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Anti-bias pedagogy and the progressive legacy

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Abstract

This study uses qualitative data to investigate factors that support or hinder progressive

teachers and school leaders in the implementation of anti-bias pedagogy in a variety of

New York City elementary schools. Seven educators from six schools were interviewed.

Educators who successfully implement anti-bias pedagogy benefit from: time and space

to reflect upon their own identities as related to education and social justice; trusting

relationships within their school communities; structural as well as philosophical

commitments to equity that are evident schoolwide; and a tolerance for uncertainty.

Interview data is supported by a review of the literature to underscore the fundamental

links between progressive philosophy and anti-bias pedagogy.

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Introduction / Rationale

During my first year in the classroom, sometime in early spring, two of my nine-year-old students approached me with a question during independent reading time. They held up a chapter book called *Susan Marcus Bends the Rules* by Jane Cutler. I caught a glimpse of the cover: four girls sitting inside a bus or trolley wearing midcentury clothing. My student flipped through the pages. "We want to know what a word means. Here." She pointed to the word "Negro" on the page. As I paused to think, her best friend added, "I'm telling her that it means 'black.' It says *negro*, just like in Spanish class."

I stood with my students over the book, a young white teacher trying to form a response to this query from two kids of color. The architecture of the moment felt so much larger than a first-period-after-lunch vocabulary question. Could it be that this was their introduction to the word? How to start explaining the word "negro" to these two best friends, one of whom is black and the other who is biracial? Was it my place to do so? I noted the connection they had made, and said that the word did mean "black" in Spanish, and that it had been used in the past to refer to black or African-American people.

Moments like these occur regularly in classrooms as students demonstrate, question, and act out their racialized understandings of the world. My own experience in upper elementary classrooms, along with conversations with colleagues in other settings, made it clear that there are cultures of what can and can't be said, deep convictions about what is "appropriate" to talk about with children, and a racialized dynamic of educators who can avoid or who have no choice but to acknowledge how they are situated with

regard to privilege, race, and racism. For teachers, responding to these moments or teaching into them calls upon a network of their own experiences, beliefs, and practices. Teachers make choices about what to say or not say, whether to redirect or invite students to go deeper, what to do in the moment and what to do afterward. In these choices, there is an inherent uncertainty as to outcomes. There is always a degree of doubt.

I set out in this study to ask teachers what influences their desire and capacity to engage with children about questions of race and privilege, either in organically arising "teachable moments," in emergent curriculum, or within formal curriculum. I sought to find out how they respond to these topics and why; how their current approach came to be, and what might cause their response to change in the future. Teachers spoke to internal factors such as their own identities, philosophy, and emotions, but also to external factors.

My goal in asking these questions was to identify what supports and nourishes teachers engaging their students with these topics, because these conversations need to happen. We need a teaching force that is ready to engage with students from all backgrounds about racial inequity and systemic privilege, both now and long ago, both here and far away. I believe such an approach is a necessary part of equitable teaching and teaching for social justice. Open conversations on these topics should help students understand and celebrate past victories in the fight for equity, and cultivate a sense of agency to create the further change that is still needed (see Tatum, 1999; Wineburg, 2010 on anti-bias frames in the teaching of history).

This study seeks to identify common factors that support or discourage anti-bias practice in new and veteran educators as part of a larger project of teaching for social justice. Identifying these factors is highly salient because the demographics of the current teacher population make it unlikely that most teachers will address it on their own. In New York City, nearly 60% of public school teachers are white, compared to 15% of their students (Green, 2015). In the public school system, students of color find themselves by and large in classrooms with "race-incongruent" teachers, whose backgrounds and unexamined biases can inhibit their ability to build the relationships that help students, particularly students of color, succeed: role model, mentor, advocate, or cultural translator (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015). While efforts have been made to increase the recruitment and, more challenging, the retention of teachers of color within urban systems, the teaching population continues to skew white. Until demographic change can be achieved, efforts to help white educators become more effective educators of all children (particularly children of color) can be a key part of improving student outcomes.

This study also includes the perspectives of white teachers whose student populations are mostly white, such as those who teach at tuition-supported independent schools. In their settings, an anti-bias teaching practice can help white students become advocates by examining structural inequities (including but not limited to racism), as they relate to their own identities. Not to do so ensures that these students will replicate, if only passively, the biased systems from which they cannot help but benefit. Teachers in these settings did not all begin as self-identified anti-bias teachers. Their stories help

illuminate how schools can support or fail to support anti-bias practice in both structural and philosophical ways.

The exchange with my students described above involves several examples of the networks that can influence teachers' practices. How did the mission and philosophy of our school influence my response? How safe did I feel in answering, considering what colleagues or parents might say upon finding out about our conversation? What difference did it make that I had attended an anti-bias training at the start of the school year? That I could seek advice from the school Director of Diversity if I felt I needed it after the fact? How did my own background knowledge and life experiences as a white, female, American New Yorker contribute to my response? It was with questions like these that I approached fellow classroom teachers and school leaders, to weave together a picture of the structural and philosophical factors that allow in-depth, advocacy-minded engagement with race and privilege to take its rightful place in the curriculum.

To answer questions like the one my students posed takes practice, reflection, and prior exposure. It takes commitment, on an individual and community level, to supporting teachers' growth. It is my hope that this research can aid school leaders, pre-service and in-service teachers, and teacher-educators in supporting future generations of educators committed to equity, advocacy, and anti-bias practice.

II. Literature Review

Revisiting roots

Below, I explore the links between Bank Street's progressive philosophy and anti-bias pedagogy, as well as writings that helped to frame my inquiry among fellow teachers. The term "anti-bias" in this study encompasses a set of values and practices by which teachers seek to affirm students' varied identities, cultures, and abilities, and approach curriculum with the goal of dismantling systemic inequities such as racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, etc. For the purposes of this study the term "anti-racist" can be considered a subset of anti-bias practice. Anti-bias practice, in turn, is considered in many frameworks to be one component of teaching for social justice as a larger project, acknowledging that anti-bias efforts should be "part of larger individual, school, and community action" (Teaching Tolerance, 2014).

To examine how teachers undertake anti-bias practice means examining how their environments affect their ability to build relationships, take risks, and repair mistakes or breaches when they occur. For some educators, friendship and allyship with a colleague makes all the difference. Other teachers are supported by professional networks with a shared sense of purpose who provide each other with support that may not exist in their school environments -- thus creating a space for collective discourse and action among, rather than within, individual schools. In some schools, administrators are also allies to anti-bias teachers, demonstrating top-down trust in teachers' judgement and commitment to their ongoing growth. Of course, in some schools administrators may present obstacles to which teachers acquiesce in their pedagogy, or work around behind closed doors.

At its best, the developmental-interaction strand of progressive pedagogy is education for social justice. A belief in the political nature of education was central to Progressive Era reformers, namely John Dewey, who asserted that a democratic society "must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder" (1916, p. 115). Similarly, the link between individual learning and "the social uses of education" was foundational to the educational approach articulated by Lucy Sprague Mitchell at the founding of the Bureau of Educational Experiments in 1916 (Nager & Shapiro, 2000, p. 12-13). Edna K. Shapiro and Nancy Nager further articulate and update this connection in their 2000 work proposing "new directions" for the developmental-interaction approach. They assert the need to bring the idea of the "social individual" back to the foreground of developmental-interaction, in concurrence with its Deweyan roots, particularly Dewey's strong belief in "democratic social processes in schooling" (2000, p. 23). Shapiro and Nager also acknowledge that, unlike the trend toward rationalism and research in educational psychology, developmental-interaction "never intended nor attempted to be value-free" (2000, p. 24). Instead, it can and should take an active stance toward a vision of a changed society -- calling on the famous "dare" of George Counts to schools to build a new social order (1932/1978).

Shapiro and Nager clarify the roots of developmental-interaction, but also advise some new growth areas, which are particularly salient to a discussion of anti-bias efforts within progressive practice. Context and culture must come to the foreground, and earlier emphasis on individual autonomy must cede ground to relatedness and the consideration

of "the actions of persons in situations," (Nager & Shapiro, 2000, p. 25). In terms of curriculum, the authors call for culturally responsive pedagogy, rich connections between curriculum and children's lives, and a "culturally responsive understanding of development" (2000, p. 33). These charges to twenty first-century practitioners of developmental-interaction seek to bring greater inclusion and diversity of experience to the approach.

In the same volume, Eileen Wasow notes that the "interaction" half of developmental-interaction should include a comprehensive view of "family, peer, and community systems." Developmental-interaction can and should "expand to include anti-bias frameworks for family-school interaction" (2000, p. 287). The charge to integrate a wider range of cultural perspectives builds upon the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy as articulated by Gloria Ladson-Billings. This framing calls for students to experience academic success; develop or maintain cultural competence; and develop a critical consciousness to challenge the inequities of the social order. While akin to critical pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy is "specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment" (Ladson-Billings 1995, p. 160).

To claim anti-bias pedagogy as part of developmental-interaction and the larger progressive legacy that aims to teach for social justice, we need teachers who are confident and competent when it comes to implementing practices guided by the values that undergird the philosophy. These teachers must be prepared to be ongoing students of their own practice and careful, astute, and sensitive observers of the experiences and perspectives of the students they desire to teach.

Day to day possibilities

In addition to understanding the relationship between progressive pedagogy and anti-bias practice as essential aspects of teaching for social justice, we need to know more about the systems in which teachers are operating, and how they are encouraged or discouraged when enacting this work, whether they believe in it fully and enthusiastically or are reluctant to begin "difficult conversations" with students and colleagues.

A large part of examining such a teaching praxis means inquiring into moments when pedagogy and underlying philosophical principles meet real-time actions and reactions. When we inquire into such moments, there is a wide variety of factors that influence an educator's choices and responses, but one of the primary ones can be described as the educator's sense of what is *possible* in such moments, what the options are for speech and action. This sense of one's choices, and the means to act upon one's purposes together with others is how Maxine Greene defines freedom. Her definition relies on shared space in which to "make new promises and to act in our freedom to fulfill them" (1988, p.51). Pedagogical praxis unfolds in real time as a collective exercise occurring among individuals. As such, it has the capacity to create discursive space to engage with students about race, privilege, identity, and collective action for change.

Greene calls such spaces an "in-between," a mediating space between the private and public spheres. Anti-bias teaching exists in such a space, but must work against tensions and trends in contemporary American life that tend toward the shutting down of spaces devoted to dialogue. Historically, a split has existed between the nature of speech and action that is permitted in each sphere. Beliefs and emotions are kept private, within

the home or family, while public discourse, particularly discourse calling for change, is

dominated by rationalism, and persuasion through appeals to logic. Greene describes

contemporary life as characterized by "silence where there might be -- where there ought

to be -- an impassioned and significant dialogue" (1988, p. 2). Individuals may feel a

strong sense of "autonomy" (as distinct from freedom), but lack the capacities and

resources to imagine alternatives to things as they are, or join with others to share "a

project of change" (p. 9). Anti-bias teachers are well-positioned to lead such efforts if and

when they connect their day to day work with children and communities to a greater

project of collective empowerment.

Teaching for social justice

Teachers who join with others to imagine alternatives and create dialogue along

the lines of Greene and Ladson-Billings' descriptions embody much of what Marilyn

Cochran-Smith calls teaching for social justice. An approach rather than a method,

teaching for social justice involves interrogating "implicit assumptions about teaching

and learning," developing a critical perspective about the roles and "arrangements of

schooling," and examining how teachers maintain or disrupt inequity in American society

(1999, p. 115). Teaching for social justice involves claiming the role of both educator

and activist, and making a commitment to "diminishing the inequities of American life"

through one's practice as an educator (1999, p. 116). This is not meant to be a substitute

for social and policy change at a larger scale, but it nevertheless has the capacity to

contribute to such movements (see also Rothstein, 2015). While her approach does not

come with prescriptive methods, Cochran-Smith does identify six underlying principles

of practice (1999, p. 119-131) that can guide efforts to teach for social justice:

- ❖ enable significant work within learning communities
- ❖ build on what students bring to school with them -- knowledge and interests, cultural and linguistic resources
- ❖ teach skills, bridge gaps
- ❖ work with (not against) individuals, families, and communities
- ❖ diversify modes of assessment
- ❖ make activism, power, and inequity explicit parts of the curriculum

Cochran-Smith illustrates these principles with examples from the experiences of

pre-service teachers she has taught. In one example, a teacher of Puerto Rican descent

encourages her students, who are of similar backgrounds, to evaluate traditional and

revisionist narratives of the encounter between Christopher Columbus and Taino Indians.

While students' initial reactions indicate the Eurocentric stereotypes they have

internalized, they gradually feel a more positive connection to their ancestors' side of the

story, and come to question aspects of the dominant narrative (Cochran-Smith, 1999, p.

123).

In a similar vein, Sonia Nieto (2006) has used qualitative data to enumerate

qualities that characterize effective teachers of students from diverse backgrounds. These

are above and beyond more widely acknowledged skills such as background knowledge,

pedagogical familiarity, communication and organizational skills. As in Cochran-Smith,

Nieto's frame is meant to "take into account the sociopolitical context of education"

(2006, p. 457). Nieto's inventory includes:

- ❖ sense of mission
- ❖ solidarity with, and empathy for, their students
- ❖ the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge
- ❖ improvisation
- ❖ a passion for social justice

Just as the qualities enumerated by Cochran-Smith and Nieto are drawn from qualitative data, this study in turn applies their inventories to new data in order create a rich picture of the factors underlying successful anti-bias teaching.

Cochran-Smith notes that her framing of what it means to teach for social justice is influenced by and overlaps with other conceptions such as Ladson-Billing's culturally relevant pedagogy, as well as critical, feminist, and reconstructionist pedagogies (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 18). While these terms are not synonymous, there is a rich common ground among them, as well as threads that can be traced back to the theoretical "roots" cited above. Greene, for example, foregrounds the impact of teaching with a sense of mission and common purpose. One of the goals of this study is to highlight these links and continuities in the practice of progressive anti-bias educators today.

Relationships and relatedness

Teachers have the capacity to open an "in-between" or space for change by fostering relationships and ongoing dialogue among community members including students, families, colleagues, and administrators. For Greene, the affective bonds of these relationships are a key part of helping individuals achieve a sense of collective agency, the capacity and will to act to change their circumstances and achieve their goals. To build these relationships, educators committed to anti-bias practice and teaching for social justice tend to have key elements of their practice in common. Simply put, they are committed to a continuous process of learning about their students, their own selves, and the social and political contexts of their teaching.

If educators seek to create authentic relationships within a community whose citizens participate fully in public life, the educator must involve her own self in those relationships, bringing herself as a situated being to the school context. Jonathan Silin, whose work provided important doorway into this study, explores this idea in *Sex, Death, and the Education of Children* (1995), about the theory and practice of teaching young children at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Attempts to build pedagogy related to HIV and AIDS uncovered tensions between providing "factual" or "practical" information and inviting dialogue and action about the social implications of the disease; set in relief teachers' contradicting beliefs about the nature of children's knowledge and learning; and it put teachers in newly vulnerable positions as they considered their own relationship to "health" and to the uncertain social contours of the disease.

I gravitated toward Silin's writing in part because of his engagement with his own identity and position as a gay man and early childhood educator. He attributes this practice of "keeping the speaker situated" to feminist thought (Silin, 1995, p. 34), an example of reframing power differentials within a relationship so as not to replicate the traditional power-over that resides exclusively with the aloof, objective, "specialist" teacher. Similarly, Cochran-Smith frames the work of teachers as simultaneously practical, intellectual, and political. The teacher is a maker of meaning by virtue of being situated and engaged in a process of co-constructing knowledge with students and colleagues (1999, p. 115-116).

In Silin's writing I saw a strong parallel to current conversations and silences about institutional racism in America. Consider the parallel between a white heterosexual

male in the 1990s who considers himself almost completely "safe" from HIV/AIDS, and a white teacher in 2016 who, in light of her majority-white student body, decides race is not "relevant" to her classroom. Both individuals are absolutely bound up in the social parameters of the topics they feel they can afford to keep at arm's length (if only for the moment). What is lacking is a lens in which they can see themselves as situated, implicated, but also as potential agents of change.

Shapiro and Nager decried the use of "developmental inappropriateness as an argument against discussing difficult or frightening topics" (2000, p. 31), and assert that children's experiences of the world should be built upon in school as avenues to learning - or in Cochran-Smith's words, to build on what children bring to school. Today, educators must first be aware of their own racial identity and concurrent privileges and lack of privilege in order to engage with students on these topics. As Silin reminds us, the educator is "polyvocal," and may be both oppressor and oppressed (1995, p. 2). In a given setting, teachers may be in ways powerful and in ways vulnerable, and draw on both to implement anti-bias pedagogies.

"To teach you I have to know you"

Just as students must have ways to know their teachers, relationships that open an in-between space and build students' ability to imagine things being different also requires educators knowing their students, their identities and backgrounds. Lisa Delpit provides research and philosophical grounding for really knowing the students one desires to teach, and how that should inform the practices provided to different students.

Delpit describes the process of teaching as "reaching the worlds of others," but educators must first be able to understand and acknowledge these worlds exist (2006, p. xxiv). This echoes Greene's call for educators to attend to more voices, more stories: "as we do so, our perspectives on the meanings of freedom and possibility of freedom in this country may particularize and expand" (1988, p. 89). Only when teachers know their students well can they guide processes of individual becoming as well as collective self-determination.

Like Cochran-Smith, Delpit addresses the need to acknowledge power relations and access to the codes and culture of power, bringing anti-racist education out of the shadow of multiculturalism. It is not enough to "celebrate" all cultures, she asserts, when certain students are in turn denied access to the dominant culture -- a culture to which teachers may hold many keys as activists, influencers, and gatekeepers (2006, p. 40). It is here that educators involved in anti-racist practice must acknowledge the political context of their work, and educate for change.

The themes of power and change that are so present in Delpit and Greene's writings dovetail within Cochran-Smith's description of teaching for social justice. She highlights the need pursue these goals in an ongoing process of professional inquiry. Contrary to the expectations of some pre-service teachers, there is no single course or part of the curriculum that will render the topic "done." These authors would also likely agree that there is no setting in which these principles are not relevant.

What if all the kids (and teachers) are white?

In schools where predominantly white educators teach majority white and/or privileged populations, an anti-bias approach will look different (as Delpit could confirm) compared to teaching poor and/or racial minority students, but it will be just as salient. Amy Bauman, building on Silin's work, documents the difficulty in broaching topics of race and privilege with students from the dominant culture. At first, she encounters obstacles and silence, and a tacit understanding of the "liability in speaking" (2007, p. 10). She is able to proceed by building relationships and helping her students mine their own identities as preparation to engage with difficult or "delicate" topics. She connects with students over a self-portraiture project, which allows students to reflect on their own lives and also creates a safe space to begin to talk about students' critical understanding of their social worlds. Bauman's work illustrates the power of a collective project in bringing individuals together and sustaining a space for authentically being with others. In a community of privilege, Bauman finds, reaching that authenticity requires disrupting the commitment to comfort that is implicitly woven into the school setting, breaking a silence "born of self-preservation" (2007, p. 28). Like Cochran-Smith, Bauman affirms Greene and Delpit's assertions that authentic relationships and a sense of community are key steps to self-determination in groups with significant class and race privilege as well as those without.

Responsibility

A recurring theme among these writers and thinkers is that of responsibility in educational practices. For Greene, responsibility and freedom are "inextricably meshed"

-- to act upon one's freedom comes with a sense of anguish, because in taking action we must acknowledge our own responsibility for things as they are and for what happens next (1988, p. 5). And it is in acting collectively that freedom becomes meaningful. In Greene's paradigm, freedom is not a passive state of being; rather, it comes with "an imperative of decision and action" in concert with others toward a common project (1988, p. 46). Public or community space is essential to freedom because it is where plans and projections of change become real: "No radical reflection, underground or anywhere else, can provide visibility or significance without a deliberate opening to the common" (Greene, 1988, p.100). Delpit also argues for the importance of collective dialogue, noting that "the dilemma is not really the debate over instructional methodology, but rather in communicating across cultures and in addressing the more fundamental issue of power, of whose voice gets to be heard in determining what is best for poor children and children of color" (2006, p. 46).

Taking responsibility as a collective, social process relies on relationships, a sense of "what it means to be alive among others" that is often lost in the individualistic, compartmentalized patterns of contemporary life (Greene, 1988, xii). Frank Pignatelli explores accountability as the the taking of responsibility within relationships, particularly between teachers who support each other's work. These friendships are characterized by an ethic of care and an emotional investment in transformation of the other for the better. Pignatelli draws on Judith Butler's writing on ethics, characterizing accountability as the self testing itself in the presence of others, an act of vulnerability and uncertainty but also opportunity (2011, p. 222). To be responsible for and

accountable to one another requires teachers to have "a tolerance for ambiguity and acceptance of uncertainty, even as we act" (p. 223). Here as in Greene's writing, collective commitments and risk are the "glue" of these professional relationships.

In effect, strong relationships are where situatedness meets principle. When teachers commit to being accountable and vulnerable to each other and to their students, they cannot choose but to remain situated as emotional, individual beings. At the same time, their commitment to a particular ethics of relationship within the school community is a manifestation of a political commitment.

Greene describes at length how Jane Addams, a Progressive Era advocate for social change, navigated and troubled the divide between the public domain of her work, which was nevertheless personal, and the private domain of her life, which was nevertheless political (1988, p. 75). Cochran-Smith likewise calls for educators to resist the imposition upon them of policies and curricula that proceed from rationalist "best practices," and instead claim the fruits of their own labor as practitioners and theorists of their own work. The principles of education for social justice enumerated above provide a powerful blend of the intellectual and affective. The work resists easy divides, instead honoring deeply the rational *and* the emotional as essential parts of the work. With great warmth of heart I read Marilyn Cochran-Smith's assurance that teaching for social justice "is profoundly practical… located in the dailiness of classroom decisions and actions… at the same time, however, it is work that is deeply intellectual" (1999, p.138). Such work nourishes Silin's goal of keeping the educator in context, in a particular environment and set of relationships.

Finding success

Taken together, these authors suggest an expanded network of factors to look for in teachers who successfully implement anti-bias practice. The list below builds on Nieto's core values and brings together resonant elements from the other authors cited. Anti-bias educators demonstrate:

- ❖ sense of mission (Nieto)
- ❖ solidarity with, and empathy for, their students and colleagues; build on what students bring, work with not against individuals and families; develop and maintain cultural competence (Nieto, Cochran-Smith, Ladson-Billings)
- ❖ the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge (Nieto, Silin)
- ❖ improvisation; tolerance for uncertainty (Nieto, Pignatelli)
- ❖ a passion for social justice; make activism, power, and inequity explicit in curriculum; develop critical consciousness (Nieto, Cochran-Smith, Delpit, Ladson-Billings)
- ❖ vulnerability; teaching from a situated self (Pignatelli, Silin)
- ❖ responsibility; accountability (Greene, Pignatelli)
- ❖ commitment to ongoing professional development and learning (Cochran-Smith)

In an era of high-stakes testing and demands for highly specialized and hyper-managed accountability, valuing these qualities can help educators reclaim the political and the affective aspects of teaching practice. The hybridized discourse of Silin, Greene, and Delpit refuses to separate culture and curriculum, school and body politic. It vests authority in the rational *and* the emotional, resisting the division between the two. This serves as the crux supporting the pursuit of social justice aims in teaching praxis.

With the above inventory in place, we can begin to analyze educators' own accounts of their successes and challenges in anti-bias practice.

III. Methodology

This study consisted of qualitative data collected through in-person and email interviews conducted between October 2015 and March 2016. The interviews took place at participants' current school settings or at Bank Street College, between one participant and the researcher. Two of the participants work at the same school and were interviewed together to better capture their experiences supporting each other as colleagues.

The seven participants work in six different schools of varying types, including public, charter, and independent, located in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn. These schools serve populations with different needs and resources, from high-socioeconomic status to majority free and reduced-price lunch, and majority white to majority students of color. The school philosophies and pedagogies range from more traditional to progressive. The school profiles are summarized in the table below. All school and teacher names have been changed.

School name*	Type	Philosophy	Statistics	Teachers interviewed, years in education*
Yeled Emet School	Independent	Reform Jewish Day school, challenging academics, Hebrew, Judaic studies.	PK-8, 570 students Very few students or teachers of color (according to teachers interviewed)	Jean 7 years Kate 7 years
Greentree Day School	Independent	Progressive, with ethics and diversity program.	K-12, 1700 students 34% students of color 15% faculty and staff of color	Caroline 6 years
Reenvision School	Non-zoned public school	Emphasizes community	PK-5, 221 students 99% students of color	Amy 10 years

			partnership, social responsibility, inclusion model.	85% free lunch 26% students with special needs	
River Academy	Charter	Progressive, inclusion model.		K-6 (K-8 by 2017), 351 students 94% students of color 82% free lunch, 15% students with special needs	Meg 5 years
Blue Lane School	Independent	Progressive, social reconstructionist strand.		PK-12, 650 students 35% students of color Mention equity project, SJ mission	Marcia 26 years
Towers School	Charter	Direct instruction plus thematic social studies units. Inclusion model.		K-8 in two buildings, 453 elementary students, 54% students of color 24% free lunch 25% students with special needs	Soraya 15 years

*School and teacher names have been changed. Except where noted, information has been obtained from school websites and/or insideschools.org.

Sampling rationale

The educators interviewed for this study vary in their identities and experiences, in their school settings and the populations they teach. They have a few things in common: they teach or have taught at the elementary level, they identify as women, and their teacher training and/or practice have strong links to Bank Street's approach to progressive education, the developmental-interaction approach. They are all are seeking to implement anti-bias and/or social justice pedagogies, whether they work directly with students, as administrators, or as specialists.

What emerged in our discussions of anti-bias practice was a deep personal and philosophical grounding these teachers feel toward this work, which can sometimes

conflict with other practices even in progressive school settings. These teachers and leaders demonstrate the ways in which progressive education *is* anti-bias education, a legacy they claim explicitly.

Interviews

Interviews were loosely structured around four to six pre-selected questions. Participants were asked to describe their setting, their role, and to comment on existing social justice, anti-bias, or anti-racist curriculum, if any was currently being implemented. I asked about factors supporting and impeding their own efforts toward anti-bias pedagogy. I also asked teachers to describe how they feel and respond when teachable moments related to race or other aspects of identity come up in the classroom, and how their reaction to these emergent curriculum moments has changed over time.

Inquiring about formal and emergent curriculum related to diversity and anti-bias efforts provided a window into both the institutional approach to the work, and the realities of implementation. In later interviews, I asked participants to identify shifts in their approach, and any pivotal moments that come to mind that they feel capture a point of evolution in their practice. As certain themes emerged, I asked later participants to comment on the role of colleagues, professional networks, and other factors in their development.

Partway through the study, I was asked as a separate endeavor to reflect on how anti-bias work became salient for me, as a white woman from a privileged background. It was a rich question that brought up a network of answers and anecdotes, and it impressed

upon me the importance as a white educator of acknowledging that arc. From that point forward I asked the remaining white participants the same question.

      With each participant's consent, interviews were audiorecorded and transcribed. I also took handwritten notes and summarized the data in a typed reflection following each interview.

Sampling of questions posed

- ❖ Tell me about your setting. Who are the students and families? What is your role?
- ❖ What formal curriculum, if any, does your school have related to anti-bias, anti-racism, or social justice more generally?
- ❖ What moments come to mind when you think of turning points in your anti-bias work?
- ❖ Looking back on your own experiences and training, what made this work salient for you?
- ❖ When questions or comments related to race and/or privilege come up in the classroom or at school, what do you generally do? How do you feel in those moments?
    - ➢ Follow-up: has your typical reaction changed over time? What made the difference?
    - ➢ Follow-up: is there anything you would change about your response in the moment? What would support that change?

Ethical considerations

      This study rests on a key assumption: that active efforts toward anti-bias pedagogy are necessary to reduce educational inequity and are an essential part of efforts to teach for social justice. Taking that as given, this study was undertaken in an effort to document and unpack what helps such efforts succeed on an individual and institutional level. Knowing the demographics of the teaching force, I focused on interviewing white educators who have undertaken this work.

In most cases, participants shared both positive and negative aspects of dynamics within their schools, some of which implicate the power hierarchies between and among new and veteran teachers, administrators, and parents. School and educator names have been changed to protect participants. The overall profile and dynamics of these schools is likely to resonate with many other school communities within New York City. In particular, I hope this study will aid school leaders in identifying ways to support individuals as well as communities in ongoing anti-bias and diversity work. I hope it will also help progressive educators claim or continue to embrace anti-bias pedagogy as part and parcel of their approach to teaching and learning.

Educators were not compensated in any way for their participation. I am grateful for their time, candor, and thoughtfulness in contributing to this study.

IV. Data and Discussion

The educators who contributed to this study practice anti-bias education and claim it as an explicit part of the progressive education philosophy and legacy. I sought to find out how these teachers make that connection, and how their teaching environment structurally supports or hinders that work. I looked for ways in which these teachers conceive of their work as social justice, in concurrence with Cochran-Smith's frame, as well as how they align with Ladson-Billing's and Nieto's prescriptions for culturally responsive, courageous teaching. From these teachers and leaders I learned how their anti-bias practices exist in and constitute an in-between space as described by Greene, attempting to engage with the inequities of public life within the community space of the

school and seeking to change these inequities through a process of collective dialogue, self-determination, and action. The seven teachers I interviewed fall into three groupings.

Teachers in the first group -- Caroline, Kate, and Jean -- teach with an anti-bias lens but find themselves in environments that in ways support and in ways hinder their practice and development as anti-bias educators. This has to do with a combination of school culture, structural and programmatic factors, and philosophical mismatches among their colleagues and administrators.

The second group consists of two white educators, Meg and Amy, who teach mostly students of color. They have both developed a more consistent anti-bias practice within or sometimes in spite of institutional constraints. Particularly interesting here are the structures and attitudes among their colleagues and administrators that enable this work; namely trust, vulnerability, commitment to adult growth, and nurturing rather than restrictive approaches to oversight and accountability.

Lastly, my interviews also included Marcia and Soraya, two school leaders with very different populations who both have succeeded at uniting the community in a "common project" toward diversity and anti-bias efforts. As in the case of Meg and Amy, their success depends on the philosophical ties they articulate between anti-bias efforts and progressive education more generally, as well innovative structural choices and programs within their schools. The fruits of Marcia and Soraya's efforts drive home the fact that across a wide range of communities, relationships and vulnerability are at the heart of anti-bias work.

Group One: "Not utopia yet" — Caroline, Kate, and Jean

Before Caroline began teaching, she worked in marketing. The no-nonsense, let's-make-a-plan attitude of her previous field remains with her in discussions of education, accompanied by a righteous sense of justice that perhaps hints at why she changed fields in the first place. I spoke with Caroline toward the beginning of her year at Greentree Day School, a prekindergarten through twelfth grade school where she is a third grade assistant teacher. It was the time of year for Columbus Day-related read alouds, and her head teacher had recently done well, in Caroline's opinion, mediating a discussion of the picture book *Encounter* by Jane Yolen. The third graders absorbed the story of Columbus as told from the point of view of a Taino boy, and with their head teacher's "matter-of-fact, clear, cool, non-dogmatic" facilitation, did the work to begin questioning: why would we celebrate someone who did such bad things? In contrast with her positive feelings about her head teacher's efforts, Caroline noted that Greentree "is not as good as it could be." There are teachers "fired up about changing that" as well as those who "would rather not talk about the hard stuff."

I interviewed Kate and Jean together in the library of Yeled Emet School, a Jewish day school in an upper middle class neighborhood. Jean is a third grade teacher, and Kate is the librarian for grades two through four and teaches each class once a week. There was great warmth between the two throughout our interview. They built organically on each other's anecdotes and empathized with one another's comments, all with good humor and a strong sense of justice. Some topics they had clearly discussed before, part of their ongoing support of one another.

There are some interesting similarities between the three teachers' schools. Greentree Day offers an academic program grounded in the principles of progressive education, along with a commitment to the development of students as responsible community members through initiatives like school-wide ethics classes. Yeled Emet is a reform Jewish day school offering challenging academics integrated with Judaic studies, Hebrew language classes, and a schoolwide commitment to the development of Jewish values. For example, positive behavior as a community member is connected to the Jewish concept of *mitzvot*, or doing good. The schools are united in having both an academic and an explicit values-based mission. They are both tuition supported schools. Founded in the 1800s, Greentree is a significantly older program than Yeled Emet. The latter is affiliated with a synagogue in the neighborhood.

Greentree Day reports a student body that is 34% students of color, and 15% faculty and staff of color. There is an active institutional commitment to diversity, particularly notable in the four staff members who serve as diversity coordinators for each division of the school, headed by a Director of Diversity. While Yeled Emet does not publish any diversity statistics, Jean and Kate reported that on a staff of 150 teachers, only "a handful" are educators of color, and that very few of the students are nonwhite. The staff of the school, they pointed out, has a much higher proportion of people of color, most visibly the members of the maintenance staff and the security staff.

Jean identifies as a biracial woman, and sometimes feels isolated in her awareness of the lack of racial diversity at Yeled Emet. She described beginning a previous school year walking on eggshells, feeling she had no one to talk to about

looking different from all the other teachers and kids and whether that fact was "even worth talking about." A variety of exchanges have led her to feel that she and her colleagues "are not really seeing the same issue" when it comes to race at the school. Kate added that among faculty, the opinion is sometimes voiced that conversations about race aren't important or relevant for the school community. Kate attributes this sentiment to an underlying assumption that "our community is very homogeneous when in fact it's not."

Caroline, by contrast, reports working with faculty members at Greentree Day whom she could "sit with at lunch tomorrow to talk about [how race is playing out at the school] and it would be considered normal." To her, this is positive but also "astounding." The ongoing conversation is clearly needed, even in a place as self-aware as Greentree tries to be: Caroline had spoken recently with a colleague who was distraught about a black boy who had been in the school since kindergarten only to be counseled out in the fifth grade. As her colleague put it, "if he wasn't fitting in, why?" Caroline was fired up on behalf of this student, surprised that such things could happen even at her school. "The school is completely responsible... Where are [people] falling through the cracks? Why isn't this utopia yet?! If we're going to promise to be the best ever, I'm going to be pissed when I find out the ways we're not the best yet."

Alongside this group fired up about discussing and changing oppressive dynamics within the community, are faculty members whom Caroline calls "conservative," that is, who are more tentative about broaching certain topics with their students, and perhaps less flexible in adopting new lenses or practices in the classroom. In Caroline's view, it

could be a matter of habit, of age, of conflict-aversion, or due to the fact that for the teachers in question, "diversity" might mean something more abstract and less immediate than it does for younger teachers.

Kate and Jean shared that at Yeled Emet, diverging faculty perspectives lead to inconsistencies in how curriculum is implemented, which leads to a varying degree of commitment to social justice across one age band or even one curriculum unit. Kate, somewhat sardonically, offered a full spectrum: "I can tell you about what happens in [one teacher's] classroom, I can tell you about what happens in [another teacher's] classroom, who doesn't adhere to the curriculum in any way whatsoever, and then we can tell you what's in the curriculum grant, and then Jean can tell you about her own practice in the third grade." Jean and Kate's main ally in augmenting or modifying existing curriculum to be more inclusive and/or more social justice-oriented is the curriculum director, whom they describe as a liberal white woman. Aside from her, fellow faculty members and administrators are generally more "conservative" and less likely to include social justice-oriented themes in their implementation.

Kate described one colleague's reaction when she tried to engage her library group in a conversation about events in Ferguson, Missouri around the start of the 2014-2015 school year. The killing of Michael Brown by a white police officer and the subsequent protests had been in the news, and Kate wanted to connect these events to the library curriculum. In this instance, she "did it what I thought was the right approved way." She alerted her administrator, who then alerted the curriculum director. The response was hesitant: "well, we want to see everything you're going to say and we want

to send a note home to parents beforehand." Kate felt afraid and scrutinized. When it came time for the discussion, the classroom teacher remained in the library as if to watch her next move. She changed her plan rather than try to conduct the discussion in front of a colleague she knew did not share her views.

Kate's approach has changed over time. She feels more confident about doing what she knows "is the right thing to do in my practice," and is more likely to dig into a topic when it comes up "with an open, curious attitude," rather than filing a plan and waiting for approval. She continues to look for ways to engage her students in conversations about race, immigration and citizenship, class, and more.

Caroline expressed impatience with the fact that some of her more experienced colleagues at Greentree Day share the reluctance of the administration and teachers at Yeled Emet. At Greentree, it is the administration that has charged ahead with regard to diversity initiatives, such as the rollout of racial affinity groups for all upper-elementary students last year. Parents were divided about the program, and felt the decision hadn't been communal enough. Teachers, Caroline reported, tended to respond conservatively as well because of the feedback they were fielding from parents. Individuals like the diversity coordinators and ethics teacher find themselves having to work around the comfort levels of head teachers.

Despite not being able to implement all of her plans, Caroline described sharing teacher resources with the ethics teacher and "bonding" with her when she first started at the school. Similarly, Jean described multiple occasions when the support of Kate and books she had selected for the library were instrumental in supporting the conversations

and lessons Jean sought to bring to her third graders. "Last year [Jean was] ravaging my library," Kate recalled, to find more diverse offerings for a narrative nonfiction unit. Jean added that after that her reading groups "got way more meaningful." She has also partnered with Kate to request and order specific titles to support emergent conversations on topics as they arise - these have included gender identity, including transgender identity and gender-neutrality. When a specific book comes in, Jean tells her students, "okay, now we can have the conversation."

In addition to supporting each other, Jean and Kate have grown in their anti-bias work through their connection to outside organizations. Kate cited the professional network We Need Diverse Books, which helps connect teachers and librarians to diverse offerings. Jean has been trained as a facilitator for the Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) program, a national peer-led professional development initiative that trains educators to lead ongoing conversations with their colleagues about systems of power, oppression, and privilege. When we met, Jean had just begun facilitating monthly meetings at Yeled Emet. At different times, Jean and Kate have also received professional development through New York State Association of Independent Schools (NYSAIS) conferences, and through Border Crossers, another organization training educators to recognize and dismantle patterns of racism in their schools.

It can be an uphill battle for teachers to discuss race and privilege with mostly or entirely white, mostly privileged groups. Jean describes the "constant" push to bring up issues of equity in her classroom. She observed that the curriculum director has become more supportive in part because she identifies as a lesbian and is the parent of a young

woman of color, and thus "she encounters things that are different from the norm of what's happening at school." Kate summed up this sentiment in an email several months after our interview: "if I had to speculate, I would say that actually being part of a community that is majority-minority is what is missing for these other teachers who are well-intentioned, but don't have a sense of urgency." It was a sentiment that resonated with many other stories and comments from other participants.

One pronounced example of this is Caroline's first teaching experience, which was formative for her as an anti-bias educator. Caroline began her teaching career in South Korea after completing her TEFL certificate in 2010. Her students had a highly stereotyped view of Americans, and little to no exposure to other racial groups. Caroline's nationality and appearance were subject to comments that, while not malicious, were certainly uncomfortable for her. Creating a safe space in the classroom, Caroline related, "was first about making the space safe for *me*." She now describes this as a "nonnegotiable" part of her teaching, conscious of the experience of being in a setting where she was in the minority.

Group one reflections and analysis

Of the capacities enumerated by Nieto (2006), Jean, Kate and Caroline particularly embody the sense of mission and passion for social justice that characterize effective teachers. And although this mission is not uniformly shared throughout their school community, Jean and Kate have gained the skills and confidence to begin to effect change. As Silin notes, "internal contradictions provide openings for change. Frequently

it is our own perception of hegemony that is the biggest block to creating effective local strategies" (1995, p. 66-67). As a SEED facilitator, Jean has put herself forward as a locus for change, driving the conversation and bringing her colleagues together. Action like hers "signifies beginnings or the taking of initiatives; and, in education, beginnings must be thought possible if authentic learning is expected to occur" (Greene, 1988, p. 22). In her own setting, Caroline and fellow teachers keep a sense of mission alive through their gathering to discuss challenging topics. They are "empowered to interpret the situations they live together," like the teacher lamenting and questioning the counseling out of her student, which Greene notes is a prerequisite to people "locat[ing] themselves so that freedom can appear" (1988, p. 122).

These educators are also each doing their part to challenge "regimes of truth" in ways appropriate for their students. Caroline's description of the *Encounter* read-aloud shows students learning to raise "questions about history and 'truth,' perspectives and power" (Cochran-Smith, 1999, p. 123). When Jean's students asserted that "it's impossible for a boy to be a girl," she encouraged deeper conversation on the subject, to make visible "perspectives and realities different from those that are officially sanctioned" (Nieto, 2006, p. 467). Caroline described a similar offhand comment from a white student about "skin color," and sought to unpack what assumptions present in the student's use of that phrase to refer to caucasian skin tones.

This group of teachers also demonstrated strong examples of the power of relationships and empathy in effective teaching, both as moral support and as a form of accountability. In Pignatelli, friendship is described as "a relationship of concern for the

other's well-being, for the other's happiness and success." In addition to this mutual

concern and support, there is an aspect of transformation to friendship, in that "the friend

mirrors back to the other who he is not yet but desires to become" and is engaged in an

ongoing "account giving predicated upon achieving further clarity and deeper

understanding" (Pignatelli, 2011, p.217-218). This sharing of oneself in process helps an

individual to change, and bring her actions and relations more in line with the self she

would like to be. When Jean and Kate or Caroline and the ethics teacher share their

challenges, depend on each other's support, and hold each other accountable, they are

transforming themselves as educators as well as the school around them.

A final reflection on this group of teachers emerges from a comment Caroline

made, describing her process connecting with a kid of color who was acting out in the

course of standing up to a white child who was bullying him:

> I need to show kids of color I that I have their back, that I'm sticking up for them - a
> failure to do so would signal to that kid that I'm not on their side, that I can't be trusted…
> [my student's] teachers are white, so he's thinking "they must not be on my side." If I
> have to pick a side, I'm going to pick the more vulnerable kid's side every time, because
> ... I see kids of color [in a majority white school] as being more vulnerable - even if
> they're doing something wrong. Not something inherent [to the kids], but *structurally
> vulnerable*, the same way I'm more structurally vulnerable as a woman on the subway
> than my husband.

The term "structural vulnerability" is a socioeconomic descriptor for families living in

chronic poverty (Alwang, Siegel & Jorgesen, 2001, p. 7). It reflects lack of access to

resources, rather than inherent deficit or difference as described in Caroline's example. In

extending this idea to educational contexts, structural vulnerability bears resemblance to a

social model of disability, which locates deficits or mismatches in the environment rather

than the individual. In the scope of this study, structural vulnerability relates strongly to

Greene's ideas on agency and the ability to act. Structural vulnerability could be considered a measure of the avenues of action and response that feel safe or viable to a given actor in a given system. If a child is structurally vulnerable, then they may feel they have fewer choices of action when they feel misunderstood or isolated. An educator of color on a majority-white staff might feel that her options in the face of institutional racism are silence or facing professional consequences. This same educator in a school that has an explicit commitment to equity and provides her with professional allies committed to that mission might have many more avenues of action and therefore less structural vulnerability.

Caroline drew a comparison between a student of color in a school with a white cultural majority and the example of gender on the subway, which underscores the notion that structural vulnerability is context-specific, and lodged in environments rather than individuals. Caroline has experienced this variability having been the structurally vulnerable one during her teaching in South Korea. Jean also expressed structural vulnerability in her sense of not knowing whether difference "was even worth talking about." Kate, while part of the racial majority of the school, was scrutinized and made to feel vulnerable because of her chosen identity as an anti-racist educator. In these cases, structural vulnerability presented an obstacle to these educators. In other groups, a different and more positive kind of vulnerability presented itself.

Group Two: "Go ahead, take a stab" - Amy and Meg

In her interview, Amy was a vivid example of a situated speaker, with her

identities as educator and mother simultaneously visible rather than artificially divided

into professional and personal (see Silin, 1995, p. 35). Our conversation took place in an

empty classroom after the end of the school day. At the time she was on maternity leave

from Reenvision School, a small public school of choice in a high-poverty neighborhood.

She brought her toddler along to the meeting. We talked about critical literacy as we

chased him around the room and watched him explore supply drawers and bins of books.

Amy admirably continued her anecdotes and reflections even while she prevented him

from testing every bit of stray matter on the floor for edibility. "It's a constant struggle

just to keep him alive," she quipped at one point.

Meg is a wearer of many hats. By day, she is a fourth grade ICT teacher at River

Academy, a progressive charter school in a working-class majority Hispanic and Latino

neighborhood, where she has taught for five years. By night, she is an adjunct graduate

instructor. And on weekends, she teaches dance at a studio on Long Island, where her

students range from three year olds to teenagers. Before classroom teaching, she studied

dance and was both a performer and teaching artist.

Meg and Amy are both white women who teach mostly kids of color in

low-resource communities. On paper, neither of their schools has a formalized anti-bias

curriculum. However, they both show strong personal commitment to a social

justice-oriented approach to the social studies and to teaching more generally. Meg lives

this commitment from both sides, implementing curricula with her elementary students

while teaching adult learners a social justice-oriented approach to planning curriculum.

The approach involves basing a unit in key understandings and concepts, rather than

content, and the inclusion of a social action component that connects students' learning to the world around them. In one example, students might participate in a local waterfront cleanup after studying the role of the river in the development of their city.

Meg has seen her school implement positive changes when teachers perceived that curriculum did not follow this philosophy, though she believes "there is a lot more that we can do." Recently, a fifth grade unit on African kingdoms was restructured into an American Civil Rights unit that was more grounded in concepts and in social action. The impetus to do so came from a member of the leadership team, who sat down with the fifth grade team and articulated what had been, until that point, a missing part of the vision for that grade. If not for that push, Meg said, "I know for a fact I would not have pushed myself." In her experience teaching other grades at the same school, there is not the same push from administrators (different leadership team members oversee different grades). After her experience helping to frame the Civil Rights unit, Meg finds herself encouraging colleagues to restructure curriculum units that have similar deficits, with mixed results. She wonders if a dedicated curriculum person working across grade levels would help translate teachers' desire for more thoughtfully structured and diverse curriculum into action. "Social studies curriculum in general, our directors would say it's the biggest part of our school… I don't think that it is. Philosophically it is, but as far as follow through in the classroom I'm not sure that it is."

After Meg helped to rewrite the Civil Rights unit, actually teaching it "really pushed me as an educator, specifically in regards to my comfort with being a white

educator of students mostly of color." She found herself "learning right along with" her

students:

> One of my favorite moments was when a student said to me, "No offense, because you're white, but white people…" This sparked a whole debate about power, who has it, when they have it and when they don't, how it changes, etc. Last year, and every year, in every moment, I feel that it's important for students to see us struggling to understand the same concepts we are asking them to, especially in regard to race and privilege. So when these questions come up, I listen, and I make sure the class is listening too. We often pause, restate what we heard, possibly rephrase for clarity, and then dig into it. I still have feelings of discomfort...it's sensitive, so I will probably always have those feelings, but that's how I know we're on to something.

Perhaps because anti-bias curriculum is not formalized, Meg and Amy show particular

aptitude for improvisation, and addressing teachable moments as they come up. Amy

even commented that she would prefer not to use a formal curriculum for this work: "a

lot of the best instruction, discussion, and work in the areas of social justice, race, bias,

diversity, etc. comes from knowing the students well, listening to them, and addressing

their needs, questions, fears, curiosities, and disagreements as they arise." In these

moments, Amy's knowledge of her students and her strong relationships with them

enable teachable moments.

More than once, Amy mentioned the discussions she has with her students about

the derogatory use of words like "retarded, nigger, faggot, and gay." In a conversation

about the word "gay," she asks students if any of their friends or their parents' friends

identify as gay, and Amy shares that her mother is a lesbian. She finds that all her

students "have lessons they've learned… that at heart are about acceptance. They're just

so accustomed to hearing derogatory terms slung around that they use them too without

thinking." As for the word "nigger," Amy addresses the term with her fourth graders

when she introduces *When War Comes to Willy Freeman* by James Lincoln Collier, a book that, because of its setting and time period, includes the term in the text. She explains what it means to abridge or censor a book, and specifies that the language in the book is "not appropriate for you to use but appropriate for you to read about." This preface, she says, enables kids to explore the author's word choice, and gauge their own reactions of offense or injustice as they read.

Meg shows similar ability to level with students, even or especially when the group is exploring their own social identifiers. In one of her fifth grade lessons about word choice, labels, and assumptions, she opened herself up to her students, asking them "what do you assume about me? What do you think I am? Take a stab - you're not going to hurt me or offend me." Students hesitated, giggling and nervous, not sure what was fair game. One student prefaced each of his comments with "not to be offensive," or "I don't want to offend you, but -- " until, with Meg's encouragement, he and others became more confident. "We were all the same at that moment," Meg says, as they explored the common experience of making assumptions and getting wrongly judged.

Meg and Amy habitually take these kinds of risks in their work with students. Sustaining this approach and this practice relies on certain institutional structures. For Amy, trusting relationships with administrators have been an essential part of her work at different institutions and regardless of grade level. She needs to feel that she can "trust the administration enough to invite them in, or to not be nervous when they come in." At Reenvision, Amy has built up trust that allows her autonomy to choose the topics and discussions she engages in with students. Like Kate, Amy at first sought permission from

administrators before broaching certain topics, and found that it was "grudgingly given."
She started to take that as blanket permission, and instead of asking beforehand, would
report back afterward if a certain topic came up and relate what the outcome was.

In her setting, Meg pointed to an inconsistency in the messages coming from her
administrators and school leaders. While the top-down administration message is an
emphasis on inquiry based learning and rich, school-wide units of study, teachers can
find themselves pushing back because of the many other student outcomes for which they
feel responsible. This seems to create the most tension when teachers ask for flexibility,
but are hesitant to take advantage of it. Meg mentioned her administrator suggesting that
she build in fifteen minute breaks for her class to go to the roof deck and move. "That's
great," Meg acknowledged, "but what's going to get cut?" As for inquiry based
curriculum that has been proposed but not implemented, "if we say it's important but
then we don't give the time allotted to do it, then it's not important."

Teachers at Meg's school may operate with more of a scarcity mindset when it
comes to scheduling because the school was under threat of having its charter revoked
several years ago. "We put all these things in place in those three years, and I'm
traumatized from it," says Meg. Now, with the school's charter renewed, teachers and
administrators feel they have room to "breathe out," but some teachers, including Meg,
are looking ahead to the possibility of being in that situation again. By decreasing
emphasis on other more recent priorities like test preparation or literacy in favor of more
inquiry-based experiences, they fear setting students and the school up for failure on high
stakes assessments.

Teacher and administrator perspectives can also diverge at Amy's school. She described one hiring decision in which a candidate, a man of color, asked during an interview about the fact that the staff of Reenvision, which serves mostly students of color, was mostly white. School leaders found his question off-putting, while teachers appreciated his forthrightness. The candidate was not hired. In a different year, the only three black educators at the school were conspicuously placed at the same grade level. Teachers were uncomfortable with the decision, and unsure how to voice their concerns to administration, even though they knew there was a general consensus among staff. For her part, Amy felt it "wasn't my place" to bring it up to administrators because she was not a person of color. Without a school-wide norm of discussion questions of race and identity, the teachers in question and their colleagues all felt paralyzed. Furthermore, Amy notes that in general, "anytime race has not been acknowledged by administrators, there's been discord about it. And a feeling that the administrator is racist."

At different times and with different leadership, Reenvision School has been more open to staff-wide discussions of identity. This is the kind of situation in which Amy says she sees the most growth, specifically when "teachers were given a lot of autonomy and responsibility for each other" as mentors. Administrators led by example when it came to conversations about race and class, and it made "a huge difference… it makes everybody a little more open with each other, and more willing to be vulnerable, and to do what you're going to force kids to do… you're going to put them in that situation in your classroom, so you have to be willing to be in that situation with your own peers, too."

Meg reported similar growth through whole-staff identity work at her school as well. The staff currently has regular professional development meetings about identity as it relates to diversity and social justice work. Hearing from her colleagues has driven home for Meg the need "to be aware of other people's experiences" which differ strongly from hers in terms of racial and economic privilege. At the same time, her colleagues are accepting. If, for example, the staff is sharing about hardships they've overcome, "your negative experience is your negative experience, it's not something to be weighed against someone else's." Meg pointed out that this is the same approach of affirmation that she uses in classroom discussions. There is acknowledgement that "we're gonna mess up and it's not intended to hurt anybody." No one gets shut down.

Meg and Amy both grew up outside New York City: Meg in the suburbs of New York, and Amy in small town Pennsylvania in a working class family. Amy attributes her awareness of social justice issues to her parents, who were both community organizers and members of the Socialist Workers Party when they were younger. In college, she felt discomfort when her white friends announced themselves to be "colorblind." Amy argued that it is "important to someone to be black… and it was up to us to learn why it mattered."

Meg describes her home community as a "bubble" when it comes to her awareness of privilege growing up, and race was largely invisible to her. She wonders how her father's death when she was ten years old may have contributed to this sheltered perspective, and limited the amount of cultural transmission within her own family. Meg's father was a social worker, and learning more about his work and the communities

he served, Meg imagines, may have increased her awareness of privilege at an earlier age. In college, she worked with two different dance mentors, both people of color, who challenged aspects of her training to that point, and pushed her as a performer in pieces with some social justice themes. A close relationship with a man who is native Pacific Islander threw into relief her own sense of not having a culture of her own, as well as a sense of difference: her partner referred to her as a "haole" or mainlander when speaking with his family, and felt constantly out of place and angry in an eastern seaboard college town. After these early experiences, Meg's ongoing professional development and interactions with colleagues have continued a new chapter in her reflections and awareness.

Both Meg and Amy have done considerable learning with regard to their students' home cultures, and the differing expectations parents and teachers can have about schooling based on race and class backgrounds. In her first year teaching, Amy witnessed a mother take off her belt at the end of a parent-teacher conference and chase her first grader out of the room: "I sobbed. But it was a different community, different childrearing techniques… I just wasn't accustomed to it." Another parent challenged Meg about the number of field trips her class was taking, especially when her fourth grader was having trouble with basic reading: "She said, 'my child can't even read the word Education! I want the word written up on the blackboard and I want him to practice it until he gets it!'" Meg appreciated in that moment the difference of perspective with that parent, and admitted "I get where you're coming from… Do I think that means he

shouldn't be going on field trips? Absolutely not, but I understand why that's your question."

Amy has also gotten some pushback about curricular choices, such as the book mentioned above. She sends a note home to preview parents, but some will still question her rationale and request a face-to-face meeting. That, Amy says, is an opportunity to restate the message of her note, and also make explicit the underlying principle: "teaching about race is important to me. I know I'm white, but it's still important." She names her race, she says, because "otherwise it's an elephant in the room, like, 'who's this white lady talking to my kid about racism?'"

Both Amy and Meg continue to learn, to question their assumptions, and seek to serve their students better through their choices as educators. Recently, because of her maternity leave, Amy had her first experience as a part-time substitute for students at a specialized music school. While the school is very racially diverse, it was Amy's first time teaching children of highly educated parents, who come from high-resource or privileged backgrounds. She thought, "I'm going to have a hard time finding the value in it," but quickly came to question that assumption when she realized "they're still kids." In terms of conflict resolution and community building, she finds the needs are the same. Unlike at Reenvision School, she doesn't see herself as providing "the most consistent, safest eight hours of somebody's day," but her sense of purpose is just as present.

For Meg, her graduate teaching continues to push her growth in the classroom. When her adult learners question the viability of teaching a concepts-driven curriculum from an anti-bias standpoint, it makes Meg feel "like I need to fight harder for it," and

make a better, more accessible case to those teachers. And then, returning to her school, she feels "obligated in a good way" to put the same principles into practice in her own classroom.

Group two analysis and reflections

Meg and Amy make a clean sweep of the expanded inventory of anti-bias educator qualities proposed in this study. They show a deep sense of mission, as when Amy describes her sense of motivation to serve students from low-resource backgrounds, or Meg's willingness to continually question and revise her practice. They feel deep empathy for their students, which includes "genuine respect… high expectations and great admiration" (Nieto, 2006, p. 466). Meg describes a third grade student who "would get on the phone and scream at me and curse at me like, 'I hate you.'" Despite the challenges of the relationship, this student grew enormously in the course of the year, and Meg now says, "I love him more than anyone else… I know you're not supposed to do that." Caring relationships can, and did, make a difference.

When Meg describes the decision to "pause, restate… and then dig into" a challenging topic, she demonstrates courage to challenge mainstream knowledge, such as the assumptions her students make, and to "develop more nuanced understandings of complex issues" (Nieto, 2006, p. 467). Interestingly, this is the same work she describes trying to do with her graduate classes, pushing teachers to reconsider "what your thinking is behind the choices that you're making," and trying to "make a small dent in that," building the practice of ongoing inquiry as advocated by Cochran-Smith. Amy's framing

of *War Comes to Willy Freeman* empowers her students with a critical literacy lens, encouraging them to "learn to be skeptics" rather than accepting texts without question (Nieto, 2006, p. 468), and to develop a critical consciousness they can apply to many systems of power in their lives (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.160). The qualities of courage and vulnerability from the expanded framework converge in these teachers' willingness to bring different dimensions of their social identities to their work, as when Amy names the fact that her mom identifies as gay, or when Meg unpacks her students' assumptions about her own background. They encounter vulnerability in front of and with their students as a way to create mutual recognition and thereby construct an ethical relation (Pignatelli, 2011, p. 222).

As white educators, Amy and Meg also show key efforts to reach their students across lines of culture, race, language, and class. According to Delpit,

> teachers are in an ideal position to play this role, to attempt to get all of the issues on the table in order to initiate true dialogue… by seeking out those whose perspectives may differ most, by learning to give their words complete attention, by understanding one's own power, even if that power stems merely from being in the majority, by being unafraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness with people of color, and to listen - to hear - what they say. (2006, p. 47)

Meg's conversations with her students show this willingness to name and de-center her own power as the teacher and a member of more privileged groups. Amy similarly seeks out and tries to connect with parents whose perspectives differ, and build trust by naming her whiteness alongside her commitment to talking about racism.

Whether currently or in previous settings, Meg and Amy also come up against the consequences of institutional silence that Delpit describes. In school, "race continues to feel salient but is seldom talked about in any public way. It is there but not

acknowledged, which makes it all the more fearsome (Delpit, 2006, p. 191). In Meg's

first year at her school, her co-teacher cautioned her "get ready for families to come to

you, first, before they come to me." As a woman of color, Meg's co-teacher was aware of

the unspoken hierarchy that would lead parents, even parents of color, to confer more

power on a novice white teacher.

Like Jean and Kate, Amy and Meg illustrate the importance of "the friend" to

one's becoming and ongoing growth as a teacher. In another part of our interview, Amy

spoke about the many problems and stories she brought home to her roommate or her

father in her early years as a teacher. She added, "I always need someone like that in my

professional life… who can be supportive." She also spoke to another dimension of

Pignatelli's conception of the friend, that of accountability. Amy references times when

she has discussed a challenge with a colleague, and then invited that person into her

room: "we talked about this, would you mind coming in and seeing how it goes? And

trusting that they can give you some critical feedback and you won't be offended by it."

This illustrates Pignatelli's description, drawing on Judith Butler, of the ethical self that is

"coaxed out of itself… testing who it is in the presence of others" (Butler, 2005, cited in

Pignatelli, 2011, p. 222).

This process of testing and responding involves willingness to improvise, a

process which Nieto describes as "being prepared for uncertainty" (2006, p. 468).

Teaching involves hundreds of small daily decisions, risks, and mistakes. A key

difference between Jean and Kate's private school and the climate of Meg and Amy's

schools is the expectation of mistakes and the greater tolerance for uncertainty, rather

than the wariness and demand to know all details that characterized Kate's effort to talk about police violence with her students. Meg described her desire to shift her students' mindset in a manner that would likely benefit the adults in the school as well, to go from a concept of "hard to talk about topics" to "important to talk about topics."

The ability to test oneself and be accountable to another even "in a world of contingency" (Pignatelli, 2011, p. 223) is a key element of anti-bias practice. Meg, Amy and others embrace "vulnerability in the context of being morally accountable" with an "awareness that we can never know, fully and for certain, who we are" (Pignatelli, p. 222-223). When Amy looks back on the many teachable moments she has had navigated with students, she admits there are situations in which she could have responded differently. Time and experience have not provided her with a sense of certainty about how to approach "difficult" topics in the classroom; rather, they have given her confidence. Silin, reflecting on the reactions of teachers to a staff development seminar about HIV/AIDS curriculum, notes: "they want to get it right… I fear I will only frustrate them by declaring that there is no sure way to get it right" (1999, p. 114).

Not discounting the strength of their practices, Amy and Meg's stories point toward important gaps in implementing effective anti-bias pedagogy on a school-wide scale. Both teachers related how administrative silence, obstruction, or simply mixed messages (whether perceived or real) can lead to teachers feeling unheard or unsupported in their efforts. One disadvantage of Amy's focus on teachable moments is the missed opportunity to approach curriculum as a whole with a more anti-bias frame. It is also evident in Meg's reflections what an uphill battle it can be to restructure curriculum when

an institutional commitment is not consistently in place. To further explore the question

of institutional commitment, the third grouping of interviewees comprises two school

leaders who are explicitly responsible for supporting the anti-bias practice of teachers at

scale.

Group Three: "It's messy work but we have to do it" — Marcia and Soraya

"We talk about institutional work," says Marcia mere minutes into our interview,

"but institutions are made up of people." This is why, she explains, training in the form of

professional development and ongoing learning has been critical to her transition from

being a classroom educator with "a heart for diversity work and social justice work" to a

leader of that work among teachers, students, and parents.

For the past eight years, Marcia has been the Diversity Director of Blue Lane

School, a small progressive independent school in a formerly working class

neighborhood that has gentrified significantly since the school's founding. For many

years prior, she was a classroom teacher in a variety of progressive settings. "I self

identify as an anti-bias educator," she asserts. "All those years as a classroom teacher

doing this work is what helped to prepare me" to take on a more formal role supporting

diversity and equity in her school. Still, that experience was supplemented, she says, with

experiences that deepened and extended her understanding of topics like leadership,

identity development, and relationship building that helps her implement the work on an

institution-wide level.

Soraya holds a position similar to Marcia's, but in a very different setting. She is the Director of Community Development at Towers School, a charter school in a mixed-income neighborhood that is home to public housing, new condominiums, and upscale brownstone homes. Her school was designed to serve students who are diverse in terms of race, class, and ability. "It's one thing to create a diverse space," says Soraya, "and it's another thing to be responsible to that diverse space. That was where my position came into existence."

In speaking about their work, both Marcia and Soraya emphasized the importance of an explicit institution-wide commitment to equity and diversity: At Blue Lane, this takes the form of a stand-alone diversity mission statement in addition to the school mission, which affirms the school's commitment to "explore, celebrate, and encourage differences and commonalities, and the challenges and opportunities they present." There is also an an emphasis on diversity within the four driving concepts of the school. Faculty and community members at Blue Lane understand that values like courage and citizenship have much to do with diversity, with being, as Marcia puts it, "willing to take into consideration that other people's position in society matters" and knowing "how do I act when I see injustice taking place?" Soraya noted that because adults have different levels of exposure to social justice work, teachers "need support as a staff" if they are expected to implement curriculum around diversity and equity. At the same time, a commitment to social justice in teaching is something Soraya and her colleagues look for starting at the interview process, because "there's a commitment even when you start at the school, that this is something that's incredibly important to us."

Soraya likewise describes diversity as part of her school's mission, but notes that in the school's first few years, the lottery was overrun with children from middle- and upper-class families. The lottery was adjusted to reserve 40% of the school's seats for students from the public housing units near the school to "safeguard" what Soraya calls the "natural diversity" of the neighborhood.

In Soraya's mind, an anti-bias curricular approach means more than just "it's 2:30 p.m., let's talk about racism. It's embedded in everything we're doing." She works with teachers across grade levels to examine current curriculum units through a social justice lens, transforming the questions teachers ask and the directions student inquiry might take. For example, when second graders undertook their transportation study, they compared urban and suburban transit systems, and also examined access to those systems and how it relates to income. It was, Soraya, says, "complex but developmentally appropriate." Across the grades, Soraya and her colleagues have also identified a sequence of social justice concepts and how they can be taught and developed as students mature. Concepts like "diversity" and "allies" may be introduced as early as kindergarten, with definitions that expand and deepen through eighth grade. Fourth graders, in turn, learn how to examine stories and nonfiction texts for evidence of bias in the form of stereotyping or omissions.

In her work with the lower school division of Blue Lane, Marcia has helped teachers identify and implement an anti-bias framework adapted from Teaching Tolerance. Its four components are: affirm identity, celebrate diversity, build awareness of social justice issues, and social action. As is the case for teachers at Soraya's school,

teachers look for the social justice and anti-bias opportunities within the curriculum, and

Marcia helps them see "how social justice work can live in the social studies, science, or

literacy curriculum." Teachers are trusted to decide when to steer students toward

elements of the framework, but Marcia sets an expectation as well: "In the course of ten

months the children are living with us in the curriculum… in ten months time they should

be bumping up against all four of those [components]." For example, teachers of

four-year-olds conduct a study of hair with the students, though they decide each year the

best time to implement it. In kindergarten, students create a series of multimedia

self-portraits between September and June, looking closely at themselves and learning to

appreciate the physical differences among members of their own classroom community.

As Marcia puts it, "that's both identity development and progressive practice."

Marcia and Soraya understand that a philosophical commitment to diversity is not

a solution in itself. Each of their schools has structural, institution-wide programs in place

to help ensure the mission is being walked out day to day. One important practical factor

is access to faculty, particularly face-to-face time. Marcia facilitates three formal

meetings per year on diversity topics, and is part of regular meetings with division heads

and the head of school so she can be aware of what's happening across grades.

Conversely, teachers also know they have access to Marcia as a resource, and as a

non-supervising faculty member. "My faculty know how to reach me, my faculty knows

what to reach me about." That might include a "puzzle," a challenge, or the need to

brainstorm language for addressing a particular topic. One white teacher asked Marcia to

read over her narrative report notes about a child of color, to make sure her first formal

report on the child was as unbiased as possible. "I don't want to be the diversity police," says Marcia, but she does want to hold people accountable. At Blue Lane, faculty and administrators are exploring use of a "personal action continuum" that helps teachers gauge their own engagement with anti-bias work through participation in conferences, professional development, as well as reflection, self-awareness, and other skills such as conflict resolution or emotional intelligence. This continuum could become part of qualitative teacher evaluations at Blue Lane. As Marcia describes it, the continuum meets the school's need to be "evaluating, critiquing, [and] encouraging" teachers to develop their skills as anti-bias educators.

A similar, though more decentralized, system exists at Soraya's school through the Diversity Working Group, a self-selected group of teachers and staff members who meet regularly to examine curriculum as described above, and to design professional development for fellow faculty members on race, class, gender, sexuality, and other elements of diversity, and how these play out in interactions with students and families. Teachers in the working group become point persons on their grade teams to continue applying a social justice lens. Administrators or members of the social work team bring the group's discussions to bear on their interactions with families. Similar to Marcia's role, teachers will approach Soraya to seek advice about particular situations, but they can also seek out any member of the working group. Rather than positioning herself or her colleagues as experts, however, Soraya and other teachers from the working group are sources of support, "someone to think through [challenges] with." The power to shape

teachers' responses "doesn't only reside in one person," diffusing the power dynamic that could come from having one perceived "expert."

In fact, the working group has sought out training and resources through a variety of organizations, and individual members bring their areas of expertise back to the school setting to share with colleagues. The faculty as a whole also participates in conferences aimed at diverse schools and/or social justice-oriented teaching, as well as teacher training organizations like Border Crossers (focused on race) and Class Action (focused on economic disparity). These experiences help build a community of professional learners who can be resources to their colleagues within the school, and fuel ongoing conversations about curriculum, equity, and diversity at Towers School.

In her capacity as Director of Community Development, Soraya focuses particularly on designing experiences to build relationships among families. These might include parent gatherings to cook and converse or take part in other activities. What's important, she says, is small group size, consistent and repeated meetings with the same group, and an attention on her part to building space for everyone to share. For example, a group of adults cooking together might be prompted to share their childhood memories about food, or a food that was meaningful to them growing up. "It's a question that everyone can access and answer... your level of being able to share is not dependent on your privilege," in contrast to the rest of society, says Soraya. Parent initiatives like the cooking experience bring together families who would not necessarily interact in their daily lives. The groups are intentionally diverse. Over time, Soraya says, she sees "shifts in culture" resulting from the new connections and relationships between parents.

Students whose parents would not otherwise meet have play dates, and parent activities have expanded to include an adult chorus, book club, and cooking club (Harball, 2012).

In both Marcia and Soraya's schools, the community includes families with a wide range in their levels of access, resources, and privilege. Soraya's thoughtfully-structured parent groups help to lessen the divide that would otherwise exist. In Marcia's case, one of the ways she described partnering equitably with parents was through responsiveness. For example, she recently pushed a teacher to respond right away to an email from a parent of color regarding her child's social relationships with the school. The parent expressed concern that racial differences were creating tension in her child's social group. While the child's teacher expressed to Marcia that she wanted to wait to respond until they could confer, Marcia urged her to act: "this parent is hurting and they're letting you know they're hurting for a racial reason. You need to respond right away." Marcia contrasted the situation with a similar one earlier in the year, in which a very wealthy white parent demanded a meeting about her child's social dynamics, unrelated to race. "The parent got attention very quickly, because she had power… she knew she could demand it and she knew we would respond." An equitable response, Marcia explained to the teacher, required that a parent of color on financial aid receive a similar response. That parent "needs to know 'you might not be aware of the power you have in emailing us, but we know, and we're going to let you know by responding right away: let's have a meeting, I'll clear my calendar, let's talk tomorrow.'" In this way, Marcia explains, responsiveness can confer power to parents who might not take or demand it otherwise.

The Blue Lane community has also come together to frame a set of more formal policies promoting equity in various areas of school life. Birthday party invitations are sent to homes rather than delivered in school, to avoid situations of exclusion. These equity policies also include providing families with funding for transit, after school snacks, laptops, or other costs that can be considered part of "the full experience" of the school. "We won't ask anything of our families that we can't provide for them," says Marcia, "because otherwise we're saying in order for you to have an experience at our school, you need to have the finances." The principle of equity "tells us to give access to families, not just the demanding ones."

With all their expertise and dedication to anti-bias education and equity within their schools, Marcia and Soraya readily acknowledge that this work is an ongoing process for themselves and for others. They both emphasize the need to accept and expect mistakes and missteps in that process. Soraya described the ethos at her school:

> With this work, there's never a moment where you say, "I've got it." We're always constantly in new situations where we're learning. How did I deal with that? Do I need support dealing with that? What does that look like? How do I say this? I really messed it up the first time I said it, how do I say it in a different way?… Even the language of the [staff working group] is encouraging staff to say this is part of the process, we're gonna mess up, it's gonna be messy, it's not gonna feel good a number of times until it does feel good for you, until we are okay with the language. Not having the conversation is more a of a disservice than anything.

With this mindset in place, she finds that across the board staff show a willingness to learn and a tolerance for mistakes in their own and others' growth. Marcia quoted her head of school, whose words echo Soraya's: "diversity inclusion work is messy work but we still have to do it."

Marcia also emphasized the necessity of her own ongoing learning. She strives to keep abreast of the latest conversations in social justice work and bring these back to her faculty at Blue Lane. If she didn't, she says, "I wouldn't be bringing my community along in terms of the conversation we need to have." It can be difficult, says Marcia, to find herself pointing out growth areas to faculty members who have made some progress. "They feel like they've done some work… and when you bring to the surface for them… that they're still getting it wrong? That's really hard!" Marcia knows she is not exempt from the vulnerability of sometimes getting it wrong. "There's no doubt that in my interactions with people… I'm going to say something that's going to raise a level of frustration on their end, and I hope that they'll say 'that was stupid, back off,' but if they don't I've got to be able to be aware of that."

As an institution, the work carries on. As Marcia puts it, even with an explicit mission statement, a director of diversity, and institution-wide commitments, "every year I've still got a job. I'm still getting paid to tell these people, 'you still don't have it yet!'" For both Marcia and Soraya, the work they do with their colleagues and communities comes from a deep sense of mission that is personal and political. It's also, they say, fundamentally progressive.

This year, Marcia stepped temporarily into a different leadership role, which required moving into the office that originally belonged to the founder of the school. Marcia told a story about what it was like to fill this role. A member of the maintenance crew (of whom most are Latino) came by and was introducing a new member of the staff to Marcia:

> He stands by the door and points to me and tells his new buddy, 'that's the first Latina ever to sit in that office.' And I was like 'oh my god the pressure!' This is a historical room. It means a lot to me, and to step into her [the founder's] shoes is a huge responsibility. So, shepherding new teachers or veteran teachers to move forward with both progressive practice *and* social justice is really essential for why I'm here, and why I stay.

For Marcia, social justice at Blue Lane is bound up in the mission and legacy of the school as a progressive education leader, and stretches back to the values of the founder and her colleagues of the early twentieth century. The change and growth Marcia strives to support "have always been and will continue to be part of what it means to be engaged in progressive practice."

Soraya and Marcia also bring their personal commitments to their work. As a Persian-American member of the Bahai'i faith, Soraya believes "our first identity is as humans." Bringing children and adults of different experiences together in a caring community, she says, speaks to that "oneness of humanity," and has a deep effect on the individuals involved. When kids who are different from another learn to coexist, "and to honor and value every human in that room, that sits with you," Soraya says, "and I think that changes you in your core. It causes you to be able to understand that there are people different from you… There's great power in that. That human connection, that's what will change, slowly, how our society functions."

Marcia's identities similarly fuel her work and sense of mission. Over time, she has come to view the "marginalized" aspects of her identity -- as a queer Latina woman growing up in poverty -- not as deficits but as a source of resilience and experience that she can use to help others and give back. Her teaching philosophy, foundationally progressive, has also shifted from "I do this work because it's the right thing for *me* to

do" to a stance that closely echoes Ladson-Billings: "I do this work because social justice equity work is synonymous with good teaching" (see 1995, p. 159).

Group three analysis and reflections

Soraya and Marcia's perspectives draw together many of the themes, successes, and challenges addressed by other teachers in this study. When asked whether Blue Lane still has growth areas regarding diversity work, Marcia's words closely echoed those of Caroline at Greentree Day: "Come on now! We're not a utopian society! We're not there yet!" As a senior administrator, however, Marcia has much more ability to influence school-wide conversation and set goals for growth compared to Caroline and her like-minded colleagues, who can feel isolated in the midst of inconsistent efforts toward equity within their school.

At the same time, there is a difference in quality in the anti-bias efforts at Blue Lane compared to what Soraya described at Towers School. While Marcia described occasional resistance from teachers she critiques, Soraya said that resistance is not present at Towers School, because the faculty have accepted from the time of their hiring that anti-bias work is part of the school's mission. It may also be that because Towers serves a greater proportion of children of color and children from low-resource backgrounds, the rationale for anti-bias work is more immediately felt by educators. Towers School educators may be less likely to question the need for "yet more" identity work or examination of their own unconscious biases. Both schools, however, show the strongest examples in the sample of structural commitments to equity, such as the

rebalancing of the Towers School lottery toward children from public housing, or the materials provided by Blue Lane for students to access the "full experience" of the school.

In her own reflections, Marcia referenced the continuum of racial and cultural development put forth by Louise Derman-Sparks (2012), and the need for teachers to support the growth of "authentic identities" no matter who their students are. This contrasts sharply with the adults in Kate and Jean's predominantly white school, who felt that race or other questions of diversity "just weren't relevant" for their community. In Derman-Sparks' continuum, children as young as one and two years old are aware of differences between people, and absorb society's messages about the positive or negative values of those differences as early as three or four (2012, p. 1-2). By approximately age nine, children's racial attitudes are fairly fixed, which means that in the absence of anti-bias education, they will replicate the dominant racial attitudes of society (2012, p. 4). Marcia referred to finding the diversity within an all-white community as a necessary step toward teaching "that identity matters" and toward learning to respect difference. It may also be that at Kate and Jean's school, there is a silence similar to what Bauman found among her middle school subjects. They project a "public image" to match the norms and expressed values of the school, "while disassociating from personal struggles so their outward lives [can] fit a predetermined picture of social order" (2007, p. 22). In these situations, students and teachers need to develop "a mental set for diversity" (Delpit, 2006, p. 69) in order to see, engage with, and respect the differences present in their communities.

Marcia and Soraya's descriptions of the anti-bias efforts in their schools provide rich examples of accountability on both institutional and interpersonal levels. As was demonstrated by several other participants, caring relationships between teachers are a key aspect of accountability and positive change. At Towers School, that accountability is flexible, as teachers choose whom to seek out for the vulnerable process of "examining and disclosing oneself to the other" (Pignatelli, 2011, p. 221). At Blue Lane, the pursuit of equity is a collective commitment undertaken by Marcia, her fellow administrators, and staff -- and even so, it poses "an ongoing ethical challenge," but one in which collective actions are made possible because of collective commitments (2011, p. 223). And in both schools, accountability also takes the form of forgiveness when ethical commitment breaks down, as it is expected to do. At these points of harm, failure, or fragility, Soraya describes individuals who are able to say to themselves and each other, "I messed up, but that's not it… there's always a new conversation." When a misstep happens, Marcia says, "you have to be ready to receive that and to do something about it." That response does not follow a set formula. Soraya articulated the flexibility needed to meet the unpredictable demands of anti-bias work: "we don't have to respond to everything in that moment, but I think not responding is a problem." And, she acknowledged, "there's never the exact right answer, but the wrong answer is just to let things go."

Soraya, Marcia, and others in this study spoke of teaching as deeply personal to them, a profession with which they identify strongly. They share this quality with the teachers studied by Ladson-Billings who are successful practitioners of culturally

relevant pedagogy (1995, p. 163). Like Ladson-Billings, Soraya and Marcia also share the belief that anti-bias teaching is "just good teaching," or, more specifically, good progressive practice. Marcia's story about changing offices demonstrates her strong sense of carrying on that legacy. Soraya also commented that while she herself has not taught at or attended Bank Street, she's worked with enough people who have to know that anti-bias work "is fundamentally progressive work." Wasow and others reexamining the developmental-interaction approach called for a greater emphasis going forward on the connection between schooling and democratic processes (Nager & Shapiro, 2000, p. 23). The work led by Marcia and Soraya in their settings is rich with examples of "respect for different perspectives, tolerance for the messiness of a range of voices, and commitment to collaboratively constructing new meaning out of the everyday challenges of working and learning together," which is "an essential part of school and building a just community" (Nager & Shapiro, 2000, p. 287).

Voices within and outside the explicitly "progressive" education community echo this connection between effective anti-bias teaching and a social justice-oriented philosophy. A sense of mission, of believing in students and in the transformative possibilities of education, was common to all of the teachers interviewed for Nieto's framework (2006, p. 463). Ladson-Billings (1995) also notes that philosophy is a key ingredient to effective teachers' success: there are core strategies and competencies, there are sentence stems and professional development sessions you can look for, but a description of what makes good work work, requires examining the "philosophical and ideological underpinnings of practice" (1995, p. 162). It is here that the importance of

Cochran-Smith's approach becomes salient: given that anti-bias teachers are committed on a philosophical and not just practical level, how can educators *learn* this orientation as part of their teacher preparation?

In speaking with anti-bias educators, to speak of strategies or structural factors was to speak of philosophy, demonstrating how these are intertwined. Marcia and Soraya show what is possible when individuals with both deep philosophical commitment and extensive expertise are put in a position to leverage those beliefs and that knowledge on an institutional scale.

V. Findings and Recommendations

Despite the differences in their schools, their neighborhoods, and their own identifiers, the experiences of the educators in this study resonated with each other in powerful ways. From their challenges and successes, four major findings emerge.

Identity work matters

The educators in this study demonstrate that to successfully implement anti-bias practice, teachers and leaders must first have opportunities to examine their own identities and situate themselves within relationships of culture, power, and privilege. Educators of color, like Marcia and Soraya, described the explicit connections they feel between their social identities and the work that they do. In Soraya's case, the principles of her faith inform her commitment to a school culture that affirms individual humanness

while creating connections across difference. Marcia spoke of the change in her own

view of her identities from a deficit model to affirmation, and her desire to leverage that

perspective and resilience to the benefit of others.

For white educators, identity work is even more crucial for developing an

anti-bias approach with any student population. Meg spoke candidly about the significant

shifts in perspective that resulted from her experiences with colleagues in professional

development conversations on identity and diversity (in this case, a conversation related

to police brutality):

> It was emotional and made you question who you were and who your kids were. It made
> me question what am I doing as an educator as someone who doesn't walk outside and
> feel frightened for my being. I haven't had [those]experiences. People talking about how
> that is their experience and that of some of our kids makes me question who I am as an
> educator.

This is akin to Soraya's words on the significance of talking about racism while "sitting

across from someone who says 'that's what this was like for me' -- that human

connection." These connections require dedicated time and space, as has been made at

Meg's school using professional development time, or at Kate and Jean's school with the

founding of a SEED cohort, which has seen great success over the course of its first year.

Conversely, Caroline and Amy described the fraught climate that grows when

administrators and teachers lack or discourage dedicated spaces to have these

conversations.

While reflective forms of identity work can help educators better understand their

own positionalities and identifiers, they are also not the end goal. In their own settings,

educators and leaders must then be prepared to "find the diversity that's there" and foster

dialogue about it, thus breaking the institutional silence that can exist at seemingly homogeneous schools like Jean and Kate's. Identity work for teachers also needs to extend beyond the school in what Greene calls a "project of change." As Marcia put it, "for all educators in the dominant group the work is self-awareness, and then from self-awareness you should be open to the issues that are happening in the world, and then come to taking action." Meg described feeling strongly motivated by her staff's periodic conversations, but not knowing "what the actionable steps are" afterward. With the chance to reflect and take responsibility should come opportunities to act. Educators need to be encouraged to "claim the role of both educator and activist" in authentic ways (Cochran-Smith, 1999, p. 116). Silin adds that to do so, teachers "must reject the myth of the neutral professional," and recognize how they are implicated in social inequities, "lest they too be deprived of their own being, their own life histories" (1991, p. 53). In other words, there is a reason that Soraya's school lists self-reflection as one of its key aims -- and why one of the four key values at Marcia's school is citizenship.

Relationships matter

The educators interviewed also shed light on the key role that relationships play in building effective anti-bias practice. Teachers cannot do this work alone. At the other extreme, they cannot do it under hostile scrutiny.

In the absence of other supports, a caring relationship with another teacher engaged in anti-bias practice can be a vital support. Amy described the value of checking in with a colleague who can follow up to observe or hear about the outcomes of a

conversation or lesson. Jean and Kate have found ways to support each other emotionally

and materially (through books and curriculum choices) as they take steps to change their

individual practice as educators as well as the culture of their school.

The leaders interviewed emphasized the importance of their non-evaluative

relationships with teachers. Marcia has access to her teachers and vise-versa, and the

opportunity to provide them with feedback and accountability. Soraya's school has

further decentralized this process of seeking feedback so that she and many others can

serve as resources, but the school's teacher working group is nevertheless anchored by

commitment from leadership to the ongoing process of examining curriculum and

teachers' own practices.

Meg and Amy also described the frustrations and rewards of building authentic

relationships with their students, sometimes as a prelude to and sometimes because of

frank conversations about inequity. In their conversations with students, such as Meg's

about identifiers or Amy's about derogatory labels, they found wellsprings of insight and

enthusiasm for the topic. Meg and Amy placed students "concerns and questions at the

center of the curriculum," and found in these important and emotional themes "the basis

of a socially relevant curriculum" (Silin, 1991, p. 45).

The relationships needed for transformative anti-bias practice also extend beyond

the school building. Thoughtfully-constructed events for parents at Soraya's school help

build relationships across racial and class differences by focusing on common

experiences and attempting to mitigate the exclusion or disconnect that can result from

privilege in the larger community. Marcia builds responsive relationships with parents of

color or other individuals who may feel marginalized by school structures in order to help

them leverage power they might not know they have.

In all of these relationships live elements of uncertainty and vulnerability. Trust is

therefore essential to be able to collaborate on the process of anti-bias work and weather

uncertain outcomes.

Woven in, not added on

Even when teachers identify strongly with anti-bias pedagogy or teaching for

social justice, they are more successful when there is institutional support for their

efforts. An important distinction emerged in this study between philosophical

commitments, which articulate values, and structural commitments, which contribute in

more tangible or measurable ways to greater equity within a school institution. Both are

needed to bridge the gap between awareness and action, which means in practice that

educators in classrooms and in leadership must be on board to carry out school-wide

anti-bias initiatives.

The mission statement of Caroline's school emphasizes the cultivation of ethical

learners and responsible citizens. This mission is made tangible through specific

academic initiatives like racial affinity groups and a social justice-oriented curriculum.

For Marcia and the rest of the Blue Lane community, philosophical commitments with

regard to moral accountability and ethical citizenship are complemented by the school's

equity policies that provide financial and material assistance. At charter schools like Meg

and Soraya's, the terms of the school's entry lottery are a form of structural commitment

to equity, ensuring that seats are reserved for a diverse population and centered on the school's own neighborhood.

Another form of structural commitment are the forms of accountability put in place to help support teachers' anti-bias work and development. It is important to keep in mind that "accountability" here does not mean current cultures of high-stakes assessment with punitive consequences, but rather an ethical commitment undertaken in the presence of others (Pignatelli, 2011, p. 228). Meg's school leaders provide this type of support informally, by holding faculty conversations about topics they in turn expect teachers to discuss with students. The "personal action continuum" at Marcia's school helps teachers gauge their own growth along benchmarks that are communicable to administrators. The sequence of social justice concepts developed by Soraya and her colleagues ensures that teachers at every grade level have a developmentally appropriate place to begin teaching anti-bias vocabulary and concepts to their students.

It is important to note that in schools with strong institutional commitments as well as those without, educators cited professional networks, organizations, and teaching tools as important supports, regardless of the level of anti-bias efforts within their own school. In some cases, engagement with these professional development sources on the part of individual teachers can be an important first step in making social justice and anti-bias pedagogy more prominent parts of school culture and practice. In just one year of SEED cohort meetings, Jean and her colleagues have started important conversations and built momentum for more consistent anti-bias efforts at her school.

Mess is necessary

At times it was startling how directly participants echoed each other without prompting, and nowhere more so than on the topic of "messing up" in the process of anti-bias work:

> Caroline: This is a great place, but it's not perfect, and we're mad and fired up about changing those things.
>
> Amy: Sure, sometimes I wish I'd have waited until anger died down, sometimes I wish I'd have addressed something right away instead of planning to bring it up first thing the next day. Sometimes I wish I'd have given some issue less airtime, sometimes more.
>
> Soraya: There's never the exact right answer. It's going to be messy.
> Meg: We're going to mess up and it's not intended to hurt anybody.
> Marcia: Diversity inclusion work is messy work but we still have to do it.

In this wide range of schools, among teachers and leaders with varying experiences, successful school-wide anti-bias work came with the acceptance and the expectation that individuals will mess up, misstep, and stumble in the process.

The above comments on the messiness of anti-bias work indicated the inherent uncertainties of it, even for teachers with a great deal of training, knowledge, and experience. "Mess" also implied the strong emotions and vulnerabilities bound up in conversations about identity, bias, and inequity. This element of messiness is present in both Ladson-Billings' and Nieto's inventories of qualities of effective teachers. Nieto calls it improvisation. Ladson-Billings refers to it as "artistry, not a technical task that [can] be accomplished in a recipe-like fashion" (1995, p. 163). Wasow characterizes "tolerance for the messiness of a range of voices" as a key part of the "interaction" half of the developmental-interaction approach (2000, p. 287). In this regard, anti-bias work is not only "just good teaching," it's good progressive practice.

Conclusion: The heart and the skills

The findings above illustrate how school philosophy and support structures can enable consistent anti-bias practice for educators. Where these exist, teachers have strong opportunities for growth in their own practice, and school leaders have avenues to help their faculty develop. For this reason, school leaders including principals, Directors of Diversity and other administrators should set aside dedicated time for the community conversations, identity work, and professional development that will support their faculty members as anti-bias practitioners. Modeling and encouraging the risk and uncertainty of anti-bias work among adults is a vital step in encouraging teachers to embrace this work with students. School leaders can also encourage an anti-bias approach by establishing formal and informal mentorship structures between teachers, in recognition of the vulnerability involved in sharing "messy" aspects of pedagogical practice with others.

At the same time, these findings invite the question of how to prepare both teachers and leaders so they enter school environments already steeped in the philosophical principles that undergird anti-bias practice. Marcia commented on the difference between teachers who enter the profession ready to engage in identity work and anti-bias practice with students, compared to those who begin to learn in professional settings, rather than in their graduate programs or earlier. The teaching program graduates entering Marcia's school (and many other schools) are "young and mostly white, and it's obvious what they need," Marcia said. "We'd rather not be fixing it down the line."

This would suggest that schools of education, particularly those in the progressive tradition, need to do more to incorporate a social justice orientation in their coursework

and fieldwork teaching experiences, in order to make clear to beginning teachers the political dimensions of their work. Meg described her approach to this question as an adjunct instructor for graduate students:

> It's not even a matter of do you believe it or not, which is awful because everyone should have their own opinion… but I think my stance is this is the way that we need to be. This is what we need to be thinking about as educators. I'm not going to tell you how to implement anything in your classroom… I'm more interested in what your thinking is behind the choices that you're making.

Just as Marcia has progressed from a more personal to a more universal set of pedagogical beliefs, Meg strives to instill a particular approach in her students, however much they may be willing to adopt it. This is akin to Silin's forthright renouncing of objectivity: "Of course the students are right. I do have an agenda. I am clear from the first day of the semester that I bring to class a critical view of education, a demand for more socially relevant curriculum, and the experiences of a gay man" (in Nager & Shapiro, 2000, p. 270). Pedagogical choices flow from philosophy, which connects (or should connect) to identity and experiences.

On a strategy level, the shifts required for progressive teacher training programs may not be large. Meg encounters apprehension from white teachers who are learning from her how to craft a curriculum "rooted in anti-bias or anti-racism… I think it's because it's being presented as this big thing, when really it's not. Really it's sitting down with a kid and saying hey, let's unpack that word. The smallest little step is a huge leap forward." For Meg and for others, the actionable steps may be small, but they are the expression of the underlying philosophy that translates principle into action. Some examples of anti-bias action described by Meg and others interviewed include:

❖ interrogating terms and labels to unpack power relationships they represent
❖ engaging with students about current events related to discrimination and oppression that impact their own lives and communities
❖ evaluating classroom resources for bias; seeking out resources that represent a range of viewpoints and experiences
❖ responding flexibly to emergent moments and the emotional needs of students
❖ teaching into the practices of critical literacy, including identifying authorship, reading for multiple meanings, and an expansive definition of what constitutes "text."

These are a strong place to start for graduate programs preparing future educators and for leaders seeking change within schools.

While these strategies are concrete, they nevertheless require practice. In contrast to Marcia, Amy asserted that teachers can be prepared "for the challenge" of responsive, anti-bias practice, but that it was actual conversations with students in difficult moments that have built her confidence. "Nobody teaches you," she said, to deal with emergent moments. Or, as Caroline put it, "teacher preparation is largely about delivering content, not the stuff that comes up in the middle of delivering the content such as cultural differences, behavior management, social emotional needs. I don't think any of us get training on that."

To the extent that she can, Meg is trying to change that. Her efforts reveal the close links between concrete strategies and deeper identity work for teachers in training. When her graduate students display resistance to adopting a more anti-bias approach, Meg feels "like I need to try harder for it." She looks for more ways in: more access points, more strategies to try, and also "more information about that person, what their setting is, what their background is, what their goals are as an educator, and then figure out a way to make a piece of it work for them." Her approach demonstrates an intuitive

understanding that for educators to adopt practices and implement them authentically, they must feel a philosophical connection to their own rationales and reasons for particular approaches. The professional identity work Meg seeks to do with her students helps clarify the underlying "why" of practice.

To further this aim of teaching specific strategies while also supporting identity work, teacher training programs can make a conscious effort to provide *exposure* to anti-bias practice through fieldwork experiences and through the structure and pedagogy of graduate courses. Meg and Amy, both white teachers, spoke candidly about moments in their first years of teaching when they were exposed to practices and values that were completely unfamiliar to them: parenting practices, or beliefs about education, race, and sexuality. These encounters broadened their perspectives and led them to question their values and biases. What might it be worth to ensure that teachers encounter such moments of disequilibrium during their training, not after? Through mentors, thoughtful fieldwork placements, and opportunities to reflect with peers and instructors, pre-service teachers can be encouraged to examine their own biases and begin the process of becoming advocates and anti-bias practitioners.

In explicitly mentoring teachers to embrace anti-bias practice, institutions like Bank Street would more thoroughly claim an often underrepresented aspect of the progressive legacy: the role of schools in shaping a new social order. As Silin reminds us, "a theory of education is not only a theory of individual growth but also a theory of political and social power," and therefore "must be informed by a vision of the *polis* the student will eventually enter" (1995, p. 87). Children and adults enter schools already

members of different social worlds; these worlds are homogeneous, heterogeneous, marginalized, powerful, complicit, resistant. When teachers make space for those worlds within the classroom, honor varied identities while fostering authentic dialogue, and encourage self-determination as well as collective becoming, then we can see anti-bias practice fueling deeper fulfillment of the progressive legacy. Then we see educators who are prepared practically and philosophically to improve the society that we as humans have created.

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VII. Appendix 1: Resources

Elementary level books mentioned in this study that are appropriate for anti-bias lessons and conversations with students:

Cutler, J. (2014). *Susan Marcus Bends the Rules*. Holiday House.

Collier, J.L. (2008). *War Comes to Willy Freeman.* Paw Prints.

Yolen, J. (1992). *Encounter*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

VIII. Appendix 2: Permissions

Permission letter for research involving human participants:

Frank Pignatelli <fpignatelli@bankstreet.edu>

Permission

Gil Schmerler <ace@bankstreet.edu>   Wed, Apr 27, 2016 at 3:34 PM
To: Frank Pignatelli <fpignatelli@bankstreet.edu>

Frank -

This is to confirm that Chiara DiLello may proceed with her independent study as planned, using the human subjects in a protected manner that has been approved by you.

Gil Schmerler
(for the IMP Committee)

The following letter was provided to all individuals interviewed for this study.

Dear participant,

As you know, I am completing my Master's degree at Bank Street College of Education. My culminating project documents the practices and beliefs of anti-bias teachers and leaders in a variety of progressive school settings.

I would like to obtain your permission to include direct and paraphrased quotes from our interviews (in person and via email, as applicable), in the final version of my thesis. To maintain the confidentiality of all participants, pseudonyms will be used and identifying information will be removed from descriptions of all schools. Please note that some personal information will still be included as it relates to the data being shared.

The study will be kept in the Bank Street College Library and be available to be borrowed both within and outside of the Bank Street community. It will also be available online.

Please sign and return this form to confirm your consent.

Thank you again for contributing to this study.

Sincerely,

Chiara Di Lello