could not allow her to watch it again. I felt anxiety course through me, "What? Why?"

"Because one of the characters is in Blackface," he said simply.

I stared at him stupidly. "In what?" I stammered.

"I hesitated to even tell you because I knew it was an honest mistake, I actually didn't even catch it, but my wife was upset so I thought I should say something." He asked me to pull up the video and we watched it together. At 9 minutes and 20 seconds a minstrel character playing the banjo appeared on the screen, he pointed to it and said, "There, pause it." Mr. Martin then proceeded to educate me on Blackface, something I knew absolutely nothing about. I was baffled, embarrassed, and ashamed, and I let these emotions show all over my—now bright

pink—face. *How had I never learned this?* I thought. I asked him to apologize to his wife and daughter and assured him that I would remove the video from future lessons.

Later though, as I was ruminating on the conversation (*was he trying to make me feel guilty?!*), I remember feeling frustrated at having to throw out a "good" curricular resource all because of one three-second frame. I negotiated with myself: *Maybe I could continue using it if I stopped the video before the 9:20 minute mark.* In the end, I honored my promise to my teammate, my friend, but I wasn't happy about it.

Figure 6.

Disney's ® 1953 Toot, Whistle, Plunk, and Boom

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My conversation with Mr. Martin revealed dysconscious racism on multiple levels. Consider the influences of White comfort and White emotionality on our discussion; both in my expectations of remaining comfortable and in the placating lengths Mr. Martin went through to avoid emotions of guilt, anger, sadness, shame, denial, defensiveness, or cognitive dissonance from me (DiAngelo, 2011). In an analytical memo, I wrote the following,

> *Imagine being put in the position of weighing the consequences of his wife's justified outrage with my fragile White comfort...*

Niceness was a suffocating presence in the room at Mr. Martin's expense, who had been placed in the awkward position of reeducating a 'nice' White girl on a rather rudimentary issue of race. Mr. Martin's carefully planned and nonthreatening choice of words throughout the interaction communicated that he assumed positive intentions from me and was therefore offering the benefit of the doubt (how exhausting for him and how disappointing for the critical discourse this discussion might otherwise have been). In order for me to remain receptive to his communication, Mr. Martin felt obligated to reaffirm my beliefs about myself—before, during, and after the interaction—as a 'nice' and 'good' person, who had made an "honest mistake" and would obviously 'do the right thing.' This was perhaps best exemplified in the 'nice,' apologetic, and self-deprecating nature with which he said,

> *"I hesitated to even tell you because I knew it was an honest mistake, I actually didn't even catch it, but my wife was upset so I thought I should say something."*

"¡Ola!" A Vignette

I had this rolling bulletin board. I spent hours decorating it at the beginning of the school year in a "Travel the World" theme. It had a map of the world and a map of the United States with a witty saying across the top like, *"Music Takes You Places,"* or something. The previous music teacher left a stack of visuals that said, "Hello," in a variety of languages. I pulled them out of storage to use as the border. I planned to add push pins to mark every location from which our songs originated as a way of celebrating musical diversity. I was very excited to say, "We get to add another pin to our map today!" It was something I daydreamed about. I posted a picture of the finished bulletin board to social media at the beginning of the school year; I was so proud of my work.

On the first day of school a third-grade Hispanic student—whose name, at the time, I consistently forgot (Estrella, her name was Estrella)—tugged on my sleeve and said, “Ms. Oliver, hola is spelled wrong.” I glanced briefly at the poster, mildly irritated by the perceived criticism, “Oh, I didn’t make those posters, but I’ll fix it later.”

The next week, she tugged at my sleeve again and said, “Ms. Oliver, hola is spelled wrong.” Again, I glanced at the poster and said, “I didn’t make those posters, I’ll change it later.”

Week after week, “Ms. Oliver, hola is spelled wrong.” Week after week, I brushed her off with an excuse and a halfhearted promise to change it.

Halfway through the fall semester, the child tugged my sleeve with more force and said, “You keep saying you’ll fix it but hola is *spelled wrong.* It’s H-O-L-A, not O-L-A.”

I spun to face her, face flushed, voice raised, “I *also* said over and over that I didn’t make those posters. I can’t help how someone else spells things!” A hush fell over the room, “It’s not even that big of a deal, it’s off by one letter. I have so many things to do. I said I’ll get to it and I’ll- get- to- it- later-” Estrella recoiled.

The “¡Ola!” poster remained on the bulletin board for the entire school year. I finally got around to changing it in October or November of the following year. She never mentioned it to me again.

Figure 4.

Music Takes You Places Bulletin Board

It should be acknowledged that the original photo no longer exists. I have long since deleted it from all platforms including my personal files. The existing photo is the revised version, notably without Spanish representation (see Figure 4).

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The hostility with which I responded to Estrella in this vignette demonstrates how White educators deflect issues of race through emotional tools of whiteness (Picower, 2009). Over the course of several months, I consistently displaced responsibility for racism in my classroom by constructing the racist as someone else, more specifically, the previous music teacher (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013) as shown below,

> *"I* also *said over and over that I didn't make those posters, I can't help how someone else spells things!"*

The uncritical habit of mind in this vignette also illustrates an underlying belief in the monocultural and monolingual status quo of schools (Alim & Paris, 2017). I marginalized a native Spanish-speaker by centering the White gaze in my multicultural practices (Alim & Paris, 2017).

Notably, Estrella demonstrated a consistent commitment to critical discourse over the course of several months in speaking truth to power. That is, until the consequence for doing so became too severe for an eight-year-old child. My very public reaction to her final attempt at correcting the poster was a socially sanctioned counter-move (DiAngelo, 2011) in which I ostracized her in front of her peers in order to protect my fragile whiteness from the same fate (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021). Estrella's cultural invalidation was of no consequence to me in that moment because of the ways whiteness insulated me from my own harmful actions (Matias et al., 2014). For Estrella and her classmates, however, this experience was a proverbial masterclass on the costs of standing up to an authority figure on issues of race (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Orozco, 2019).

First-Come, First-Serve, A Vignette

"Remember, I can only invite eight people. Since we have more than eight singers, not all of you will get to go. If you want to participate, bring back your permission slip as soon as possible and make sure you bring it straight to me or leave it on my desk. If it's in my mailbox, it might not count." With this final word of warning, I handed out the permission slips to the eligible singers. Mia, a fourth grader, gripped hers tightly as she slipped the paper in her agenda notebook. She was thrilled to finally be old enough to attend Honors Chorus and mentioned it to me often.

Honors Chorus was an annual district-wide event for intermediate students. Each school could invite up to eight participants, for a total of more than 200 singers across the district. Students spent the day at the university concert hall, rehearsing and preparing for a public concert. They got to ride a bus into town, eat pizza for dinner, and perform on a huge stage! I had chosen to select my school's participants on a first-come, first-serve basis.

The following day, permission slips started trickling in. The day after, I received a few more. Six spots filled. Mia tracked me down on her way out to the bus at dismissal, "I'm going to bring mine back tomorrow morning, Ms. Oliver! My mom said she will sign it tonight!" As I hurried out the door on Thursday afternoon, I found one slip in my mailbox and carelessly added it to the stack without looking at the name. Seven spots filled.

Before the bell on Friday morning, I was skimming through emails at my desk when Mia and Lilly skipped into the Music Room, arm in arm, clutching freshly signed Honors Chorus permission slips. They were neighbors and their families often carpooled. As if choreographed, they reached over my desk organizer, each placing a signed permission slip on the desk calendar in front of me so that the papers landed neatly on top of the stack—first Lilly's and then Mia's.

“Did we make it?!” The third- and the fourth-grade neighbors were holding hands, jumping up and down, and looking expectantly at the stack on my desk.

“I only have one spot left,” I said slowly. They stilled. There was a worried silence. I shuffled the stack of slips, not remembering which six had been handed to me and which had been left in my mailbox. I looked down at the two slips that the girls brought in, nine students and only eight spots. I stalled for more time, “It was first-come, first-serve. I can only pick one of you.”

The room became very quiet, their bodies tensed. Mia shook her head slightly, dark fairy-knot curls bouncing from side to side. She squared her shoulders and stared at me defiantly, “But we handed ours to you at the exact same time.”

“Well— Lilly handed me hers first. See?” I held up the third grader’s half sheet of paper with neat handwriting in blue ink and her mother’s loopy signature on the bottom line, “It was on my desk first.” A long silence followed. The two children looked at each other, then at me.

“Can’t we both go?” Lilly pleaded, looking with pity at her friend.

“I’m sorry girls, I can only take eight singers,” I paused, “You can try again next year, Mia.”

“But that’s *not fair!* We handed them to you at the *same time!*” Mia contested shrilly, “Plus, I’m older!”

I straightened my cardigan and ended the conversation with a cold authority, “Those are the rules. I said it was first-come, first-serve. You should have gotten it to me sooner. The bell is about to ring. You don’t want to be late for class.”

Eight White children went to the district Honors Chorus that year, including one third grader and an anonymous child who left their slip in my mailbox instead of on my desk.

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Educational hegemonic whiteness functions most effectively in mundane, everyday classroom happenings (Bonilla-Silva, 2012). Consider, for example, this vignette in which a child of color was denied entry to a gate-kept musical experience as the result of the music educator's feigned objectivity and view of the classroom as an apolitical space (Baptiste, 2008; Bissonnette, 2016; Bradley, 2015). By rejecting Mia's permission slip and accepting Lilly's, I fully embraced the myth of neutrality, believing myself and my decision-making to be fair and impartial (Bissonnette, 2016). I acted automatically on deeply held and wholly unexamined Eurocentric beliefs about who belonged in select, highly competitive music ensembles, and who did not (Bradley, 2006; Clauhs, 2021; Hess, 2018b). Under the guise of objectivity, I withheld these views from the students as well as from myself. Mia, however, saw straight through the mirage and spoke out against inequity when she said the following,

"But that's not fair! We handed them to you at the same time! Plus, I'm older!"

The way in which I withdrew the warmth in the room and refused to continue the engagement in response to her outcry is another example of socially sanctioned punishment aimed at preserving my beliefs about myself as 'nice,' fair, and unbiased (Bissonnette, 2016).

Mindful Reflection 2: The Next Chapter

I was an island. The time spent working long past my contractual time, the energy spent pouring into a community that treated me with a cold indifference, and three years of lunches alone at my desk were too heavy and I was tired of trying to reach a constantly shifting goal post. It didn't help that I had inherited a program that was too 'big' for a novice teacher. I had run myself ragged trying to follow in the footsteps of my predecessor and I was steadily becoming more and more disillusioned with the unofficial job requirements of the Private-Public School.

The glitz and glamor of the nice-preppy-teacher faded. I was burned out from trying to look the part, act the part, and be "seen" performing the part. It was expensive and unfulfilling. Even so, I continued desperately striving for insider status as the pressure to be accepted by this community grew urgent (the dreaded pink slip year only 12 months away).

Mutual Disillusionment, A Storied Analysis

Two days before Winter Break I was summoned by the principal to a "Mid-Year Review." Turns out my worries were confirmed: the community had not accepted me; the disillusionment was mutual. She informed me that, though my professional evaluations were "strong," she would not be renewing my contract. She kept her cards very close to her hand, but the unspoken words were loud, *"You are not one of us."* Deep in my gut I already knew that, but the cold reality was brutal, and I was crushed. *If I wasn't one of them, who was I?*

The despair, however, was short lived. This was, by far, the best bad news I had ever received. On the first day of Winter Break, I was scrolling through the district website when I came across a news bulletin announcing the principals of several brand-new schools, for which construction was already underway. The hiring window would open in early January. I drafted an email to two of the newly announced principals. Ja'Niyah Miller responded within the hour.

First Impressions, A Vignette

Ja'Niyah Miller was coming to observe. Sweat beaded on my forehead, despite the January chill. I pulled another Clorox wipe from the cylinder. I had already dusted, cleaned, and tidied every visible surface, had I missed something obvious? I went back to the table and straightened the corners of my portfolio binder for the nth time. On top of the binder, I had attached a cover page that read, *"Welcome Ms. Miller,"* in twirling Edwardian Script font. I tucked and re-tucked the blue plastic chair under the table. There was toothpaste on my freshly

pressed Oxford shirt and my necklace clasp had worked its way around to the front. I straightened the necklace chain and scraped my thumb nail across the toothpaste stain. When I looked up, Ja'Niyah Miller was standing in the doorway.

She was petite, barely 5'1," with a commanding presence and effortless elegance. She wore a sparkling statement necklace and a tailored dark purple blouse that shimmered under the fluorescent lights. She walked easily across the tiled floor in five-inch black patent-leather heels. Each strand of hair sat precisely in a styled bob that tucked just-so below her chin. The red lipstick she had been wearing all day was flawlessly lined. Ms. Miller placed her designer tote to the right of my portfolio, took out a notepad and pen, and pulled out the chair in a fluid motion. She sat tall and still with hands folded gracefully in her lap. Her presence in that plastic blue chair was such that she could have been presenting the final arguments of a high-stakes grand jury trial or seated at the head of a dark cherry conference table surrounded by floor-to-ceiling glass windows in the penthouse executive suite of a corporate firm on Wall Street. She would have been right at home in either setting.

Ms. Miller stayed for almost an hour after the observation. She conversed easily, as though she had all the time in the world to meet with me. She listened twice as much as she spoke, gently guiding the conversation with open-ended questions. She complimented my multidisciplinary lesson plan and perused intently through the portfolio binder I had prepared, asking targeted questions about each section (an action that pleased me greatly, considering the time I'd poured into it). She was detail oriented. When my answers were too broad, she pursed her lips and pushed for specifics.

From this very first encounter I could tell, Ja'Niyah Miller was someone worth listening to. Always, when Ja'Niyah Miller spoke about East Pine Elementary, she did so with authority,

passion, and commitment. She delivered every sentence with precision and intention, as if the words had always been there waiting to be summoned by her. She rarely used filler words or sounds. Ms. Miller remains one of the most intentional people I have ever met. She was direct and candid, using words I had never heard anyone say out loud—racialized words like, "Black," and "Brown."

Her plans and dreams for East Pine were bold: a PBL-driven curriculum with the arts as a central tenet. She wanted a team of creative people; she wanted to take risks and think outside the box. This is why, she explained, she had decided to hire the Special Area team first. Her tone was unyielding when she placed a manicured hand on the table and said, "I will always put children first, even if it means more work for adults. Opening this school will not be easy and it will not be for everyone."

I have to get this job, I thought.

****

I have repeatedly tried and failed to analyze this vignette without emotion. As such, I have given up the pretense. I will have to honor in analysis that this memory brings significant emotions to the surface (Anderson, 2006). In part because I can pinpoint the origins of my own long and arduous journey in disinvesting from whiteness to this precise conversation with Ja'Niyah Miller. The decisiveness with which I had been recently rejected from the Private-Public School certainly bears weight. Had I been welcomed into the world of the nice-preppy-teachers, I would not have found myself in a position to sit across from Ms. Miller and imagine for myself the picture she was painting; the long and arduous journey would have been snuffed out before it could begin.

What I have attempted to portray in this vignette and what I continually return to in analysis is the sheer pull Ms. Miller's gravitational field as a critically conscious leader. From this very first interaction, Ms. Miller demonstrated a deliberate disinvestment from whiteness and an unapologetic commitment to disrupting the educational status quo through critical action, as exemplified in her statement below,

> *"I will always put children first, even if it means more work for adults. Opening this school will not be easy and it will not be for everyone."*

This was the first, but certainly not the last time I would hear her say some combination of these words to young uncritical White educators like me. Amid health battles, bureaucracy, and in the mundane everyday happenings of running a high-needs Title I school, I witnessed her uphold this belief time and again as principal of East Pine Elementary School. Come what may, Ja'Niyah Miller stood her ground. It made her a mentor to many and an enemy to some, but to me personally, it made all the difference.

Contending with My Race, A Storied Analysis

White, middle class, monolingual, monocultural experiences made up virtually all of my social interactions in childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. I never 'saw' myself as a member of a racial group because I had the privilege of defaulting to whiteness (Orozco, 2019). Ms. Miller knew this when she hired me. She called on a weekday, about two weeks after the official interview and a month after observing my lesson at the Private-Public School, to offer me the East Pine general music position. I told her felt called to East Pine and had prayed hard about it.

She said, "Hearing you say that you've been praying just confirms that I've made the right decision because I have been praying too, from the very beginning." Her job offer came

with a sincere warning that as a White teacher of "Black and Brown students" (a phrase that made me flinch every time she said it) I would undoubtedly struggle to overcome "issues of race and culture" including racial bias, color-evasiveness, and cultural incompetency. The vignettes in this section illustrate the extent to which my dysconscious racism shaped my worldview in the summer before the inaugural year (King, 1991).

"Ghetto" Names, A Vignette

The five Special Area positions—Library, Art, Music, Physical Education, and STEM—were among the first hired to the staff of East Pine. We were all relatively close in age, but I was the youngest team member in my mid-20s. We had a lot in common from the jump.

We met for lunch several times that summer to get to know each other. At one such meeting, somehow, someway, the conversation at the table turned to unusual first names. We went around the table sharing the 'weirdest' names we had encountered in our careers, or names that had been 'ruined' for us due to student behavior or popularity.

"I will never name my child Connor. I've known too many Connors and there was something wrong with all of 'em."

"We had a Vin'nyla, like the ice cream flavor."

"I knew a kid whose name was Pryncess Twilight. So- strange-!"

"Oh, the phonetic spellings are what get me. Sarah but spelled S-e-h-r-u-h. Like, why?"

"Some of these names wouldn't even fit on a driver's license! Pryncess Twilight?? How do you go through life like that?"

When it was my turn to share, I said, "I say bring it on! All the ghetto names. There were so many boring names at my old school. So many. There must have been two Emilys in every class! I can't wait to meet a LaDasha, or a Shaniqua, or a Marquez," I said laughing.

Later, the group was sharing about their families, significant others, and children. The librarian said, “I have a toddler. She’s gonna tear through here swinging from the rafters in a couple of years. She’s all spit and vinegar. I’m glad she has some grit, but jeez!”

“Oh, how old?” the gym teacher asked, “Mine just turned two and she’s putting us through it.”

“What’s her name?” the librarian asked.

His cheeks flushed sheepishly, and his voice became suddenly small and quiet, “Emily,” he said with a sideways glance at me.

****

The frivolity of this exchange exemplifies how the deficit discourses of ‘nice’ White educators furthers deficit narratives about communities of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006b). Humor played an important role in setting the parameters that insulated the conversation in niceness, wherein the group was willing to engage with and be entertained by, subliminal racist messages about social status, level of education, and community values so long as they remained within the humorous, lighthearted context of the ‘joke.’

This vignette also points to the normalizing force of hegemonic Whiteness in determining correctness and incorrectness (Bonilla-Silva, 2012). Consider how group members filtered the perceived correctness or incorrectness of students’ names through the White gaze (Alim & Paris, 2017), such as in the following exchange,

Teacher 1: *“Oh the phonetic spellings are what get me. Sarah but spelled S-e-h-r-u-h. Like, why?”*

Teacher 2: *“Some of these names wouldn’t even fit on a driver’s license! Pryncess Twilight?? How do you go through life like that?”*

The perceived innocuity of the conversation allowed the group to evade direct dialogue about skin color (Annamma et al., 2017). By normalizing traditionally White names and 'othering' or exoticizing the names of people of color, the group was able to construct a racial hierarchy with themselves on top (Alim & Paris, 2017; Leonardo, 2002; Matias et al., 2014).

Further, the role of humor surrounding the topic of names introduced an element of absurdity to the dialogue that positioned people of color as inconsequential in society and therefore less than fully human (Kendi, 2019, Leonardo, 2002). That is to say, if a name is exoticized, trivialized, or invalidated through whiteness, the persons and communities attached to that name will also be exoticized, trivialized, or invalidated, while whiteness absolves itself of any residual harm incurred (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013). My racist comment is a prime example,

> *"I say bring it on! All the ghetto names. There were so many boring names at my old school. So many. There must have been two Emilys in every class! I can't wait to meet a LaDasha, or a Shaniqua, or a Marquez."*

The inclusion of the indefinite article, "a," before each name indicates preconceived notions of children of color as stock characters, rather than complex human beings (Kendi, 2019; Leonardo, 2002). Additionally, this comment contains performative tools of whiteness, in which I sought to publicly position myself as a 'good' White person for denouncing traditionally White names that were common at the predominantly White school I was leaving and embracing the 'challenge' of a high-needs school with a racially diverse student population (Picower, 2009).

"People are not mixed. Dogs are mixed," A Vignette

During another informal summer gathering, I found myself eating lunch with Ms. Miller, the guidance counselor, and the assistant principal (AP). I was telling the AP about a funny

conversation I had had with one of the students at a recent East Pine meet-and-greet. She couldn't quite picture the student in question, and so I defaulted to a description of her physical appearance. "She's mixed," I explained. I repeated myself a bunch of times, "She's a mixed third grader." "She has long dark hair, about this tall, she's mixed."

Each time I described the child this way, Ms. Miller, from her seat beside me, corrected me quietly without leaving her own conversation or fully engaging in ours. It went something like this: "She's mixed."

"Biracial."

"She's a mixed 3rd grader."

"Biracial."

"She has long dark hair, about this tall, she's mixed."

"Biracial."

After about the fourth such description, Ms. Miller disengaged abruptly from her conversation to the surprise of everyone at the table and turned to face me directly. She placed her manicured hand on the table between us, I stared at it, not daring to meet her eye, "People are not mixed. *Dogs* are mixed. People are biracial or multiracial." I gaped at her in response. My speechlessness confirmed that she had driven home the point. She shifted in her chair and picked up where she had left off with Mrs. Clark, as if she had not just removed the gravity and oxygen from the room.

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Here is an example of my own miseducation on an issue of race (King, 1991). I ignored Ms. Miller's more subtle corrections, dysconsciously assuming she had not been speaking to me (Kendi, 2019). When it became clear that she was, indeed, addressing me, she first used my own

language to identify the distorted understanding (*"People are not mixed."*) before correcting it succinctly (*"Dogs are mixed. People are biracial or multiracial."*) and affirming through reflective silence that the issue would not need further clarification.

The entire critical discourse lasted less than one minute. In the grand scheme of things, it was a relatively small moment. However, this vignette illustrates how Ms. Miller capitalized on small moments in order to trouble taken for granted assumptions, problematize uncritical habits of mind, and make the dysconscious conscious (King, 1991). Further, this vignette illustrates a key characteristic of Ms. Miller's leadership. As this chapter will show, Ms. Miller engaged critical discourses in good faith, consistently facilitating discussions under the belief that, "*when we know better, we do better."* Ms. Miller knew that accurate critical self-reflection would lead to transformative critical action. Her critical action in engaging a critical discourse served as a model for everyone at the lunch table and set a precedent for future practice: East Pine would be a space to engage courageous conversations about race (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021).

Dream Wish List, A Vignette

I literally built my dream classroom. And it was, too—the East Pine Music Room is an amazing space. Even seven years later, sometimes I just have to stop and admire. It has anything and everything you could imagine for an elementary music classroom and some things that might come as a surprise, like a fully integrated Yamaha ® LC4 music technology lab (see Figure 8; see Appendix B). I credit Ms. Miller who, when discussing plans for the Music Room, said simply, "Give me your dream Wish List and we'll go from there." I hesitated; *Dream Wish List is expensive.* As if reading my mind she said, "I just want to see it."

When the list was ready, we met again. I handed it across her dark cherry desk and waited. And waited. She was quiet for an infinite amount of time. I started to squirm; *she hates*

it. I made a mental note of things to strike off the list (*Did I really need three frog rasps?*). After eternity had passed, she nodded, "Okay," and fell silent again. I opened my mouth to say I didn't need three frog rasps or twelve tambourines, but she spoke instead, "Looks good."

My jaw was on the floor. I was sure I'd heard her wrong. *Did she just say, "Okay,"? To that price tag?!* "Yes. All of it." (*Was she actually telepathic??*) "But our classes will cap at 25 so let's take the quantities from 30 of everything to 28. Go ahead and start the PO Requests." I took the list next door to the bookkeeper's office who said (and I'm not kidding), "I can't wait to find out what a frog rasp is."

We proceeded in this *Spare No Expense* mindset and built the most incredible elementary music classroom I have ever seen (see Figure 5). We ordered so much stuff. So much. Three days before the first day of school, my classroom had rows upon rows of floor to ceiling boxes. I spent nights, weekends, and every spare moment unpacking box after box, building music technology workstations, organizing, reorganizing, and re-reorganizing. When students walked in the door on the first day, I had barely cleared a path from the door to the circle carpet in the middle of the room. It would be months before I successfully cleared all of the hundreds of boxes out of the room and years before every instrument found permanent shelf- or wall-space.

Figure 5.

The East Pine Elementary School Music Room

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At the time, Ms. Miller's *Spare No Expense* attitude toward the arts programs at East Pine was exciting, fun, and the very best kind of stressful. I got to build my dream classroom! I handpicked every drum, egg shaker, and xylophone! I got to spend someone else's money, and just about as much of it as I wanted! My thoughts didn't go much deeper than that and with all the boxes to unpack, who had the time to think deeply about anything?

What I didn't see then that I see now is the critical action, intentionality, and foresight behind Ms. Miller's decision to *spare no expense*. Consider, for example, that she chose to hire the Special Area team first and prioritized the Special Area classrooms in the school budget. This decision funneled large sums of school funding to the learning spaces in the building with the farthest reach; the Special Area resources would benefit every East Pine student on a weekly basis for as many as six years of their public education. In this way, Ms. Miller secured not just equitable, but privileged access to high-quality materials, resources, and experiences for East Pine students.

Additionally, by *sparing no expense* on the East Pine arts programs in particular, Ms. Miller resisted deficit narratives about Title I arts programs as underfunded and under-resourced

and instead, made the East Pine ordering and planning process an exemplar for future new schools in the district (and this is not just hyperbole, by the way. After setting up the East Pine music technology lab, the technology department opted to include the necessary electrical work into future budgets for new builds). Further, Ms. Miller ensured that the East Pine arts programs would not easily become underfunded or under-resourced, given the amount of specialty equipment (the Art Room has sewing machines for heaven's sake) therein (Abramo, 2015; Abril, 2009; Campbell et al., 2007).

Mindful Reflection 3: One Step Forward, Three Steps Back

Just as Ms. Miller had warned, I struggled. Dysconscious racism framed my conceptualizations of student behavior, culture, and music pedagogy. I built 'nice' systems and structures in my classroom in the service of whiteness. My one saving grace was that I was surrounded by leaders who chose to willfully disregard my tools of whiteness and put me in uncomfortable conversations, time and time again. The following vignettes illustrate several pivotal experiences that forced a critical discourse with a critically conscious mentor.

Main Character Energy, A Storied Analysis

I joined the PBIS team, having absolutely no idea what the acronym, PBIS, stood for, let alone what a PBIS team *did.* Something about behavior management? I figured I could learn to fly the plane in the air. With 'behavior management' on the mind, I dove headfirst into Whole Brain Teaching (WBT), a set of instructional techniques that presume to establish objective rather than subjective behavioral conditions for teaching and learning (Baptiste, 2008; Biffle, 2013). I inhaled the book, *Whole Brain Teaching for Challenging Kids:(and the Rest of Your Class Too!)* and practiced each chapter's scripted examples in my head (Biffle, 2013). I watched YouTube ® videos of each instructional strategy and formatted my lesson plans to mimic these

exemplars. I was taken by the fast-paced, high-energy structures, the hand motions, the call-and-response. It was fun, exciting! It was like a performance, and wasn't I a performer at heart? I was trading in my 'preppy' teaching persona for this theatrical one. Little did I know how difficult the theatrics would be to sustain day after day, week after week. Main Character Energy is actually just a fast track to burnout.

Every grade level recited The Five Class Rules (with choreography!) at the beginning of every music lesson. It was a ritual and one that I considered Very Important (capital V, capital I). Classes entered on a Voice Level 0, formed a circle at the Music Carpet, and echoed me in our performance of The Five Class Rules. Every grade level. All year. And with enthusiasm! I posted The Five Class Rules all over my classroom:

1. *Follow Directions Quickly!*
2. *Raise Your Hand for Permission to Speak or Leave Your Seat!*
3. *Keep Your Hands and Feet to Yourself!*
4. *Make Smart Choices!*
5. *Keep Your Dear Teacher Happy!*

There are, of course, a number of underlying assumptions about *who* constitutes a 'challenging' kid and how dysconscious racism informs the ways an individual—particularly a 'nice' White lady with *Main Character Energy*—might interpret behavior in a way that is determined to be 'challenging' (Howard, 2013; Irby, 2014). And then, there is the problem of steeling oneself to encounter 'challenging' kids before one has even met said kids (Howard, 2013; Irby, 2014). Additionally, the practice of over-scaffolding behavior expectations creates oppressive conditions for marginalized children (Hammond, 2015). Many of the problematic ways I acted on my deficit views are illustrated in the following series of vignettes.

"You Petty," A Vignette

The equipment was brand-spanking new, and I was scared to use it. It didn't help that I hadn't quite figured out how to arrange the big, bulky furniture in my classroom and I still had towers of boxes cluttering the open floor space. We barely had enough space to enter and exit, let alone use the materials in a functional way. Still, I had a deep-seeded distrust for the students that I communicated in a thousand spoken and unspoken ways. They knew it, I didn't (or at least, I would never have admitted to it).

Halfway through October, the xylophones remained untouched. A fifth-grade class filed into the Music Room and formed a circle at the carpet. I began the lesson as I always did, by reciting the 5-Class-Rules. The class complied unenthusiastically. As we started our dramatic recitation of "Rule Number Four, Make Smart Choices," a student standing across from me on the carpet rolled his eyes and sat down. I told him to stand up. He ignored me. "We'll start over," I announced, and restarted: "Rule Number One, Follow Directions Quickly!" staring condescendingly at him as I said it. The class groaned inwardly. He glared and settled in, stretching out his legs and leaning back on his hands.

"I gave you a direction, I expect you to follow- it- quickly-" I chirped. This was my go-to phrase with 'defiant' students. He shook his head. I went on with the 5-Class-Rules, staring at him the whole time. We were in a full-fledged stand-off.

"Rule Number Five! Keep your dear teacher happy!" The class echoed dully. I motioned to the group to sit on the carpet. As I sat crisscross, I addressed the defiant student from across the circle, "Lorenzo, your choices are making me *unhappy,*" (another gem I repeated endlessly).

To my surprise, he responded, “You make us do these stupid rules every time we come here, we haven’t used the instruments at all, we just come in and sit at this carpet every week and sing some stupid nursery rhyme.”

“You are choosing to be disrespectful,” I said with a predatory calm, “Go sit in Timeout and practice Rule Number One.” I pointed to the Timeout desk at the front corner of the classroom (we barely had room to enter and exit yet I had carved out a corner of the room for ‘behavior management’).

“No.”

“Go to Timeout. *Now*.”

Lorenzo stood. When he spoke his words were venomous, “Music sucks,” he snarled. He took arduous, slow steps, making a show of scuffing his shoes so that each step squeaked loudly on the white tiles. His peers laughed at each squeak. Their laughter made my cheeks burn red. He stood at the desk, leaning his weight on the back of the chair so that it became unbalanced, the front legs lifted off the floor and the seat banged loudly into the bottom of the hollow desk.

“I said sit— not— stand—” I over-enunciated each syllable so that the consonants exploded from behind my teeth.

“You petty,” he pulled back the plastic blue chair with excess force, sending it clattering to the floor. With all the main character energy I could muster, I marched to my classroom phone and made a big show of calling the front office. Loudly enough for the class to hear I declared, “I need to have a student removed from the classroom. He is throwing chairs.”

When the PBIS coach arrived a few minutes later—breathing heavily after running across the building—Lorenzo was sitting in the chair with his arms crossed on top of the desk and his

head buried in his hands. His ears were red in a way that betrayed him; he had been crying silently. Mr. Williams looked at me confused, whispered to Lorenzo, and they left the room.

The next morning, Mr. Williams knocked on my door, “Hey, can we talk about Lorenzo?” I felt immediately guarded, I leaned one hip on the instrument counter and crossed my arms, “Um, is something wrong with the referral?” I mumbled.

He launched right in, “Lorenzo was on my caseload at George Washington Carver. You have no idea how far he’s come. Two years ago, he really would have thrown that chair across the room. He would have destroyed the whole room, that’s why I ran over here. He used to stand in the hallway, fists curled, face beet red, just— so angry. He was always ready to fight. That situation yesterday— He was angry when he left your room.”

“*He* was angry??” I interrupted incredulously, “He said all kinds of disrespectful things to me,” my voice began to quiver, my hands were shaking.

“But he *went,*” Mr. Williams cut in emphatically, “He went to Timeout. He pulled the chair out and it fell backwards. But he did what you told him to do.”

My eyes welled with tears, “I feel like you’re attacking me! He was being defiant, and I, I didn’t want to— I mean, I didn’t mean to— I was just trying— I, I—” I trailed off, beside myself, unable to continue as a sob caught in my throat. Mascara trailed down my cheek, I roughly brushed it away with my palm. Mr. Williams was taken off guard by this outpouring of emotion. He pulled me into a side hug, “It’s alright,” he said awkwardly, “It’s nothing but love for ya, Mace.”

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Ideas about control plague this vignette. Again, we see evidence of the normalizing force of hegemonic whiteness in determining correctness and incorrectness (Bonilla-Silva, 2012).

Withholding the instruments from students—whom I believed to be irresponsible, destructive, and untrustworthy—until they could 'behave appropriately' indicates underlying assumptions about, (a) appropriate and inappropriate decorum in music classrooms; (b) who deserves access to high-quality music education resources and how often and; (c) on whose authority such determinations are made. Such is the uncritical acceptance of the status quo of hegemonic whiteness by 'nice' White teachers (Castagno, 2014; Miller & Harris, 2018).

I held tightly to the deficit belief that educational materials and resources were a privilege, not a right, and that their behavior would determine whether we learned music the "fun way" or the "unfun way" (things I actually used to say). This language is an example of culture of poverty discourse, founded in the unexamined belief that my role was to bring order to students' chaotic lives and prepare them for the 'real world' (Alim & Paris, 2017; Castagno, 2014; Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2017a). Student rebellion, then, was further evidence of the need for 'discipline' and 'order' rather than a reflection of my patterns of oppressive behavior as an educator (Castagno, 2008). All of which brings us back to Lorenzo.

While I was reacting to his immediate actions, Lorenzo was responding to—more specifically, protesting—the culmination of my established pattern of oppressive behavior as a 'nice' White lady (Kenyon, 2022; Miller & Harris, 2018; Orozco, 2019). The implementation of oppressive structures, like the Five Class Rules, centered White ways of knowing, being, and doing (Alim & Paris, 2017; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). By simply refusing to comply with the system, Lorenzo was resisting not just whiteness, but my personal performance of whiteness, as shown below,

"You make us do these stupid rules every time we come here, we haven't used the instruments at all, we just come in and sit at this carpet every week and sing some stupid nursery rhyme."

Given my complete investment in whiteness, I perceived Lorenzo's resistance as an affront and reacted as if I had been personally attacked (Picower, 2009).

White emotionality shapes how we come to understand politeness (Miller & Harris, 2018). First, we see the 'nice' ways in which the narrative was controlled through an undercurrent of privilege and penalty (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021). Lorenzo was penalized for escalating the situation while I was privileged, and more specifically, vindicated. For all intents and purposes, I was egging him on only to gaslight him. My cold demeanor, pointed stare, and dehumanizing condescension in the examples below communicated underlying deficit beliefs about students of color:

- *"I gave you a direction, I expect you to follow it quickly."*
- *"You are choosing to be disrespectful. Go sit in Timeout and practice Rule Number One."*
- *"I said sit, not stand."*

At no point during the interaction did I break character from my 'nice' White lady performance (Bissonnette, 2016). Then, when Lorenzo spoke out against my oppressive niceness (*"You petty"*), I sought to penalize him through channels to which I had privileged access from my position as an authority figure. Over the phone, I purposefully led my colleague to believe the Timeout chair had gone sailing through the air, endangering the safety of all in its path, and that we were all in grave danger, as the following statement shows,

"I need to have a student removed from the classroom. He is throwing chairs."

I expected that my account of the events would be privileged as objective and so I shaped the narrative in my favor (Annamma et al., 2017). Such is the power of whiteness in controlling the narrative that forms 'objectivity,' and social 'realities' (Annamma et al., 2017; Baptiste, 2008; DiAngelo, 2011). Consider, as well, the animalistic rhetoric used to describe Lorenzo's actions (*"When he spoke his words were venomous, 'Music sucks,' he snarled"*). Dehumanizing rhetoric such as "venomous," and "snarled" originate in social messages about people of color as dangerous, violent, or aggressive, and morally, emotionally, or intellectually less than fully human (Howard, 2013; Irby, 2014; Kendi, 2019).

Then, there is the follow-up conversation with our PBIS Coach, Mr. Williams. White comfort stunted an open critical dialogue with Mr. Williams. Mr. Williams approached the conversation with the expectation that this would be a meeting-of-the-minds (Howard, 2003). That is, we would engage in a critical collegial discourse for the equity and well-being of a child of color. Hence, Mr. Williams's fervent defense of Lorenzo that follows,

> Mr. Williams: *"Lorenzo was on my caseload at George Washington Carver. You have no idea how far he's come. Two years ago, he really would have thrown that chair across the room. He would have destroyed the whole room, that's why I ran over here. He used to stand in the hallway, fists curled, face beet red, just— so angry. He was always ready to fight. That situation yesterday— He was angry when he left your room."*
>
> Macy: *"He was angry?? He said all kinds of disrespectful things to me," my voice began to quiver, my hands were shaking.*
>
> Mr. Williams: *"But he* went! *He* went *to Timeout. He pulled the chair out and it fell backwards. But he did what you told him to do."*

Instead of a critical discourse for the equity and wellbeing of a child of color, I victimized myself through an outpouring of White emotionality that left me utterly speechless, and unable to continue the engagement (DiAngelo, 2011). When Mr. Williams came too close to speaking candidly about race, I reacted defensively and retaliated against him with an emotional tool of whiteness (*"I feel like you're attacking me!"*) in an attempt to absolve myself of the guilt and shame of my own behavior (Picower, 2009). The emotional outburst was also strategic in nature, serving as a socially sanctioned counter-move which excused me from continuing critical racial discourse with Mr. Williams (DiAngelo, 2011; Orozco, 2019). Consider the abrupt manner with which the conversation ended,

"It's alright, It's nothing but love for ya, Mace."

The moment I began to cry Mr. Williams felt obligated to concede the argument and restore my sense of emotional safety (Orozco, 2019).

Protection from Uncomfortable Feelings, A Storied Analysis

My follow-up meeting about Lorenzo was the first in a long series of uncomfortable conversations with the larger-than-life PBIS Coach, Mr. Williams. Loud, funny, and energetic, he was like a Southern Baptist preacher, gregarious and passionate in a simultaneously infectious and intimidating way. Students were in awe of him, teachers were frequently unnerved by him. He would be the first to admit that he wasn't going to "break it to you easy" and he wasn't one to "sugarcoat." His disinvestment from whiteness, combined with a proclivity for wearing his emotions on his sleeve, was not well received by the reserved, modest, 'polite' White staff members (like me) who expected to be emotionally protected from uncomfortable feelings.

"Their Least Favorite Specials." A Vignette

The Special Area team had consistent Behavior Check-in meetings with Mr. Williams in that first year. The introverted and soft-spoken Art Teacher, Ms. Adams and I were the only Special Area team members in this particular Behavior Check-in session in Late Autumn. I felt guarded the moment Ms. Adams and I walked into the STEM Lab to find Mr. Williams waiting for us with the guidance counselor and FRC coordinator.

"It's just going to be us today," Mr. Williams said. Ms. Adams and I shared a foreboding look as we slid into the desks at the front of the classroom. While these meetings were never particularly uplifting, the knowledge that we were down three teammates was troubling. The meeting began as I had come to expect. We made 'The List' on the whiteboard. That is, a list of (mostly intermediate) students who were 'disrupting' our classes and stopping instruction. We aired our grievances of each student in turn.

As the meeting turned into another venting session for the two 'nice' young White teachers, Mr. Williams grew increasingly irritable. Clearly unwilling to entertain yet another discussion on the ways these students of color had defied or disrespected us, Mr. Williams snapped. "Look, I took a poll," he said slamming the marker lid closed; it made a crisp *click* as it locked into place. "I went to each fifth-grade class and asked them their least favorite Specials classes and they said, 'Art and Music.'"

The comment cut through the air and hung there, between us. I gaped at him, stunned. I turned to Ms. Adams. She sat perfectly still, as if through stillness she might disappear from the room. She stared miserably at her hands, which were clasped so tightly the whites of her knuckles showed. Her mousy blonde hair hung in front of her face; she wouldn't look up. After a tense silence I backtracked, stammering, "We just need *time.* I— they— don't even really know

us yet. It's only October. We only see them once a week. We just need more time to get to know them."

"At this point, I'm not sure you know how to do that," Mr. Williams replied curtly. I bristled. He continued with a harsh edge in his voice, "No one else seems to be struggling as much as the two of you. I've brought Mrs. Mitchell and Mrs. Clark here because they are great at building relationships," (*and*—in parenthesis—*you're not*). "They are here to brainstorm some ideas," he finished, gesturing roughly towards them. He pulled a chair back from the table and sat abruptly. Mrs. Mitchell nodded and smiled softly, sensing that she and Mrs. Clark had walked blindly into some ongoing tension between Mr. Williams and the team. If she spoke, I didn't hear her. I was a vault. I didn't say anything else and I don't remember a word anyone else said. I just remember staring at the table waiting for the perceived attack to end.

I didn't 'come to' until we were well out the door and down the hall, opening the door to the library. I propped open the door with my shoe, picking mindlessly at a tab of my Lilly Pulitzer ® planner as we loitered listlessly in the doorway. Ms. Adams started to cry, "That was so *mean.* How could he say those things about us?"

"What good was going to come from that?" I said angrily, "It was three against two."

****

This vignette offers another charged example of uncritical White emotionality within a paradigm of niceness (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013). In addition to White defensiveness, guilt, and anger, we see the emotional toll of White emotionality on someone as disinvested from whiteness as Mr. Williams; someone who had consistently offered mentorship and support only to be rebuked by 'nice' White teachers, time and again. Having had many similar conversations with 'nice' White staff members by this point in late Autumn, in this vignette Mr. Williams did

something unexpected and socially risky: he voiced his frustration at our apolitical orientations and uncritical understandings of 'adverse behavior,' as the statement below shows,

> *"Look, I took a poll. I went to each fifth-grade class and asked them their least favorite Specials classes and they said Art and Music."*

Ms. Adams's disengaged reaction shows that his frustration frightened us, as two young 'nice' White ladies who had been socialized to fear outspoken Black men (Irby, 2014),

> *She sat perfectly still, as if through stillness she might disappear from the room. She stared miserably at her hands which were clasped so tightly the whites of her knuckles showed. Her mousy blonde hair hung in front of her face, she wouldn't look up.*

When my attempt at defensiveness was countered, I also demonstrated a refusal to continue the engagement, as shown below (DiAngelo, 2011).

> *If she spoke, I didn't hear her. I was a vault. I didn't say anything else, and I don't remember a word anyone else said. I just remember staring at the table waiting for the perceived attack to end.*

The perception of being 'singled out' and 'blamed' for the racial problems in our classrooms disrupted our worldview and caused cognitive dissonance, sending us further into the safety of whiteness (Matias & Zembylas, 2014). In our followup conversation, we each made an effort to reconcile cognitive dissonance about the experience through the paradigm of niceness (Behm Cross et al., 2019),

> Ms. Adams: *"That was so mean. How could he say those things about us?"*
>
> Macy: *"What good was going to come from that? It was three against two."*

Positioning Mr. Williams as "mean" and ourselves as the unsuspecting victims of a surprise attack (*"It was three against two"*) allowed us to use niceness to restore our emotional safety through the social paradigm in which we felt emotionally secure (Matias et al., 2014).

"They're all Black boys." A Vignette

The Special Area team sat around the long rectangular tables in the Art Room with Ms. Miller and Mr. Williams. Our original discussion was sidetracked when someone in the room, quite possibly me, brought up a recent adverse behavior that disrupted the lesson. Before long we were back to making our list of names, airing our grievances, and venting about disrespect, irresponsibility, untrustworthiness, the usual.

The venting went on for a time—the Specials teachers overlapping each other's sentences, surely no one more animated than myself. Always quick on his feet, Mr. Williams tried desperately to keep up, responding to as many grievances as possible with his endless supply of practical strategies and suggestions. Ms. Miller, on the other hand, sat in composed silence, watching it all unfold. We almost forgot she was there.

Cutting through the noise, her voice barely above a whisper, she asked, "What do you notice about this list?" The 'conversation' came to a screeching halt as we all turned to face her. No one dared move, let alone speak up. She let the silence become awkward.

"They're all Black boys," she commented.

Postscript: Later, in the safety of our mutual whiteness, we were free to speak our minds. I remember very little from that conversation, but I remember this much:

"It's not even about race," I complained.

"We can't help that the kids who aren't following the rules are all— African American," someone said.

"I feel like I am trying to find reasons to write up the White kids in the room," someone else said.

****

Whiteness is noisy, particularly when uncritical White teachers are gathered in a circle of trust. Therefore, the use of silence by White people is significant (Annamma et al., 2017; Gordon, 2005). In this vignette, the racial balance in the room favored the White Special Area teachers five to two, thus the team felt insulated by whiteness and emboldened to discuss deficit ideology within the 'nice' parameters of 'adverse' student behavior (Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006b). Here, 'adverse' student behavior functioned as a silencing tactic to strategically evade direct mention of skin color (Annamma et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006b).

This vignette also illustrates the effective and strategic use of silence for critical discourse. Ms. Miller could have broken her own silence long before she did, however she knew we would not, of our own accord, acknowledge race directly. By waiting until the deficit discourse was in full swing, she was able to pinpoint that which we had so tactfully avoided: *"they're all Black boys."* In the postscript, the team made every effort to reframe the uncomfortable experience through the racial hierarchy of hegemonic Whiteness in an effort to avoid accepting responsibility for our individual displays of racism (Behm Cross et al., 2018; Castagno, 2014; Picower, 2009).

Mindful Reflection 4: Failing Forward

Dysconsciousness formed distorted understandings of race and culture that took years of critical reflection and critical discourse to change (King, 1991). After taking one step forward and three steps back for long enough, I was starting to get somewhere. I entered a phase of failing forward in which I was generally moving toward the path of critical awareness. However,

as these vignettes will show, becoming more self-aware was painful. I often struggled to engage in accurate critical reflection, critical discourse, and critical inquiry and fell short of critical action in most instances. I held tightly to unexamined beliefs about myself as a 'nice' person; I wanted to believe I was 'good' and that my actions were altruistic (which were, of course, ideological tools of whiteness). The vignettes in this series of mindful reflections illustrate the painful process of becoming more critically aware of myself as a 'nice' White lady—who might actually be responsible for racial harm (McDonough, 2009).

Guitar Pedagogy, A Storied Analysis

My only real experience of guitar pedagogy was the handful of private lessons I had taken as an adolescent where I learned the G chord, D chord, and A chord and how to use a capo to play those three chords in virtually any key. I had never seen guitar pedagogy in a group setting and I didn't know where or how to access curricular resources. But I had ordered a class set and it was one of the instruments my administrators were most excited about (I'm not going to lie, they looked pretty darn impressive hanging on the walls of the Music Room). So in those first three years of teaching guitar, I was more or less failing forward ever so incrementally. My dysconsciousness was all the more obvious because teaching the guitar put me so far outside of my pedagogical comfort zone. There are three salient memories from those early guitar units.

The Zero-Tolerance Policy, A Vignette

My guitar rules were very rigid, more so even than the oppressive Five Class Rules discussed earlier in this chapter. I was terrified at the possibility of damaging an instrument, so I implemented something of a zero-tolerance policy for any and all 'irresponsible choices.' The zero-tolerance policy combined with archaic curricular resources and lesson plans (think the Alfred piano series for guitar) was a total creativity killer. The Capital R-Rules and the Holier-than-Thou lessons took up so much space in the room that the learning itself was an arduous

chore for everyone, including me. All of us were miserable, or at the very least not having any fun. I reconciled this cognitive dissonance by convincing myself that guitar was a technical instrument and so the lessons just 'had to be this way.' I fell into the self-deprecating trap of thinking, *The real world isn't always fun, maybe teaching isn't always fun.*

Needless to say, students resisted in big and small ways. On one such occasion, I had spent more than ten minutes of the lesson passing out the guitars, one at a time, going way over the top making sure each individual student was holding it *just so.* From the front of the classroom Alex—a student with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)—unexpectedly shot out of his seat and raised the guitar above his head, extending his arms to their full length and demanded incredulously, "Are we ever going to play or just sit here holding them?"

"Not like *that* you won't!" I shot back. In response, Alex adjusted his grip and forcibly swung his guitar, locking eyes with me as he did so. There was a collective intake of breath as the other students sat frozen, all eyes on the guitar careening toward the floor. Just then, Alex flexed and the guitar stopped suddenly, hovering half an inch above the white speckled tile. I was in a full-blown panic, albeit a frozen one. This was my worst nightmare. There was a moment in which everyone was perfectly still. Then emerging from the tableau, Alex's para moved slowly. He gently placed a hand on Alex's shoulder, leaning down to whisper in his ear. Alex roughly handed the guitar to the para who laid it on the front table with a gentle thud. Together they left the classroom.

Later that day, I caught his case manager in the hallway. Still reeling, I launched right in, "Hey, we're doing our guitar unit right now and Alex isn't going to be able to. They're just too fragile. He needs an alternate plan during this unit."

The SPED teacher tucked her blond extensions behind her ear and studied me for a moment before replying, “We have to follow his BIP.”

Surprised by the push back, I went on—surely more detail would make her see reason, “Well, I can’t risk breaking a guitar. I have a zero-tolerance policy.”

“And he has a diagnosis. We have to follow his BIP.”

“But he had the guitar over his head today and he acted like he was going to slam it on the ground. What if he had dropped it or hit the ground and broke it?”

The case manager was firm and unbending, “He has to have equitable access to educational resources. We can’t just withhold resources, that’s a violation of his rights as a student. He has a BIP and we have to follow it.”

Realizing I wasn’t gaining any sympathy and this conversation was not going as planned I murmured, “Yeah. Okay, thanks,” and retreated down the hallway.

Rather than taking the time to read through Alex’s BIP, however, I hung the guitars up on the walls, ending the unit then and there.

****

This chapter has already shown that as a ‘nice’ young White music teacher, the curriculum of whiteness and institutionalized cultural scripts shaped my early classroom systems and structures (Lea, 2001; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). I absolved myself of racialized harm through cognitive dissonance and the tools of whiteness (Behm Cross et al., 2019; King, 1991; Picower, 2009). As the passage below illustrates, I increased the vigor with which I enforced White ways of being, knowing, and doing where my areas of music pedagogy were weakest (Wozolek & Atif, 2022),

> *The Capital R-Rules and the Holier-than-Thou lessons took up so much space in the room that the learning itself was an arduous chore for everyone, including me. All of us were miserable, or at the very least not having any fun. I reconciled this cognitive dissonance by convincing myself that guitar was a technical instrument and so the lessons just 'had to be this way.' I fell into the self-deprecating trap of thinking, The real world isn't always fun, maybe teaching isn't always fun.*

Alex resisted the oppression in my classroom. I sought a socially-sanctioned punishment—isolation—from a fellow White teacher, and was met, instead, with culturally sustaining, anti-racist obstinance that left me feeling betrayed by someone who was supposed to be on *my side* (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021). As the passage below illustrates, the SPED teacher resisted my attempts to establish 'nice' parameters for deficit discourse—the zero-tolerance policy—and instead engaged the dialogue through a critical lens,

> Macy: *"Well, I can't risk breaking a guitar. I have a zero-tolerance policy."*
>
> SPED Teacher: *"And he has a diagnosis. We have to follow his BIP."*
>
> Macy: *"But he had the guitar over his head today and he acted like he was going to slam it on the ground. What if he had dropped it or hit the ground and broke it?"*
>
> SPED Teacher: *"He has to have equitable access to educational resources. We can't just withhold resources, that's a violation of his rights as a student. He has a BIP and we have to follow it."*

While I recognized this dialogue as critical discourse, I had considerable difficulty engaging with the SPED teacher without defaulting to dysconscious racism (King, 1991).

Half of the Guitars and Sharing With a Partner, A Vignette

The following year, I plotted a new course of action. Rather than in chairs, students would sit on the floor. Rather than individual guitars, students would share with a partner. I found this to be a satisfactory solution to last year's problem. That is, until Ms. Miller called me into her office. She was cool as a cucumber at the expansive executive desk with her hands folded over her desk calendar. Gifted with temperance and a world-class poker face, sometimes conversations with Ms. Miller were difficult to read. This, surely, was one of those times. I squirmed in the cushioned sofa chair across from her, flustered by her composure.

"How is everything going?" She asked conversationally.

"Good, really good, we just started guitars this week with fourth and fifth."

"Yes, I understand the students are sharing." She left the sentence open-ended, inviting me into her train of thought.

"Yes," I hesitated.

She continued, "But we have 28 guitars. Shouldn't each student have their own?" It was more of a recommendation than a question.

"Uh, it's just a lot of maintenance to get them all tuned and everything. It takes my entire planning and then I can't actually plan the lesson. I thought if they could share with a partner—" I trailed off, not really knowing how I intended to end the sentence.

She considered my statement. "I see," she paused, "When I met you, you had students transitioning through three separate stations. Every instrument was playing a different part of the song. I know you'll be able to find a way to make this work."

I went back to the Music Room and pulled the remaining guitars from the walls. For the rest of the unit, the guitars (all 28 of them) were dreadfully out of tune and the students sat facing a partner.

****

In this vignette, Ms. Miller used critical discourse to encourage independent critical reflection on an inequitable pedagogical decision (Duncan-Andrade, 2004). This is an embodied example of Ms. Miller's critical action statement,

"I will always put children first, even if it means more work for adults."

Without appeals White comfort, Ms. Miller scaffolded a dialogue that guided me through the inequitable outcome of my decision to utilize only half of the guitars at a time. Reminding me of our first meeting encouraged essential critical self-interrogation (Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Miller & Harris, 2018), as shown below,

"When I met you, you had students transitioning through three separate stations. Every instrument was playing a different part of the song. I know you'll be able to find a way to make this work."

This conversation is among the first in my memory in which I engaged in critical reflexive work on an issue of race without White emotionality (Howard, 2003). Contrasting my instructional strategies at the Private-Public School, where the student population was overwhelmingly White and affluent, with my instructional strategies at East Pine, where students of color made up two-thirds of the population, was a significant milestone in my developing critical awareness of whiteness. However, as this vignette shows, I struggled to turn critical reflection into critical action. As I committed to more equitable use of the materials, I lowered

my standards for musical rigor by permitting the consistent use of out-of-tune strings (Hess, 2018b).

Hang Up the Phone, A Vignette

Following the long-range plans of more experienced music education mentors, I structured my lessons into six-lesson instructional units. Meaning, I planned approximately six weeks of guitar, six weeks of music technology, six weeks of barred instruments, etc. I was woefully oblivious to the fact that six weeks of anything is about three weeks too long. This structure created a learning environment where student motivation waned in week three and yet the unit dragged on for another four lessons. By about week four, the novelty of the given instrument group had worn off and students were cognitively bored. It was around Lesson 4 that this salient memory occurred.

I was just over halfway through passing out guitars to a fourth-grade class. This was my third year teaching guitar and I was making small improvements. Still, I had very little tolerance for non-compliance, and I resisted their negative feedback, particularly feedback about the length of each unit ("Guitars again?"). I had called for a Voice Level Zero while I passed out guitars and two students did not comply. To prove the point, I gave everyone around them an instrument and continued to ignore them until they stopped talking. When they did not, I proceeded with the lesson. The class was practicing strumming when Lukas shouted over the noise of guitars, "You skipped us!"

"When you're at a Level Zero I will bring you an instrument to play," I recited, taking a guitar off the rack and handing it dutifully to his neighbor. I turned my back and began weaving my way through the open spaces between guitar necks, unaware that my nonchalance was the trigger. He stood abruptly and charged after me, pushing roughly past each classmate without

regard for their bodies or instruments. Guitars knocked into one another recklessly with a cascade of hollow thuds.

I stopped and turned to face him, hoping to spare the wear and tear on the guitars. Lukas closed the space between us until his nose was millimeters from my cheek, “I said, you- skipped-us-” he growled. There was a sudden uneasy silence and the room stilled. He held this uncomfortable closeness, continuing to push into my personal space as I struggled to move away from him. At 5’3” with broad shoulders, Lukas was eye level and physically larger than me. He was using his body to physically intimidate me. I felt my pulse quicken and the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. It was working.

I sidestepped him and weaved back across the room to the classroom phone with him on my heels. As I lifted the phone from the receiver, Lukas reached over my shoulder, his arm on top of mine, and forced the phone back down to the receiver. We remained frozen there at an impasse, me struggling to pick up the phone and him overpowering me. In one motion I let go of the phone with my left hand, pivoted away from him, pulled out my cell phone, and opened the Messaging app: “Need help now,” I typed frantically in the Special Area group chat. Just then, Lukas was in front of me. He grabbed the phone and yanked it forcibly from my grip. Instinctively, I reached to take it back and as I did he yelled, “You hit me! You hit me!”

For a moment, nobody moved. I remember thinking, *How did it escalate to this?* Feeling all eyes on me, I let go of my grip on the cell phone and put one foot slowly behind the other, backpedaling into an empty, silent hallway. I turned the corner and sped down the hall with Lukas in my wake. My heart racing, my mind blank, I felt crazed. “Nobody is coming to help you,” he jeered as I searched desperately for another adult. We traveled all along the back of the building in this manner, the toes of Lukas’s shoes pulling on mine as I half-ran.

In a moment of spontaneous clarity, I realized that I had left the class without any supervision whatsoever. In grim acceptance of Lukas's taunts ("Nobody is coming to help you"), I resigned to return to the Music Room. You could have cut the tension with a knife.

****

This vignette illustrates the intersection between misogyny and childhood (Irby, 2014). Societal messages about Black men and White women influence the social conditioning of these two groups. Ideas about Black males as aggressive, dangerous, unpredictable, and simultaneously older and younger than their biological age, create deficit narratives that harm children of color (Howard, 2013; Irby, 2014). Social messages about White women as accommodating, nurturing, nonthreatening, and innocent position the White woman as the antithesis of the Black man (Bissonnette, 2016). White women are socially conditioned to fear Black males (Howard, 2013; Irby, 2014). This comes to matter in classrooms where White women make up the majority of the workforce and enact the curriculum of whiteness in increasingly racially and culturally diverse schools (Lea, 2001; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). Teachers and students act out issues of race in classrooms according to cultural scripts (Lea, 2001).

Here, two performers acted out culturally scripted roles, according to social messages about gender and race: a Black ten-year-old boy performed the role of The Aggressor and a young White female teacher performed the role of The 'Nice' White Lady (Lea, 2001; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021). As a Black male, Lukas made strategic use of physical intimidation to gain power over others. As a young White woman, I accommodated him by making myself small and yielding the space. The examples below illustrate the way physical space was leveraged between the actors,

- *Lukas closed the space between us until his nose was millimeters from my cheek. He held this uncomfortable closeness, continuing to push into my personal space as I struggled to move away from him …*
- *… I sidestepped him and weaved back across the room to the classroom phone with him on my heels.*
- *As I lifted the phone from the receiver, Lukas reached over my shoulder, his arm on top of mine, and forced the phone back down to the receiver. We remained frozen there at an impasse, me struggling to pick up the phone and him overpowering me …*
- *… I let go of the phone with my left hand, pivoted away from him, pulled out my cell phone, and opened the Messaging app: "Need help now," I typed frantically in the Special Area group chat. Just then, Lukas was in front of me. He grabbed the phone and yanked it forcibly from my grip.*
- *Instinctively, I reached to take it back …*
- *I remember thinking,* How did it escalate to this? *Feeling all eyes on me, I let go of my grip on the cell phone and put one foot slowly behind the other, backpedaling into an empty, silent hallway. I turned the corner and half ran down the hall with Lukas in my wake. My heart racing, my mind blank, I felt crazed.*
- *We traveled all along the back of the building in this manner, the toes of Lukas's shoes pulling on mine as I half-ran.*

The fifth example represents the one instance in which I did not yield space but instead reached into it. In response, Lukas publicly penalized me with a false accusation of physical violence

(*"You hit me! You hit me!"*) that caused me to yield the entire room to him in order to escape (Howard, 2013; Irby, 2014).

Mindful Reflection 5: Eurocentrism

Just because I was becoming more critically aware does not mean I suddenly engaged every instance of critical discourse in a self-reflective way. As this chapter has made abundantly clear, my critical awareness of whiteness developed in fits and starts—one step forward, three steps back. I held tightly to certain beliefs, assumptions, and views of the world, even as others slowly evolved and changed. My own Eurocentric music education gave me a narrow cultural lens in which I 'othered' musical traditions outside the Western European canon (Bradley, 2006; Hess, 2014; 2018; Kruse, 2020; VanDeusen, 2019).

My early career conceptualizations of 'diverse' repertoire were crudely constructed around surface level integrations of culture and contingent on the extent to which I could apply my dysconscious Eurocentric beliefs about music education (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). That is to say, I celebrated the use of 'diverse' repertoire so long as my methods for teaching and performing could be filtered through the White gaze (Alim & Paris, 2017). As the vignette below will show, I held tightly to a Eurocentric music curriculum and defaulted to the tools of whiteness when my beliefs about music curriculum were challenged (Picower, 2009).

"North America is Part of the World," A Vignette

In the middle of East Pine's third year, Ms. Miller delegated me to lead a new PBL unit we would call the Schoolwide Showcase of World Cultures. She scheduled a meeting to go over the repertoire together and make plans for an end-of-unit performance, which I was to lead. I sat across from her, explaining how I had chosen to organize the show, "I think it'll be easiest to divide the grade levels into different continents. Fifth grade will have Africa, fourth grade South

America, third grade Asia," and so on until I came to kindergarten, when I said, "and kindergarten will have folk songs from North America."

Ms. Miller stared at me intently and allowed a long silence to expand between us. I felt increasingly awkward, adjusting my posture repeatedly in the dark cherry armchair. Finally, she asked simply, "Why North America?"

"Well, um," I stammered, "If our focus is, um, folk songs from around the world I thought it would be best to give kindergarten songs from their own culture, um, so they can just— sing in English," I finished lamely.

"Our focus is music from the specific countries represented within- our- school," Ms. Miller said pointedly, "It is an assumption to say that kindergarteners are most proficient in English. Why don't you reach out to the EL team for a list of our students' languages and countries, and we will meet again next week to look over the revised list." With that, I was dismissed.

My eyes welled with tears as I walked aimlessly down the hallway. I found myself opening the door to the library. "All this work and she hated it!" I exclaimed to no one in particular.

Danielle, the librarian, looked up from her computer screen, straightened her glasses, and brushed her wavy curtain bangs from her face, "What! What happened?"

I pushed angry tears from my eyelashes, "She asked why I included North America in the world showcase. Because North America is *part- of- the- world!*" I whined.

****

After listening to the uncritical and miseducated plans of a 'nice' young White monolingual/monocultural teacher, Ms. Miller once again scaffolded critical reflection on

Eurocentric dysconsciousness through the strategic use of silence and open-ended questioning (Howard, 2003). The uncritical habit of categorizing cultures by continent represents a gross miseducation of culture based on stereotyping and appropriation (Alim & Paris, 2017; Annamma et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2000). The uncritical manner in which this 'nice' young White teacher chose to represent North America through the White gaze indicates an assimilationist worldview with homogenous ideas about "one American identity" (Ladson-Billings, 1990, p. 340). The carefully chosen words, *"folk songs from North America,"* were deliberately color-evasive (Annamma et al., 2017) and further communicated homogeneous assumptions (Ladson-Billings, 1990).

The uncritical belief that English is the 'correct' language for a kindergarten performance indicates a proclivity for assimilationism with an underlying acceptance of the monolingual/monocultural status quo of schools (Alim & Paris, 2017). As the following response shows, I attempted to deflect Ms. Miller's open-ended question, *"Why North America?"* when the conversation challenged my Eurocentric understandings of 'culture,'

> *"If our focus is, um, folk songs from around the world I thought it would be best to give kindergarten songs from their own culture, um, so they can just— sing in English."*

Ms. Miller was quick to address my distorted understandings and intentionally target my color-evasiveness when she said the following,

> *"Our focus is music from the specific countries represented within- our-* school. *It is an assumption to say that kindergarteners are most proficient in English."*

Connecting me with critically conscious mentors through the planning of the project is an example of Ms. Miller's critical action. She secured a consistent network of colleagues that

would continue to challenge my uncritical worldview and prevent me from defaulting to Eurocentrism, as shown below,

> *"Why don't you reach out to the EL team for a list of our students' languages and countries and we will meet again next week to look over the revised list."*

Notably, during the follow-up conversation with Danielle, I deliberately misrepresented the critical racial discourse with Ms. Miller in ways that appealed to my cognitive dissonance (Behm Cross et al., 2019),

> *"She asked why I included North America in the world showcase. Because North America is* part of the world!*"*

By crudely insinuating that I was somehow more educated in rudimentary geography than Ms. Miller, I used a performative tool of whiteness to navigate racially discomforting discourse in ways that reconstructed the racial hierarchy with myself at the top (Picower, 2009; Williams et al., 2020).

Mindful Reflection 6: From Mentee to Mentor

During my sixth- and seventh-years teaching, I finally began putting all the pieces together, just in time for the onset of the COVID-19 shutdown when society came to a screeching halt and education turned itself upside down. I realized that all along the way my critically conscious (and stubborn) mentors had been modeling something deeper, something bigger, than just surface level academic and behavior strategies. This realization was the start of my own, independent, disinvestment from whiteness.

Critical inquiry became the focus of my coursework in graduate school. With the widespread cancellation of nearly every social event for the foreseeable future, I had nowhere to go and nothing to do but learn. I found myself pouring over critical consciousness content—

scholarly journals, articles, books, and coursework, social media, podcasts, and blogs. I began unpacking my classroom experiences through a critical framework and grappling with the harmful ways I was showing up in my classroom as a 'nice' White lady (Bissonnette, 2016; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Kenyon, 2022; Miller & Harris, 2018; Orozco, 2019).

During Remote Learning, I also found myself in a position to model critical action. I would point to this phase of my career as the turning point, when my critical consciousness shifted from follower to leader, where I became capable of scaffolding critical reflection and discourse with and for others. It was also during this time that I became a mentor for the district's new teacher mentorship program and a cooperating teacher for the undergraduate pre-service education programs in the area. I began regularly hosting student teachers and practicum students. It is prudent at this point in the narrative to reiterate that I am not intent on villainizing others in the writing of this dissertation. Rather, I hope to illustrate the ways in which niceness is internalized by individuals and operates through the dysconsciousness to create and sustain systemic societal inequities for marginalized students.

Remote Learning with Mr. Mister, A Storied Analysis

Throughout the remote portion of the COVID-19 Shutdown school year I was partnered with a novice White male fourth grade teacher. We ran a live Zoom every morning from 8:00 to 11:30 where we co-taught Tier 1 Math, Reading, and Science. After the students logged off for the day, Mr. Mister and I frequently hung back to debrief. These post-Zoom conversations afforded many opportunities for critical discourse.

Mr. Mister was from a conservative, White, upper-class, Southern, Christian family. From our initial introduction, I got the distinct impression that he had been raised to see himself as an authority figure. As an outspoken, young White man, he was used to receiving a certain

degree of deference. He enjoyed giving directions and having them followed. He believed in meritocracy, considered race to be a nonissue in the classroom, and maintained an apolitical view of schools.

He felt comfortable in positions of power and frequently leveraged his gender to gain power over others, even in the company of educators with more theoretical knowledge and practical experience, like the numerous occasions when he referred to me as his teaching "assistant" in front of parents, staff, and students. Or, the time I made a self-deprecating joke about the music teacher having to relearn mental math and he said, "Class, Mrs. Bell is like my student teacher, I'm teaching *her* how to teach *you.*" While some of these interactions were, admittedly, off putting, I was able to leverage critical action in significant ways during our time together on Zoom.

I recognized immediately that Mr. Mister's view of the world was limited to White spaces and White normality, as mine had been. I was therefore able to support and guide him through many of his novel experiences as a White teacher of marginalized students. Two experiences are particularly prominent in my memory.

No Blankets, a Vignette

We logged into Zoom with a fresh coat of frost covering the grass and trimming the windows. It was the first cold-snap of the season, unusually early in mid-September. I wrestled my favorite slouchy turtleneck sweatshirt from the back of my closet and settled in at the kitchen table with my laptop and hot cup of coffee. Several minutes later, the Waiting Room filled with Mr. Mister's fourth graders. I opened the Zoom Room to them and one by one their rectangles filled the screen. Immediately their morning greetings came rolling through the chatbox, as they did every day.

“Happy Wednesday, Super Scholars!” I typed, “Open Mr. Mister’s Google Classroom to find our slides for the day,” I pasted the direct links in the chat box.

“hi”

“hi”

“hello mr mister”

“hi mrs bell”

“im cold”

“me too 🥶🥶”

“Yes, it is cold out there this morning! There was frost on my grass!” I replied.

“❄️”

Sometime later, Mr. Mister called for attention and the day’s activities began. We started each day in whole-group Math. I kept pace in the chat box and took care of the logistical side of all-things Zoom Education—messaging unengaged students (as indicated by muted mics, cameras off, lapses in chatbox participation), sending relevant links through the chat, and monitoring student engagement on the numerous virtual education platforms we used—while Mr. Mister led the instruction. Today, cameras were on (all of them!) and the chat box was consistently on task and on topic. It was going to be a good day.

That is, until Mr. Mister stopped instruction abruptly to address a student who rarely showed his face on camera. With the short, percussive tone that we had all come to understand as Mr. Mister’s way of saying he *meant business* he barked, “Ronaldo- take- off- the- blanket- and- sit- up.” My eyes darted to Ronaldo’s rectangle. His face was very close to the screen and slightly off-center, as if he was propped up on a pillow with his Marvel comics blanket curled tightly around his head and cinched under his chin like a hoodie. His video was so dark and

pixelated I could only just make out the outline of his face through my Zoom screen. He hesitated, staring fearfully at the camera. I looked out my window, daylight was breaking but only just. Without lights, my kitchen would have been dark too.

Mr. Mister's voice snapped my attention back to my screen, "Take- it- off. Now!" He bellowed before assuming a tone like a preacher giving a passionate sermon, "This is not how we will engage in learning here! And why are you sitting in the dark?"

Slowly, Ronaldo pulled the blanket off his head, shifting nervously in his seat. His discomfort was visible through the pixelated, slightly robotic video delay of an unstable Wi-Fi connection. I experienced a sharp pang of secondhand embarrassment for him. He was a quiet, introverted child. When he participated in the live Zoom, he almost always did so via chat box. Very rarely did he turn on his camera, and now this.

Ronaldo sent two quick messages through the chat, "ok," then, "sorry." Immediately, he turned off his camera and his nametag shifted to the bottom of the Zoom screen. He didn't turn it back on for the rest of the morning.

When the students logged off for the day, I said, "We need to talk about Ronaldo. Did you notice his camera stayed off for the rest of the morning?"

"Yeah," Mr. Mister acknowledged.

I spoke with measured words, "If we are going to require them to keep their cameras on, we have to be willing to accept them however they come: blankets, tank tops, in the dark. We have to be okay with all of it."

"But he had clearly just rolled out of bed, that's no way to—"

I cut him off, "This cold snap came early this year. People may not have turned on their heat yet. We don't know if maybe his house is cold. Maybe they haven't gotten their warm

clothes out of their closets yet. Heck, maybe last year's coats don't even fit them anymore. We don't know. But he was here on time and his camera was on, which is rare. He was meeting your expectation. If we're going to require cameras, we're going to have to be willing to accept them however they come. I can always cut their camera off manually, if something is going on in the house that we don't need to see. But blankets when it's cold, tank tops when it's hot, let's not sweat the small stuff."

Postscript: A few weeks later, in an anti-bias staff training, Mr. Mister unmuted to say, "Why sweat the small stuff? If their cameras are on and they're participating, who cares what they're wearing?" At least he heard me.

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Mr. Mister's authoritarian disposition via Zoom indicates underlying assimilationist beliefs about power, control, and hierarchical student-teacher relationships (Ladson-Billings, 1990). Consider the privileges and penalties in the following passage in which Mr. Mister—who sat warm and comfortable at his personal desk in a suburban home, wearing a sweatshirt, and sipping hot coffee—confronted a cold, shy, and sleepy nine-year-old child in short sleeve Marvel Comics pajamas, with considerably less power to change his environment,

> *That is, until Mr. Mister stopped instruction abruptly to address a student who rarely showed his face on camera. With the short, percussive tone that we had all come to understand was Mr. Mister's way of saying he* meant business, *he barked, "Ronaldo- take- off- the- blanket- and- sit- up." My eyes darted to Ronaldo's rectangle. His face was very close to the screen and slightly off-center, as if he was propped up on a pillow with his Marvel Comics blanket curled tightly around his head and cinched under his chin like a hoodie. His video was so dark and pixelated I could only just make out the*

outline of his face through my Zoom screen. He hesitated, staring fearfully at the camera. I looked out my window, daylight was breaking but only just. Without lights, my kitchen would have been dark too.

Mr. Mister and I perceived Ronaldo's hesitation in opposite ways. To me, he experienced an inner conflict between his socially conditioned response to follow the directions of teachers and his more immediate physical need for bodily autonomy on an unseasonably cold day. Mr. Mister, however, perceived Ronaldo's hesitation as defiance and doubled down, as the following dialogue shows,

"Take- it- off. Now!" He barked before assuming a tone like a preacher giving a passionate sermon, "This is not how we will engage in learning here! And why are you sitting in the dark?"

Throughout the confrontation, and especially at this final unnecessary and condescending remark (*"This is not how we will engage in learning here! And why are you sitting in the dark?"*), Mr. Mister revealed his lack of critical awareness and narrow cultural aperture (Hammond, 2015). I could see that Mr. Mister had not considered alternate explanations for Ronaldo's decision to cover himself with a blanket before initiating this negative interaction (Hammond, 2015).

His choice of words was curious (*"This is not how we will engage in learning here!"*), as if there were a *'here'* in which to engage in the learning. It seemed that Mr. Mister had conceptualized our (mostly make-believe) Zoom classroom as sovereign; as if our wants, needs, and the various details and distractions demanding our attention in our individual homes on a daily basis somehow ceased to exist between the hours of 8:00am and 11:30am. Mr. Mister seemed to make an effort to make Zoom Education as close as possible to the status quo of in-person schooling (Alim & Paris, 2017). In many ways, this is the oppressive reality of in-person

schooling within the structures of hegemonic Whiteness, where authority figures (i.e. teachers) control student access to even the most basic physical, emotional, and cognitive needs (e.g. bathroom breaks, drinks of water, brain breaks, physical exercise, time outdoors, etc.). Mr. Mister relied on his tools of whiteness in his attempts to legitimize remote learning for himself and his students (Picower, 2009). In doing so, a child of color was unduly penalized through public humiliation for prioritizing his physical need for warmth over Mr. Mister's systems and structures of whiteness (Orozco, 2019). As the passage below illustrates, Mr. Mister's performative tools of whiteness embarrassed Ronaldo in front of his peers and alienated him from the virtual learning environment,

> *Ronaldo sent two quick messages through the chat, "ok," then, "sorry." Immediately, he turned off his camera and his nametag shifted to the bottom of the Zoom screen. He didn't turn it back on for the rest of the morning.*

In the private critical discourse that followed, my main goal was to scaffold a critical reflection around the possible alternate explanations for Ronaldo's blanket and establish more equitable future decisions. I enacted critical action to widen Mr. Mister's cultural aperture and disrupt the social messages he had internalized about the status quo of schools (Alim & Paris, 2017). As the postscript below shows, Mr. Mister later recapitulated my reflection—almost verbatim— but in a performative manner, reminiscent of my early career performances as the 'nice,' 'good,' White person,

> *"Why sweat the small stuff? If their cameras are on and they're participating, who cares what they're wearing?"*

Although Mr. Mister retained our critical discourse, he used an altruistic performative tool of whiteness to communicate White saviorism in front of his colleagues (Miller & Harris, 2018; Picower, 2009).

The Trailer Park, A Vignette

Mr. Mister stepped out of his luxury SUV looking sober and out of place as he hooked the loops of his cloth mask around each ear. I noted a tension that wasn't there before. Having been to all but two of his students' homes delivering prize baggies, we had just pulled up to our second-to-last stop, Ramiro's home, in the downtown trailer park adjacent to the public cemetery. Our first few stops was in the school subdivision, Pine Grove. These single-family homes had fertilized lawns, garden flags, and designer dogs peeking through HOA-approved privacy fences. Mr. Mister walked confidently up to each of these front porches. Now though, standing outside Ramiro's trailer, Mr. Mister was shifty, guarded, and uncharacteristically—quiet.

Ramiro was an active participant in our Zoom classroom. Attentive and focused, he was always ready to answer questions on the mic or in the chat box. His background had good lighting and his home had a stable Wi-Fi connection. He typically wore headphones and sat at his kitchen table with his sister beside him. The double-wide trailer sat on a corner lot with a bright white garden fence lining the property. The door opened onto a large wooden front porch that looked custom-built and brand new. We stomped up the wooden stairs, holding the railing. Mr. Mister hesitated at the door, searching briefly for a doorbell before opening the storm door and knocking lightly on the metal door.

Almost immediately the door swung open. In the doorway stood Ramiro, his sister Patricia, his mother, and an indiscernible number of tiny dogs, barking and jumping happily at their feet.

I paused to allow Mr. Mister to take the lead, when he didn't, I waved and smiled through my cloth mask, "Hi! I'm Mrs. Bell and this is Mr. Mister. We are Ramiro's teachers at East Pine, and we just wanted to stop by and say hello! Hi Ramiro, hi Patricia, how are you guys??"

"Hello! Welcome! Come in, come in!" Ramiro's mother gestured excitedly, guiding the children and animals away from the threshold. Ramiro and his sister smiled sheepishly as we scuttled awkwardly through the doorway, all of us barely managing to keep the dogs from darting across the threshold and out into the world beyond.

"Please come in, sit, sit, sit!" Ramiro's mother shepherded all of us toward the sectional sofa on the opposite end of the room. Of the 18 or so students we had visited that day, this was the first family to invite us into their home. Ramiro and Patricia each perched on an arm of the sofa, Mr. Mister and I landed in the middle, and the dogs bouncing across the sofa cushions to all of us in turn.

"Thank you! Wow, your home is beautiful, and your dinner smells wonderful! I hope we didn't interrupt your meal," I said cheerfully.

"No, no, no, not interrupting. Thank you, yes, thank you! Are you hungry?" Ramiro's mother marched back to the stovetop, where something was frying on a pan (it really did smell delicious).

"Oh, thank you, we're fine," I managed to say just before she filled two extra plates of food. She put the bowls back in the cabinet. "We just wanted to come and say how much we've missed you guys! What have you all been up to?"

Ramiro and Patricia continued to stare at us. Two teachers in their home! On their sofa! Imagine! “Um, have you been playing soccer?” I prompted.

“Yes,” Ramiro said simply.

“What about you Patricia? Have you been playing outside?” Patricia blushed and nodded.

“Well good! Well— we’re just so glad you see you!” I said in that awkward way one does when a conversation-starter falls flat. There was a pause where no one said anything. I looked to Mr. Mister, who sat stiffly on the green cushion beside me, still absolutely no help whatsoever.

“What do you say?” Ramiro and Patricia’s mother prompted from over her shoulder.

“Thank you,” “Us too,” they said simultaneously.

Somewhat abruptly, Mr. Mister cleared his throat. His voice was rigid when he spoke, “Well, Ramiro, we are here to congratulate you on your hard work on the Unit One Test and great behavior on Zoom. We brought you this.” He thrust forward a teal gift bag with a piece of gray tissue paper sticking out the top.

Ramiro reached across the sofa to take the gift bag, murmuring, “Thank you.” Patricia stared at her brother in amazement (teachers in her house *and* presents?!). As Ramiro began pulling out the tissue paper, Mr. Mister stood as if suddenly realizing he was late for something important.

“You’re welcome,” Mr. Mister replied tersely, taking long strides towards the door. I thanked Ramiro’s mother for her hospitality and bid Ramiro and Patricia goodbye. “Bye! Thanks!” They called distractedly. They were already rifling through the gift bag and chittering quietly with one another about the prizes therein—slime, sticky hands, a slap bracelet.

Outside we peeled off our masks and agreed to meet at Destiny's home, our final stop. Unlike Ramiro, Destiny rarely participated in Zoom learning. When she attended 'class,' she did so with her camera off and mic muted. Her responses in the chat were sparse. Destiny frequently logged in and out multiple times per lesson due to an unstable Wi-Fi connection. If she did speak into the mic or turn on her camera, her audio and video were so terribly delayed, pixelated, and robotic, it was nearly impossible to decipher what she had communicated. These challenges, combined with a language barrier, meant she was frequently overlooked by Mr. Mister, who sometimes went days at a time without speaking to her directly.

Destiny's trailer had no front porches, no garden fences, no outdoor adornments of any kind. There were black garbage bags piled haphazardly up the side of the trailer and stray garbage littered the lawn. The trailer itself was in a state of disrepair with broken windows, peeling paint, and sagging gutters. Moss and weeds were creeping up one side of the cracked dull beige siding and black and green mold framed the windows. Mr. Mister stared up at the trailer ashen faced.

"Okay?" I prompted as I closed my car door and stepped into the patchy lawn.

"Uh, yeah," he mumbled.

I walked up the concrete blocks to the storm door. The concrete blocks wobbled unsteadily beneath my weight. I rapped gently on the storm door and retraced my steps back down to the lawn. We waited for a while, in silence. The moments folded into minutes.

"Um, maybe no one's home," Mr. Mister whispered uneasily and turned to leave.

"No, give it a minute. I think she's here. Look," I pointed to a curtain at the far side of the trailer. It fluttered as a tiny hand reached up to touch the filthy glass. I walked back up the concrete blocks and knocked again on the storm door, "Destiny?" I called, looking in the

direction of the corner window, “It’s Mrs. Bell and Mr. Mister. We just want to say hello and we brought you something from the school!”

I stepped back down the blocks. A forehead and a pair of dark eyebrows popped into view in the square window. Destiny held up one finger indicating to us that we should wait for her. We heard rustling inside the dark trailer. After considerably more time had passed, we heard locks clicking and the storm door swung open. Destiny stepped out onto the threshold with a toddler on her hip. She leaned her shoulder into the door to prop it open. Both children were visibly dirty, wearing clothes much too small for them. The toddler’s diaper was sagging over Destiny’s forearm.

“Hi!” I cheered. Mr. Mister stood frozen at the sight of them.

“Um, we brought you this!” I took the gift bag from Mr. Mister’s limp hand and thrust it up to Destiny in the doorway.

“Oh, um, thank you—” she said quietly. She adjusted the toddler on her hip and took the teal bag with her free hand.

“We just want you to know how much we miss you and how proud we are of you for participating on Zoom every day and being such a Super Scholar. You are working so hard and we are so proud of you! Mr. Mister and I were just talking about how much fun that math lesson was today—you guys are teaching me so much—who would have thought the Music teacher could relearn math, huh? I’m going to become a mathematician before you know it!” My words ran together into one giant run-on sentence. I was rambling shamelessly, stalling on the top step, straining to catch sight of an adult in the dark trailer. I glanced down at Mr. Mister, hoping he would catch on to my tactic and add something else, something that might give us more time. He stared vacantly up at us, dumbstruck.

"Thank you," Destiny said shyly.

"Destiny?" I asked hesitantly, "Is your mom home? I would love to say hello to her too."

"Um, she's not here right now, she's um— she's working," Destiny said vaguely, "I'd better go, my sister needs me to, um, we have to go—" her voice trailed off.

"Okay, that's okay. Have a good weekend. Tell your mom we said hello. We'll see you online on Monday," I bumbled awkwardly as Destiny slipped back into the dark entryway and closed the storm door. The deadbolt snapped into place with a definitive click.

I wobbled my way back down the cinder block steps. Mr. Mister and I turned slowly on the dirt patch and walked in a tense silence back to the curb. He stopped listlessly at his SUV, removing his mask with one hand, and holding the car handle with the other.

"I, I didn't— this is— I didn't know it—" he said, stumbling over his words.

"It really puts Zoom in perspective, doesn't it?" I reflected.

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This vignette illustrates the ease with which I automatically defaulted to a performance of my expected cultural script, even as I actively resisted whiteness in other contexts (Lea, 2001). Here, I leveraged my race and gender to mask the culture shock of a young White male educator and maintain comfort for all parties (Orozco, 2019). That is, I performed the 'nice' White lady role when my White colleague froze (Orozco, 2019), as the passage below indicates,

> *I paused to allow Mr. Mister to take the lead, when he didn't, I waved and smiled through my cloth mask, "Hi! I'm Mrs. Bell and this is Mr. Mister. We are Ramiro's teachers at East Pine and we just wanted to stop by and say hello! Hi Ramiro, hi Patricia, how are you guys??"*

Here, I used niceness to intercede while Mr. Mister coped with his culture shock. This compulsion to 'be nice' is so deeply ingrained in me, particularly when others are communicating feelings of discomfort. Consider the performance on Destiny's doorstep, when I leveraged niceness to stall for more time as shown below,

> Mrs. Bell: *"We just want you to know how much we miss you and how proud we are of you for participating on Zoom every day and being such a Super Scholar. You are working so hard and we are so proud of you! Mr. Mister and I were just talking about how much fun that math lesson was today—you guys are teaching me so much—who would have thought the Music teacher could relearn math, huh? I'm going to become a mathematician before you know it!"* My words ran together into one giant run-on sentence. *I was rambling shamelessly, stalling on the top step, straining to catch sight of an adult in the dark trailer. I glanced down at Mr. Mister, hoping he would catch on to my tactic and add something else, something that might give us more time. He stared vacantly up at us, dumbstruck.*
>
> Destiny: *"Thank you."*
>
> Mrs. Bell: *"Destiny? Is your mom home? I would love to say hello to her too."*
>
> Destiny" *"Um, she's not here right now, she's um— she's working. I'd better go, my sister needs me to, um, we have to go—" her voice trailed off.*

Mr. Mister's uncharacteristic speechlessness is also of significance in this vignette, especially considering the drastic change in his behavior as soon as we left the middle-class neighborhood and entered the trailer park (Alim & Paris, 2017). Picower (2009) argued, "White teachers are often entering the profession with a lifetime of hegemonic reinforcement to see students of color and their communities as dangerous and at fault for the educational challenges

they face" (p. 211). As his guarded body language seemed to indicate, Mr. Mister had internalized societal deficit narratives about trailer park communities as dangerous (Emdin, 2016; Picower, 2009). The hospitality shown to us by Ramiro's mother counteracted some of Mr. Mister's unease. However, particularly during Destiny's visit, Mr. Mister's body language communicated extreme discomfort to the point of fearfulness.

The New Normal, A Storied Analysis

The return to in-person learning at the end of the school year did not, in any way, mean a return to normalcy. There is nothing normal about Music-on-a-Cart. At regular intervals throughout the day, my student teacher and I could be spotted rolling a towering cart of awkwardly shaped, haphazardly stacked rattling, clicking, and buzzing auxiliary percussion instruments down a narrow hallway, trailed by a line of bass xylophones tied together in a long and impossible to steer train. One of us ran into the hallway poles at least once per day, sending instruments loudly clambering into each other, or else crashing into doors or walls.

When we finally made it into a classroom, sweating and disheveled after this bizarre hallway parade, we were the bane of everyone's existence. As it turns out, music-making is quite a noisy endeavor, best kept at the far back corner of the building (who knew?). Almost daily, our lessons were interrupted by nearby neighbors asking us to lower the volume, change the activity, etc. for x, y, or z reason (*"Mrs. Bell, we're testing next door and we can hear the bass through the wall. Can you turn it down?"*).

Except for a fifth-grade promotion ceremony music video project called 'The R2P2 Project' (Bell, 2022; see Figure 6), the end of the COVID-19 Shutdown school year passed by in a blur. We couldn't gather in groups of "mixed cohorts" which ruled out any possibility of a live

performance or communal musicking experience. It wasn't until the following school year that we began to see the 'new normal' take hold.

Figure 6

The R2P2 Project 'Album' Art

"Tearing the Fourth Grade Apart," A Vignette

Two vexed fourth grade teachers stood in my door, arms crossed, and brows furrowed. With a tone that said they needed to get something off their chests Mr. White said, "Hey, do you have a minute?"

"Winter Showcase drama?" I joked and waved them into the Music Room. I had been given the go-ahead to plan our first live performance since the COVID-19 shutdown, nearly two years prior. You would have thought they were performing at the Grammy's for how serious the students were taking it. Ms. Hill gave an exasperated sigh as she leaned against the cabinet and Mr. White declared, "This fourth-grade group just can't handle it."

"Well," I paused, "What happened?" A simple question and I'd opened Pandora's box. They started tripping over each other's sentences, as if they couldn't wait to unload their baggage:

"It's tearing the fourth grade apart."

"We're having to deescalate kids."

"We have kids crying at recess every single day."

"When Little Miss Goodie-Two-Shoes is screaming at people on the playground, you know it's bad."

"I even tried to help Little Miss Goodie-Two Shoes's group, and they didn't want to listen to me! I told them if they keep arguing like this, they'll be pulled from the show." Mr. White said, shaking his head.

I filtered through the hyperbole and zeroed in on one word: "Deescalate." I repeated. "Who all is having to be deescalated?"

"Well," Ms. Hill paused, "Sassy."

"Sassy is having to be deescalated," I restated flatly.

"Today on the playground. She was strangling people and running around punching people."

"She was kicking kids out of her group."

"Four kids were crying. We can't have that."

"It's been chaos every day."

"When I brought her in, she was hanging on me, crying hysterically, making herself sick gasping for air."

"Who deescalated her?" I prompted.

"She was hyperventilating in the front office," Ms. Hill continued then in direct response to my question, "We got Ms. Calm."

"We want to support you but this fourth-grade group is a mess. They can't handle it," Mr. White said again.

They seem more upset about this than even the kids, I observed, *And they really want me to call off this showcase.* "Okay," I paused to consider my audience (two novice White teachers) and measured my words accordingly. I decided to take the pandemic-route, "Socially they are behind where they should be in fourth grade and this project is very social. We knew that going in. They basically have to figure it out on their own. This is maybe the first time some of them have had to work independently with a team since, ever, or at least since the second grade. The whole thing is up to them, they have to make the decisions. I will say this, if we want them to have social skills, we have to give them opportunities to practice being social," I paused again, my audience was beginning to squirm, coming close to tuning me out. I put away the proverbial soapbox and fast-forwarded abruptly to the conclusion, "That said, I've noticed a difference between this year and years past. They're arguing more and accomplishing less," then I decided to switch gears, "I don't want you to be putting out fire after fire at recess every day. What can I do to help you? Would a grade level meeting be beneficial?"

Mr. White crossed his arms and leaned back on his hip, "Yes! And really just lay down the law and make it clear that they won't get to be in it if they are disrespectful."

Sidestepping this, I asked, "How soon should we meet?"

"The sooner the better. We can lead it if you're too busy," Mr. White offered.

"No, I need to be the one leading it," *No way I'm leaving this in your hands, Bub,* I thought.

"Maybe at the beginning of Specials on Monday morning then," Mr. White decided.

I bit my tongue (I still needed to talk to Ms. Calm after all), "Yeah, that might be good. I'll send an email. I can go back over the rubric and remind students of the rehearsal expectations, it'll be good. I also think we should probably not have kids practice at recess if kids are arguing with each other. It's supposed to be fun. Like I said, you guys don't need to be fighting fires at recess every day. I'm going to talk to Ms. Calm about Sassy. I'll go do that right now, actually."

"She may just not get to be in it if she's going to do all *that,*" Ms. Hill concluded.

"Well, let me talk to Ms. Calm and then I'll talk to Sassy. She may just need to be brought back down to Earth and reminded that she is not in charge of the Winter Showcase," *and neither are the two of you.*

"She does not need to be in charge of anything!" Ms. Hill burst out. We all laughed.

"Right. That's why they give me a paycheck," I declared and closed with a final bit of encouragement, "The rubric will weed out people who don't deserve a spot in the show. Also, know that this is the low point in the project. Everything kind of falls apart in Week 2 and then starts coming together in Week 3, so don't let it stress you. It all falls apart and then it gets better." They nodded and turned to go, saying thanks for the chat.

"It gets better, I promise!" I called out as they walked out the door and down the hall.

Postscript 1: As soon as they'd turned the corner I made a beeline for Ms. Calm's office and knocked twice, "Hey, you got a sec before you head out?"

"Hey, yeah, come in."

"I'm just gonna—" and closed her door before going on, "So, what happened with Sassy? Two fourth grade teachers just came to me all in a tizzy." We laughed at the absurdity of two

grown adults getting swept away in the drama of a bunch of ten-year-olds. I relayed the entire conversation, with all of the side commentary and zero of the restraint. Ms. Calm added, “Well, from what I can tell, she’s just putting too much pressure on herself and her team. They aren’t as committed as she is, I think, and she’s stressing over it.”

“Okay,” I laughed, “That’s exactly what I thought. These young teachers, Ms. Calm, I’m *telling you!* They want to fix kids’ performances and take the credit. Mr. White wants to fix everyone’s dances and be the teacher that Saved the Winter Showcase and now he's got Ms. Hill doing it too. That’s not what this is! If they don't want to accept your feedback, guess what: they-don’t- have- to!” I said, clapping my hands, “It’s theirs! If they choose not to take your advice, step back. Let them do it. If a team isn’t doing the work, or spends all their time arguing, so what? Let them get up there on the stage and be—bad. This is literally the lowest possible stakes imaginable. So let them experience a little bit of healthy embarrassment. Maybe they need to know what it’s like to walk up on a stage in front of people and have nothing to present.”

I thought about emailing the fourth-grade team right then and there, but then thought, No, let them have their ‘win’ for now, I’ll break the news to them on Monday.

Postscript 2: I met with Sassy’s ensemble on Monday morning. “What happened?” I prompted and was met with the same Pandora’s Box: the strangling, the crying, the punching, and the kicking people out of the group. For a minute, it was a complete barrage of theatrics, Kyler acting out the scene by falling dramatically to the floor.

Mariella said, “Well, Sassy wanted to practice and we didn’t.”

“You guys never want to practice!” Sassy groaned.

“Yeah, we wanted to play on the playground and Sassy got mad,” Kyler snapped back.

Sassy added, “Our dance isn’t ready and we don’t have much time. Like, I want it to be good. Like, I want it to be good. I don’t want to be embarrassed up there with the whole school watching us!”

With everyone talking at once, we somehow managed to come to the agreement that Mrs. Bell—who receives biweekly paychecks from the school district—would be the only person with the power to “kick” members out. We decided not to put so much pressure on our teammates because “too much stress is toxic.” We further agreed that “the drama was over and it was time to move on” with a refreshed outlook.

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The ‘nice’ White novice teachers in this vignette demonstrated a dysconscious commitment to two prominent deficit narratives about marginalized students: culture of poverty discourse and poverty of culture discourse (Ladson-Billings, 2006b; 2017a). Mr. White and Ms. Hill held tightly to their deficit beliefs about students of color to justify their own racially-motivated desire to convince me to call off the Winter Showcase, believing that, (a) as educators, their role was to bring order to the chaotic and dysfunctional lives of their students and; (b) the extreme actions of a few children represented the fourth grade as a whole (Emdin, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006b; 2017a). Further, the examples below illustrate a tendency of Mr. White and Ms. Hill to conceptualize their uncritical thoughts, opinions, and actions as ‘neutral,’ ‘objective,’ and ‘representative of reality’ even as they grossly over-exaggerated the severity of events (DiAngelo, 2011):

- *“This fourth-grade group just can’t handle it.”*
- *“It’s been chaos every day.”*
- *“It’s tearing the fourth grade apart.”*

- *"We want to support you but this fourth-grade group is a mess. They can't handle it."*

White educators use poverty of culture discourse to exoticize the behaviors of marginalized students, as the intentional use of hyperbolic language in this vignette has shown. Through the myth of neutrality, these teachers constructed caricatures of the students that reified the racial hierarchy with themselves at the top (Baptiste, 2008; Bissonnette, 2016; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021).

This vignette also demonstrates the ways in which niceness misinforms understandings about communication styles (Emdin, 2016; 2021; Goodman, 2001). Do Not Offend rules police communication in elementary schools in ways that oppress students of color (Emdin, 2016; 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2017a). The statements below indicate an underlying assumption that I—another White person—would engage with them in deficit discourse and make inequitable educational decisions based on White notions of what is and is not productive academic discourse (Emdin, 2016; 2021; Castagno, 2014),

- *"When Little Miss Goodie-Two-Shoes is* screaming *at people on the playground, you know it's bad."*
- *"Yes! And really just lay down the law and make it clear that they won't get to be in it if they are disrespectful."*
- *"She may just not get to be in it if she's going to do all that."*

Here, Mr. White and Ms. Hill perceived disrespect as any behavior that offends others, particularly White teachers. This line of deficit thinking positions Sassy as the aggressor and her teammates as victims (Goodman, 2001). Through this lens, Sassy's actions, in particular, become one dimensional and lack nuance, as if she set out to terrorize the playground at the onset and the team members were innocent bystanders. The brief mention of a separate playground incident

involving Little Miss Goodie-Two-Shoes illustrates how much value the White teachers placed on White norms of 'productive' discourse, as shown below (Emdin, 2016; 2021; Castagno, 2014),

> Ms. Hill: *"When Little Miss Goodie-Two-Shoes is* screaming *at people on the playground, you know it's bad."*
>
> Mr. Mister: *"I even tried to help Little Miss Goodie-Two Shoes's group, and they didn't want to listen to me! I told them if they keep arguing like this, they'll be pulled from the show."*

When Little Miss Goodie-Two-Shoes 'broke character' and "screamed" at her team, the White teachers perceived that the discourse had ceased to be productive and was therefore offensive. Additionally, Mr. White's reply (*"I even tried to help Little Miss Goodie-Two Shoes's group, and they didn't want to listen to me!"*) demonstrated how White teachers use Do Not Offend rules to silence marginalized students and privilege their own voices (Goodman, 2001).

In this vignette, Do Not Offend rules invalidated Sassy's and Little Miss Goodie-Two-Shoes's level of commitment to the project, their natural leadership capabilities, and their (albeit misguided) efforts to hold their less motivated teammates accountable (Goodman, 2001). The display of White emotionality by Mr. White and Ms. Hill indicates an uncritical acceptance of Do Not Offend rules as an effective behavior management strategy wherein White comfort was prioritized over authentic peer accountability.

My critical awareness of the tools of whiteness used by these novice White educators informed the steps I took in the events following this conversation. Ms. Calm and I problematized their apolitical orientations and attempts at deficit discourses. Further, my follow-up meeting with Sassy's team reestablished roles and responsibilities without Do Not Offend

rules (Goodman, 2001). I supported Sassy in holding her team accountable and reframed the events through Sassy's point of view.

Mindful Reflection 7: In with the New

Mrs. Jolly was selected to be the second principal at East Pine Elementary, when Ja'Niyah Miller was promoted to a district-level role. Mrs. Jolly was bubbly, personable, and friendly White woman. She had a habit of touching the arm of the person nearest or reaching across tables in conversations. In her interview for the principal position, she handed out packets and handwritten thank-you cards to every member of the interview committee. She loved themes and went all-out on spirit days — she carried around a lightsaber and Baby Yoda in a backpack on Star Wars Day and often borrowed her son's Air Force 1's ® on dress-down Fridays. She had been in the district for over 20 years when she was hired as principal.

Mrs. Jolly loved the sound of her own voice. She seemed to like the idea of being a leader-that-listened more than the actual act of listening. She was usually thinking of a response while you were still speaking and would often interrupt you before you had finished your thought. Like, for example, at the end of her interview when she asked, "What qualities are important to you in your new principal?" A kindergarten teacher said, "It's very important to me to have a leader who truly list—" Mrs. Jolly cut her off to say, "Oh, yes, listening is *so* important." During our "Get to Know You" meeting in late July, I jotted the following in my field notes,

> *I expected to go in and do a lot of the talking, I guess that's just what I'm used to, but I actually hardly got to talk at all? Mrs. Jolly floated a lot of school wide initiatives—everything from changes to arrival/dismissal and lunch to dress code (including staff dress code) to something they keep calling WIN Time? Something about a SAFE Room*

too? Then all of a sudden, she was talking about hiring and all of the open positions still unfilled. I had a little bit of initiative whiplash during this particular conversation.

There was also a lot of talking about "knowing" the staff (e.g. husbands' names, pets, personal interests) but never once was a question posed to me that might allow me to share that information with her. It's safe to say I got to know her much better than she got to know me.

The new AP, Mrs. Anderson, was in many ways Mrs. Jolly's opposite. Where Susie Jolly was friendly and approachable, Mrs. Anderson was detached and formidable. The novice staff members were quite intimidated by her. Frankly, Mrs. Jolly herself often seemed intimidated. Mrs. Anderson's ideas about her role as an administrator centered on power and control. Like in October when the students walked into the cafeteria and found that she was assigning seats for breakfast and she said, "They're miserable, I love it!"

They were an odd team, to be sure. Though they performed their 'nice' White lady roles differently, both leaders were fully invested in the curriculum of whiteness (Wozolek & Atif, 2022). For example, after a staff meeting, I jotted the following field notes,

I briefly mentioned my research interests and offered to do a culturally sustaining pedagogies training with the staff. Right away it was very clear to me that we do not have a common definition of what CSP is. The conversation quickly devolved to surface culture: cultural family nights, posters/flags on the walls, "We love celebrating culture." Three White women talking about "celebrating culture."

Doing The Work, A Storied Analysis

Before she left, Ja'Niyah Miller promoted Dominic Patterson to the PBIS Coach position. Dominic was an East Pine "Day One," an original member of the inaugural staff—or as Ms.

Miller called us, her "OGs." Dominic was smart, easy-going, a college athlete, and just an overall effortlessly cool guy with long locs tied back with a basic rubber band and an impressive collection of limited-edition sneakers. The students naturally gravitated towards him, wanting to be in his orbit. They weren't the only ones, seemingly every principal in the district wanted him on their team. The summer before the school year, he was finishing up a graduate degree program in school administration and deciding between multiple leadership offers from other schools in WCPS. Ja'Niyah convinced him to stay, saying of one school, "Don't go there. As a Black male they'll just turn you into the school cop. Stay at East Pine where you can continue doing The Work, where you can grow." He heeded her advice and accepted the PBIS Coach position just before the start of the school year.

"High Flyers," A Storied Analysis

The amount of well-intended initiatives from the new administration was staggering, particularly in regard to behavior. One such initiative was the establishment of a "Refocus Room," an additional dedicated behavior space. We already had a De-Escalation Room, which was used by the Special Education team for specific behaviors indicated in BIPs and IEPs. The purpose of the "Refocus Room," however, was much less clearly defined. I wrote the following in my field notes after our August PBIS meeting,

> *So, we're getting something called a "Refocus Room" this year. It slipped into the conversation during our PBIS team meeting. It was presented as 'good news' ("teachers will be able to* teach*"). Refocus, SAFE, Detention, whatever you want to call it, they're all the same thing, if you ask me. There will be a dedicated paraeducator whose job is to oversee the Refocus Room. This feels sketchy. This will be East Pine's seventh year and our first with a designated, physical space for 'problem behaviors.' Our former principal*

was adamant that we operate without one because it enables color-evasiveness. We did have a de-escalation room, but it was used intentionally by the SPED team for specific behaviors identified by BIPs & IEPs. I have a bad feeling about this plan. I hope it doesn't become a place to banish struggling children.

Not long after, I wrote the entry below,

Just as I predicted, the Refocus Room has become the penitentiary of our school building. The paraeducator in charge of the space is the school cop, interrogator, jailer, presiding circuit-court judge, and jury all in one. I call him Mr. Jailer— he's big and White and intimidating. The preferred language being used by some in the building is that these episodes in the Refocus Room are the result of "big behaviors" stemming from "mental health issues" and "COVID-19 trauma." I'm sorry, no. You're telling me the only children experiencing mental health crises are males of color? No. It's about whiteness, plain and simple. It's our own mini school-to-prison-pipeline. It's a devastating thing to have happened to East Pine.

The sounds coming from that room are horrifying, often loud enough that I can hear the banging, shouting, screaming, and crying through four sets of cinder block walls from my Music Room at the back of the building. There is no restorative language, de-escalation, or support, and there is certainly no refocusing happening. It's a space where children are yelled at, 'punished' for their 'crimes,' and held until they have 'served their time.' This is what we've come to: bullying our children into compliance and submission. I don't even recognize this place.

The existence of the Refocus Room created an environment in which adults were more focused on compliance than academic rigor or the social-emotional wellbeing of children. Order

and control were the ultimate priorities (Behm Cross et al., 2019). Deficit language like the examples below became more commonplace among staff than I ever remember under Ms. Miller's leadership:

- A teacher sent a student to Refocus saying, *"I mean, some kids are just destined for jail, you know?"*
- A para called the first graders *"little shits,"* on the playground at recess.
- A newly hired Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD) teacher said, *"I work with the bad kids."* That teacher quit a short while later.

On the other hand, definitions of 'being nice' grew further disconnected from justice (Castagno, 2014). Table 2 shows some of the ways teachers at my school conceptualized 'being nice.'

Table 2

Various Definitions of 'Being Nice'

Example	*Possible Function*
"We have to be nice to each other."	Communicating empathy
"That wasn't very nice. Say you're sorry." "When you hurt someone's feelings, it's nice to say you're sorry."	Voicing empty platitudes
"Why does she have to say it like *that*?"	Silencing disquieting discourse
"Why can't she just be nice?"	Communicating offense
"Be nice, not mean."	Avoiding offense
"Friends are nice to each other."	Building healthy relationships

Similarly, teachers frequently defined friendship in 'nice' terms, through the framework of Do Not Offend rules (see Figure 10; Goodman, 2001). The administrators put up a bulletin board in

the Special Area hallway called, “How to be a F.R.I.E.N.D.” (see Figure 7); it featured the following message:

- **F**ind something in common;
- **R**espect other students, space, property, ideas;
- **I**nvite & include kids to participate;
- **E**mpathy: Show you care;
- k**N**ow when to support each other;
- **D**o the right thing even when no one is looking;
- **S**ay you’re sorry, everyone makes mistakes.

Figure 7

How to be a F.R.I.E.N.D. Bulletin Board

Staff also used coded language, referring to certain children as “high flyers,” or “frequent flyers,” a practice that was explicitly modeled by the school administrators. These students were

in and out of the Refocus Room or De-Escalation Room multiple times per day and could often be seen roaming the hallways in between what I can only describe as their 'solitary confinements.' At multiple points per day, all administrators and SPS team members were tied up with "high flyers," so that no one was available to effectively run the school.

In a dispiriting turn of events, the 'nice' White ladies placed Mr. Patterson in the exact position Ms. Miller tried hard to spare him from—he was for all intents and purposes the East Pine "cop." He spent the majority of each day escorting the "high flyers" to and from the Refocus Room or else carrying them—kicking and screaming—into the De-Escalation Room, which was relocated from its original place in an unoccupied classroom to the A/V Room, smack dab in middle of the library (of all places).

Both spaces were in consistent daily use, much to the dismay of Ms. Cézanne, the school librarian, whose lessons now had a custom soundtrack of guttural screams and crashing furniture, and who raised her concerns of its detrimental effects on her classroom culture on multiple occasions throughout the year. Unsurprisingly, the Refocus Room did nothing to minimize the behaviors that supposedly justified its establishment. If anything, it put adverse behavior on display in a very public way and added a deplorable layer of racial oppression to the school culture that the students resisted with a vengeance (Irby, 2014).

"Refocus? More like Reescalate," A Vignette

"Support needed in Ms. Jackson's Room," a voice called over the walkie. Behavior calls were more frequent this year (it seemed to be code for "I need someone to come get this kid because I'm tired of them and I want them out"), but rarely from Ms. Jackson. I put it to the back of my mind (things happen) and continued typing at my desk. Sometime later, the sound of furniture slamming, the unintelligible garble of an angry adult shouting, and a child wailing

interrupt the silence of my empty classroom. I felt a sudden rush of anxiety in my chest. I've heard bangs and shouts through the walls before, but the angry voice of an adult was something new. An ominous silence followed. I held my breath in the tense stillness. The ping of an incoming text message gave me a jump-scare. It was Ms. Magenta to the Specials group chat, "Huge power struggle in the deescalation room between Mr. Jailer and Brycen. I seriously don't know what to do. Screams of distress 'let go!!!!'"

The anxiety traveled up my neck, my throat constricted and my ears burned. I typed, "Oh my gosh Sage. I can hear it from here. My heart is racing," and send.

The walkie clicked and I heard Mr. Jailer's voice through the static, "Hey Mr. Patterson, you may need to come down here," Click. "Give me a minute," Click. *Whatever happened, it is big and it is harmful,* my inner monologue narrated.

My phone lit up again, "I could cry," Sage wrote, "He sounds helpless and there is no restoration language."

Fast forward to lunch.

Together, the Special Area team rehashed the morning with overlapping dialogue in meadow report style retelling, layering in everyone's first and second-hand experiences, hearsay, internal thoughts, interpretations, and side commentary to form a collective understanding of the event.

"Brycen is saying Mr. Jailer pushed him up against a wall." ("What! He's a grown man!") ("Even if he's exaggerating it's Brycen's word against Mr. Jailer and it's a windowless room with no cameras.") ("I wish I'd recorded it on my phone.")

"Mr. Jailer said Brycen scratched him." ("Can you blame him?") ("He was cornered!") ("Oh come on. Mr. Jailer was egging him on!")

“He wasn’t even escalated when he walked into the Refocus Room.” (“And it’s a Refocus Room, not a deescalation room!”) (“Refocus? More like Reescalate!”)

“Imagine being in a small group next door [in the mental health specialist’s office], hearing all that!” (“Talk about secondary trauma exposure!”) (“We literally just did a training on not retraumatizing kids.”) (“I was scared!”) (“I’m going to ask Ms. Ramsey what she heard.”)

“Did you see the way admin was huddled outside the door? Looked like a coverup to me.” (“I walked by to try and eavesdrop by the were talking too quietly I couldn’t hear what they were saying.”)

“Ms. Ramsey was the one that stopped Mr. Jailer, she just texted me. She said she knocked on the door and said, ‘Enough!’ and like, ‘This has gone too far!’ Then she told Mr. Jailer to leave the room. And then she took over the de-escalation.” (“That must’ve been when everything went quiet.”) (“Good for her!”) (“I knew I liked her!”)

“Mr. Jailer was totally shaping the narrative. I saw him out in the hallway with his hands up saying, ‘I never want to be alone in a room with that kid again!’ They’re totally writing Brycen off, they want it to seem like he’s making it up!” (“I could hear Mr. Jailer shouting through four cinder block walls!”)

“I almost called Brycen’s uncle and said, ‘Come to the school right now. Just come up here.’ I’m still tempted to call and tell him, ‘Ask Brycen what happened at school today and believe what he says.’”

A few days later Mr. Patterson, the PBIS coach, pulled me aside for a rushed sidebar:

> “Hey, I just wanted to let you know, if you or the Specials team need behavior support, please use my name or Ms. Ramsey’s name on the walkie. Don’t call for Mr. Jailer anymore,” Dominic said in a hushed tone.

"Dominic, what happened with Brycen, that was— We've gotta start turning this. Brycen was in distress. I heard it all the way in the Music Room, through four cinder block walls. I have never heard anything like that here before this year. I don't care what he said, he does not deserve to be treated that way from an adult who is supposed to be taking care of him. This is not who we are!" I was speaking fast, scream-whispering, "You know how things used to be, this is not- it-. There aren't many of us left, what like 12 of us left? We don't *bully* kids here! It's just so far from where we started. My heart is just so heavy. Like, some days I don't even recognize this place!"

"I know. It's not going to happen again," he said severely, "At first, I was open to his advice because he has a lot more experience in behavior than I do and well, but it's clear to me now that I've been listening to the wrong people. We're going to restructure behavior supports. We're going to be doing things a lot differently from now on. You have my word."

****

Oppressive school policies such as East Pine's Refocus Room reflect dysconscious racism through underlying assimilationist beliefs about order and control (Emdin, 2016; Irby, 2014; Kendi, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1990). Mr. Jailer's actions indicate the assimilationist beliefs that (a) students of color need to be controlled through any means necessary and; (b) his role as an educator is to bring order to their chaotic lives (Ladson-Billings, 2006b). His habit of speaking more harshly and forcefully to students of color further illustrates deficit views (Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1990). Through cognitive dissonance, Mr. Jailer distanced himself from his own harmful actions (*'I never want to be alone in a room with that kid again!'*). The observation made by the Special Area teacher below illustrates how the White

administrators chose to prioritize White comfort by strategically and purposefully insulating the incident in silence (Gordon, 2005),

> *"Did you see the way admin was huddled outside the door? Looked like a coverup to me."*

By elevating Mr. Jailer's version of the story, the administrators prioritized Mr. Jailer's White comfort over Brycen's Black dignity (Wozolek & Atif, 2022), as the following description shows,

> Sage: *"Mr. Jailer was totally shaping the narrative. I saw him out in the hallway with his hands up saying, 'I never want to be alone in a room with that kid again!' They're totally writing Brycen off, they want it to seem like he's making it up!"*
>
> Carmen: *"I almost called Brycen's uncle and said, 'Come to the school right now. Just come up here.' I'm still tempted to call and tell him, 'Ask Brycen what happened at school today and believe what he says.'"*

Ms. Ramsey was the only adult present who took critical action, as the account below describes,

> Sage: *"Ms. Ramsey was the one that stopped Mr. Jailer, she just texted me. She said she knocked on the door and said, 'Enough!' and like, 'This has gone too far!' Then she told Mr. Jailer to leave the room. And then she took over the de-escalation."*

In schools centered on the curriculum of whiteness, critical action to disinvest is not without professional risk, as the sidebar with Dominic and myself illustrates. Dominic seemed to be communicating that future critical action would have to be covert—hidden from particular administrators and staff members—as the following examples show:

- *"Hey, I just wanted to let you know, if you or the Specials team need behavior support, please use my name or Ms. Ramsey's name on the walkie. Don't call for Mr. Jailer anymore."*
- *"At first, I was open to his advice because he has a lot more experience in behavior than I do and well, but it's clear to me now that I've been listening to the wrong people. We're going to restructure behavior supports. We're going to be doing things a lot differently from now on. You have my word."*

Rafiki (Friend), A Vignette

We were scattered around the conference room table — the Specials teachers, Dominic Patterson, Mrs. Jolly, Mr. Barker, and Mr. White. The meeting was called to discuss a new student with behavior needs. The child was a refugee and had experienced significant war-related trauma.

"—He fled his country with his aunt and was in a refugee camp before coming to the United States. But his aunt is displaying some significant mental health issues herself and the house was no longer safe for him and so now he has been placed in foster care," Mr. Patterson was saying, "When they came here their apartment complex was in Central's neighborhood so he went to Central." There was a collective eye roll and then someone in the room said aloud, "Oh jeez."

"Yeah, so, looking through his behavior plan there are a lot of things in place that I don't think we will be doing. So, we'll look at his plan today and talk about some things. We just had a two hour meeting about him and Central sent over his BIP and they had a lot of good information to share. But also," he said interrupting himself, "I think coming to a school where there are more people who look like him, you know more adults, more male adults who look like him, and

placing him with a male teacher and just, I think we'll see that he is able to be more successful here. But you know, we're going to make sure he is getting lots of supports. Like, we want to get him started off on the right foot and especially on Day One and I'll be with him. Uh, he's currently in-patient at The Facility for Child and Adolescent Mental and Behavioral Health," Mr. Patterson explained, "He will be coming soon to us, we just don't know exactly when that will be."

"They can't give us a start date? Why?" Someone in the room asked.

"When a student is admitted to The Facility they are unenrolled from Washington County Public Schools. The Facility manages everything (behavior, medication, academic), while they are there. We can't have any information because they are no longer WCPS students," Mrs. Jolly explained, "And, well, they take them off everything to see sort of like their baseline and then add medicine back in. If a kid's stay is extended it's usually because of that, because they are trying to balance medication. Which is probably what they're doing now, which is probably why Rafiki has stayed so long," she added.

"So, what exactly is the behavior?" I asked.

"Yeah, so we'll look at his plan. Mostly fleeing," Dominic said and began to read from the document on his laptop, "So it says here, there was an incident where he refused to get on the bus so they tried to get him in a staff member's car to take him home and he ran and hid."

"I mean, that seems like a logical reaction to me. I wouldn't get in a stranger's car either!" I exclaimed. The group laughed and some of the tension in the room subsided.

"Yeah, not sure why they would try to take him home in a staff member's car in the first place. It says they ended up calling law enforcement and the police drove him home," Dominic concluded.

"In the back of a cop car? Jeez, that's traumatizing in and of itself," Carmen muttered.

Dominic continued to read, "Another time he left the building and started running up near the highway so they called law enforcement."

"I mean, Central Avenue is a very busy road," Tyler conceded, and we all agreed.

"But calling the cops? That seems extreme," said Amy.

"Well, he just leaves. He just leaves the school. And he hides from adults," Mrs. Jolly said firmly.

"A lot of countries have different expectations about attendance. In France there was a two hour break in the middle of the school day and everyone went home and then came back," Amy offered.

"Yeah, I student-taught in China and students just walked out sometimes. It was normal," Carmen added.

"He hasn't really had any formal education up to this point," Dominic explained, "According to his age, he really should be in sixth grade but WCPS placed him in fifth because we don't really know what he knows yet."

Mr. White shook his head with a knowing expression, "He hasn't taken the English Proficiency Test and," he added disapprovingly, "The EL teachers at Central said he refuses to learn English when they've tried to work with him."

Mr. Barker spoke for the first and only time, "Good for him, why don't we learn some Swahili instead of acting like English is all there is."

"Yeah! Stick it to The Man," I agreed. The group laughed again. I changed my tone, "So, what does an escalation look like for him exactly?"

"From what they've told us, tapping. He taps. Tapping is sort of his way of expressing frustration so if you hear it, it's time for a break, and there might not be much time. It's kind of unclear, really," Dominic shared, "He has also shown some physical aggression towards his peers but that's not in this file they shared so I don't really know."

"Oh, so like a normal Tuesday?" Someone in the room joked.

Mrs. Jolly nodded, interrupting herself and changing her train of thought multiple times as she said, "I say give him to us. We'll take him. We'll take all of the big behavior kids. Not to say that Central did a bad job— but, just, we are more equipped to handle big behavior— not that they aren't but— We've seen it, we know more— what to do with it. He's going to be wrapped in supports. I don't think we're going to see as significant of behaviors as they saw. We'll love him through it. It'll be fine. I think he's going to do much better here. And thank you to Mr. White—when we said, 'We've got a new behavior kid coming,' Mr. White accepted him without question."

****

White ways of being, knowing, and doing are explicitly taught through a curriculum of Whiteness, with underlying assumptions about language, relationships with time, student agency and autonomy, and what constitutes a 'formal' education (Alim & Paris, 2017; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). In this vignette, the BIP shared by Central Elementary paints a racialized portrait of Rafiki as a defiant and insubordinate child who resists the curriculum of Whiteness.

Several actors in the scene were fully invested in the curriculum of whiteness and embraced with uncritical acceptance the 'objectivity' of the BIP. Others were more critically aware of the BIP's color-evasiveness and framed the discussion through a culturally sustaining, pluralistic lens (Alim & Paris, 2017). Consider the critical action of Mr. Barker when English-

monolingual proficiency was addressed. Mr. Barker challenged Mr. White's uncritical acceptance of the monolingual/monocultural nature of schools (Alim & Paris, 2017), as shown below,

> Dominic: *"He hasn't really had any formal education up to this point. According to his age, he really should be in sixth grade but WCPS placed him in fifth because we don't really know what he knows yet."*
>
> Mr. White: *"He hasn't taken the English Proficiency Test and," he added disapprovingly, "The EL teachers at Central said he refuses to learn English when they've tried to work with him."*
>
> Mr. Barker: *"Good for him, why don't we learn some Swahili instead of acting like English is all there is."*

Here, Mr. White used English-monolingual proficiency to center the conversation around whiteness (Alim & Paris, 2017). By centering Swahili, Mr. Barker enacted critical consciousness that effectively de-centered Whiteness (Alim & Paris, 2017). Similarly, by defending Rafiki in the passage below, I centered the discourse around his experience rather than the 'nice' White authors of the report (Alim & Paris, 2017),

> Dominic: *"So it says here, there was an incident where he refused to get on the bus so they tried to get him in a staff member's car to take him home and he ran and hid."*
>
> Macy: *"I mean, that seems like a logical reaction to me. I wouldn't get in a stranger's car either!" I exclaimed. The group laughed and some of the tension in the room subsided.*

Dominic: *"Yeah, not sure why they would try to take him home in a staff member's car in the first place. It says they ended up calling law enforcement and the police drove him home."*

Carmen: *"In the back of a cop car? Jeez, that's traumatizing in and of itself."*

By sharing their experiences abroad, Amy and Carmen challenged monocultural assumptions about student autonomy that de-centered White understandings of time and school attendance, as the dialogue below illustrates,

Mrs. Jolly: *"Well, he just leaves. He just leaves the school. And he hides from adults."*

Amy: *"A lot of countries have different expectations about attendance. In France there was a two hour break in the middle of the school day and everyone went home and then came back," Amy offered.*

Carmen: *"Yeah, I student-taught in China and students just walked out sometimes. It was normal."*

Within the structures of hegemonic Whiteness in U.S. schools, time is a controlled and controllable resource. The narrow cultural aperture through which the report is framed does not take into account alternate cultural understandings of student autonomy and time, as Amy and Carmen's widened cultural apertures revealed.

Here too, are threads of the altruistic tendencies of 'nice' White educators, characteristic of the ideological and performative tools of whiteness (Miller & Harris, 2018; Picower, 2009), as Mrs. Jolly's closing statement illustrates,

"I say give him to us. We'll take him. We'll take all of the big behavior kids. Not to say that Central did a bad job— but, just, we are more equipped to handle big behavior— not that they aren't but— We've seen it, we know more— what to do with it. He's going to be

wrapped in supports. I don't think we're going to see as significant of behaviors as they saw. We'll love him through it. It'll be fine. I think he's going to do much better here. And thank you to Mr. White—when we said, 'We've got a new behavior kid coming,' Mr. White accepted him without question."

Mrs. Jolly's altruism (*"I say give him to us. We'll take him. We'll take all of the big behavior kids."*) is a 'White Savior' performance of the 'nice' White lady (Miller & Harris, 2018; Picower, 2009). I got the distinct impression that Mrs. Jolly believed Rafiki would successfully assimilate into 'formal' education—in spite of significant post-traumatic stress from war-related trauma—simply because we were going to *"love him through it."*

Mindful Reflection 8: A Safe Place to Land

As I changed, the Music Room changed—taking on a personality of its own. It became a space that students sought out by choice rather than a place they visited once a week because the master schedule indicated that they do so. It also became less 'mine' and more 'ours.' Students demonstrated that they felt comfortable there, maybe even that they felt a sense of ownership there. During Orientation Night I overheard an older sibling tell her incoming kindergarten brother, "This is my favorite place in the school. I just love it in here."

The Music Room became a daily landing place for many students such that there was a consistent stream of random pop-ins from individuals or small groups of kids (*"Mrs. Bell, can we practice guitars?"* or, *"Mrs. Bell, we're gonna work on our song at lunch,"* or, *"Mrs. Bell, we need to borrow some drums for a thing we're working on."*). I learned to thrive within a certain threshold of semi-organized, creative chaos, as random groups of students squeezed various self-initiated projects into the cracks in their day (e.g. lunch, recess, arrival, and dismissal).

I came to expect and even plan for this. I set aside a music technology workstation every afternoon for a fifth grader who used his recess to practice piano, and I kept a group of tuned guitars on a rack for the guitar-enthusiasts who stopped by several times a week to play. Some students took on active helping roles in the technical, logistical, and organizational tasks of facilitating music learning (*"Hey Mrs. Bell, need any help today?"* and, *"I'm going to go to recess today but I'll be back at dismissal to shut down the technology/organize the shelves/change the xylophone bars/help tune guitars."*) Still others established themselves as student-student teachers (*"Mrs. Bell, next week can I help teach kindergarten? My teacher said it's okay."*). I started planning primary lessons so that these student-student teachers could easily step in and lead certain activities if and when they wanted to.

Real Recognize Real, A Storied Analysis

A student teacher once asked me what to do when a colleague's actions cause oppression. I told them, "You might have to make a few enemies. There will be colleagues you'll need to keep at an arm's length and there may be times you need to make a situation uncomfortable." My critical awareness of whiteness also meant that I engaged in collegial relationships differently and developed several strong friendships as a result. The mental health specialist told me once, "When I first came here, I wasn't sure what to expect—you know some music teachers are *weird*—but you're a Real One." The following vignettes illustrate two instances in which my colleagues and I used our network to act critically in support student resistance of oppressive whiteness.

"I Want 24 Hours' Notice," A Vignette

The students were beside themselves, celebrating with cheers and joyful chatter. I had just announced that the music technology lab was finally ready, after a long saga with worn out

equipment that barred our use of the space. I launched into my spiel about "being good stewards of school property" when a loud knock brought all attention to the door.

"Mornin'," I smiled as the door swung open.

The middle-aged White band director leaned into the threshold, "Where is LaTreece?" he grumbled by way of greeting, eyeing the students irritably. Taken aback, the students looked nervously over at LaTreece, who raised her hand timidly.

"It's Wednesday. You have Band," he growled.

"But—" LaTreece started.

He cut her off with a dismissive wave of the hand, "No. I don't want to hear it. It's your day to have Band. Get up and get your instrument ready."

She restarted her sentence bravely, "But, it's our first day on the *technology,*" she gestured to the lab, where 25 computer screens were loaded to the title slide, "Music Technology Lab: Piano Methods, Mrs. Bell's Music Room East Pine Elementary School."

"And I drove all the way across town to be here. You're the only person I see on Wednesdays since everyone else has dropped out. So, I drive here *for you.* If you are going to miss, I want 24 hours' notice. Otherwise, you are wasting- my- time," he said in a clipped and dismissive way, "You did not notify me ahead of time. Let's- go-"

"I didn't know!" She exclaimed pleadingly.

"She didn't know," I said, inserting myself, "It was a surprise."

Ignoring me again he responded condescendingly, "This is unacceptable. Let's go." When she didn't move, he added, "Now!" in a harsh tone. LaTreece flinched and jumped up quickly from the carpet. She zipped her purple fleece jacket all the way to the top, tucking her chin behind the collar as she did so, and stuffed her hands forcefully into the pockets. Her cheeks

were a deep scarlet as she made her way slowly across the Music Room, averting all 24 dumbfounded pairs of eyes (including mine) that followed her path to the door. By the time she got to the doorway, her eyes were full of tears.

A few minutes later, when the class was fully engaged in the technology lab, there came another knock on the door, this time lighter, fluttery. I swung open the door to see Mrs. O'Connor and LaTreece standing together.

"We've decided there's not- going- to be- any Band today," Mrs. O'Connor announced. We shared a knowing look.

"Well, that worked out, didn't it!" I said brightly, "Station 24's all yours, Girlfriend!" LaTreece rushed to set up her station, leaving Millie and I huddled at the door.

"I found her sobbing in the hallway with him standing over her yelling at her. When I told her she didn't have to go today, he got up in my face and yelled at me!" Millie half-whispered, half-yelled.

"Come in, come in," I whispered, latching the door behind us, then in my full voice I said fiercely, "Oh, he wouldn't even let me get a word in edgewise. Talk about a masterclass in what not to do! Good grief, it's eight in the morning. Like, can we *not?!*"

"I- can't. And we just had that de-escalation training yesterday, ugh," Millie sighed, "Anyway, I know she's safe in here. I just want her to be somewhere she's safe."

"Yep, yep, yep. Chill— vibes— only—" I said, stretching each syllable theatrically and we laughed.

"Alright, well. That took up most of my planning. See ya' in a few minutes," she said, softly closing the door behind her.

****

This vignette offers another example of the ways in which we come to understand time as a transactional resource through the lens of hegemonic Whiteness (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013). School adults are in the privileged position of dictating how students will spend their time throughout the school day, as the East Pine Master Schedule shows (see Figure 8). Time, then, is the main resource by which we come to understand privilege and penalty systems in schools: time given, time taken away, time delegated, and time withheld (Hughes & Pennington, 2017).

Additionally, the valuation of time in schools is hierarchical and based on the distribution of power through hegemonic Whiteness, where students' time is less valuable than school authority figures (e.g. administrators, teachers, etc.). Such understandings of time create oppressive conditions in schools.

As the following statement shows, the band director demonstrated an underlying belief in time as a transactional and hierarchical resource in which his time was more valuable than his student and her time was subject to his discretion. When LaTreece challenged him, he used his authority to publicly penalize her,

> *"And I drove all the way across town to be here. You're the only person I see on Wednesdays since everyone else has dropped out. So I drive here for you. If you are going to miss, I want 24 hours' notice. Otherwise, you are wasting- my- time," he said in a clipped and dismissive way, "You did not notify me ahead of time. Let's- go-"*

Finally, by setting an unreasonable expectation for an eleven-year-old child—like demanding 24 hours' advance notice of scheduling changes—the band director was able to reify his deficit beliefs about LaTreece, and students of color more generally, as irresponsible, untrustworthy, and *"wasting-"* his time.

As described below, the band director reacted with anger when another White educator challenged his actions,

> *"I found her sobbing in the hallway with him standing over her yelling at her. When I told her she didn't have to go today, he got up in my face and yelled at me!"*

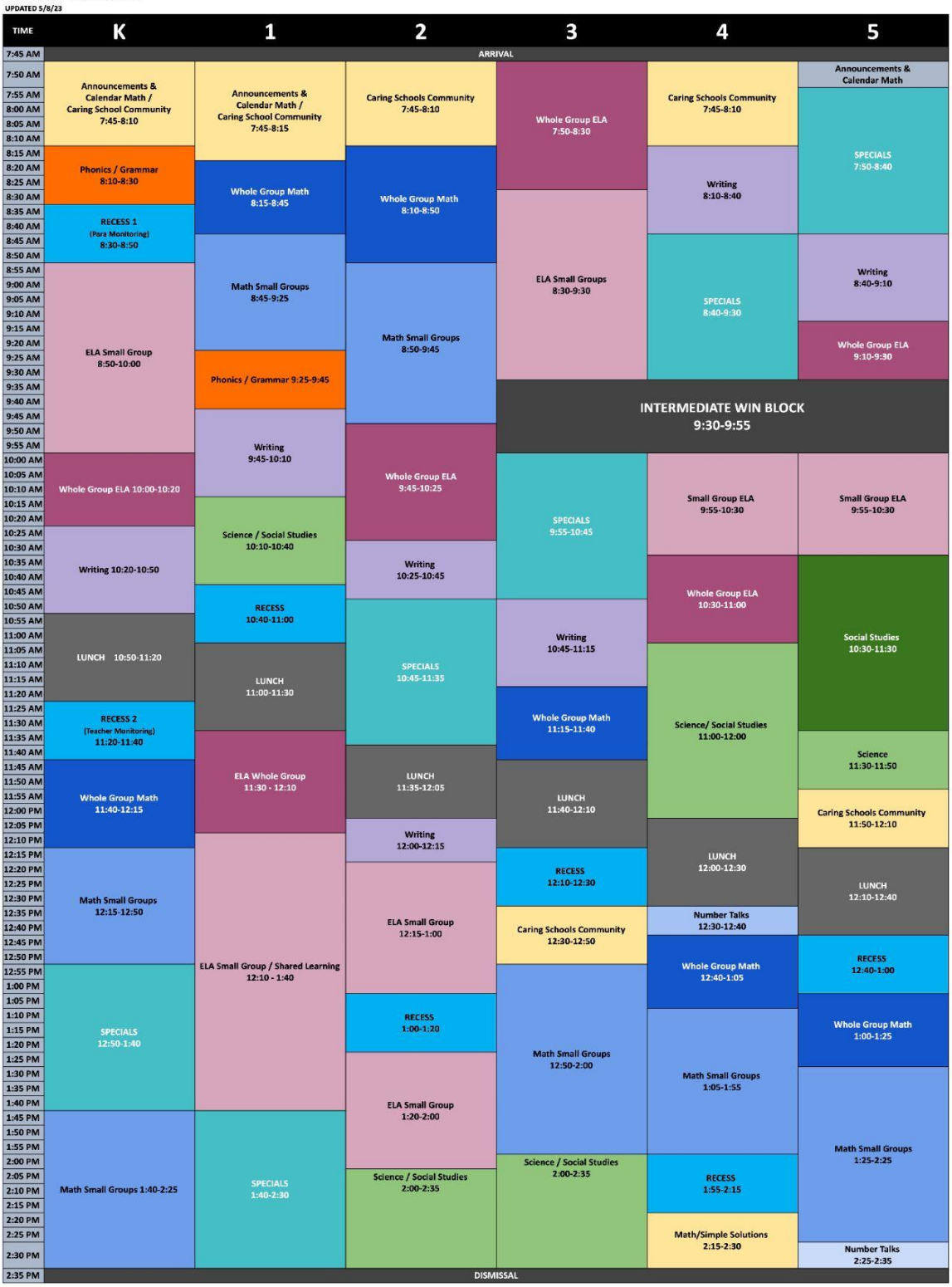
Mrs. O'Connor's critical actions illustrate a critical awareness of the harm incurred by White notions of time, power, and authority, as the following statement shows,

> *"Anyway, I know she's safe in here. I just want her to be somewhere she's safe."*

By using our network of critical action, Mrs. O'Connor and I were able to advocate for LaTreece and resist oppressive whiteness.

Figure 8

East Pine Master Schedule



Angry About Math, A Vignette

'I just get so— mad. I mean we're *third* graders—"

"Almost fourth," I interjected.

"Right, almost fourth, like, we can make groups of ten, okay? We don't need to show our work for math we can do in our heads. She just explains everything to us like we're in kindergarten," Tyree ran his fingers over his hair, tracing the lightning bolt shaved behind his ear and slumped glumly against the cinderblock wall.

"Do you want me to help solve a problem or do you just need to vent?" I asked casually.

"Vent? What's that?"

"Just, you know, letting out some—"

"Mrs. Bell, can I get a drink of water?" Interrupting, Cooper poked his head out the door of the Music Room. Inside my student teacher was leading a high energy movement activity with movement scarves, flashes of color popped in and out of my line of vision from my position just outside the door.

"Sure," I said absentmindedly before returning my attention back to Tyree, "—a way to just talk it out, let out some frustration," I finished.

"Oh, um. I dunno, maybe solve the problem. Maybe both?"

"Okay, sure. Why don't you vent first, and we'll see if we can't find a way to solve the problem later."

Tyree launched back in, "Well, I mean, sometimes I just feel so angry, but I really try not to let it out, the anger. I try to keep it in and push it down, because, well, I'm responsible for my choices and I want to try to make good ones and so I keep adding more and more anger in and-"

"Sometimes I get so angry like that too, it feels like I might explode with it," Cooper, who had been edging closer and closer to our chat after his not-so-quick-sip of water, slid down the green cinder block wall, curling himself into a ball. We both nodded sympathetically as he retreated within himself.

I turned back to Tyree. "Tyree, buddy, it's healthy to feel your feelings. Really you need to feel them, otherwise your body holds on to all of that negative energy and it's not healthy for you. You know, that's when people explode over a really small thing, when they hold in their big feelings for too long," he considered this for a moment and I added, "I hear what you're saying though, I can see you're really trying hard to be a super scholar and I'm proud of you for not acting in anger. I can tell you're really trying to handle this in a respectful way."

Not knowing how to respond to this, Tyree backtracked, "Yeah, I mean, we're *eight* years old. We don't need to be talked to like babies. And every time Ms. Wallace subs for us, she acts like we don't know anything. Like she has to tell us every little thing, like we can't do anything."

I still couldn't quite figure out where all this was going, "So, when she was going over the groups of ten, was this whole group, or did she say not to work ahead, or what?"

"She said we didn't have to listen to her, but, I mean, the worksheet took me ten minutes and what else was I supposed to do when I was done?? We didn't even get to anything new because she spent the whole time talking about stuff we learned years ago. If this is how Reading is going to go, I—"

"When do you have Reading?"

"After lunch," Cooper chimed in from the fetal position.

"I wish I could go to Mrs. Carpenter's room, like I used to before Winter Break. I liked going there, to Mrs. Carpenter's room," Tyree reflected.

“Do you think you were the only one feeling this way?”

“No, I don’t think so,” he wavered, “Well, maybe, I don’t really know.” He returned to his train of thought and said, “We stopped doing flex groups for Reading so now I just stay with my class all day.”

“Yeah, we don’t change classes anymore,” Cooper echoed.

“So, the pacing of the math lesson really bothered you this morning because you felt like it was too slow for third, almost fourth, graders,” I summarized, “And you were disappointed not to learn anything new?” He nodded approvingly, I was evidently getting the gist. “Do you want to start brainstorming some ways to solve the problem?”

“Yeah,” he exhaled.

“Well, if you like going to Mrs. Carpenter’s room, you’re happy there, and challenged, it seems like an easy fix, to me. I wonder if she would let you join her class for the Reading block this afternoon. Do you think she would?”

“Oh! Yeah! We have Reading after lunch,” he said, perking up from his gloomy mood.

“I mean, if you’re not flex grouping anymore then you’ll be doing the same lesson, just from Mrs. Carpenter’s room,” I reasoned.

“But, I’m scared to ask Ms. Wallace,” he realized suddenly.

“Well, I think maybe you should talk to Mrs. Carpenter first because if she says no—”

“—there’s no point even talking to Ms. Wallace, yeah,” he continued, thoughtfully.

“Yeah, there would be no point,” Cooper echoed again. Now, he was laying facedown on the anti-slip rug, his quick drink of water a distant memory.

“Right, so I think you should talk to Mrs. Carpenter first,” I agreed.

“Can I have some paper and a pencil? I need to get my thoughts organized.”

I brought the requested supplies and added a clipboard for good measure. He slid down the wall to sit on the floor with the clipboard propped up on his knees and wrote,

"Mrs. Carpenter,

I was feeling frustrated by the pacing of the math lesson this morning. Can I join your class for Reading today?"

—Tyree

He took great pains with the wording.

"Alright, I think this is a really solid plan, kiddo," I said conclusively, "Are you ready to join the music lesson now?"

"Yeah, I feel a lot better," he grinned, clutching the note, "I just want to practice this a few more times so I can say it on my own without looking."

"Sure, whatever you need. Do you mind if I go join the group? It sounds like things are getting hectic in there. I'll leave the door cracked open so you can get in when you're ready," I said lightly. Then, "C'mon Cooper, this has been the longest water break on record." Cooper popped up from his facedown position on the rug and followed me through the door.

At the end of Specials, Tyree peeked out the door and saw Mrs. Carpenter down the hall. "There she is!" he exclaimed and took off toward her. As they talked, I saw her nod kindly and pat his shoulder. On their way back up the hall he slyly passed me the note he'd written. He turned back to me with a thumbs up.

****

'Nice' White ladies communicate deficit views about students of color by over-scaffolding the curriculum (Hammond, 2015; Kleinfeld, 1975). Over-scaffolding the curriculum creates oppressive conditions for students of color and influences their self-concept (Hammond,

2015; Kleinfeld, 1975). In this vignette, Ms. Wallace's deficit views of Tyree and his classmates, as demonstrated by her instructional practices, contrasted his positive self-concept as intelligent and capable of high levels of academic rigor. He reacted with frustration and anger when attempting to reconcile the cognitive dissonance of this experience, as the examples below illustrate,

- *'I just get so— mad. I mean we're* third *graders—"*
- *"Right, almost fourth, like, we can make groups of ten, okay? We don't need to show our work for math we can do in our heads. She just explains everything to us like we're in kindergarten."*
- *"Yeah, I mean, we're* eight *years old. We don't need to be talked to like babies. And every time Ms. Wallace subs for us, she acts like we don't know anything. Like she has to tell us every little thing, like we can't do anything."*
- *"We didn't even get to anything new because she spent the whole time talking about stuff we learned years ago."*

Tyree's metacognitive reflection on anger in the dialogue below suggests that, as a Black male, he has absorbed negative social messages about his emotions as inappropriate or unwelcomed, and has learned to intellectualize his emotions to avoid causing offense (Goodman, 2001),

> Tyree: *"Well, I mean, sometimes I just feel so angry, but I really try not to let it out, the anger. I try to keep it in and push it down, because, well, I'm responsible for my choices and I want to try to make good ones and so I keep adding more and more anger in and-"*
>
> Cooper: *"Sometimes I get so angry like that too, it feels like I might explode with it."*

Cooper's introspective response indicates that he has experienced negative social messages about Black male emotion as well. My challenges to this particular worldview, as shown below, confused Tyree and Cooper and so they opted not to respond,

> *"Tyree, buddy, it's healthy to feel your feelings. Really you need to feel them, otherwise your body holds on to all of that negative energy and it's not healthy for you. You know, that's when people explode over a really small thing, when they hold in their big feelings for too long."*

For Tyree, where Ms. Wallace represented the Sentimentalist teacher in this vignette, Ms. Carpenter personified the Warm Demander (Hammond, 2015; Kleinfeld, 1975; Ware, 2006). As shown below, Tyree expressed positive views of Ms. Carpenter's classroom as an intellectually and emotionally safe space where he felt supported through appropriate scaffolding, academically challenged, and encouraged to engage in productive struggle (Hammond, 2015; Kleinfeld, 1975),

> *"I wish I could go to Mrs. Carpenter's room, like I used to before Winter Break. I liked going there, to Mrs. Carpenter's room."*

Finally, the opportunity to change his circumstance *hopefully* communicated to Tyree that his anger as a Black male is not always inappropriate and that his teachers can and will elevate his voice when he speaks out against educational inequity (Hess, 2018a).

Mindful Reflection 9: It Had to Be Said

No Filter, A Storied Analysis

I initiated this autoethnography to explore how my critical consciousness has developed overtime. However, I didn't realize autoethnography in turn influence developing critical

consciousness, particularly critical action. Several times during this research study, I have found myself acting critically *because of* autoethnography.

For example, at the beginning of the Honors Chorus concert, the audience was cheering and shouting for their singers as they entered the stage. The cheers were loud and enthusiastic, with many audience members standing and waving unabashedly to their child, even after the concert had officially begun and Mr. Pembroke was at the podium giving the opening comments. Several of my colleagues were appalled at this conduct and had negative things to say. The conductors stood in a small circle backstage crossing their arms, shaking their heads, rolling their eyes, and saying contemptuous things like,

"Okay now this is just getting ridiculous."

"Now you see where the kids get it."

"The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, huh?"

"So— unbelievably— rude—"

"For heaven's sake, it's like they're at a football game."

"Are we going to have to do an attention signal for the audience?!"

I laughed and said lightheartedly, "They're excited for their kid. I mean, this isn't Carnegie Hall or the Met. It's just not that serious."

Not all the conductors appreciated my perspective and upon realizing that perhaps they were not in a circle of trust, several of the more outspoken conductors dispersed to sulk independently. One conductor smiled and said, "True, but they should at least stop while Mr. Pembroke is speaking." The following vignettes demonstrate a few more occasions in which I acted critically when silence or color-evasiveness was expected of me.

You Can Lead a Horse to Water…, A Vignette

"*These* kids," the orchestra sub said, shaking her head. "They just aren't *motivated.* The concert is next week and half of 'em don't know any of the notes." She lifted two music stands onto the cart and slid them into place. She had been using the Music Room as a rehearsal during the testing window, when her usual spot in the cafeteria was occupied by students taking the test.

"Well, they're still kind of figuring out what they like and don't like at this age," I said diplomatically, waiting to see where this would go.

"Yeah, they'll be in for a rude awakening on the day of the concert when they don't know anything," she said, following her own train of thought, "Those ones in the back just might not be able to do it. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink, right?"

"But you can give him salt to make him thirsty," I added, conspiratorially. My student teacher perked up, smiling wryly behind her laptop.

I put the last stand on the rack and leaned against it, "You didn't ask, but I say let them perform. Let them feel what it's like to be up on a stage with an audience watching. They need more live performance opportunities."

"That's— true—" she faltered. As she wheeled the cart down the hall she called back over her shoulder, "Thanks for letting me take over your space!"

"Anytime!" I called and closed the door behind her.

When the orchestra sub was gone, my student teacher looked up again, "I've never heard that last part," she said.

"That's something one of my mentors used to say. Makes it a lot harder to justify inequitable actions, doesn't it?" I smiled cheekily.

****

As this chapter has shown, 'nice' White ladies set up 'nice' parameters around culture of poverty discourse to absolve themselves of harm and reify the hierarchy of hegemonic Whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 2017a). The adage, *You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink*, is a common example of such a parameter for deficit discourse in educational spaces. So long as their racist discourse remains within the established parameters, 'nice' White ladies seldom expect to be contradicted, particularly by other White ladies (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Kenyon, 2022; Miller & Harris, 2018). As the dialogue below illustrates, inserting myself through critical action disrupted this unspoken norm and surprised the orchestra substitute,

> Orchestra Sub: *"Those ones in the back just might not be able to do it. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink, right?"*
>
> Mrs. Bell: *"But you can give him salt to make him thirsty. You didn't ask, but I say let them perform. Let them feel what it's like to be up on a stage with an audience watching. They need more live performance opportunities."*
>
> Orchestra Sub: *"That's— true— Thanks for letting me take over your space!"*

My student teacher's reaction and the initiation of the critical discourse that followed, suggest an evolving worldview and the development of a critical awareness of dysconscious racism (Friere, 2021; Sleeter et al., 2004).

"Be Careful," A Vignette

"—So, the performance will more or less mirror Kadir Nelson's Heart and Soul," I was explaining to Mrs. Jolly, Mrs. Anderson, and Mr. Patterson. I continued, "We will start with Slavery, that'll be Chapter one, if you will, and then we'll move on to Abolition. We have several Spirituals we can sing. Next we'll talk about Reconstruction and tie it to the Blues."

"You've got kids playing the Blues?" Mr. Patterson interjected, excitedly.

"Yeah!"

He said, "Cool," and I continued.

"Then we'll jump ahead in the timeline to The Civil Rights Movement and end with present day resistance: Black Lives Matter and current events."

This time it was Mrs. Jolly interrupting, and for a much different reason, "I, well, I just— we have to be careful with current events. Parents might complain," she said vaguely.

"Well," I paused, "I will say, we've already had a lot of great discussions in the Music Room. Today a kid made a connection between The Civil Rights Movement and the discrimination that's happening at the border and the things his family experienced coming to the U.S. from Mexico," I looked to Dominic, who was nodding as I spoke. I continued, encouraged by his validation, "It's important that they don't see The Civil Rights Movement as the end of the story. I want to honor the lived experiences of *our* students. I want them to see history as an ongoing thing, you know? Something that they are a part of."

"Oh yeah, yeah. Definitely. I just, I'm not sure we need to say— well," she interrupted herself, "I think we need to be careful, um, about the words we use," Mrs. Jolly replied joltingly, "But, I— um, we'll figure it out, parents will always find things to complain about. I like that it's tied to a text, that helps—"

"Well, I plan to frame it through Martin Luther King Junior's speech and ask, like, have we actually accomplished his dreams, or do we still have work to do? But again, I feel really strongly that it's important that the conversation doesn't just end with The Civil Rights Movement."

“Oh, yeah, I like that,” Mrs. Jolly said noncommittally and shifted in her chair, “Could you share your presentation with Dominic to look over? Not that we’re going to be checking it or anything just—” she waved a hand through the air, finishing the rest of her sentence nonverbally.

“Um, sure, no problem,” I stole a glance at Dominic, who seemed to be reading my mind.

“What time do you want to start calling classes down?” Mrs. Anderson asked.

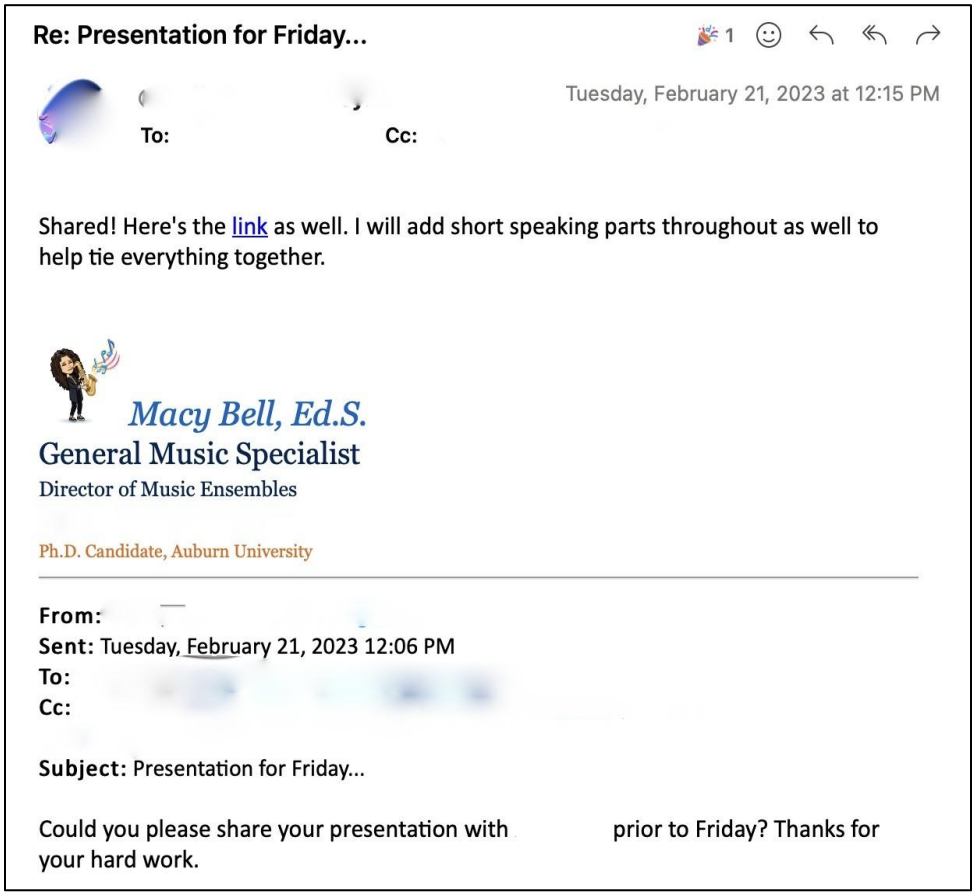
I cleared my throat, “So, we have enough music for about 30 minutes, with transitions I would think 45 minutes to an hour. And I can definitely trim some of the fat. Looking at it again, I think I’ll combine Slavery and Abolition. I’ll probably cut it down to three or four chapters rather than six. Maybe a little earlier than usual, I know we have a guest speaker so maybe like 8:05, 8:10?”

“Okay, you can just text me when you’re ready,” Mrs. Anderson replied.

A few minutes later, I received an email notification from Mrs. Jolly with the subject line: “Presentation for Friday…” Mrs. Jolly wrote, “Could you please share your presentation with Dominic prior to Friday? Thanks for your hard work.”

Figure 9

Follow-up Email



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In this vignette, Mrs. Jolly performs her role as the 'nice' White lady by leveraging the hypothetical emotionality of White parents over the actual lived experiences of her marginalized student body, as the following dialogue illustrates (Orozco, 2019),

> Mrs. Bell: *"Then we'll jump ahead in the timeline to The Civil Rights Movement and end with present day resistance: Black Lives Matter and current events."*
>
> Mrs. Jolly: *"I, well, I just— we have to be careful with current events. Parents might complain."*

Throughout the meeting, Mrs. Jolly used *"Be careful"* as an ideological tool of Whiteness to subvert direct discourse of current issues of race, suggesting an underlying belief in the myth of progress (Behm Cross et al., 2018; Picower, 2009). With Mr. Patterson's backing, I acted critically to disrupt the color-evasive, *"Be careful"* discourse, as the interaction below shows,

> Mrs. Bell: *"Well," I paused, "I will say, we've already had a lot of great discussions in the Music Room. Today a kid made a connection between The Civil Rights Movement and the discrimination that's happening at the border and the things his family experienced coming to the U.S. from Mexico. It's important that they don't see The Civil Rights Movement as the end of the story. I want to honor the lived experiences of* our *students. I want them to see history as an ongoing thing, you know? Something that they are a part of."*
>
> Mrs. Jolly: *"Oh yeah, yeah. Definitely. I just, I'm not sure we need to say— well," she interrupted herself, "I think we need to be careful, um, about the words we use. But, I— um, we'll figure it out, parents will always find things to complain about. I like that it's tied to a text, that helps—"*
>
> Mrs. Bell: *"Well, I plan to frame it through Martin Luther King Junior's speech and ask, like, have we actually accomplished his dreams or do we still have work to do? But again, I feel really strongly that it's important that the conversation doesn't just end with The Civil Rights Movement."*

Mrs. Jolly's appeals to White comfort were at odds with her conditional acceptance within Whiteness (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021). It was therefore necessary as a 'nice' White lady that she be perceived as 'not racist' (Kendi, 2019; Miller & Harris, 2018). Her 'nice' follow-up email

implied that the Black History Month performance would be conditional on Mr. Patterson's oversight (see Figure 9).

Translators, A Vignette

"We will give directions at the end of the concert for parents to meet their child at the meeting spot," Mr. Pembroke was explaining to the music teachers gathered for the monthly General Music PLC meeting.

"Do we have translators yet?" I asked casually.

Mr. Pembroke hesitated and then said slowly, "No— not— yet—"

"At our meeting in the fall, we had talked about it as a possibility so I was just wondering. I think it would be really helpful for families," I shared, "We'll probably definitely want a Spanish translator. And then we can make sure we get the programs translated in all languages needed," I added. At this, music teachers from around the room chimed in —

"We have Swahili."

"We have Chinese."

"I have an Arabic student."

"Well I mean, if we try to have translators giving announcements during the concert for all language needs, that could take 20 minutes, that could go on forever."

An idea was presented that translators could be stationed throughout the lobby so that they are available to families, as needed. This idea was well received by the group. One music teacher was not convinced, "Well, we have not had much success with translators when we have had events at Monarch Elementary. They don't always keep their appointments."

Mr. Pembroke turned back to me, effectively concluding the dialogue, "I'll ask about it, Macy, but I don't know if we're going to have much district support for something like this."

****

As this chapter has shown, educators accept with an uncritical habit of mind the monolingual framing that positions English as normal and other languages as unusual (Alim & Paris, 2017). In this vignette, the music teachers embrace linguistic pluralism with varying degrees of readiness (Alim & Paris, 2017). Initiating a critical discourse about linguistic pluralism disrupted the typical trajectory of the meeting and challenged the monolingual status quo of the Honors Chorus event (Alim & Paris, 2017). As the following statement shows, one music teacher used White conceptualizations of timeliness to rationalize monolingualism,

> *"Well I mean, if we try to have translators giving announcements during the concert for all language needs, that could take 20 minutes, that could go on forever."*

Another music teacher seemingly justified her monolingualism by positioning the potential translators as unreliable,

> *"Well, we have not had much success with translators when we have had events at Monarch Elementary. They don't always keep their appointments."*

Mr. Pembroke also demonstrated misgivings by displacing the responsibility,

> *"I'll ask about it, Macy, but I don't know if we're going to have much district support for something like this."*

Mindful Reflection 10: The Fight for Space

The neighborhood development on the east side of town significantly outpaced the school district's plans for the area, so that East Pine—which was built for an enrollment of approximately 600 students—was already 100 students over capacity within seven years of its construction. At the time that this autoethnography took place, district plans for the construction of a new east side public school were still more than four years away.

At the time of the research study, East Pine had 26 kindergarten- through fifth-grade classrooms, two preschool classrooms, and one Moderate and Severe Disabilities (MSD) classroom. The projections for the following school year included two additional kindergarten- through fifth-grade classrooms for a total of 28 classrooms, two preschool classrooms, two MSD classrooms, and significantly increased Learning and Behavior Disorders (LBD) and EBD caseloads. Issues of equity arose as the school and district leadership scrambled to make impactful decisions regarding the use of space in a building that was not physically large enough to meet the demands of the growing numbers of students. Said plainly, East Pine had too many people and not enough places to put them.

Too Many People, Not Enough Places to Put Them, A Storied Analysis

Support personnel (i.e. EL team, interventionists, Special Area, Special Education, etc.) were most affected by the decisions regarding learning spaces. There were so many rumors and hearsay throughout the 2023 Spring semester that it was difficult to tell fact from fiction or truth from opinion. In an attempt at transparency the new principal, Mrs. Jolly, actually contributed to the confusion by sharing partial, inaccurate, or out-of-date information with small groups of teachers a little at a time. As the school year drew to a close, several support teams were still contending with the foreboding likelihood of losing a dedicated physical space in the building and instead, being placed "on a cart."

With two weeks left in the school year, Mrs. Jolly still could not articulate clearly what the following year would look like for the Arts team. It became likely that all decisions would be placed on hold until the tenth instructional day, putting the support staff in an indefinite holding pattern.

“How do I plan my curriculum when I have no idea whether I’ll have an Art Room next year?” Sage sobbed, her voice trembling with unresolved worry and stress.

“How do I pack my room?! Like, am I packing for summer or packing for— storage???” I echoed. The vignettes below articulate how decisions regarding space affected the visual and performing arts programs at East Pine.

“They Walked Your All’s Rooms,” A Vignette

This vignette is a secondhand account of a pivotal conversation with Mrs. Jolly and the Special Area team while I was absent. It marks the first occasion the Special Area team heard about the potential loss of our dedicated spaces for the 2023-2024 school year from Mrs. Jolly, herself, despite weeks of “Specials on carts” rumors circulating the staff. Given the weight of it on the team and the chain reaction of events that followed, I felt compelled to analyze it through autoethnography, even though I was not there in person. As such, I have constructed a tale based on the numerous retellings I gathered from the Special Area team, and I have assumed the role of fly-on-the-wall narrator.

“So, they walked the building,” Mrs. Jolly said without preamble, pulling up a chair at the long gray Art room table, where the team was finishing a hurried lunch. “I haven’t heard back about the building yet. Um, they did come to walk— We are adding an MSD unit, as of right now—” She had a habit of interrupting herself and not finishing her sentences, making it challenging to follow the train of thought and leaving meaning to be interpreted in the silences that followed.

“Where will it go?” Amy prompted.

“Oh! They walked your all’s rooms,” she emphasized.

“So, that’s fine,” Carmen said derisively, “I’ll leave.”

“But it’s so true though!” The pitch of Mrs. Jolly’s voice rose to the top of her register in a false cheerfulness that did not match the weight of the content she was relaying. She maintained this false cheerfulness throughout much of the forthcoming dialogue. “The lady was like, ‘Let me see your Art Room—’ I was like *‘Okay—*”’ she ended shrilly.

Carmen became immediately defensive, “Where do they want us to put all this *stuff?* For waste. In storage?”

“Oh, I know girl,” Mrs. Jolly agreed, her dark brown curls bouncing as she nodded, “So— I don’t know what’s gonna happen.”

“Plus, doesn’t it have to have a bathroom?” Carmen continued.

“They’re gonna build a bathroom,” Mrs. Jolly answered simply.

“Oh Lord have mercy,” Carmen growned, “They need to put it somewhere else!”

“That, that’s my question. Why did they choose our school?” Amy asked pointedly.

“Because they move in this area. So there are more MSD kids,” Mrs. Jolly explained, “It would be like, if your kid, and you lived in that house right there and I said to you, you can’t come here because there’s not enough room?”

“Well then, somebody else needs to go. This school is exploding!” Amy reasoned, “That does not logistically make sense!”

Mrs. Jolly began speaking before Amy was finished, “When the lady walked around she said, ‘Until every space in the building is a classroom space—’ which is what has happened in some schools, I mean unfortunately everybody are in portables—”

“But, so they don’t consider our classrooms, classroom spaces?” Carmen clarified.

“Your’s, these would be classrooms before they would—” Mrs. Jolly trailed off, seemingly unable to decide where the sentence was going.

Carmen continued to press the issue, “But it *is* a classroom space. That’s insulting to me, you know?”

“It is, I mean, they could turn it *into* a classroom,” Mrs. Jolly answered. They were speaking past each other—two different understandings of the word, ‘classroom.’ She adjusted the cuff of her jean jacket absentmindedly.

“But the way that they look at it is just disgusting in a way,” Carmen said quietly.

“Because we do— classroom teaching,” Amy added in a way that suggested she wanted to contribute but was momentarily lost for words.

“Yeah, I hit multiple standards in a lesson,” Carmen said vaguely, trying to summon the advocacy needed in the moment and coming up short. She settled for, “It’s just frustrating,” and fell silent.

“It is,” Mrs. Jolly conceded, “You know and hopefully they will not go in that direction if I can, I just, I don’t, I don’t have control over it.” She threw her hands up and clapped them together in a praying motion.

Sage spoke for the first time, “Do you know when we’ll know by?”

“Um, I don’t. So, what’ll happen is right now they’re taking both LBD rooms because we’re adding a second and we’re adding a fourth for next year, that’s just without Day Ten. From there, I’m gonna have to move LBD somewhere, because that’s Patrick, that’s four teachers that are gonna be out of a space.”

“Are they giving us portables?” Amy asked.

“Oh, we don’t know yet. No, not until this building— not until, I don’t think until we’ve used all the space.”

“Oh my god,” Carmen muttered disapprovingly.

Mrs. Jolly continued, “So until those rooms are full, until every—”

Amy finished the sentence for her, “—until they’ve Taken Specials rooms?”

Her answer was uninspired, “I— I don’t know, I haven’t gotten an answer back from her yet.” The temporizing manner with which she engaged this conversation was maddening.

“Can we advocate to her?” Amy asked pointedly, “I don’t want to overstep you but like, I’m willing to fight for—”

“No,” Mrs. Jolly interrupted, sounding decisive for the first time, “No. HmmMmm. Because that—” She cleared her throat and seemed to decide not to say whatever it was she was thinking. Instead she said, “I just met with the director of Special Ed and he walked out and basically said the same thing. Other schools have everybody on a cart except for classroom teachers.”

“I, I’m sorry, but I will probably leave,” Carmen repeated in a dejected tone.

“Yeah. I get it. I get it,” Mrs. Jolly acknowledged with an airy tone that said, *I can’t make your decisions for you.*

Carmen continued, “I, I just, when I’m set up for failure, I’m not about it.”

“So, I don’t know if that will happen but we won’t have, I don’t have control of that,” Mrs. Jolly reiterated equivocally.

“And I understand,” Carmen conceded, “It is what it is, but I just—”

“They control facilities,” Mrs. Jolly concluded with a note of cold finality.

“I would love to write to them—” Amy continued to try.

Mrs. Jolly stood, pressing the tips of her fingers on the tabletop, then took several steps toward the door, “Hopefully that won’t happen, we’ll see, I mean maybe they would do portables before we got to that point, um, but there’s just no say in—” She interrupted herself and turned

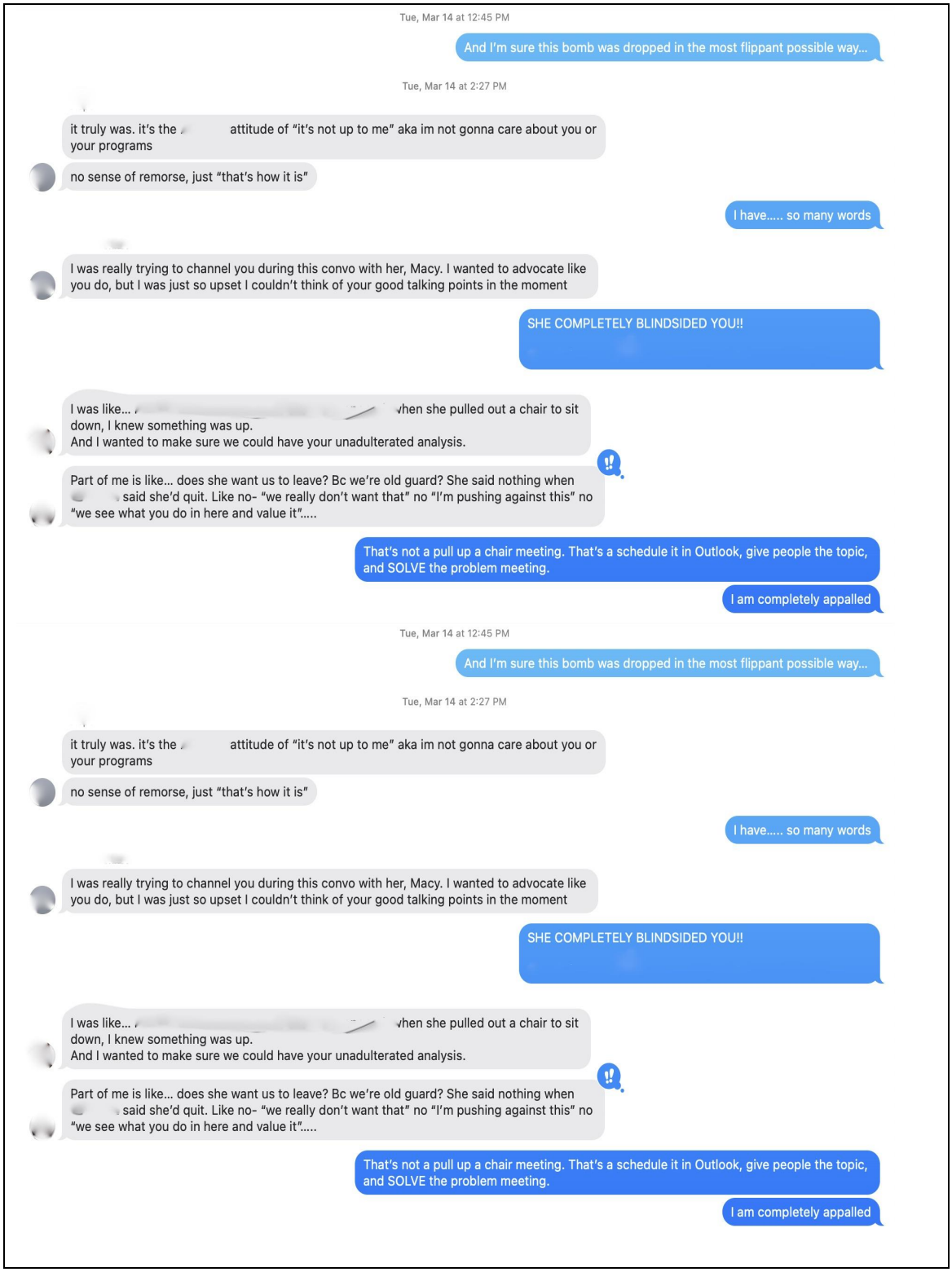
back to the team, “Like, Patterson Elementary has been a mess because they just got portables and they’ve got people in their conference rooms.” She turned back to the door and held the handle.

“It comes down to, like, what is education and what do we want it to be?” Amy contemplated philosophically, “Because, the more you do that, the more it’s just big giant babysitting. Like, what are we cultivating here?” Returning to the corporeal Amy asked, “Okay, so is this like, ‘Hey, I’m coming around trying to warn you guys?’”

“No, I’m just transparent, I’ll tell you guys, I don’t know anything. I mean, we don’t have control— I mean, I don’t get a choice in it. Does that make sense? Like they own the facility, they own the building, they can come and tell me, I mean, I don’t really have a choice. They’re at this point, they’re gonna take other rooms and tear down the wall and build a bathroom for MSD. I can’t tell them no. Does that make sense?”

Figure 10

Reactions to Mrs. Jolly's Impromptu Meeting about the Building Walk-through



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What struck me about this conversation in data collection and analysis is the lengths 'nice' White ladies will go through to apply dysconsciousness to justify inequitable educational decisions (Behm Cross et al., 2018). The team seemed to be witnessing, in real time, a 'nice' White lady attempting to convince herself of her own powerlessness to affect change. As in the *"Be Careful,"* vignette, Mrs. Jolly made consistent use of several dysconscious qualifier statements throughout this and subsequent conversations about classrooms, which served to displace the blame and responsibility of the decisions, display a perception of powerlessness, and generalize the East Pine experience. These statements contributed to her personal absolution of any harm incurred (Castagno, 2014; King, 1991; Picower, 2009). I used In Vivo coding to organize Mrs. Jolly's dysconscious qualifier statements according to their function within a paradigm of niceness (see Table 3).

In addition to the dysconsciousness Mrs. Jolly applied to discussions of facilities, she consistently demonstrated a narrow view of the term, 'classroom,' as synonymous with 'homeroom,' —that is, a permanent space for housing general education teachers. As the dialogue below illustrates, this limited definition created a sense of confusion among the Special Area teachers, who defined 'classroom' more broadly, as a permanent space for housing classes—that is, groups of students,

> Mrs. Jolly: *"When the lady walked around she said, 'Until every space in the building is a classroom space—' which is what has happened in some schools, I mean unfortunately everybody are in portables—"*
>
> Carmen: *"But, so they don't consider our classrooms, classroom spaces?" Carmen clarified.*

Mrs. Jolly: *"Your's, these would be classrooms before they would—"*

Carmen: *"But it* is *a classroom space. That's insulting to me, you know?"*

Mrs. Jolly: *"It is, I mean, they could turn it into a classroom."*

Carmen: *"But the way that they look at it is just disgusting in a way."*

Amy: *"Because we do— classroom teaching."*

Carmen: *"Yeah, I hit multiple standards in a lesson. It's just frustrating."*

Mrs. Jolly: *"It is. You know and hopefully they will not go in that direction if I can, I just, I don't, I don't have control over it."*

The Special Area teachers perceived Mrs. Jolly's narrow definition of the term 'classroom' as a lack of support for the arts, as shown in Figure 10.

Finally, consider the deliberateness with which Mrs. Jolly adjusted her use of the possessive pronoun, *"your's"* to the demonstrative pronoun, *"these"* (*"Your's, these would be classrooms before they would—"*) in an attempt to depersonalize the experience of losing designated arts spaces in the building.

"If We Lose Our Rooms, We'll Never Get Them Back," A Vignette

The building walk-through was the main topic of our staff meeting following the Special Area meeting. "They came out and started looking at our Music Room and our Art Room and they said, 'uh huh' and 'mmm … hmm …' —" she summarized glibly.

I called out across the library, interrupting her, "They're just seeing prime real estate— Where does the quality of teaching and learning (and the inevitable *loss* in quality of teaching and learning) come into play?"

"I think Patterson had Special Area on carts before they got portables," She added bass to her voice, seeming suddenly self-aware that her previous tone had been too frivolous, "They own the building."

"But we own the test scores," I fired back. At this, there was a low rumble of assent among the staff.

She shifted her weight to her toes and shook her curls from her face, apparently surprised by this level of pushback, "Because we are advocating in a way that is very *respectful,* they're listening. But they do own the facilities."

"So how much say do you have in what gives?" I asked defiantly, echoing a phrase she had used earlier when describing our rapidly growing neighborhood: *"Eventually something has to give. We may be the first school in the history of WCPS schools that they redistrict for."*

"Well, we just had that conversation," she said with a marked coldness, "And our director is advocating, but what is above me is above me. They are listening to us, but hopefully they will find some solutions." She quickly moved on to another topic so as to avoid prolonging the debate any further.

After the meeting, I sought her out, not to apologize (I wasn't sorry), but to continue the dialogue privately and to push for specifics, considering the Special Area meeting I had recently missed. "Mrs. Jolly, hey, do you have a second?" I asked, jogging to catch up with her in the hallway.

"Sure!" she said, turning to face me.

"I didn't mean to jump down your throat," I allayed in a tone that said, *I meant every word and I'm not sorry but I acknowledge that I pushed you pretty darn hard in front of an audience*.

"Oh, that's okay, I know," she touched my arm forgivingly.

I took a breath, "I am deeply concerned about this."

"I know," she said, matching my sincerity.

I could see that I had her undivided attention and I knew I needed to make it count, "They're just seeing prime real estate, but these spaces are full of students all day, every day, using equipment they wouldn't have access to anywhere else. Between Art and Music, we're talking about an investment of over $300,000. The music technology lab alone cost us almost 50 grand. It's state of the art, collegiate-level equipment. It would be a devastating thing to take resources out of kids' hands and let them sit in a warehouse to gather dust."

"I know, we're trying to keep that from happening. I'm doing everything I can," Mrs. Jolly said maternally. "I mean, you should have seen our director this afternoon on the phone with Facilities. He was going *off.* I kept trying to get him out of the hallways," her voice was steadily rising. "I was like 'Michael, Michael, why don't you come inside my office!'" She finished shrilly.

"As he should be! Well, I'm glad he's taking it seriously," I acknowledged.

She began to veer off course, "It's not just us, it's everywhere on this side of town. These neighborhoods are just exploding. The Patterson Specials teachers moved to carts and—"

I was not willing to entertain another tangent about other schools, "Right," I said, cutting in, "But Patterson *knew* they were moving into portables, so carts were a temporary solution until the portables were ready." I had to keep the conversation focused on *this* school, *these* kids. I said, "If we're never getting portables, if they've already told us 'no portables,' then whatever decision we make now is going to be permanent. Susie, if we lose our rooms, we'll never get them back."

That seemed to strike a chord. She considered for a moment before saying, “This is at the top of the superintendent’s list. He is aware. It’s the number one topic of his meeting with the directors this week. He may even come and tour the spaces himself.”

“Well, when he does, I want you to come find me. I want to introduce myself and I want him to shake my hand.”

I was serious but she laughed melodiously, “I will. I will do that. And as soon as I know anything, I will let you know. I want to be as transparent as possible.”

“Well, I appreciate it, really. Is there anything we can do while we wait? Anyone we can reach out to? This decision is inequitable. It’s an injustice to our kids.”

“No,” She shook her head adamantly, “No, we’ve been respectful through this whole process, we’ve been cooperative. They’re working on solutions, and our director has brought it to the superintendent’s attention. So, no. We can’t say anything. If we do, it’ll just get us in trouble. It could make things worse. And if I say— No. There’s nothing.”

“Well, please keep me updated. Like I said, they’re just seeing prime real estate, they’re not seeing the active learning that’s happening there. They’re not thinking long term about what Specials on carts would do to this school, to the quality of teaching and learning.”

Postscript 1: Following the staff meeting three staff members reached out to me privately.

“I just wanted to say thank you for speaking up at the staff meeting about equitable spaces for learning in our building. You are appreciated!”

“Thanks for saying what everyone was thinking, Macy!”

“Someone had to,” I replied.

“I’m glad you spoke up. We’re thinking about you.”

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As this chapter has shown, Mrs. Jolly's 'nice' White lady performance included an uncritical habit of fickleness and flippancy on issues of inequity where stability and steadfastness were needed. Mrs. Jolly placed considerable value on 'respectful cooperation,' as expressed in the examples below,

- *"Because we are advocating in a way that is very* respectful, *they're listening. But they do own the facilities."*
- *"No. No, we've been respectful through this whole process, we've been cooperative. They're working on solutions, and our director has brought it to the superintendent's attention. So, no. We can't say anything. If we do, it'll just get us in trouble. It could make things worse. And if I say— No. There's nothing."*

These explanations suggest that Mrs. Jolly conceptualized 'respect' through the parameters of Do Not Offend rules (Goodman, 2001). In the service of politeness, Mrs. Jolly was willing to engage in silencing to avoid offending others (Gordon, 2005). Consider, for example, her description of the school director's indignant response to the facilities walk-through: when his indignation threatened her previously established 'respectful cooperation' with the Facilities Department, she became uncomfortable,

> *"I mean, you should have seen our director this afternoon on the phone with Facilities. He was going* off. *I kept trying to get him out of the hallways," her voice was steadily rising. "I was like 'Michael, Michael, why don't you come inside my office!'" She finished shrilly.*

Similarly, Mrs. Jolly was uncomfortable with my public display of indignation during the staff meeting. She made multiple attempts to placate me through the 'nice' strategies shown in

Table 3. When her attempts did not dissuade me, she insinuated that perceived offensive actions might result in problems, as she described in the following statement,

"We can't say anything. If we do, it'll just get us in trouble. It could make things worse."

Table 3

Mrs. Jolly's Dysconscious Qualifying Statements

In Vivo Codes	Function	Examples
They own the building.	Displacing blame / responsibility	*"**The lady** was like, 'Let me see your Art Room—' I was like* 'Okay—'*"* ***"They control facilities."*** ***"They own the building."***
I don't have a choice.	Perceived powerlessness	*"You know and hopefully they will not go in that direction if I can, I just, I don't, **I don't have control over it.**"* *"So, I don't know if that will happen, but we won't have, **I don't have control of that**."* *"They're at this point, they're gonna take other rooms and tear down the wall and build a bathroom for MSD. **I can't tell them no.**"* ***"... what is above me is above me."*** *"No, we've been respectful through this whole process, we've been cooperative. They're working on solutions, and our director has brought it to the superintendent's attention. So, no. We can't say anything. If we do**, it'll just get us in trouble. It could make things worse.** And if I say— No. There's nothing."*
I don't know …	Perceived powerlessness	*""No, I'm just transparent, I'll tell you guys, **I don't know anything.** I mean, we don't have control—"* *"Oh, **we don't know yet.** No, not until this building— not until, I don't think until we've used all the space."*

In Vivo Codes	Function	Examples
It's not just us / Other schools	Generalizing the experience	*"Because **they move in this area.** So there are more MSD kids. It would be like, if your kid, and you lived in that house right there and I said to you, you can't come here because there's not enough room?"*
		*"When the lady walked around she said, 'Until every space in the building is a classroom space—' which is what has happened in **some schools,** I mean unfortunately everybody are in portables—"*
		*"**Other schools** have everybody on a cart except for classroom teachers."*
		*"Like, **Patterson Elementary** has been a mess because they just got portables and they've got people in their conference rooms."*
		*"I think **Patterson** had Special Area on carts before they got portables."*
		*"It's **not just us,** it's everywhere on this side of town. These neighborhoods are just exploding. The Patterson Specials teachers moved to carts and—"*

The EPES Arts Facilities Report, A Storied Analysis

At the request of the district Fine Arts Director (see Figure 11), Ms. Magenta and I compiled a Facilities Report to advocate for the art spaces at East Pine (see Appendix B). We submitted it for the Director's meeting with the Facilities Department. As we compiled our report, I also sought Ms. Miller's input (see Figure 12). The decision to act critically in this way meant standing in direct opposition of our school administration and courageously facing the potential professional consequences of doing so.

Figure 11

"This space serves X, Y,Z because A,B,C."

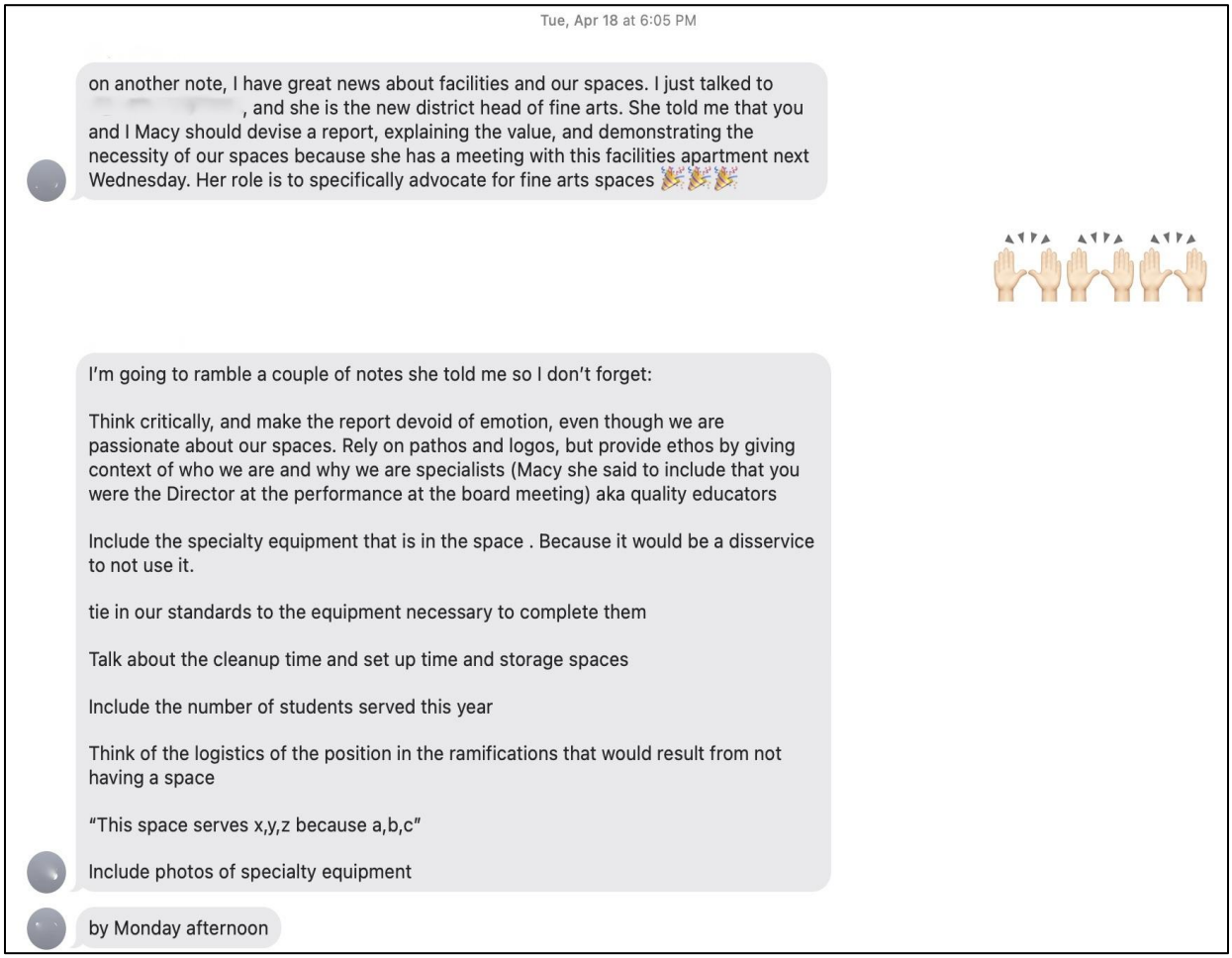
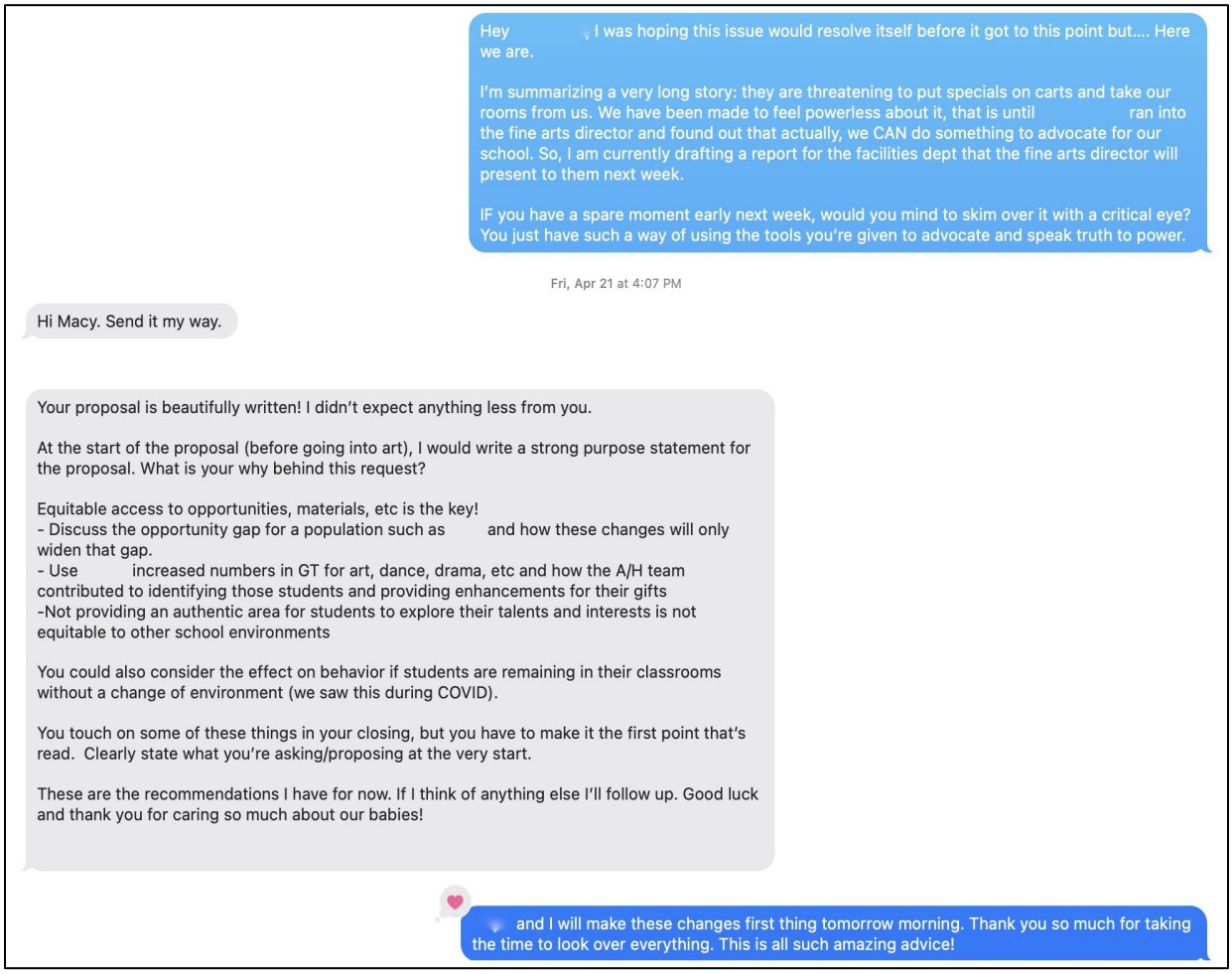


Figure 12

Ms. Miller's Advice about the EPES Arts Facilities Report



Chapter 5

Discussion

Although I am unable to draw generalizations due to the nature of autoethnographic work, I found that my career experiences as a White, middle-class, monolingual music educator reflected the CWS literature on educational niceness in resounding ways. Through analytic autoethnography I found that niceness is an integral part of the educational status quo in my community (Castagno, 2014; Goodman, 2001). The normality of educational niceness supports the sustained societal racial dominance of whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2012). In this discussion I will attempt to synthesize the ways in which these data illustrate, (a) my investment in dysconscious racism through my identity as a 'nice' White lady (see Figure 13) and; (b) my gradual and ongoing disinvestment from whiteness through enacted critical consciousness (see Figure 14).

Evolving Understandings of 'Good Teaching'

Particularly in elementary schools, niceness is expected. Therefore, 'being nice' and 'good teaching' are very nearly indistinguishable from each other (Castagno, 2014). In other words, we take for granted that our educators will be 'nice' White ladies (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021). The findings in this dissertation showed that dysconsciousness framed my early conceptualizations of 'good teaching' such that I fully invested in the identity of 'nice' White lady and struggled to perceive myself any other way. My identity as a 'nice' White lady was deeply connected to ideas about politeness, respect—particularly, respect for authority—good sportsmanship, emotional poise, helpfulness, and friendliness. Early in my career I also internalized ideas about 'preppiness'—a community-specific form of niceness that comprised White elitism, classism, social status, and racialized understandings of school quality (Vaught,

2008). However, as my critical awareness grew under the mentorship of critically conscious leaders, my understandings of 'good teaching' slowly evolved beyond White norms and values (Alim & Paris, 2017; Hammond, 2015).

'Nice' White Lady

'Nice' White ladies reify whiteness in schools through dysconscious racism. Findings from this dissertation can be summarized into three major themes of dysconscious racism that form the overall identity of the 'nice' White lady (see Figure 13): (a) uncritical habits of mind, (b) institutionalized cultural scripts, and (c) tools of whiteness for maintaining White comfort. Each of these themes contributed to the values and priorities of the 'nice' White lady in teaching to the curriculum of whiteness (Lea, 2001; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). Within the three major overarching themes were a variety of sub-themes that illustrated specific characteristics of the 'nice' White lady as she enacted dysconscious racism (see Figure 14).

Disinvestment from the 'nice' White lady identity through autoethnography was a rigorous critically reflexive process that involved: (a) an evolving worldview in which I learned to sit with my own discomfort in order to grow; (b) the deliberate and critically conscious disruption of institutionalized cultural scripts and; (c) resistance to the ideological, emotional, and performative tools of whiteness through enacted critical consciousness (see Figure 17).

Figure 13

Themes of a 'Nice' White Lady's Dysconscious Racism

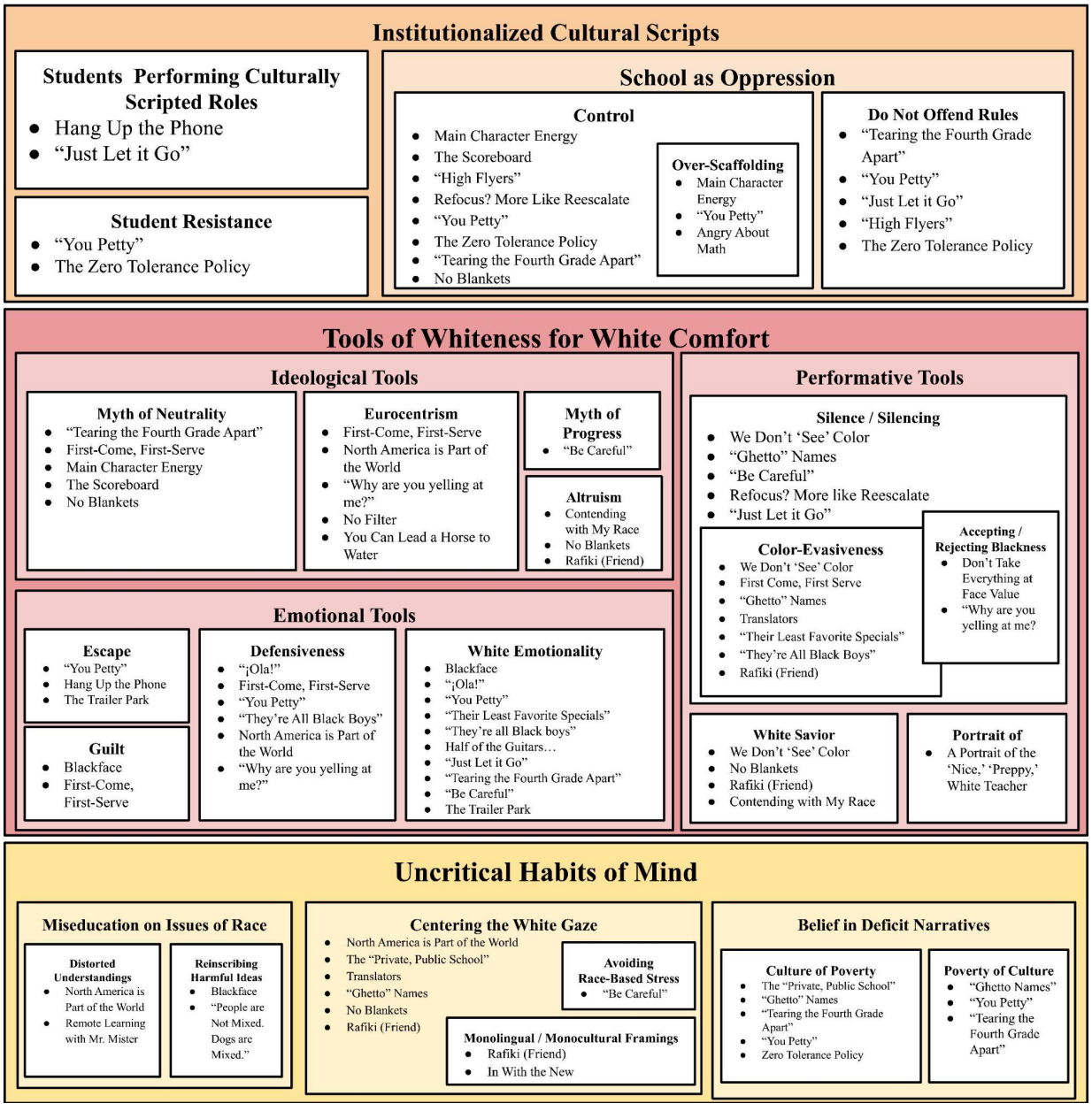
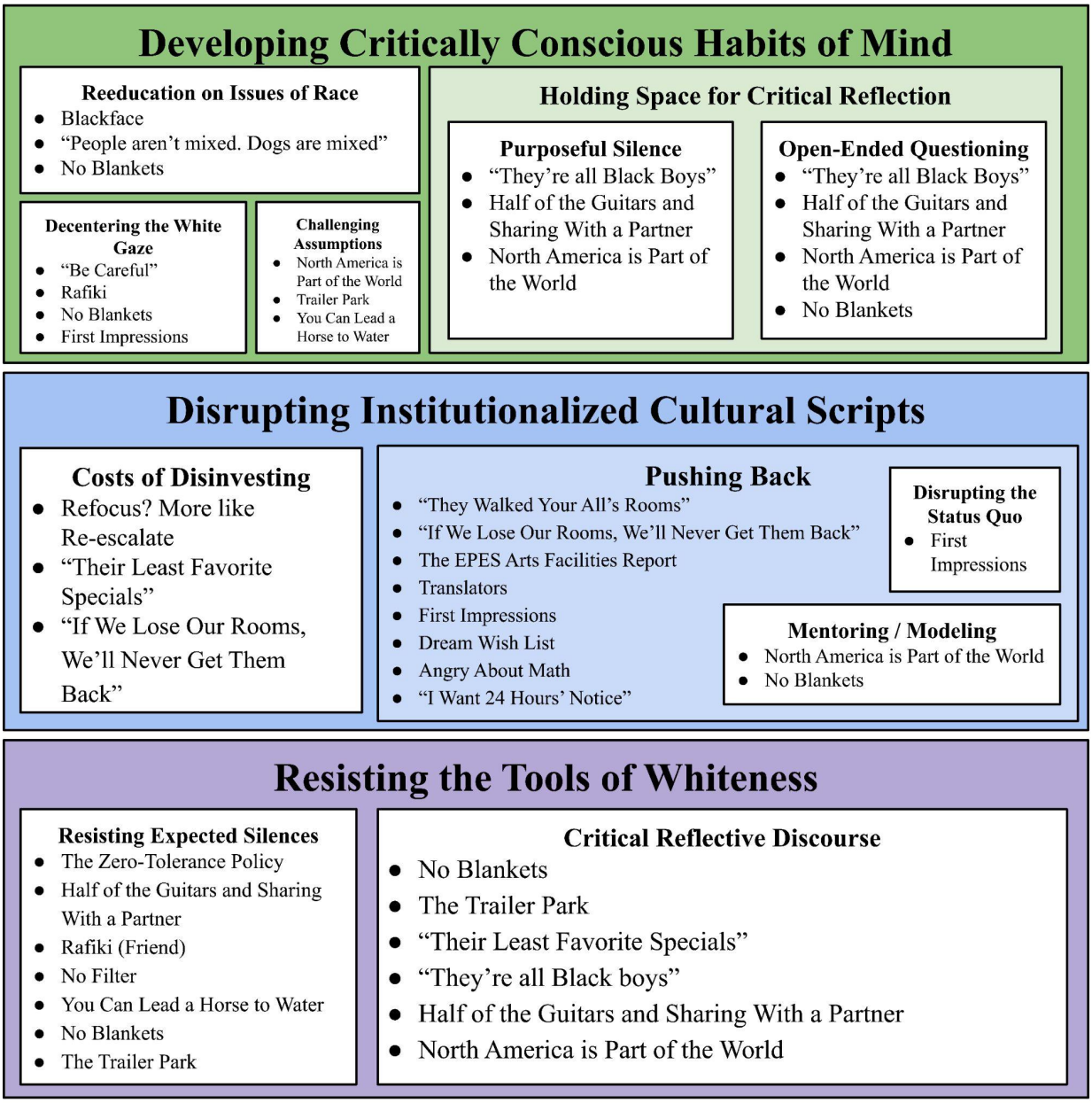


Figure 14

Themes of Enacted Critical Consciousness



Uncritical Habits of Mind

My findings show that uncritical habits of mind set the stage for every racist thought, feeling, and action communicated by 'nice' White ladies (King, 1991). Dysconsciousness allowed 'nice' White ladies to adopt institutionalized cultural scripts under the ubiquity of 'good teaching' (Castagno, 2014) and the ideological, emotional, and performative tools of whiteness under 'professionalism' (Picower, 2009). The findings in this dissertation show that uncritical habits of mind manifested as (a) miseducation on issues of race, (b) centering the White gaze and, (c) deficiency beliefs about children of color and their communities.

Miseducation on Issues of Race. These data illustrate a variety of examples of miseducation on issues of race that contributed to my dysconsciousness. Especially early in my career, I demonstrated distorted understandings on a number of issues pertaining to race that stemmed from my own limited experiences in overwhelmingly White spaces. For example, in the *"North America is Part of the World"* vignette, I demonstrated a gross miseducation of racial and cultural identities that was largely based on stereotyping and appropriation (Alim & Paris, 2017; Annamma et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Reinscribing Harmful Racial Ideas. Miseducation on issues of race comes to matter as White educators engage in the political and highly contextualized act of teaching (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). In the *Blackface* and *"People are Not Mixed. Dogs are Mixed,"* vignettes my miseducation on rudimentary issues of race reinscribed harmful racial ideas (Castagno, 2008; Kendi, 2019). My miseducation was so profound, in fact, that I tuned out Ms. Miller's subtle corrections, uncritically assuming she couldn't possibly be addressing me (Kendi, 2019). My uncritical assumptions reflect the argument by Matias et al. (2014) that "whites believe they are not a part of race when they actively invest in white racial production" (p. 291).

Centering the White Gaze. Many times in this study, I found that 'nice' White educators demonstrated the uncritical and harmful habit of marginalizing students of color by centering the White gaze (Alim & Paris, 2017; Emdin, 2016). The systems and structures of education are founded on hierarchical understandings of race, where success is framed in terms of a "unidirectional assimilation into Whiteness" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 3).

Behavioral Assimilation into Whiteness. The findings of this autoethnography showed an uncritical acceptance of the status quo of whiteness in determining the academic and behavioral success of children of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Consider the *"High Flyers"* storied analysis in which White-centered understandings of 'adverse' student behavior significantly influenced administrative decisions regarding investments of time, funding, valuable resources, and the use of viable learning spaces within the building. Such over-scaffolding of behavior marginalized children of color and created an oppressive learning environment centered on control, compliance, and assimilation (Alim & Paris, 2017; Emdin, 2016; Kendi, 2019).

Academic Assimilation into Whiteness. Similarly, *Mindful Reflection 10: The Fight For Space* encapsulates the academic priorities of 'nice' White ladies in 'low performing' schools. Mrs. Jolly consistently centered her administrative decisions for East Pine on White middle-class norms of academic achievement that were largely driven by standardized testing scores in mathematics and reading (Alim & Paris, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995). As I pointed out in the Special Area group chat such a limited view of academic success creates space for inequitable educational outcomes (*"Absolutely no foresight. This is exactly how underserved schools BECOME UNDERSERVED. Small inequities… put specials on a cart, maximize 'classrooms' and 'storage.' Pretty soon specials are cut and the specials classrooms become closets."*). Mrs.

Jolly's White-centered approach stands in direct contrast to Ms. Miller's philosophy of education which deliberately decentered whiteness by recentering diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing, as multiple vignettes showed (*"I will always put children first, even if it means more work for adults."*).

Monolingual and Monocultural Framings. These data revealed an important sub-theme of monolingual and monocultural framings (Alim & Paris, 2017). For example, the *"¡Ola!"* vignette illustrated how I leveraged the White gaze to marginalize Estrella and reify the monolingual and monocultural status quo of schools (Alim & Paris, 2017). Mr. White demonstrated similar assumptions about learning in the *Rafiki (Friend)* vignette when he framed academic success through the narrow lens of English-language proficiency. On multiple occasions, Mrs. Jolly revealed monolingual and monocultural understandings of school and conceptualized 'culture' as surface level elements (*"We love celebrating culture."*).

Avoiding Race-Based Stress. Centering the White gaze for the explicit purpose of avoiding race-based stress was an important sub-theme in these data (Behm Cross et al., 2019; DiAngelo, 2011). In the *"Be Careful"* vignette, Mrs. Jolly centered the gaze of hypothetical White parents over the lived experiences of her students of color when she urged me to *"be careful with current events."* Mrs. Jolly's impulse to decenter Blackness in a Black History Month program indicates an uncritical expectation of avoiding race-based stress and remaining "racially comfortable" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 60) throughout the Black History Month celebration.

Belief in Deficit Narratives. Many times in these data, I saw a pattern of 'nice' White educators communicating deficiency thinking about high-needs schools, such that ideas about 'good teaching' in a high-needs Title I school were deeply intertwined with deficit-based pedagogies. I found that both culture of poverty (Ladson-Billings, 2017a) and poverty of culture

(Ladson-Billings, 2006b) discourses were frequently used by 'nice' White educators to frame deficit beliefs about students of color.

Deficit Discourses. Deficit discourses allowed 'nice' White educators—in particular young 'nice' White educators—to express uncritical racialized ideas about authority, control, privilege, and penalty within the safety of niceness. 'Nice' White educators at East Pine displayed a deeply held belief in the role of discipline and order in controlling students of color and preparing them for the 'real world' (Alim & Paris, 2017; Castagno, 2014; Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2017a). For example, the use of 'The Scoreboard' to track class behavior overtime indicates an instructional decision based in culture of poverty thinking (Ladson-Billings, 2017a). Consider the ways in which Mr. White and Ms. Hill used deficit discourses in the *"Tearing the Fourth Grade Apart"* vignette to convey their own personal low opinions of individual students of color (*"She does not need to be in charge of anything!"*). Their racially-motivated desire to call off the Winter Showcase indicated significant cultural incompetencies about communication styles and an underlying belief that access to high-quality performance experiences should be contingent on students' ability to adhere to White discipline and order (Ladson-Billings, 2017a). Comparably, my instructional decision to withhold instruments from students in the first semester at East Pine indicates an underlying deficit belief that access to high-quality educational materials and resources should be a privilege, not an educational right (Ladson-Billings, 2017a). My deep-seated mistrust of students of color did not reflect my own limited experience and was therefore, based largely on societal deficit narratives about students of color as irresponsible, destructive, untrustworthy, and/or criminally dangerous (Howard, 2013; Irby, 2014; Clauhs, 2021).

Several times in these data, I found that 'nice' White educators used poverty of culture discourse to invalidate, exoticize, or trivialize students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006b). The Special Area team used a poverty of culture frame to exoticize through humor traditionally Black names in the *"Ghetto" Names* vignette. Such discourse created caricatures of students of color and communicated underlying deficit beliefs about them as being less than fully human (Kendi, 2019). Mr. White and Ms. Hill used hyperbole in the *"Tearing the Fourth Grade Apart"* vignette to make generalizations about the fourth grade class as a whole based on the actions of one or two children (Ladson-Billings, 2006b). Poverty of culture discourse illustrated underlying cultural incompetencies that contributed to my cognitive dissonance as a 'nice' White lady (Behm Cross et al., 2019).

Developing Critically Conscious Habits of Mind

Developing critically conscious habits of mind contributed to my overall disinvestment from whiteness. As my mentors enacted critical consciousness, they supported critically conscious habits of mind in three primary ways: (a) supporting my reeducation on issues of race, (b) decentering the White gaze and, (c) holding space for critical reflection through purposeful silence and open-ended questioning.

Reeducation on Issues of Race. I found that my critically conscious mentors supported my reeducation on issues of race in ways that significantly influenced my worldview (King, 1991). Vignettes such as *Blackface* and *"People are not mixed. Dogs are mixed,"* had a lasting impact in making the dysconscious conscious and troubling my taken-for-granted assumptions about race (Gordon, 2005). Later in my career, I was capable of supporting others through the model provided to me by my mentors, as the vignettes in *Mindful Reflection 6: From Mentee to Mentor* showed (Robinson, 2017).

Decentering the White Gaze. I found an important sub-theme in the data in which educators consistently decentered whiteness by enacting critical consciousness (Paris, 2021). The *Dream Wish List* vignette illustrated how Ms. Miller used the Special Area classes to decenter White middle-class norms of academic achievement in her school (Alim & Paris, 2017).

Linguistic and Cultural Pluralism. In the *Rafiki (Friend)* vignette, Mr. Barker decentered whiteness by engaging a critical discourse around Mr. White's monolingual assumptions about academic success that framed linguistically diverse students as deficient (*"Good for him, why don't we learn some Swahili instead of acting like English is all there is."*). Likewise, I decentered the White gaze in the *No Filter* storied analysis by troubling Eurocentric ideas about decorum in high-quality music performance settings (*"They're excited for their kid. I mean, this isn't Carnegie Hall or the Met. It's just not that serious."*).

Holding Space for Critical Reflection. Ms. Miller consistently demonstrated a commitment to critical reflexivity, operating under the belief that *when we know better, we do better.* Holding space was an important sub-theme in these data and a defining characteristic of the critical discourses facilitated by Ms. Miller. The strategic use of open-ended questioning and purposeful silence served to make the dysconscious conscious and resist the tools of whiteness (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013).

Open-Ended Questioning. I found that Ms. Miller almost always introduced critical discourse with an open-ended question or statement. Several vignettes including, *"They're all Black Boys," Half of the Guitars and Sharing with a Partner,* and *"North America is Part of the World"* illustrate Ms. Miller's use of open-ended questioning for critical reflection (Escalante, 2020; Robinson, 2017). Table 4 shows Ms. Miller's open-ended questions/statements and the critically conscious purpose that accompanied them.

Table 4

Ms. Miller's Open-Ended Questioning for Critical Reflection

Question/Statement	Dysconscious Assumptions	Critically Conscious Purpose
"What do you notice about this list?"	Color-evasiveness — 'adverse behavior' as a frame for avoiding race-talk	Direct discourse about whiteness (Annamma et al., 2017)
"I understand the students are sharing."	Culture of poverty — beliefs about order and control, access to high-quality resources is a privilege, not a right	Access to high-quality resources is an educational right, not a privilege (Ladson-Billings, 2017a)
"Why North America?"	White normality and centering whiteness — monolingual and monocultural views	Decentering whiteness through linguistic and cultural pluralism (Alim & Paris, 2017; Gay & Kirkland, 2003)

Purposeful Silence. Comparably, I found that purposeful silence almost always accompanied critical discourses with Ms. Miller and generally followed her initial open-ended question/statement. I found that silence served an essential role in making the dysconscious conscious for 'nice' White educators like me (King, 1991). Her use of silence was frequently discomforting to the point of awkwardness, as multiple vignettes have shown. Ms. Miller's willingness to be comfortable with discomfort made her resistant to the tools of whiteness that so often derailed critical racial and cultural discourses (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013).

Tools of Whiteness for White Comfort

The ideological, emotional, and performative tools of whiteness contributed to my distorted understandings of education (King, 1991; Picower, 2009). I found that I almost always enacted the tools of whiteness to maintain White comfort or resolve cognitive dissonance on discomforting issues of race (Picower, 2009). Further, I found that the tools of whiteness were most impactful in reifying whiteness when 'nice' White educators were gathered together in groups. Such was the case in *"They're All Black Boys, "Refocus? More Like Reescalate,"* and

"Tearing the Fourth Grade Apart." These findings suggest a socially constructed pattern by which White educators collectively invest in the social funding of race (Ladson-Billings, 2018).

Ideological Tools. The findings in this autoethnography showed that my East Pine colleagues and I used the ideological tools of whiteness to promote White normality in teaching, wherein whiteness was positioned as objective and representative of reality (DiAngelo, 2011; Matias et al., 2014). We embraced the myth of neutrality, myth of progress, and altruism in the service of niceness (Baptiste, 2008; Bissonnette, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

Misaligned Beliefs and Actions. I found that my colleagues and I maintained an apolitical orientation of schools in the face of contradictory evidence (McDonough, 2015). For example, in *First-Come, First-Serve* I held tightly to beliefs about myself as fair and unbiased, even as I engaged in highly subjective actions. Similarly, Mr. White and Ms. Hill used the myth of neutrality to position themselves as fair and impartial, even as they communicated hyperbolic opinions that revealed underlying deficit beliefs about individual students of color. Misaligned beliefs and actions caused cognitive dissonance that 'nice' White teachers resolved through the emotional tools of whiteness (Picower, 2009).

Emotional Tools. As these data show, 'nice' White ladies use the emotional tools of whiteness to purposefully and strategically maintain White comfort and avoid race-based stress (Behm Cross et al., 2019; DiAngelo, 2011). In the vignette,*"Their Least Favorite Specials,"* Ms. Adams and I demonstrated a wide range of White emotionality that included guilt, sadness, and shame (*"We just need time. I— they— don't even really know us yet…"*), anger and defensiveness (*"What good was going to come from that? It was three against two."*), and denial and cognitive dissonance (*"That was so mean. How could he say those things about us?"*). Our

displays of White emotionality served to restore our shared sense of emotional safety within the paradigm of niceness and displace blame and responsibility for racial harm (Matias & Zembylas, 2014).

Weaponizing White Emotionality. My findings illustrate a variety of experiences in which I demonstrated an acute ability to weaponize my own White emotionality in order to escape, evade, or silence critical discourses about race (Behm Cross et al., 2019; Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013; Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Orozco, 2019). My weaponization of White emotionality was so successful, in fact, I could generally derail entire conversations and make people abandon their intended purpose. Multiple vignettes, such as *Blackface, "You Petty,"* and *"Why Are You Yelling at Me?"* illustrate the effective use of my White victimization strategy in, (a) displacing the burden of race and racism onto my colleagues of color (Matias & Zembylas, 2014) and; (b) bringing disquieting discourses to an immediate end (Bradley, 2006; DiAngelo, 2011). Consider the vignettes in which colleagues of color apologized to me for bringing up disquieting discourse (e.g. *"I hesitated to even tell you because I knew it was an honest mistake, I actually didn't even catch it, but my wife was upset so I thought I should say something."*) or else absolved me of the responsibility for racial harm (e.g. *"It's alright. It's nothing by love for ya, Mace."*).

Performative Tools. Performative tools of whiteness contributed to the overall identity of the 'nice' White lady at both the Private-Public School and East Pine. The 'White Savior' was an important role performed by 'nice' White ladies in these data. I found that 'nice' White teachers performed the 'White Savior' role—specifically in the presence of other White people—to maintain their position as 'good,' and 'well-intended' White people who 'embraced' racial, linguistic, or cultural diversity (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021). For example, the

performative actions of White teachers in *We Don't 'See' Color, Rafiki (Friend),* and *No Blankets* illustrate how these educators operationalized the White Savior role to communicate altruistic ideals and secure their conditional acceptance within whiteness (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021).

Silence and Silencing. Silence and silencing were an integral part of the overall performance of the 'nice' White lady (Gordon, 2005). In multiple vignettes, color-evasiveness set the parameters and boundaries through which 'nice' White ladies engaged racial discourses (Annamma et al., 2017). Three of the most prominent parameters in these data included (a) humor—as shown in the *"Ghetto" Names* vignette; (b) 'adverse behavior'—as shown in the *"They're All Black Boys"* vignette, and; (c) proverbs and adages such as "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink."

Performances of Blackness. The resolute acceptance or rejection of Blackness by 'nice' White ladies was an important sub-theme in these data. Similar to the performance of the 'White Savior' role, I found that the acceptance or rejection of Blackness by 'nice' White ladies was contingent on the degree to which the performance of Blackness aligned with White values and norms (Ladson-Billings, 1995). While Mrs. Tanner was celebrated by 'nice' White ladies for her ability to "speak ghetto," to students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998), Mr. Martin was ostracized for his lack of investment in the community's White values (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Comparably, the 'nice' White teachers at East Pine frequently rebuked or punished Mr. Williams for disregarding the White norms of communication that maintained their White comfort (Matias & Zembylas, 2014). The latter rejection of Blackness was well illustrated in the *"Why Are You Yelling at Me?"* vignette.

Resisting the Tools of Whiteness

As critically conscious habits of mind eclipsed dysconsciousness, I became more comfortable with discomfort (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013). For example, the *Angry About Math* vignette featured a conversation with a student of color that put me in the rather uncomfortable position of openly engaging in disparaging dialogue about an East Pine colleague. By allowing myself to be 'comfortable being uncomfortable,' I was able to elevate his voice and support him in resisting the oppressive status quo of schools (Kenyon, 2022). In the same vein, *Mindful Reflection 9: It Had to Be Said* illustrates several vignettes and storied analyses in which I engaged critical dialogue in spite of color-evasive tactics from 'nice' White ladies (Annamma et al., 2017). This is due in part to a fundamental shift in my allegiances, which became less aligned with the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of 'nice' White teachers and more centered on the educational experiences of children of color (Alim & Paris, 2017; Clements & Stutelberg, 2021; Hammond, 2015). By knowingly and purposely making my White colleagues feel uncomfortable I resisted the silence that was expected of me (Orozco, 2019).

Institutionalized Cultural Scripts

Institutionalized cultural scripts were an important theme of dysconscious racism in the data through which Private-Public School and East Pine children learned to adhere to the rules of race through a paradigm of niceness. Institutionalized cultural scripts supported 'nice' White ladies in teaching the curriculum of whiteness through oppression (Lea, 2001; Goodman, 2001; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). Table 5 illustrates some of the lessons in whiteness that were taught by 'nice' White ladies through institutionalized cultural scripts (Lea, 2001).

In several vignettes, children of color demonstrated resistance to the curriculum of whiteness and deficiency frameworks. In each of these instances, 'nice' White ladies responded

with socially sanctioned counter-moves to silence disquieting discourse (DiAngelo, 2011; Orozco, 2019). A few times, such as in *The Zero-Tolerance Policy, Hang Up the Phone,* and *"Just Let it Go"* vignettes, I found that children of color had already internalized deficit messages about themselves and performed with proficiency their expected cultural roles (Howard, 2013; Irby, 2014; Lea, 2001).

Table 5

Lessons in School Oppression through Institutionalized Cultural Scripts

Unit	Lesson	Examples
Assimilationism	Schools are Eurocentric, monolingual, and monocultural	*"It's not even that big of a deal, it's off by one letter. I have so many things to do. I said I'll get to it and I'll- get- to- it- later"*
Elitism	Inclusion and exclusion (who belongs and who doesn't)	*"Well— Lilly handed me her's first. See? It was on my desk first."*
Authoritarianism	Teacher-student relationships are hierarchical	*"I gave you a direction, I expect you to follow- it- quickly-"* *"Lorenzo, your choices are making me unhappy."*
Privilege and Penalty	Teachers' voices, wants, and needs are privileged / students' voices, wants, and needs are silenced	*"I need to have a student removed from the classroom. He is throwing chairs."* *"Not like that you won't!"* *"When you're at a Level Zero I will bring you an instrument to play."* *"Take- it- off. Now! This is not how we will engage in learning here! And why are you sitting in the dark?"* *"And I drove all the way across town to be here. You're the only person I see on Wednesdays since everyone else has dropped out. So, I drive here for you. If you are going to miss, I want 24 hours' notice. Otherwise, you are wasting- my- time," he said in a clipped and dismissive way, "You did not notify me ahead of time. Let's- go-"*
Do Not Offend	Disquieting discourse should be avoided or silenced	*"It's time to stop talking about it. Let's get back on task, let- it- go."* *"Just ignore them."*

Do Not Offend Rules. Do Not Offend rules were an important sub-theme in these data that represented 'nice,' well-intended means of engaging in school oppression (Goodman, 2001). I found Do Not Offend rules in a variety of vignettes in which 'nice' White ladies sought to establish authority or silence disquieting discourse (Orozco, 2019). Table 4 illustrates several lessons communicated through the Do Not Offend rules found in these data (Goodman, 2001). I also found that 'nice' White educators used Do Not Offend rules to justify inequitable outcomes, as Mr. White and Ms. Hill demonstrated in the *"Tearing the Fourth Grade Apart"* vignette. Additionally, avoiding offense was Mrs. Jolly's primary motivator in *Mindful Reflection 10: The Fight For Space*, an opinion she dysconsciously expressed multiple times in these data (see Table 3).

Disrupting Institutionalized Cultural Scripts

'Nice' White ladies in this study demonstrated uncritical acceptance of institutionalized cultural scripts as ubiquitous (Lea, 2001). We expected one another to 'stick to the script' (Lea, 2001). *The Zero-Tolerance Policy* and *You Can Lead a Horse to Water* vignettes illustrate how disruptions to the cultural script frustrate dysconsciousness and deficit discourses. I was present in each scene as both the actor upholding the script and the actor disrupting the script. The reversal of my role indicates the evolution of my worldview in the interim (years). However, I also found that I could easily default to my expected 'nice' White lady cultural script when 'required.' In *The Trailer Park* vignette, for example, I defaulted to my expected cultural script to maintain or restore comfort when my White male colleague became overwhelmed (Lea, 2001).

Pushing Back. Pushing back against institutionalized cultural scripts was an important sub-theme in these data. The theme of pushing back was perhaps best illustrated in *Mindful*

Reflection 10: The Fight for Space. My commitment to pushing back against Mrs. Jolly's performance of powerlessness, particularly in the *"If We Lose Our Rooms We'll Never Get Them Back"* vignette, was not a very 'nice' thing to do, something Mrs. Jolly was quick to point out (*"Because we are advocating in a way that is very* respectful, *they're listening. But they do own the facilities."*). I found that my disruption of niceness significantly clashed with Mrs. Jolly's need to uphold it (*"So how much say do you have in what gives?"*). Niceness was Mrs. Jolly's primary inhibitor for advocacy such that Ms. Magenta and I had to 'go above her' in order to effectively advocate for East Pine students (See Appendix B).

Conclusions

'Nice' White ladies reify whiteness in schools through dysconscious racism. Findings from this dissertation can be summarized into three major themes of dysconscious racism that form the overall identity of the 'nice' White lady (see Figure 16): (a) uncritical habits of mind, (b) institutionalized cultural scripts, and (c) tools of whiteness for maintaining White comfort. Each of these themes contributed to the values and priorities of the 'nice' White lady in teaching to the curriculum of whiteness (Lea, 2001; Wozolek & Atif, 2022).

Disinvestment from the 'nice' White lady identity was a rigorous critically reflexive process that involved: (a) an evolving worldview in which I learned to sit with my own discomfort in order to grow; (b) the deliberate and critically conscious disruption of institutionalized cultural scripts and; (c) resistance to the ideological, emotional, and performative tools of whiteness through enacted critical consciousness (see Figure 17).

Disinvesting from Whiteness

I have found that the 'nice' White lady has been a challenging identity to overcome. Internally, my beliefs about good teaching were deeply intertwined with the institutionalized

cultural scripts about my race and gender (Lea, 2001). Externally, my performance of race and gender (i.e. clothes, hairstyle, the pitch of my voice, etc.) are such that strangers expect to encounter a 'nice' White lady, as my colleague expressed in the storied analysis, *Real Recognize Real* (*"When I first came here I wasn't sure what to expect—you know some music teachers are* weird*—but you're a Real One."*).

At the beginning of my arduous ongoing journey disinvesting from whiteness, I was acutely aware of the costs incurred (Castagno, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2018). I worried what other 'nice' White people might think if I reneged on my expected role (Kenyon, 2022). I experienced something of an identity crisis in which I felt constant tension between the social pressure to perform the 'nice' White lady role and the critical awareness that it was harmful (Clements & Stutelberg, 2021). This dissertation has shown that as my worldview slowly evolved beyond the White gaze, I was better able to resist my expected 'nice' White lady cultural script and trouble the curriculum of whiteness through a critically conscious frame.

Implications for Music Education

Although generalizations cannot be made given the nature of this work, my study has several valuable implications for teacher educators and practicing educators. First, music teacher preparedness programs must become intent on mobilizing critical action in music classrooms. By centering critical action in music teacher preparation programs, preservice music educators will be better prepared to act in critical ways, rather than simply reflecting on injustice and perpetuating the status quo.

Additionally, the findings of this autoethnography indicate that critical action in novice music educators can be facilitated through consistent and intentional mentorship. Ms. Miller facilitated many critical discourses that supported my developing critical consciousness. Music

teacher educators must initiate critical discourses and model critical consciousness earlier and with greater intentionality. Preservice and novice music educators could benefit from the practice of narrating critical reflections so that they can hear, in real time, how mentors unpack failed lessons, navigate difficult interactions with students, make decisions, and implement changes.

I found that critically conscious work is bigger than life inside the four walls of the Music Room. For me, critical action has meant having a seat at the tables where decisions about education are being made, both within the building at East Pine as well as within the school district and broader community. This dissertation also illustrated that critical action involves behind-the-scenes-work within a network of trusted colleagues, especially when administrative school and district actions perpetuate the status quo. In this way, I found that critical action in music education encompassed arts advocacy.

Suggestions for Future Research

Divisive concepts laws and their correlation to educational niceness need to be explored through empirical research. The hostility for race-based work, the fundamental mistrust of teachers, and legislative efforts to control teachers in the current sociopolitical environment will have profound impacts on music education. Future research should explore how political control of teachers affects the development of critical consciousness and the ability to enact critical action.

Political factors are contributing to teacher attrition. East Pine has a very high rate of teacher attrition, particularly of young novice White teachers. My tenure at East Pine is one of the reasons why I was able to grow from dysconscious to critically conscious. High turnover limits the potential for the development of critical consciousness. Teacher attrition influences how high-needs schools operate from day to day and year to year. Future research should

investigate critical consciousness through the perspectives of the teachers who stay in high-needs teaching environments, amidst high staff turnover.

Limitations

This writing has limitations, given my limited perspective as a White woman. There were two significant limitations of this dissertation that I would like to address. As an autoethnographer, I assembled data across the totality of my decade-long general music career. In doing so, this data corpus may have become oversaturated with critical self-reflection, which can be poisonous to the work of critical consciousness. One of the critiques of CWS is that it recenters whiteness through the offloading of white guilt and shame (Matias et al., 2014). It is possible that this work is overly self-critical, perhaps to the point of self-absorption. By electing for breadth instead of depth, I inadvertently focused this work on critical reflection over critical action.

Second, Gordon (2005) argued that "our White skin continues to furnish us with advantages" (p. 138) therefore developing CC is a "lifelong commitment" (p. 138). There are several examples in this manuscript in which I used animalistic rhetoric to describe the actions of students or colleagues of color. During data collection, I tried to relive each memory as vividly as possible, which included seeing the characters as I saw them then. In doing so, I made some descriptive choices as an author that 'othered' these individuals. These rhetoric choices without adequate critical analysis further illustrate the hegemony of white supremacy and the limitations of my perspective as a White woman.

Delimitations

The events and experiences narrated in this analytic autoethnographic study represent a vulnerable and honest account of the development of my critical awareness of 'nice'

dysconscious racism (Le Roux, 2017). Although I made every effort to include as many salient experiences as possible, data collection and analysis for this autoethnography were time-bound and limited to one school year. Therefore, the narrative account does not represent the totality of my career as a general music educator, but rather a storied series of narrative snapshots (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). I maintained a reflexive journal, audit trail, and utilized memo writing to document my thoughts, feelings, reactions, and connections to the literature in real time. Due to the nature of autoethnography, generalization was not an intended outcome of the study.

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Appendix A

IRB Determination

From: IRB Administration <irbadmin@auburn.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, December 13, 2022 1:10 PM
To: Macy Bell <mlo0015@auburn.edu>
Cc: Jane Kuehne <kuehnjm@auburn.edu>; Paul Fitchett <pgf0011@auburn.edu>
Subject: Bell AU IRB #22-549 NHSR, "Developing Critical Consciousness of 'Nice' Dysconscious Racism: An Analytic Autoethnography of a K-5 General Music Specialist at a High-Needs Title I School"

Dear Ms. Bell,
The IRB has reviewed your request for the study titled "Developing Critical Consciousness of 'Nice' Dysconscious Racism: An Analytic Autoethnography of a K-5 General Music Specialist at a High-Needs Title I School". The IRB has determined that your project, as described in the submission, **is not** considered human subjects research.
**Please note the application describes a single participant, a case study. Case studies are not considered research if the case is limited to a description of an outcome of three or fewer participants; the studies do not have sufficient data to contribute to generalizable knowledge. The described activity is not considered research.

Further documentation for this study does not need to be submitted. If you make any changes to your study that might include human subjects research, please contact our office.

Best regards,

IRB Administration
Office of Research Compliance
540 Devall Drive Suite 200
Auburn University
Auburn, AL 36832

Appendix B

Arts Facilities Proposal

East Pine Arts Facilities Proposal 2023

(Music Room portion, pp. 23-32)

Music Room - Room 101

Macy Bell, Music Specialist and Music Education Ph.D. Candidate

Macy Bell has been recognized as a teacher-leader in the school, district, and [redacted] region. Mrs. Bell has 10 years of experience in the elementary music classroom and is currently finishing her Ph.D. in music education. Mrs. Bell is a founding member of the East Pine staff. Upon opening the EPES Music Room in 2016, she personally ordered, unpacked, and assembled every piece of music equipment, technology, and instrument therein. The EPES Music Room has been a central place of learning, not only for the K-5 EPES student population, but numerous visiting undergraduate and graduate preservice teachers from the surrounding universities each semester, including three resident student teachers per year on average. For more details regarding Mrs. Bell's qualifications in music teaching, please see the attached CV.

- 2022 Published Author in *The Orff Echo 55 Vol. 1,* pp. 22-27
- 2023 KMEA Elementary Music Teacher of the Year
- 2023 Nominee for East Pine Teacher of the Year
- 2023 WCPS Honors Chorus, Conductor and annual WCPS-Public University Liaison
    - WCPS Board Meeting Featured Student Performance here
- Cooperating Teacher for [redacted] Music Education Undergraduate Programs (hosting 1-2 student teachers per semester and 4-5 practicum students per year)
- Annual [redacted] mentor, since 2021
- PBIS Committee member, since 2016
- Comets Chorus Ensemble Director, since 2016
- Clinician at multiple state-level music education conferences [redacted]

Specialty Equipment - Room 101, Music Room

Quantity	Equipment	Purpose / Relevant Details	Photos
28	**Yamaha LC4 Music Technology Lab with WCPS-installed Power Poles and Dell computers**	Music Technology: DAW Software, interconnected MIDI keyboards Hardware: Specialty music technology workstations, WCPS-installed power poles, power strips, and additional outlets The Music Technology Lab is used at regular intervals from September to May with grades K-5. All grades receive regular piano lessons and learn to compose using DAW software. K-5 spiraled curriculum so that fifth graders leave EPES with 6 years of regular piano instruction. In addition to the musical benefits of having regular access to a state-of-the-art Music Technology Lab, the lab supports 21st century skills, cognitive skills such as long-term memory storage, and physical skills such as fine motor skills. The Yamaha LC4 was state-of-the-art in 2016 and remains one of the highest quality labs on the market. It is valued at over $72,360 with between approximately $10,000 and $15,000 in WCPS-installed power additions. Standards Addressed: Cr1.1, Cr2.1, Cr3.1, Cr3.2, Pr4.1, Pr4.2, Pr4.3, Pr5.1, Pr6.1, Re7.1, Re7.2, Re8.1, Re9.1, Cn10, Cn11	  
28	**Yamaha ¾ sized- Classical Guitars with specially WCPS-installed self-locking wall hangers**	Diverse genres and styles: Rock & Roll, The Blues, Country Western, Pop, Reggae, Heavy Metal, Funk, Classical Guitars are used at regular intervals from August to May with grades 4-5. Mrs. Bell hosts a Guitar Club every other year during "Choice Days." In addition to the musical benefits of a full set of high-quality classical/folk guitars, non-musical benefits include 21st century skills and physical skills such as fine motor skills. The Yamaha Guitars are valued at	

		approximately $9,716 and the locking wall hangers are valued at $699.72 Standards Addressed: Pr4.1, Pr4.2, Pr4.3, Pr5.1, Pr6.1, Cn10, Cn11	
36	**Palisono Orff Instrument Set (xylophones, metallophones, and glockenspiels with Sonor mallets)**	The Orff ensemble instruments are used at regular intervals with all grades in the classroom and in live and recorded performances from August to May. In addition to the musical benefits of access to top-of-the-line Orff instrumentation, the Orff instruments support 21st century skills and physical skills such as gross motor skills, and hand-eye coordination. The Palisono Orff ensemble set is of the highest market quality and is valued at approximately $28,340. Standards Addressed: Cr1.1, Cr2.1, Cr3.1, Cr3.2, Pr4.1, Pr4.2, Pr4.3, Pr5.1, Pr6.1, Cn10, Cn11	 

100+ **Remo World Drums and Percussion**

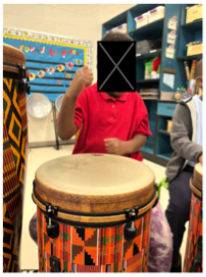
Drums and auxiliary percussion of various cultural traditions including tubanos, steel pans, bongos, gathering bass drum, buffalo drums, tambourines, frame drums, talking drums, agogo bells, gankoguis, cowbells, rainsticks, guiros, shakeres, triangles, temple blocks, Boomwhackers, egg shakers, frog rasps, vibraslap, etc.

The drums and auxiliary percussion take up considerable floor space including the entire back section of cabinetry (as shown on the right).

In addition to the musical benefits of performing and creating in the music classroom and in live and recorded performances, the drums and auxiliary percussion are used for mindfulness groups and music therapy sessions for students with disabilities (as shown on the right).

The World Drumming set is valued at over $32,000.

Standards Addressed: Cr1.1, Cr2.1, Cr3.1, Cr3.2, Pr4.1, Pr4.2, Pr4.3, Pr5.1, Pr6.1, Cn10, Cn11



28	**Appalachian Traditional Dulcimers**	Diverse genres and styles: Music of the Appalachian Mountains, Music of India, Native American music The dulcimers are used at regular intervals during the Spring semester (January to May) with Kindergarten through Grade 3. The dulcimers provide foundational understandings about string instruments prior to guitar instruction and support active music-making in the diverse genres and styles listed above. In addition to the musical benefits of having access to a lesser-known instrument in the string family, the dulcimers support 21st century skills and physical skills such as fine motor skills, and hand-eye coordination. The dulcimers are valued at $4,759.72 Standards Addressed: Cr1.1, Cr2.1, Cr3.1, Cr3.2, Pr4.1, Pr4.2, Pr4.3, Pr5.1, Pr6.1, Cn10, Cn11	
1	**Yamaha Clavinova**	Used for daily classroom instruction as well as live and recorded music performances The Yamaha Clavinova is valued at $3,799.99. Standards Addressed: Pr4.1, Pr4.2, Pr4.3, Pr5.1, Pr6.1, Cn10, Cn11	

1	**Yamaha Upright Concert Piano**	Used for daily classroom instruction as well as live and recorded music performances The Yamaha Clavinova is valued at approximately $3,000. Standards Addressed: Pr4.1, Pr4.2, Pr4.3, Pr5.1, Pr6.1, Cn10, Cn11	
1	**Yamaha Portable PA System and sound equipment (solo and ensemble mics, cords, mic stands, etc.)**	Used at all school-wide events and assemblies The Yamaha Portable PA System and sound equipment is valued at over $3,000. Standards Addressed: Pr4.1, Pr4.2, Pr4.3, Pr5.1, Pr6.1, Cn10, Cn11	 
28	**Ohana Soprano Ukuleles with specially WCPS-installed self-locking wall hangers**	The Ohana Soprano Ukuleles are on order for the EPES Music Room. They will be used at regular intervals with all grades from August to May. The order includes a set of wall hangers identical to the guitar hangers. The order is set to arrive for use during the 2023-24 school year and is valued at $2,300. Standards Addressed: Pr4.1, Pr4.2, Pr4.3, Pr5.1, Pr6.1	
	APPROXIMATE TOTAL		**$185,000**

Use of Room 101 as a Space for Creative, Collaborative, and Challenging Music Learning

Ensemble Rehearsal Space

Performing Music: Pr4.1, Pr4.2, Pr4.3, Pr5.1, Pr6.1

In addition to the high-quality arts instruction that is provided to 6-grade levels per day, Room 101 is also utilized as a rehearsal space for the special performance ensemble, the East Pine Comets Chorus. Comets Chorus was founded in 2016 and performs multiple times throughout the school year at school wide assemblies and events. In addition, Comets Chorus performs semi-annually at notable venues within the greater town community such as Trader Joe's, the Public University Baseball stadium, the Minor League Ballpark, [redacted] High School, and most recently, the Public University Women's Basketball game at [redacted] (see embedded link to video). Comets Chorus meets once per week from September through April and is open to Grades 3-5, with an average enrollment of 45-50 students, the Music Room is the most accommodating rehearsal space for an ensemble of this size. Intermediate members of Comets Chorus are selected to participate in the district-wide Honors Chorus event each March.

Large-Scale Performances & Special Student Projects

Creating Music: Cr1.1, Cr2.1, Cr3.1, Cr3.2 | Performing Music: Pr4.1, Pr4.2, Pr4.3, Pr5.1, Pr6.1

Room 101 has also been used for annual Gifted and Talented Performing Arts Auditions and as a recording studio for special student projects such as the [redacted] "R2P2 Project" which was featured in the Fall 2022 edition of [redacted] a nationally recognized peer-reviewed music education journal (see embedded link to video). Room 101 was intentionally selected as the EPES Music classroom during the building's construction due in part to its convenient proximity to the stage. Easy access to the stage is an essential component of the organization and presentation of large-scale, school-wide performances and celebrations such as the Veterans Day Program, the Holiday Remix Showcase, the Black History Month Celebration, and the Schoolwide Showcase of World Cultures (see pp. 30-31). These seminal performances have a long history of excellence that would not be possible without adequate facilities with which to rehearse, prepare, and polish.

Creative Movement & Dance

Responding to Music: Re7.1, Re7.2, Re8.1, Re9.1

Integral to an integrated music curriculum is adequate space to explore music through movement and dance. Each exploratory lesson incorporates some form of expressive movement in which a large open space is essential for the safety of the students and equipment. The example in the chart below displays students exploring the Holi Celebration in India with creative movement and colorful scarves (see pp. 30-31). Further, as music learning in Room 101 is often a considerably loud endeavor, its distance from homeroom classrooms is a benefit to both learning environments.

Authentic 21st-Century Skill-Building

Connecting: Cn10, Cn11

The loss of the Room 101 as a space for arts instruction would have lasting negative consequences on the quality of teaching and learning at East Pine Elementary School. The cognitive, social, and emotional value of the EPES Music classroom as a sovereign physical space in the heart of the school far exceeds the monetary value of the equipment, supplies, and instrumentation. EPES students have immediate access to equipment and supplies that elevate what is possible in the elementary music classroom. As such, on a daily basis at EPES, students are seen engaging in authentic problem-solving and hands-on learning in ways that are creative, collaborative, and challenging.

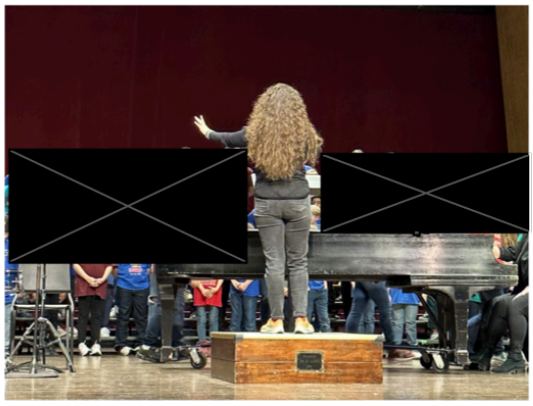
Many students have experiences in Room 101 that they otherwise would not have had, including many 'firsts' (e.g. holding a guitar for the first time or learning to play the 12-bar Blues and accompany their favorite songs on a piano). These novel experiences support social, emotional, cognitive, and physical childhood development and bring a sense of

belonging that is as joyful and meaningful. Further, as they learn to see themselves as active members of the communities to which they belong, they are also developing positive views about themselves as individuals who are capable of high levels of achievement and excellence. Former EPES students return year after year to the Music Room during Family Orientation Night every August and are excited to share their positive memories with their younger siblings. Their meaningful experiences in the learning space have given them a lasting sense of belonging and personal investment in the music classroom and the school as a whole. For the past, present, and future students of EPES, the loss of the EPES Music Room would be the loss of a vital organ within the body of the school.

A Grade 5 drum ensemble performing in the Holiday Remix Showcase

Grades 2-3 and Comets Chorus performing in the Veterans Day Program

Grade 1 performing in the Schoolwide Showcase of World Cultures



Mrs. Bell conducting *My Shot* at the 2023 WCPS Elementary Honors Chorus

31

Grades 4-5 performing in the Black History Month Celebration

Kindergarten exploring the Holi Celebration in India with colorful scarves and creative movement

32

Supplemental Visual and Performing Arts Advocacy Research

Research has shown that marginalized students have inequitable access to high-quality arts instruction (Conkling & Kaufman, 2020; Costa-Giomi, 2008; de Vries, 2018; Elpus & Abril, 2011; 2019; Jorgensen, 2007; Lorah et al., 2014; Salvador & Allegood, 2014). The "pedagogy of sameness" (Emdin, 2021, p. 15) driving the accountability movement has negatively impacted access to high-quality arts programs, particularly in high-needs schools (Costa-Giomi, 2008; Conkling & Kaufman, 2020; Elpus & Abril, 2011; 2019; Graham et al., 2013). Funding, scheduling, protected time, and **adequate facilities** were among the factors contributing to the inaccessibility of high quality arts programs for marginalized students (Conkling & Kaufman, 2020; Costa-Giomi, 2008; de Vries, 2018; Elpus & Abril, 2011; 2019; Jorgensen, 2007; Lorah et al., 2014; Salvador & Allegood, 2014).

Graham et al. (2013) found that instructional time for visual and performing arts programs was significantly reduced or eliminated due to the increased push for standardization in high-needs schools. In two related studies, de Vries (2018) found that protected time for arts instruction decreased in the weeks preceding standardized assessments and Monk et al. (2013) reported instructional time for art, science, social studies, music, and physical education was "cut by an average of two and half hours per week" (p. 179) after the implementation of NCLB.

Schoolwide master scheduling decisions contribute to the arts' "second tier' status" (Abramo, 2015, p. 49) that sustain inequitable arts education opportunities in the era of high-stakes testing (Abramo, 2015; Abril, 2009; Elpus & Abril, 2011; 2019; Jorgensen, 2007; Lorah et al., 2014). Researchers found that students who receive English Languages (EL) services, Special Education services, or Emotional/Behavior health services do not have equitable opportunities to participate in arts programs due to course schedules that include remedial courses or additional courses for tested subjects (Abril, 2009; Elpus & Abril, 2011; 2019).

Closing Thoughts

"The mission of Washington County Public Schools is to create a collaborative community that ensures all students achieve at high levels and graduate prepared to excel in a global society." By sacrificing any of the dedicated arts spaces in East Pine Elementary, schoolwide creativity and collaboration would be severely compromised and sustain existing societal inequities for the high-needs population of East Pine Elementary. Further, it would increase the already existing gap created by social, economic and environmental factors to the detriment of the students, the faculty, and the well-being of East Pine Elementary overall. Such consequences are not aligned with the values of Washington County Public Schools.

Appendix C

Additional Internal Data

The Scoreboard, A Storied Analysis

There are underlying assumptions in the belief that White teachers must 'manage' students of color (Goodman, 2001; Howard, 2013). These assumptions center appropriateness in schools on 'nice' White middle-class norms (Alim & Paris, 2017; Castagno, 2014). My ideas about education were deeply intertwined with whiteness. I centered White ways of being, knowing, and doing in virtually every educational context including communication styles between and among students, ideas about authority, control, power, and privilege, and student 'behavior.'

My early conceptualizations of 'behavior management' were problematic. After several emotional Behavior Check-ins with Mr. Williams, I came to understand 'behavior management' in 'nice' terms of whole-class tokens—positive and negative consequences—that were distinctly separate from music teaching and learning (an understanding that took years to unlearn). As this mindful reflection has already shown, I held tightly to the deficit belief that educational materials and resources were a privilege, not a right, and that student behavior would determine whether we learned music the "fun way" (positive consequences) or the "unfun way" (negative consequences).

I resolved to incentivize behavior through a paradigm of niceness (Castagno, 2014; Goodman, 2001) and developed a token system I called 'The Scoreboard,' which was adapted from Whole Brain Teaching (Biffle, 2013). Classes worked toward a 'Class Party' by earning a point for 'good' behavior during the music lesson. I think at that time classes had to earn 20

points for a Party, where they voted between watching a movie, free time on the music technology, or a dancing game.

"Just Let it Go," A Vignette

This particular fifth grade class had chosen free time on the music technology but—as so often happened during unstructured time—the 'party' quickly devolved until individuals and groups of students were wandering more or less aimlessly around the Music Room. When my efforts at redirecting students back to their technology workstations were unsuccessful, I resigned to let them be. A group of girls were huddled in a spirited conversation on the carpet while I stood across the room at the cabinets, dusting shelves and half listening as Raniyah shared a meandering story.

It seems Raniyah, herself, was only partially engaged in her story because her head whipped around as she overheard the girls whispering conspiratorially, glancing snidely over to where we stood at the cabinets. She tensed. "They're *talking about me,*" she complained.

"Just ignore them," I replied unconcernedly. But Raniyah was concerned.

She went barrelling towards them in a frenzy. Startled by her abrupt departure, I turned to find Raniyah squaring up with a child twice her size. Before I had time to react, it was a jumble of hair and elbows, Raniyah's toothpick arms swinging wildly for Mary Kate's box braids. The class cheered for their favorite fighter and instinctively formed a tight circle around them so that I was momentarily boxed out. I squeezed through two students who stood shoulder to shoulder, seizing a brief moment of inaction to put myself between the two fighting girls. Mary Kate stepped back, recognizing that to reach for Raniyah now would mean potentially hitting me instead, and that would be crossing a line. Raniyah, on the other hand, continued pinwheeling her

arms, elbows, and fists wildly, seemingly unaware that she was hitting my back instead of her opponent. From between them, I caught the eye of Mrs. Baker in the cafeteria.

"Do you need help?" Mrs. Baker shouted.

"Call somebody!" I pleaded but it was already over. Both fighters burst through the classroom door and went charging down the hallway in opposite directions. Raniyah, still in a fit of rage, shouted viciously over her shoulder as she went. When Mr. Williams came running, I was standing dumbly in the doorway while a theatrical reenactment of the scene went on behind me by members of the class.

"Did you see the way Raniyah came running?!"

"Raniyah is stupid! Doesn't she know Mary Kate is *crazy!?*"

I emerged from my stupor and began to usher students back to their technology workstations. "Alright, okay. It's over, let's let it go," I said to no one in particular.

"She's for sure gonna get jumped after school."

"What did Mary Kate even say?!"

"Let it *go,*" I repeated, more emphatically this time.

"Did you see her grab Mary Kate's braids? Like she's going to be able to do something!"

These comments unsettled me deeply. My voice shook as I announced to the class, "It's time to stop talking about it. Let's get back on task, let- it- go."

The rest of the 'party' went on in this manner, with students recalling the incident and me trying to squash all mention of it.

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Researchers have shown that the 'nice' White lady is friendly and maintains comfort at the expense of students of color (Bissonnette, 2016; Goodman, 2001; Kenyon, 2022; Miller &

Harris, 2018; Orozco, 2019; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). My conceptualizations of 'behavior management' created a long block of unstructured time that led to an unsafe and avoidable situation. The token-based behavior system I implemented in Years Three and Four was founded on a Sentimentalist need to be liked by students and perceived as friendly, caring, and easy-going (Hammond, 2015; Kleinfeld, 1975; Ware, 2006). This contrasted my first two years at East Pine where I demonstrated the qualities of a Technocrat, with high expectations but no explicit focus on positive relationship- or community-building (Hammond, 2015; Kleinfeld, 1975; Ware, 2006).

The behavioral goals of a token-based behavior system could have been better accomplished in and through a curiosity-based, experience-driven PBL music learning environment (Emdin, 2016). That a generous amount of instructional time was set aside, instead, for vaguely defined behavior 'development' indicates a priority for the curriculum of whiteness at the expense of a robust and rigorous music curriculum (Howard, 2013; Kendi, 2019; Wozolek & Atif, 2022). That I inevitably lowered the rigor of the musicking to make space for between four and six 'Music Parties' per year further indicates a Sentimentalist approach to music teaching through the curriculum of whiteness (Hammond, 2015; Kendi, 2019; Kleinfeld, 1975; Wozolek & Atif, 2022).

As this vignette has shown, these class parties did little to support authentic positive relationship- and community-building between and among students, and was therefore an ineffective structure (Paris, 2012; Ware, 2006). My initial advice to Raniyah to, *"Just ignore them,"* is an example of Goodman's (2001) Do Not Offend rules, where the ultimate purpose of school rules is to maintain comfort. *"Just let it go,"* served as a silencing tactic by which to restore the delicate balance of comfort that had been disrupted by the altercation (Castagno,

2006; 2008; 2014). My performance of the ‘nice’ young White teacher was intertwined with the traits of the Sentimentalist teacher (Hammond, 2015; Kleinfeld, 1975; Ware, 2006).