

White Teacher, Know Thyself: Improving Anti-Racist Praxis Through Racial Identity Development

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Abstract

This article asserts that White teachers in urban schools must turn their racialized focus away from implied deficits of students of Color in the “achievement gap” frame and toward the impact their racial identities have on their craft. Through empirical analysis of White teachers’ experiences, the article suggests six areas of self-work for developing positive, anti-racist White racial identities, an integral component in culturally responsive teaching. The authors draw upon Zeus Leonardo’s “third space” of navigating Whiteness and Janet Helms’s racial identity development framework to offer practical suggestions for building more anti-racist and effective pedagogy.

Keywords

race, identity, teacher beliefs, achievement gap, social, cultural responsiveness, diversity, racism, culturally relevant pedagogy, subjects, multi-cultural schools, urban education, White teachers, teacher development

The topic of race frequently arises in discussions of “the achievement gap” and the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Too often, though, White teachers remain focused on the implied deficits of students of Color, with detrimental

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consequences (García & Guerra, 2004; Matias, 2013).¹ This article suggests that a positive, anti-racist White racial identity supports White teachers to implement more effective, culturally responsive, anti-racist teaching practices.

Whether teaching in smaller emerging cities, large metropolises, or areas that share some characteristics of urban areas (Milner, 2012), the self-work necessary to realize such an identity is of particular importance for White teachers in urban schools because they predominantly serve students of Color, yet most teachers are White (Ahmad & Boser, 2014). Urban schools also serve high numbers of English Learners and tend to be under-resourced (Milner, 2012). However, few White teachers come from their students' urban communities and few fully understand the racialized socio-economic factors and scarcity of resources that contextualize urban schools as a result of systemic racism—as evidenced in higher concentrations of poverty, dense housing, food deserts, high rates of violence, and a lack of green space (T. C. Howard & Milner, 2014).

Told that they must be “culturally sensitive,” White teachers in urban schools may discuss institutional racism, yet too few have nuanced understandings of how their racial identity affects their teaching practices (Kailin, 1999; Lee, 2005; Sleeter, 2014). Consequently, White teachers' racial lens remains almost solely focused on the (often misunderstood) racial identities and experiences of students of Color. To support White teachers in taking up nuanced considerations of their racial identity, this article offers six areas of personal and professional growth that offer both theoretical and practical considerations for constructing anti-racist pedagogical practice.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Although students of Color account for nearly half of all students in the United States (with the percentage increasing annually), 80% of teachers are White (Ahmad & Boser, 2014). The disparity between the racial identities of teachers and students in urban schools is a particularly significant issue. T. C. Howard and Milner (2014) state that our predominantly White teachers “are not being well prepared to teach in urban schools across the United States, which is directly connected to their performance in these schools” (p. 200). Ranking racial and cultural knowledge among subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge as most important for urban teachers to cultivate, T. C. Howard and Milner (2014) call on teachers to “attend to their own deep-rooted beliefs, ideologies, and values” while cultivating a “deep understanding of the sociopolitical context of urban communities” (p. 107).

Research documents profound negative consequences of having a primarily White teaching force with little critical understanding of race and racism

(Dee, 2004; Delpit, 2006, 2012; DiAngelo, 2012a; Heitzeg, 2014; Matias, 2013; Oates, 2003; Picower, 2009; Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clark, & Curran, 2004). Therefore, teacher preparation programs must offer knowledge, skills, and tools for learning about cultural and racial diversity (Milner, 2006a). White teachers must understand themselves and their students as racial beings in a racialized society to go beyond simply accruing “toolkits” of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010). White people also need a clear anti-racist teaching ethic. Anti-racism involves recognizing racism as an institutionalized system of racial inequality that benefits White people, and “anti-racist education seeks to interrupt this system by educating [White] people to identify, name, and challenge the norms, patterns, traditions, structures, and institutions that keep racism and White supremacy in place” (DiAngelo, 2012a, p. 4). Effective White teachers also pay careful attention to their own racial identity as well as that of their students (Gay, 2014; Tatum, 1997). In this article, we examine potential solutions to the problems identified in the literature.

Our research is informed by two complementary theoretical frameworks to explicate the self-work White teachers must undertake. The first is Leonardo’s (2009) theoretical conception of Whiteness. The second is Helms’s (1984, 1990, 1995) more practical White racial identity development framework.

In framing Whiteness and White people, we draw upon Leonardo’s (2009) distinction: “‘Whiteness’ is a racial discourse, whereas the category ‘White people’ represents a socially constructed identity, usually based on skin color” (p. 169). Within this theoretical construction, “Whiteness is also a racial perspective or a worldview . . . supported by material practices and institutions . . . Whiteness is not a culture but a social concept” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 170). For our purposes, then, Whiteness refers to the constructed racial discourse and its connected systems of oppression, whereas White people are individual agents capable of acting through “the perspective of a White racial paradigm” or “articulating [their] life choices through non-White discourses or strategies of anti-Whiteness” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 170).

Within this framework, White people are not static figures but agents capable of either investing in Whiteness, thus reaping the privileges therein (Du Bois, 1935/1998; Leonardo, 2009; Lipsitz, 2006; McIntosh, 1988, 1989), of being superficially critical of Whiteness, or of exploring “a third space for neo-abolitionist Whites as neither enemy nor ally but a concrete subject of struggle” (Giroux, 1997; Leonardo, 2009, p. 186). This “third space” can be described as a way of being that includes ambivalence and exploration. It highlights that White people often struggle to know themselves outside of the problematic, fixed construction of the “ally” (Boucher, 2016) and move past feelings of insurmountable guilt (Tatum, 1994).

Leonardo (2009) notes that exploration of the “third space” must be “guided by non-White discourses” (p. 186). As such, White people must ground their practical self-work in Critical Race scholarship because it poses essential questions to White people engaging race (Cabrera, 2012; Lawrence & Tatum, 2004; Matias, 2013; Tochluk, 2010), including the suggestion that White people will only work for racial justice if it serves them (D. A. Bell, 1980). As a way to engage Leonardo’s “third space,” research suggests that White people need to understand the call to divest from the ways Whiteness functions as property in theoretical and tangible ways (Harris, 1993). From this perspective, engagement of this “third space” involves application of Critical Race Theory to education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This is vital, as it opens the door to holding a tension of consistent work toward anti-racism and against complicity in racist systems.

Engagement in Leonardo’s “third space” framework is supported by White people developing a nuanced understanding of their racialized selves. Helms (1984, 1990, 1995) offers a practical frame for this work in her model of White racial identity development. Helms’s framework describes six “statuses” of development in which White people may find themselves at any given time:

1. Contact: Obliviousness to own racial identity
2. Disintegration: First acknowledgment of White identity
3. Reintegration: Idealizes Whites/denigrates (people of Color)
4. Pseudo-independence: Intellectualized acceptance of own and others’ race
5. Immersion/emersion: Honest appraisal of racism and significance of White identity
6. Autonomy: Internalizes a multi-cultural identity with non-racist White identity as its core

This model of racial identity development includes what Milner (2003) terms the “deep deliberative search” White people must undertake “to understand their own and other individuals’ racial backgrounds, racial heritage, and consequences of race that cause oppression and privilege” (p. 207). For educators, this search is important because White teachers who do not see their racial identity as meaningful often allow unchecked expressions of White privilege, such as microaggressions, to create un-safe and un-welcoming classrooms for students (Matias, 2013; Sue, 2010). In addition, race conscious White educators who find their racial identity meaningful, but do not have a sufficiently nuanced and healthy racial identity (Tatum, 1997), also cause unintended injury by *naming* their investment in racial justice without

understanding how they continue to negatively affect students (Lawrence & Tatum, 2004). Thus, White teachers need an explicit White anti-racist identity (Tatum, 1997), as found in the latter statuses of Helms's model, that helps them hold the tension between their privileged position within unjust systems and their sense of self.

While much research exists analyzing the ways White teacher identity and investments in Whiteness impact teaching (Delpit, 2006; Matias, 2013; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 2001; Vaught & Castagno, 2008), additional exploration regarding the complexities that come with White people struggling to divest from Whiteness is needed (Leonardo, 2009). Some scholars have explored in depth the ways Helms's White racial identity development model applies to teaching (G. Howard, 1999; Lawrence & Tatum, 2004; Tatum, 1997), but there is a need to further explore how White teachers navigate the "advanced" statuses. A parallel is seen in the way Bruce Pratt's feminist anti-oppression work is praised by Martin and Mohanty (1986) who note, "What differentiates her narration . . . is its tentativeness, its consisting of fits and starts, and the absence of linear progress toward a visible end" (p. 206). This "tentativeness" in its "fits and starts" succinctly describes the experience many White people have when attempting to develop a sense of self as an anti-racist White person while exploring a "third space" way of being. The consequences of this struggle within White teachers, and how to support movement toward a positive, anti-racist racial identity, deserve focus.

Navigating the "Third Space" of White Identity Development

This article explores issues White teachers face when navigating the "third space" described by Leonardo (2009) with the goal of supporting White teachers as they move through the difficult in-between spaces of racial identity development. The following pages highlight issues for White teachers to consider that build upon the work of Helms (1984, 1990, 1995). This article also explores questions of application put forth by Tatum (1992, 1994, 1997), G. Howard (1999), Landsman (2001), those in the Landsman and Lewis (2006) anthology, and Matias (2013).

As two White educators who work in fields meant to help teachers improve their practice—one a professor of education and the other a PhD student in education and consultant offering professional development to teachers—we are obligated to work with White educators to develop more anti-racist ways of being White. We align with scholars who stress the need to turn the racialized lens of education around to focus on White teacher identity.

Developing the knowledge of systems of oppression, privilege, inequity, and identity without situating the self in relation to those systems often characterizes an initial step in developing an anti-racist teaching practice. However, Whites often focus entirely upon people of Color and do little to investigate “what’s going on with Whiteness” (hooks, 1999, p. 54; Matias, 2013). An exclusive focus toward systems of racism and the “other” and away from one’s racial identity limits the ability to develop a re-imagined self-concept that supports navigating difficult emotions and implementing a culturally responsive and/or “neo-abolitionist” pedagogy. After all, to divest from Whiteness risks not only material and social gain (Lipsitz, 2006) but also loneliness and isolation (Matias & Allen, 2013). Navigating the ramifications of attempts at divestment requires White teachers to move beyond a simplistic image of White people as either “the problem” or as “allies,” and instead view themselves as complicated, flawed, and yet essential participants in the work of racial justice (Lowenstein, 2009). Tatum (1997) describes this as White people “feeling good” about their racial identity “not in the sense of a Klan member’s ‘White pride,’ but in the context of a commitment to a just society” (p. 94).

Although understandable concerns arise in response to encouraging White people to feel “good” about their racial identity (Thompson, 2003), having a positive (not simply anti-racist) understanding of self is vital (Tatum, 1997). White anti-racist identity without a positive foundation often comes with self-hate, guilt, and shame. A healthy White racial identity rooted in a neo-abolitionist divestment from Whiteness and characterized by strong self-esteem and confidence supports White teachers’ abilities to implement culturally responsive and transformational teaching practices (Gay, 2010; G. Howard, 1999).

We identify six focus areas for White teachers to consider. They capture two overarching areas of exploration: *Understanding Oneself* and *Accountable Action in Community*. Several of these six focus areas build upon the analysis of Goldberg and Levin (2009), foundational members of the Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere, Los Angeles (AWARE-LA), while also drawing upon the considerations of the theorists and practitioners referenced previously. The six areas include the following:

Understanding oneself

1. Analyzing privilege and microaggressive behavior
2. Exploring ethnic and cultural identities
3. Engaging with history of White anti-racists and multiracial struggles for justice
4. Developing intersectional identity

Accountable action in community

5. Building White anti-racist community
6. Demonstrating accountability across race

These focus areas can help White educators develop a foundation that supports a healthier, positive, anti-racist understanding of themselves. They provide practical ways for White teachers to engage the “third space” while acknowledging how one remains complicit in reifying oppression and privilege.

Method

We situate our methodology within a critical hermeneutic tradition that stresses the value and necessity of individual storytelling and the context that comes with said stories in explicating and understanding ideology and its impacts on action within community (Roberge, 2011). Critical hermeneutics recognizes the limitations of exploration of ideology through individual perspective. As Roberge (2011) explains, “This work on oneself is certainly capable of presenting itself as a critique and, first and foremost, as a critique of the subject’s illusions” whereby “all this critical and multiform comprehension is always partial and fragmentary, but this has the advantage of avoiding alternatives that are too fixed” (p. 14). As White teachers engage in the “fits and starts” of exploring a “third space” way of being, critical hermeneutics allows teachers to name, reflect upon, problematize, and learn from the ongoing process of identity transformation.

Leonardo (2009) notes that work on race “must critically understand its imaginative (i.e., ideological) dimensions, or how people imagine race in their daily lives” (p. 33). Furthermore, the “normative climate in the post-Civil Rights era has made illegitimate the public expression of racially based feelings and viewpoints” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 11). Therefore, it is important to offer examples of White teachers in urban schools who are attempting to live in a “third space,” as described by Leonardo, and navigate the coded, racialized realities of teaching while reflecting on their attitudes and actions.

To provide such examples of anti-racist White identity development, this article includes narratives from the authors’ experiences as urban educators in Los Angeles and Chicago as well as from in-depth interviews conducted by one of the authors of this article (Shelly Tochluk and a co-researcher, John Beltramo) with White teachers striving to develop anti-racist practices. These interviews were conducted with teachers who participated extensively in AWARE-LA Saturday Dialogues, monthly, 3-hr workshops focused on

investigating privilege, intersecting identities, anti-racist White history, and what it might look like to be part of an anti-racist White culture while sharing personal struggles regarding efforts to live out an anti-racist practice.

These narratives act as evidence of the pitfalls and the growth that can take place as White teachers explore the latter “statuses” of White racial identity development and how this work impacts their teaching practice. In presenting these narratives, the roles taken on by the authors of this text are personal (Gadamer, 1976), and as such, there is an intimate tie to the work put forth. Within this approach, “knowledge is gained through people talking about their meanings; knowledge is laced with personal biases and values . . . [and] knowledge evolves, emerges, and is inextricably tied to the context in which it is studied” (Creswell, 1998, p. 19). We acknowledge the subjective element in this process.

Presenting narratives from White teachers themselves, rather than from teachers of Color or from students, has limitations, as the oppressed are uniquely able to comment on how the actions of those in positions of power and privilege are reflective of systems of oppression (Freire, 2005). Despite this limitation, this methodology echoes the call from Jupp and Slattery (2010) for a “second wave” of White identity studies that emphasizes dialogue and reflection “as a way to take respondents’ life histories and common sense understandings seriously while also getting [teachers] to think differently along the lines of humanities education and intellectual development in the tradition of Deweyan growth” (p. 471). Given this, we draw on self-reflection among White educators to share the insights gained from their effort to live in the “third space” of a neo-abolitionist practice.

Understanding Oneself—Developing a Positive, Anti-Racist White Identity

Analyzing Privilege and Microaggressive Behavior

The concept of identity privilege—the everyday benefits and advantages afforded to people based on their identity (Du Bois, 1935/1998; Lipsitz, 2006; McIntosh, 1988, 1989)—prompts many who benefit from White privilege to critically consider their identity and actions. Unfortunately, privilege is often treated superficially. The Midwest Critical Whiteness Collective critiques this superficiality as they explore how teacher education’s focus on privilege inadvertently inhibits anti-racist action. They argue that a focus on privilege (if it is addressed at all) fails to interrogate the complex identities of all people and that simply acknowledging the existence of privilege is often treated as an end in itself (Lensmire et al., 2013).

A nuanced knowledge of privilege plays an important role in developing an anti-racist understanding of self (Thandeka, 2001) and teaching praxis (Leonardo, 2009). This is because investigating individual privilege reveals that White privilege creates a distorted lens through which White people perceive the world (Thandeka, 2001). Continuous attention is necessary to recognize distortions and understand how subconscious enactments of racial privilege negatively impact communities, injure students of Color, and display poor modeling for White students.

This work is unlikely to be undertaken, however, if White people do not recognize that one can be *White* and *anti-racist* simultaneously, as the inability to hold both ideas together is characteristic of what Helms (1984) calls “pseudo-independence.” The difficulty many White people have in conceiving of themselves in a positive way while *also* recognizing being entrenched within a system that privileges them leads many White people to simply reject association with White identity. This rejection, leading to a limited self-reflective process, results in less awareness of subconscious displays of privilege and the ways social conditioning regarding race penetrates White people’s psyches. Examining the consequences of privilege takes dedication and requires the willingness to admit that racism is internalized. This admission is often painful yet important for White educators to commit to lifelong reflection on this issue.

In reflecting on his time teaching in Chicago, Jamie noted a relationship between his privilege and the effectiveness of his pedagogical practice:

Going into my first year of teaching, I was convinced I had the whole anti-racist White person thing figured out. I knew I had privilege, and I had a strong analysis of systems of oppression and how they were impacting my African American and Latino students on Chicago’s west side. As the school year progressed, though, I realized something quite troubling. I struggle with learning people’s names, and learning 175 students’ names was tough. But, while I knew the names of all my lightest-skinned students, I had far more trouble learning my darkest-skinned students’ names. I can’t help but think this was apparent to them. Without meaning to, what messages had I been sending them? Were the other White teachers doing the same thing? There’s no way that this wasn’t adversely affecting my students, particularly since I saw the ways Colorism was playing out in my classroom in other forms.

Microaggressions (Sue, 2010), like the Colorism of failing to learn the names of darker skinned students as quickly as those of lighter skinned or White students (Monroe, 2013), have tremendous impact. Jamie already considered himself an anti-racist teacher and had been doing anti-racist work for some time. But it was only through continuing self-reflection that he became

aware of the subconscious ways his privilege manifested so that he could begin to disrupt them.

Regular self-reflection and inquiry into how privilege manifests are necessary to interrupt subconscious enactments of microaggressions. This allows for the modification of personal behavior, improved relationships with students of Color, and lessons learned to be shared with colleagues. Thus, committing to analyzing how privilege distorts perception and shapes attitudes and behaviors is essential.

Exploring Ethnic and Cultural Identities

Part of developing a nuanced anti-racist White identity involves recognizing how Whiteness, and distinctly different but related White culture (Leonardo, 2009), affects White people's lives and a sense of connection to, or disconnection from, ancestral, familial, ethnic roots. The task before White educators includes fully accepting that one's life is shaped by historic and contemporary forms of oppressive White culture and that, regardless of one's disavowal of racially prejudicial thinking and systems, White people remain complicit in upholding the status quo (DiAngelo, 2012b).

An essential step in creating self-awareness regarding how White culture operates in one's life includes knowing how Whiteness developed and remains influential. For example, the implementation of legal, economic, social, and political privileges that solidified a new construction of self drew together various European immigrant groups under a common identity: White American.² This identity implied freedom, frugality, productivity, and ambitiousness. Cultivating this identity necessitated creating a contrasting identity that represented what it meant *not* to be White American, and therefore subjects of oppression (Tochluk, 2010). In other words, "Americans" were free, privileged, and White. Those who were not free or White could not benefit from racial privilege.

Historians also describe the birth of Whiteness as a political tool to divide poor laborers, indentured servants, and slaves by offering some Europeans access to systems of privilege and power to prevent them from uniting with enslaved and exploited Africans and Indigenous people in North America in the 1600s (Battalora, 2013; Painter, 2010; Thandeka, 2001; Tochluk, 2010). Key to European groups becoming attached to the new American identity was the assimilation of European groups into Whiteness. This occurred over generations through day-by-day, year-by-year decision-making whereby individual families, over generations, dropped ethnic traditions to gain safety and the economic security that came with Whiteness.

Knowing this history helps White teachers understand that the assimilation process into Whiteness has resulted in many White people feeling a sense of cultural loss (Thandeka, 2001). Goldberg and Levin (2009) write,

Today most White people think of themselves as having no real culture. We look at communities of Color and see culture lacking in our own lives. These feelings leave a void in White people that cause us to develop oppressive solutions for filling this void. (p. 7)

For many White educators, the cultural loss resulting from trading ethnic traditions for the privileges available in a White supremacist system complicates the ability to develop a positive, anti-racist identity and an effective anti-racist teaching praxis.

Interrogating one's relationship to systems of Whiteness and White culture allows one to make conscious choices about relating to it. Investigating ethnic, familial roots allows one to find a more meaningful cultural grounding. Together, they help White people regain a sense of rootedness that avoids prompting an escape from the reality of one's continuing connection to Whiteness and complicity with systemic oppression (Giroux, 1997). When White teachers in urban schools cannot hold this tension of recognizing one's connection to Whiteness and White culture *while* working to regain an ethnic or supportive cultural grounding, they enact a number of troubling behaviors:

1. *Distancing from White culture*: Altering dress, manner, or behavior in ways that indicate a lack of self-acceptance and a wish to be something other than White.
2. *Distancing from White people*: Decreasing ability to effectively encourage and support other White faculty to join efforts for racial justice.
3. *Over-identifying with people of Color*: Appreciating the suggestion that one is not *really* White and distancing from White identity and the responsibility to interrogate how White privilege affects one's attitudes and behavior.
4. *Over-identifying with European roots*: Disavowing one's relationship to being White, leading to statements claiming that one is not part of White culture. There is, thus, less recognition regarding how White culture, Whiteness, and privilege manifest in one's behavior.

Each of these behaviors undercuts the ability of White teachers to successfully implement the pedagogical practices suggested as part of a transformational, culturally responsive, or anti-racist approach, as they reinforce a lack of self-awareness and impair relationship building.

Shelly describes her experience teaching a fifth-grade class composed of Latino and African American students in an urban school in Los Angeles.

Like many White people of mixed European descent, connections to my ancestral cultures were traded in by my family long ago. I would say, "I have no culture," "I'm just normal," or "I'm just American." My sense of cultural loss translated into me dressing like an African during my years teaching elementary school. I wore a lappa (African skirt), an ankh around my neck, and carried a djembe into class. Although I wanted to connect with my African American students and demonstrate the value of their ancestral cultures, my approach was misguided. It would have been far better for me to include more African American voices into our curriculum. My fifth graders were also savvy enough to know I was White and was trying to act like I wasn't. I hated being associated with anything White, and part of my African dress was a direct response to being challenged about how my behavior mirrored stereotypes of White culture. I was encouraged in this by some of my friends of Color, as they seemed to appreciate me struggling to be not so White. Unfortunately, it shielded me from looking at the ways my White privilege emerged when I said things about what I believed the kids should want for their future, how they needed to work collectively to improve their neighborhood, or how they should work to have more choices than their parents.

Shelly's attempts to be seen as other than White reflected an unhealthy sense of racial identity. She did not accept that she was related to a White culture associated with historical and contemporary systems of oppression. Transforming into a teacher who could stand in front of a classroom and tell a helpful story about what it can mean to be a healthy, White anti-racist person, unafraid to accept all aspects of who she is, required her to explore her ongoing relationship with White culture while investigating where she might find a more supportive cultural grounding related to her background.

This work benefits urban schools in two ways. First, White anti-racist educators who enjoy a healthy racial identity that includes self-acceptance are able to build relationships with, and influence, White educators around them. Second, students benefit when White teachers are able to admit their relationship to Whiteness and White culture, own their responsibility to work for justice, and avoid enacting microaggressions.

Engaging With History of White Anti-Racists and Multiracial Struggles for Justice

Developing a healthy sense of White racial identity includes knowing the history of White anti-racism and its contributions to multiracial struggles for justice. Goldberg and Levin (2009) assert that the history of White anti-racism has been hidden, and uncovering this history provides the grounding and inspiration necessary to articulate what it means to be part of a White anti-racist

culture. This is necessary because a lack of this knowledge contributes to White teachers remaining mired in a sense of guilt for the historic wrongs perpetuated by their racial group and, as a result, manifesting troubling patterns.

For example, as White teachers move through racial identity development, there is often an attempt to provide students with a complete view of the horrors of U.S. racism and its continuing existence within contemporary institutions and systems. While it is vitally important to offer this often untaught history, White teachers in the middle statuses of racial identity development (“pseudo-independence” and “emersion/immersion”) tend to focus exclusively on the effects of racism and overlook the history of collective, multiracial action against racism. This can leave students of Color angry and hopeless. As J. M. Bell (2013) writes, “coming to grips with the historical and contemporary structural reality of racial equality can have a paralyzing effect. Students often leave our classrooms feeling more powerless than motivated, more hopeless than hopeful” (p. 31).

Furthermore, the ramifications of teachers not knowing White anti-racist history include White teachers remaining guilty and/or shameful regarding their association to racism. This often includes severe self-critique, recognized as self-loathing. The expression of this feeling is described as being “uncomfortable in my skin” or “not wanting to be White.” The lack of emotional resolution affects teachers’ ability to provide an effective learning environment for students when teaching about race-related issues. It also leads to White teachers isolating and distancing themselves from other White colleagues. White teachers unable to develop a positive sense of their racial selves also tend to seek validation through their relationships with students of Color to feel that they are “good” people who are overcoming patterns of oppression evident in U.S. history. This can involve White teachers being overly permissive with students of Color (Delpit, 2006).

In the interviews with AWARE-LA participants, a White teacher named Sarah described what happened during her early years attempting to enact anti-racist teaching. Her inability to accept herself created an unhealthy relationship to self and, as a consequence, with people at her school site. Sarah states,

I didn’t want to connect with the White staff because I hated White people . . . I hated myself as a White person. This was in my very hateful stage . . . that was my earliest framework about what White anti-racism was like, “I am a White anti-racist because I hate other White people, and I don’t want to be associated with being White.” Who were the people of Color on campus? The students. So I really want to identify with the students because they are the only people of Color, and by doing that I shortchanged some really amazing relationships at

the school with my colleagues. And I developed an inappropriate relationship with students . . . where the line was really fuzzy and not healthy, like I would take them to McDonald's instead of taking them to their service-learning project. That's what I mean by unhealthy boundaries . . . and that was definitely connected to the formation around my anti-racist identity at the time. Given the hate that I felt for White people at that time and all the students were people of Color . . . I needed their validation.

Sarah went on to say,

I think that my early anti-racist understanding of myself was that "I am entitled to nothing. As a White person, I am inherently flawed, and if I tell my students to do something, it might be inappropriate because I'm White." It was so self-loathing. Like, "I am not capable of providing positive direction so I am going to follow my students' directions." . . . The road has been long, but I am actually healthy and entitled to a voice wherever I am as a White antiracist person. And I think the journey to get there was intimately tied up in the work that I've done in AWARE in . . . creating a positive, radical White identity and seeing myself as fully human and invested in the struggle.

Sarah's story highlights the importance of having White anti-racist role models with which White teachers can identify.

White teachers, standing on the shoulders of White anti-racists who have paved the way, can empathize with other White people, providing them with an alternative vision of what it means to be White. With this vision, White students in urban schools are able to receive the essential message that being White does not *have* to mean that one is solely complicit with systemic oppression. White people can *also* be part of the anti-racist tradition that has existed in the United States for centuries. This is a point of strength that helps White people avoid falling prey to self-loathing, which subverts anti-racism efforts.

White teachers with anti-racist role models also recognize their work as part of a history of anti-racism and demonstrate to their students that White people can be, and have been, part of anti-racism for centuries. Striving to be part of a culture of White anti-racism, over time and through sustained work and action, provides White teachers with a confident stance that supports healthy relationships with students of Color. It can also offer a hopeful vision to students regarding multiracial groups taking action for justice efforts. Historic models of anti-racist coalitions across racial difference can lay a foundation for today's coalition building. Teachers who are part of a group of White people effectively working in solidarity with people of Color to end racial oppression are able to authentically teach the transformative possibilities of anti-racist action to students.

Developing Intersectional Identity

As important as it is to focus on race to enhance understanding of one's racialized self, humans are also complex beings with multiple and varied aspects of identity that inform lived experiences and, as such, one's race does not exist in isolation. Racial identity cannot be disentangled from the experience of gender, sexual identity, wealth or class, citizenship, religious identity, ability or disability, body size, or any other core or peripheral aspect of social identity. Central to White anti-racist identity development and a successful anti-racist teaching praxis is a commitment to understanding *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993). This concept acknowledges that each person's various identities interact with one another on multiple levels and over time, so "we must account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (Crenshaw, 1993, p. 1245).

As noted by Lensmire (2008) and Lensmire et al. (2013), there is robust analysis regarding the development of White identity in scholarship. However, racial identity development literature does not often highlight Whiteness in the context of, or at the intersections with, other aspects of identity. White teachers need to recognize that race is not a monolith that stands on its own, but it is a part of one's identity that is inextricably bound to every other part of one's self. Therefore, anti-racist White identity development must simultaneously include a commitment to anti-oppressive identity development with feminist analysis, class-consciousness, anti-heterosexist practice, and more.

This complex task leads to great challenges for White teachers in urban schools who are generally aware of privilege and oppression but who lack a positive racial identity. Navigating difficult situations involving multiple, intersecting identities is confusing. White teachers who appreciate an intersectional, anti-oppressive understanding but do not have a solid sense of racial identity can fall into a number of patterns that do great harm to students and colleagues.

One pattern involves White teachers treating Whiteness as a static identity rather than a racial discourse, refusing to recognize that patriarchy and capitalism intersect with Whiteness in ways that complicate what it means to be a White person in the United States. This can alienate White students in urban schools whose experiences with race are informed by other aspects of their identity such as a life lived in poverty or being subject to oppressive experiences by virtue of being a cisgender female or a transgender person (Lensmire et al., 2013).

Alternatively, seeking to relate to students of Color, White teachers often highlight other aspects of identity and avoid acknowledging being White.

This happens in two common ways. First, some White teachers frame everything through aspects of an identity other than race, such as gender, religion, or sexual orientation, to avoid the discomfort of accepting a relationship to Whiteness (European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness [EACCW], 2007). For example, a White female teacher might claim, "I'm a woman, so I know what oppression feels like." Second, White teachers might focus solely on an aspect of identity other than race in an attempt to connect with students and avoid an anxiety-producing conversation about race. This could entail highlighting one's background in poverty to connect with low-income African American students without recognizing the ways White poverty and Black poverty in the United States are poverties of a wholly different kind rather than of a different degree (Coates, 2014; DiAngelo, 2006).

To illustrate the importance of school staff having both a healthy racial identity and an understanding of intersectionality, at the school where Jamie taught on Chicago's West Side, confusion regarding how to navigate intersectionality complicated an already difficult situation where both teacher and student were harmed (names changed to protect those involved):

Our high school mirrored most of those in Chicago: almost totally White, predominantly female staff teaching only students of Color. We had a student named Terrance, an African American junior who was generally well loved in the school but who often found himself in trouble for playing and joking too much. Two months before the school year ended, a young and relatively inexperienced but dedicated White teacher named Karen filed a complaint against Terrance for sexual harassment. Knowing the ways that teenage boys often explore and play with sexuality in unhealthy, sexist, and boundary-violating ways and having had to talk to Terrance about this type of behavior in the past, I felt a call to act as a feminist ally in supporting Karen. At the same time, the administration called on Karen to consider the long and violent history of White women accusing young Black men of sexual aggression, and in Chicago Public Schools, an expulsion for sexual harassment put Terrance at great risk for the school-to-prison pipeline. As a result, I felt a need to engage Karen in a conversation about the powerful ways in which our race as White people intersects with that of students of Color.

I was torn between wanting to be the feminist ally for Karen and the anti-racist ally for Terrance, and no one around me was talking about this in nuanced ways that could help me think through how to strike that balance. We were either on Terrance's side because disciplinary action would continue a problematic "school to prison pipeline" trend, or we were on Karen's side because women shouldn't have to deal with the entitled harassment of men, even young male students.

Without considering the complexities of how our various identities were at play, the situation blew up and led to no one feeling safer or more supported. Karen left to teach at a suburban school at the end of the year, Terrance continued to struggle with disciplinary action in school, and I did nothing. I simply stood by and watched, feeling helpless and caught in between.

This story highlights the incredible complexity in holistically addressing identity as teachers. In dynamic motion are issues of gender, sexuality, class, race, and power, all within contexts of history and wider structures of oppression. There are real ways in which women must deal with sexual aggression and harassment on a regular basis, and converging with this truth is the concurrent reality that serious disciplinary action in school is disproportionately likely to lead to a student of Color's incarceration (Nocella, Parmar, & Stovall, 2014).

Yet, if school staff have healthy, positive racial identities as well as an ability to engage in intersectional analysis, the door is open to alternatives such as restorative justice (Zehr, 2002), an approach that attempts to hold all people accountable without furthering the dynamics of power and oppression so often present when identities intersect. A restorative justice approach could have allowed male staff to work with Terrance to explore the nature of sexism and gender violence. White staff could have talked with Karen about alternatives to suspension or expulsion and how White teachers' calls for harsh discipline in schools tend to reinforce the mass incarceration of young people of Color. This could have laid a foundation for a process with Terrance and Karen leading to growth and healing rather than punishment from a position of power or privilege and/or a sense of being further victimized.

Accountable Action in Community

It is tempting to try and develop an anti-racist, intersectional racial identity in isolation. Including others on one's journey invites critique, and the potential for hurt feelings and mistakes along the way is likely. However, an essential part of White teachers developing an anti-racist identity and effective teaching praxis involves building relationships that offer support and critical feedback in the face of errors. It is particularly important that critical feedback comes from people of Color, as they are best suited to determine what is or is not culturally relevant or who is and is not acting as an anti-racist ally (Matias, 2013). Building relationships with other White anti-racist people is also essential, as White people play an important part in other White people's development.

Building White Anti-Racist Community

People of Color in urban settings often inform White teachers that White people should work with other White people to learn about racism and address concerns about racial identity. It is not the responsibility of people of Color to attend to White people's growth and learning. However, many White people struggle to create anti-racist relationships with other White people. This is partly because White people tend to fall into patterns of either "proselytizing or distaining," whereby they "shut down dialogue while acting out [their] individualism and [their] sense of superiority, reflecting [their] White investment in hierarchy and competition" (EACCW, 2007, p. 130). These patterns occur when one of several racial identity statuses, as described by Helms, leaves White people trying to convince others, both White people and people of Color, that we are the "good White person."

This creates three problems in urban schools. First, as people of Color may rightly reject taking on the mentorship of White teachers, White teachers are left without critical relationships offering growth and learning about race and racial identity. For this reason, engaging with a purposeful, focused White anti-racist community is essential. White teachers can learn how to recognize damaging enactments of microaggressions, privilege, emotional reactions, or unexamined issues in the classroom and on campus.

Second, "proselytizing or distaining" limits White anti-racist teachers from becoming influential on their school campuses regarding the merits of employing a culturally responsive and/or anti-racist teaching pedagogy. In other words, creating a positive anti-racist identity through self-reflective work among other White people allows for more effective engagement with other White teachers around issues of pedagogy and social justice. It is important for White teachers in urban schools to enhance this skill because there are times when a White anti-racist teacher is one of only a few White people consciously invested in racial justice. In these instances, unless those committed to anti-racist practice engage with White colleagues in influential ways, school-wide change is unlikely.

Third, if White teachers are not in consistent dialogue with people of Color about their teaching practices and do not seek out White anti-racist people for support and learning, there is no one to act as an accountability partner. This means that White teachers do not have relationships that invite critical feedback about their attitudes, interpretations, and teaching strategies in terms of how they might include prejudicial elements. As Tatum (1997) describes it, "Participation in White consciousness-raising groups organized specifically for the purpose of examining one's own racism [is] another way to 'keep moving forward'" (p. 110).

Several teachers spoke about how AWARE-LA supported their growth as teachers in urban schools:

Jason: It's been in AWARE settings where it was, like, here's my space with other White people, and other White educators to talk about what's really hard for me and what comes up, and how I see myself acting in the classroom.

Rebecca: . . . It's a yearlong thinking process . . . It keeps me going and thinking and developing . . . I think AWARE is a really important place for me to bring questions . . . it's like a place just for someone [like me] where people understand . . . There's support and people in other avenues of workspaces that have other ideas and have dealt with some of this before . . . Sometimes I feel like I need to process things with people separate from work . . . I really cherish that outside perspective.

Tara: It didn't feel right going to the teachers of Color anymore. Something struck me . . . It just wasn't right. And then I could sit and talk with [other AWARE members] . . . And it just felt better. Then . . . that growth became more obvious at school. It was manifesting itself in different ways.

Tara went on to describe how processing questions and confusion with other critically minded White people striving to be anti-racist helped her develop an integrated understanding so that, over time, her anti-racist voice strengthened and became more authentic. She was no longer parroting what she heard from people of Color, but she began to understand herself as a racialized being, able to share her experience and understanding with others at her school site. She also recognized that her participation in a White anti-racist group helped her avoid much of the confusion, guilt, and shame associated with Helms's "disintegration" and "pseudo-independence" statuses, as she had models of how to actively work toward a positive, White anti-racist identity.

Overall, the benefit of the monthly AWARE-LA Saturday Dialogue space for many White teachers has been the opportunity to share struggles, fears, successes, and missteps within a community that encourages continued striving. It is a crucible for growth. This kind of group allows White teachers to (a) value learning opportunities offered by White people, (b) embrace a role as a potential influencer of other White colleagues, and (c) receive the critical feedback needed to increase awareness of subconscious enactments of micro-aggressions and privilege.

Demonstrating Accountability Across Race

No matter how much White teachers do internal work and engage with other White people, ensuring that this internal growth transforms into a solid culturally responsive and/or anti-racist praxis requires building relationships across race. Although White teachers learn a great deal reading the words of people of Color, “in textual encounters with other communities and individuals, [they] can maintain [their] distance. Face-to-face involvement, on the other hand, calls for a complex, immediate, and at times uncomfortable, kind of responsiveness” (Thompson, 2003, p. 14). White teachers failing to develop the capacity for “responsiveness” to people of Color lead to continuing enactments of privilege, oppressive policies, and superficial or dysfunctional cross-race relationships, all of which negatively impact a school’s success.

Being responsive and creating anti-racist community within schools, then, means building trust and engaging in healthy dialogue with colleagues and students of Color. A number of anti-racist organizations have created “accountability guidelines” which provide helpful models (Cushing, Cabbil, Greeman, Hitchcock, & Richards, 2010). For White teachers, two key approaches include the following:

1. *Listening*: Of utmost importance is uninterrupted listening to the truths expressed by people of Color, both colleagues and students, particularly as they relate to how racial privilege inhibits perceiving speech or behavior linked to a history of oppression and pain. For example, if a person of Color offers feedback about how a White teacher’s discipline practices are not in the best interests of students of Color, actively listen instead of self-defending.
2. *Communicating accountably*: Inevitably, White teachers will make mistakes, some of which will harm relationships and damage trust. This should not lead to disengagement. Instead, accountability requires White teachers to apologize (avoiding language like “I’m sorry you were offended,” which places the onus on the “other”) while committing to do better going forward.

Enacting accountability principles is more complex in practice than in theory, however. Figuring out exactly what action a particular moment calls for can be confusing, and this is a pernicious challenge for White teachers in the middle statuses of racial identity development. Underlying much confusion is the fact that people of Color’s opinions and expectations for what accountability looks like vary. Because people of Color are not a monolith,

what one person desires may not be appreciated by another. Accountability, then, must be understood through the context of authentic relationships (Tochluk & Levin, 2010).

Even with relationships and agreements in place, internal dilemmas often remain. To illustrate, a White teacher named Tara spoke of how challenging it was to navigate what she had learned regarding being accountable. She knew she needed to listen and be open to messages from people of Color. She also recognized the need to use her voice.

I think that one of the places where I felt stuck was in trying to have a balance between working with faculty of Color and then also working on White identity development with White people, and teachers in particular, and I don't know that I held that balance well. Or at least in the beginning I didn't, and I felt torn between wanting to be that good White teacher, like "Look at me. I know this stuff. Like we can have this conversation and I know things and I can cite things and I get it."

And then the really opposite of that is sort of shutting down and staying in the background and not saying anything and not speaking at all because I didn't want to be the White teacher that was always speaking or the White person . . . who is always speaking up and always telling people how much I knew. And I'm still exploring that middle ground. I don't know because there are days when I really feel like I need to shrink back . . . And then there are days when I'm like, "Look at me, look at me!" That middle ground is hard for me. I think I really tread lightly.

Note the way Tara relates her difficulty knowing when to use her voice publicly to her recognition of her internal desire to be seen as valuable. She struggles to determine the precise moments when her actions are appropriate and accountable, and this is complicated by her still-developing sense of self-acceptance.

Further illustrating the value of learning about issues of race via conversations with colleagues of Color, Tara discusses what happened after a male faculty member alerted Tara that one of her colleagues of Color may not fully trust her. Tara states,

He said, "It's so good to see you becoming friends with Jasmine because she's really your soul sister. But be careful because . . . she probably doesn't trust you so much." And I was like, "What do you mean? What's wrong with me?" We're like buddies, and we love each other, and we talk on the phone all the time, and she helps me with my work . . . I felt really sad. I had no idea what he meant. I went to her, and I was like "Why did he say that? Why wouldn't you trust me?"

She sat me down, and she literally, if I had a visual image of it, like opened the door into a race conversation. We just sat for hours and talked about race and race dynamics and Black-and-White dynamics in particular. And she said, “You know, I have grown to really feel comfortable with you. And you’re a really good friend, and I think you’re a great teacher. But like all of that aside, it is hard to just accept that you are genuine, or that you were doing this for a genuinely authentic reason.”

. . . I didn’t understand that . . . Like why wouldn’t it be genuine? Or what is it about teaching race as a White teacher that’s not genuine? And so through that year it was a really important experience, and a really important conversation . . . I didn’t take it personally. I felt sad about it and I wanted to understand it more . . .

Essential to highlight is Tara’s ability to resist defensiveness and be responsive to the messages received. She did not expect her colleague of Color to be her emotional support system, and she began to recognize that having a cross-race relationship dedicated to working in solidarity is not the same as having a friendship. Both require building trust. However, White teachers need to nondefensively accept that not all colleagues of Color will want to become friends outside of the collegial relationship.

Building relationships across race allows for the development of trust and an opportunity to learn what specific action steps are required for accountable justice efforts on a school campus. As this dedication to relationship building across race is also part of creating a healthy, anti-racist White identity, the commitment to understanding intersectional identity influences these relationships. A teacher being accountable across racial difference, therefore, means taking into account all aspects of each person’s identity. A praxis that strives for accountability considers how each person relates to various individual and community relationships within the context of a set of complex identities.

Discussion—Striving Toward an Anti-Racist Educational Praxis

We have explored why each of the six suggested focus areas has important implications for an educator’s practice. However, there are three important notes of caution. First, while White teachers must focus on their own practice, they must also work to transform the educational system so it attracts and retains teachers of Color in urban schools, diversifying the teaching force (D. A. Bell, 1980; Brown, 2012; Milner, 2006b; Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein, & Mayfield, 2012).

Second, simple reflection on the six focus areas identified is not sufficient. Although the process of becoming an anti-racist White educator may start when we take up the difficult, career-long process of cultivating a culturally responsive teaching practice (Gay, 2010; T. C. Howard, 2003; Matias, 2013; Samuels, 2014; Sleeter, 2001), it is the integration of a new sense of self that supports transformational change in one's teaching practice. There must be an internalization and application of understandings for new statuses of racial identity to be realized (Helms, 1990) and for any substantive development of Leonardo's "third space" to be possible. This allows for successful application of a critically responsive pedagogy. This is true because, as Gay (2010) notes,

culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education . . . Even without our being consciously aware of it, culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn. (pp. 8-9)

As movement toward a positive, anti-racist White identity continues, this provides a basis from which White educators can begin to divest from Whiteness and its connected culture and invest in Leonardo's (2009) "neo-abolitionist" "third space" with more awareness.

Finally, we must remember to seek a balance between reflection and action. Freire (2005) warns that speaking based on reflection without doing active work becomes mere "verbalism" (p. 87). In contrast, emphasizing action without reflecting is mere "activism" (p. 88). An imbalance on either side is an inauthentic expression. In the end, this article challenges White teachers to investigate how their identity affects all aspects of teaching. This includes curricular design, instructional practices, classroom management/discipline systems, grading and evaluation, and relationships with students, families, and colleagues. Further research is warranted, particularly longitudinal empirical study, to better understand how this racial identity work actually impacts the teaching practices of White teachers as well as to understand how "third space" exploration by White educators affects students of Color.

Teaching practices cannot remain static; those who are willing to change and adapt to student needs will most effectively serve their students. Therefore, the call to develop a positive, anti-racist White racial identity is a call to hone and improve White educators' educational praxis to be more effective in implementing a culturally responsive and/or anti-racist practice in urban schools.

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Notes

1. Terms referring to racial identities are capitalized to confer respect to individuals while differentiating between racial identities and colors not referring to race (Color vs. color, Black vs. black, etc.).
2. We recognize the problematic nature of the term “American” when used as a synonym for U.S. citizens, as it takes singular ownership of the word and identity that should describe a diverse group of people living in North, Central, and South America. Because “American” as synonymous for U.S. citizen is inherently privileged, we use this term intentionally to connote the ways that “White American” identity was constructed in privilege and in opposition to the “Other.”

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