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SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS' SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES IN CREATING
RACE-CONSCIOUS CURRICULUM

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters
of Arts in Education.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Rick Eckstein and Monica Nicosia for their guidance, and encouraging me to be kind to myself. To my partner Graham Earley for his constant support, thorough copy-editing and reminders to relax. To my students, for inspiring me to work towards a more just and equitable schooling experience. To my capstone committee, thank you for the time you spent helping me grow as a scholar.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I began teaching social studies because I love learning about people, and why the world is the way it is. I also believe that social studies classes have the potential to be spaces for social equity and justice. The social studies courses I took throughout my elementary and secondary experience were often very focused on dates, names and other mundane facts. We rarely learned about women or non-white people outside of a sidebar in the textbook. My understanding of history was largely whitewashed and male-centered. Even when I learned about global history in tenth grade, it was mostly through the lectures and stories of my white male history teacher's travels. In college, my experience taking history courses was vastly different. I was exposed to the ideas of counter-narrative, history-from-below and positionality. I learned about history that shed light on oppression rooted in race, class, gender, and sexuality. I learned what it meant to be anti-racist, and how to embody that mentality as a person and an educator.

When I decided to pursue social studies teaching as a career, I did so with the intention of creating a social studies class that was an anti-racist space where students could question power dynamics, learn why the world operates the way it does, discover inspiring figures they relate to, and be empowered to make changes towards a more just and equitable world. For me, being an anti-racist educator means using the classroom as a space to work against systemic racism, especially through my curriculum and pedagogical approaches. In order to effectively do the work of anti-racism as a white woman, I am constantly unlearning and fighting against the white supremacy I was

indoctrinated with as a white child in my mostly white school so that I make sure I am not replicating oppressive whiteness in my curriculum.

It is important for social studies teachers to understand that they are gatekeepers for the content that their students learn, regardless of the official curriculum or the state standards (Thorton, 1989). If a social studies teacher constructs their curriculum in a way that is whitewashed and non-representative of their students' identities, they are perpetuating the oppression of their students (Delpit, 1995; Gay & Howard, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Since social studies is uniquely situated amongst academic disciplines to critique systemic racism by teaching race-conscious history, as opposed to white-washed history, it is extremely important for social studies teachers to center race and racism in their classrooms (Howard, 2003; Tyson, 2003). Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy eventually led to a slew of scholarly work studying the relationship between culturally relevant pedagogy and social studies teaching and learning (Chikkatur, 2013; Martell, 2013; Washington & Humphries, 2011). The notion of culturally relevant pedagogy transformed into the idea of culturally sustaining pedagogy, or a teaching practice that makes space for both valuing youth culture, and critiquing the ways that youth culture perpetuates systemic inequities (Ladson- Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). Since the creation of culturally sustaining pedagogy, scholars have been interested in examining how social studies teachers use culturally sustaining pedagogy in their classes (Martell & Stevens, 2019).

Scholars have also applied a critical race framework to examining the ways that non-white people and narratives are taught and learned in social studies courses (Brown

& Au, 2014; King, 2014; Santiago, 2019; Woodson, 2015). Through critiques of the master narrative, or the hegemonic centering of white people and stories in history, scholars have pointed out the systemic racism in social studies curriculum, and the field of curriculum studies (Brown & Au, 2014). Work has also been done on the ways that white teachers are often ill-equipped and unwilling to teach race-conscious history (Almarza & Fehn, 1998; Leonardo & Porter, 2010; Vass, 2013).

Despite the breadth of work about the connections between culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, critical race theory and social studies, there still seems to be a disconnect between scholarly work and what actually happens in schools. Based on my own experience accessing and creating curriculum that is race-conscious, and in conversations I have had with social studies colleagues, there are a myriad of problems facing social studies teachers who desire to do this work. Beyond the teachers who want to do the work of creating a race-conscious curriculum, there are also the teachers who, for a variety of reasons, do not want to do the work. My study looked at a social studies department in a single school that has teachers who are all at different points in their careers and have different perspectives and practices about centering race and racism in their curriculum.

In my study, I addressed the following research question: how do social studies teachers center race and racism in their curriculum? My work also addressed the following secondary research questions:

1. How do teachers enact racial literacy when teaching race-conscious social studies?

2. How do teachers justify teaching race-conscious social studies?

In the remainder of this chapter, I will provide a context for my project through a description of my background and experiences that led the study. I will then explain the context and rationale for my study. Finally, I will provide a summary of my study and give a preview of chapters two through five.

Background of the Researcher

During student teaching, I taught middle school global studies, and my collaborating teacher gave me a lot of freedom to create a curriculum that reflected my interests. Using the state standards for global studies I crafted a unit about Central and South America that focused on geography, and the impact of environmental issues on Central and South American people. Through this unit, we studied a variety of environmental issues including the destruction of coral reefs, deforestation and water contamination, and linked those environmental issues to colonialism, westernization and immigration. We had open conversations about race and racism, and how they factored into geography and world history.

The freedom to create and the support I had in creating during student teaching felt amazing. My collaborating teacher had strong relationships with her students, and they extended that trust to me allowing for deep conversations and learning. When I finished student teaching, I felt ready to take on my own classroom, armed with what I thought was a wealth of capacity to build community and create curriculum. That illusion was promptly shattered when I accepted my first and current teaching job, seventh-grade

American history teacher at Valleydale Secondary School (throughout my study, I use the pseudonym Valleydale Secondary School).

When I began teaching at Valleydale in January of 2018 after the previous teacher quit, I jumped into the second semester with absolutely no curriculum or direction. I thought that I was prepared to teach American history in a way that centered non-white narratives, and confront my own positionality as a white woman teaching mostly non-white students. However, as soon as the district mentor and other social studies teachers told me they were not sure what the previous teacher had taught, where he had left off or what existing resources there even were for the course, I panicked.

Everything I knew and believed about teaching American history: representation is vital, the master narrative found in textbooks is historically inaccurate and almost always steeped in racism, sexism, classism and homophobia, and primary sources and lived experiences are the crux of real history, took a backseat to the urgency I felt to maintain control in my classroom and get the kids learning *something*. It took several months for me to find a balance between having “control” in the classroom, building relationships with students and finally getting to the content I wanted to teach.

When I look back on that first semester of my teaching career I feel embarrassed and horrified by the ways that I put my principles on a back burner, and instead focused on controlling my students and giving them work to do, even if that work was not always meaningful. My students did not particularly trust me, and I did not work to build trust with them until later in the semester, when it was already too late for many students. Towards the end of the semester we were able to move past the shallow textbook learning

we began with, and dive deeper into American history with a focus on race and racism, justice and protest movements. We learned about the Secret War and Hmong-American history; we learned about Black Wall Street; we learned about the Black Panther Party and the Civil Rights Movement. Some students got a lot out of the end of our semester together, and others never recovered from the bad first few months of having me as a teacher, and never trusted me. I do not blame them. Although centering race and racism is vital in a social studies course, it is also a highly personal and sensitive topic that many students do not want to talk about with someone they hardly know or trust, especially if that person is white.

In my first year of teaching, I was reminded that in order to center my curriculum on race and racism, and actually be the anti-racist educator I wanted to, I needed to first focus on building relationships with students. Once I recentered that in my practice, it became easier to create curriculum and foster conversations that questioned systemic racism through counternarratives. Some teachers in my department share that perspective, and others think that it is more important to teach social studies exactly as the standards dictate. I have found all of my administrators to be highly supportive, and even insistent on race-conscious curriculum, yet there are teachers in my department who still do not center race and racism in their curriculum. In particular, the two district-level curriculum administrators have been very helpful in helping me find and purchase resources and professional development opportunities to teach in a race-centered way. Although I did experience a lack of support when I first started teaching at Valleydale, over the past three years I have been able to build a strong foundation of a race-conscious

seventh-grade American history curriculum because of the support of these various administrators, and my like-minded colleagues.

The Study

The study examined the experiences and perspectives social studies teachers from Valleydale Secondary School have in centering race and racism in their curriculum. Through semi-structured interviews and curriculum document analysis, I uncovered the ways that the teachers in my study think about centering race and racism in their curriculum, and the ways that they actually accomplish this in their classrooms

My research showed examples of how social studies teachers successfully center race and racism in their curriculum, as well as ways that they fail to do so. In identifying the reasons why teachers in my study do not center race and racism in their curriculum, I highlighted the need for professional development opportunities that allow teachers to learn social studies in a race-conscious way and then apply that to their own courses. My findings could help districts and universities identify and create professional development opportunities and resources to help social studies teachers transform their curriculum into one that is race-conscious and anti-racist.

Summary

In Chapter One, I introduced the current study by providing a brief background on the breadth of scholarly work that supports a race-conscious social studies curriculum. I then discussed my experience with creating a curriculum that is centered on race and racism, and the ways that my experience has been similar or different to other members of my department. My journey in creating a race-conscious curriculum led me to my

study in how teachers in my social studies department center race and racism in their own curricula. I hope to unpack both the ways the teachers in my department are successful in creating a race-conscious curriculum, and the ways that they are unsuccessful to shed light on where social studies professional development and pre-service teacher training should be focused.

In Chapter Two, I situate my work in the existing literature of culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, critical race theory and its applications in social studies, and racial literacy. In Chapter Three I provide the methodology for my qualitative case study including my theoretical framework of Picower's (2009) tools of Whiteness, Kumashiro's (2015) common-sense framework, Grinage (2020's) critique of neoliberal multiculturalism, and Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) theory of Whiteness as an intellectual alibi, and describe the setting and the participants. In Chapter Four, I analyze the results of my study using my theoretical frameworks. In Chapter Five, I conclude with the significance of my research and direction for future work. My appendices include my interview questions, and classroom observations template.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

My study examines the perceptions teachers at Valleydale Secondary School have about centering race and racism in their social studies curriculum. My hope is to shed light on why teachers decide to teach social studies in a race conscious way, or not. My work is situated in a large body of literature about the intersections of race and racism and social studies education. I add on to the existing body of literature through my study of social studies teachers' perceptions about race and racism in social studies curriculum, as much of the existing literature about teacher perceptions focuses on pre-service teachers.

Chapter two reviews the existing literature related to culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, critical race theory, and their applications in social studies, as well as racial literacy and whiteness studies. In my study, I aim to address the following research question: how do social studies teachers center race and racism in their curriculum? My work also addresses the following secondary research questions: How do teachers enact racial literacy when teaching race-conscious social studies? How do teachers justify teaching race-conscious social studies?

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the foundation of social studies research that is interested in race and racism (Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRT contends that racism is a permanent and pervasive parts of society that needs to be unmasked in order to achieve equity and justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) Although CRT has been widely used in

educational analysis since the 1990s, it stems from critical legal scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s (Bell, 1980). My work draws on the CRT concepts of interest convergence, interest divergence and racial liberalism (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Guinier, 2004).

“Interest convergence” is situated in the school of racial realists, which holds that racism is more than just individuals’ actions and words, and should rather be understood as a systemic allocation of privilege and benefits (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Along these lines, Bell (1980) hypothesized that major progress in racial justice only occurred when White elites saw something for themselves to gain. Bell’s (1980) example of interest convergence argues that the Supreme Court only passed *Brown v. Board of Education* to quell domestic unrest that would inevitably occur if Blacks, who had just fought valiantly in the Korean War and World War II, were relegated back to menial labor and social denigration. Whites in power did not want more negative press about racial tensions in the United States, so *Brown v. Board* was passed as image management. At the time of the *Brown v. Board* decision, the interests of elite whites and Blacks converged, allowing for major social change.

Guinier (2004) added on to Bell’s (1980) theory by coining “interest divergence”, the opposite of interest convergence. Interest divergence posits that there are times when middle- and upper-class Whites have much to gain from the continual oppression and exclusion of Blacks, and thus work against racial justice movements. Interest divergence can also occur when Whites in power divide groups like poor Blacks and poor Whites along racial lines, even though their economic interests would converge (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2001). In my study, I see instances of interest divergence when teachers justify not centering race and racism in their curriculum by talking about the need to uphold state standards even though state standards are oppressive and perpetuate hegemonic narratives about race and racism. I believe that it would be in the best interest of both the teacher and their students to teach and learn social studies in a race-conscious manner, but some teachers falsely see a divergence in their interest to uphold the state standards and their students' interest in learning about race and racism.

Racial liberalism is derived from the notion of liberalism that upholds the role of government is to “maximize liberty” and enforce “formal equality in treatment of all citizens” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 178). Racial liberalism advocates for color-blind approaches in legal and social settings, arguing that focusing on race and racism fosters more discord than it does progress. Liberalists also say that the United States is in a post-racial stage since the election of Barack Obama. Critiques of racial liberalism argue that color-blind politics are masked in rhetoric of inclusion and equity for all, but really just offer more privileges to Whites, and perpetuate racism (Guinier, 2004). Some teachers in my study used language of racial liberalism to justify not centering race and racism in their curriculum, including saying that “things have gotten a lot better.” I situate their attitudes within racial liberalism. It took over a decade for CRT to catch-on as a framework for educational research, but eventually it did.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In the vein of seeing racism as a pervasive force in society, as CRT suggests, Gloria Ladson-Billings connected CRT to educational scholarship when she

acknowledged the breadth of scholarship about good teaching, but asked “Why does so little of it seem to occur in classrooms populated by African American students” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 484). Ladson-Billings (1995) coined the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy to explain an assets-based pedagogy for teaching Black children, rooted in the idea that a child’s culture is something to be valued, and centered in education, not erased or vilified.

Delpit (1995) also called for culture to be treated as an asset and centered in the teaching of non-white students. In Delpit’s *Other People’s Children* she called for power dynamics to be centered in the classroom and for “the culture of power,” or the rules and norms of the people who have power, to be explicitly taught to students (p. 25). She made it clear that she does not advocate for the erasure of students’ home culture, but that for a student to be successful in the world, they must have insider knowledge about the “culture of power,” and its explicit rules. Delpit wrote

I believe strongly that each cultural group should have the right to maintain its own language style... When I speak of the culture of power, I don’t speak of how I wish things to be, but of how they are... I tell them [my students] that their language and cultural style is unique and wonderful but that there is a political power game that is also being played, and if they want to be in on that game there are certain games that they too must play. (pp. 39-40)

I believe that Delpit’s work is sometimes misconstrued by teachers who use it to justify teaching in a whitewashed way. Some teachers in my study referenced Delpit’s ideas (without citing her specifically), by saying that they teach their curriculum not because

they think it's representative of their student's identities, but because they think it will help students "play the game" of navigating power structures. Other teachers correctly interpret Delpit's work and use her ideas of the "culture of power" to structure unpacking power dynamics in their curriculum.

In 2014, Paris and Alim offered a constructive critique to Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy: culturally sustaining pedagogy. They said that it was not necessary for students' cultures to be made relevant to the dominant culture, and rather students' home cultures should be honored and centered in the classroom liberated from the dominant gaze. To this point they asked "what if, indeed, the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms but to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their heritage and community practices?" (p. 86). They also argued that as American society becomes increasingly multilingual and multicultural, the "culture of power" will shift away from White middle-class norms, and towards other cultural ways of being, so a culturally sustaining pedagogy is needed to ensure equity, access and opportunity (Delpit, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014). My work is situated in the realm of culturally sustaining pedagogy as an extension of culturally relevant pedagogy because some of the teachers in my study emphasize the importance of honoring students' knowledge outside of the lens of the dominant culture, while others see their job as helping students conform to the dominant culture.

Culturally relevant pedagogy has been used and misused since Ladson-Billings introduced the idea in 1995, but it was not until the early 2000's that social studies

researchers began to take hold of the theory and apply it to social studies curriculum and pedagogy.

Social Studies Curriculum

Social studies has a long and complicated history in the American education system. Since its inception in the early 1900s, social studies' aim was to create socially efficient members of society while being aligned with other related subjects.

Understanding the purpose of American history as a K-12 subject is crucial in understanding the decision-making process of the teachers I will be interviewing.

History has long been taught in schools with the purpose of educating students about important events that shaped the world. Both willingly and unwillingly, social studies educators often teach within the tradition that it is their responsibility to provide a "unified message of what it means to be an American citizen," even when the content is not American history (Journell, 2011, p. 5). Textbooks, often written in the voice of an omniscient narrator, as opposed to a historian interpreting the complexities of existing historiography and primary sources in order to make a disputable argument, tend to provide students with a shallow understanding of American history (Loewen, 1996). Scholars have studied textbooks' inadequacies for decades, including the ways that they gloss over events, overgeneralize important nuances, and exclude the experiences and narratives of certain groups. (Allen, 1971; Apple, 1993; Banks, 1969; Brown & Brown, 2010; Gordy & Pritchard, 1995; Griffin & James, 2018; King, 2015, 2014; Loewen, 1995, 2008 Van Sledright, 2003; Woodson, 2015). More often than not, this type of hegemonic pedagogy relegates any person who is not a white, wealthy male to the

sidebars and footnotes of history textbooks (Brown & Brown, 2010). Subsequently, students whose backgrounds are not highlighted in traditional history texts and lessons often feel disengaged from social studies courses (Almarza, 2001; Almarza & Fehn, 1998; Epstein, 1998;).

State social-studies standards often use language that codifies the adherence to white, hegemonic norms in a way that makes it challenging for social studies educators to deviate from the mainstream narrative (Cuenca, 2019). In essence, the traditional practices of social studies education seek to deliver a singular message about the course of history that tends to elevate white, male, middle and upper-middle class narratives and often quiets the perspectives and stories of women and people of color.

Textbook authors have long treated women and minorities as sidebars and footnotes that are separate from the main narrative (Loewen, 2008). Additionally, textbooks tend to tell stories about America's racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups that are one-dimensional and riddled with stereotypes (Cruz, 1994; Hawkins & Buckendorf, 2010; Loewen, 2008; Sanchez, 2007; Shocker & Woyshner, 2013; Shadowwalker, 2012). Textbooks also tend to gloss over controversial moments in history to maintain the narrative of white heroism and minority exoticism. In American history, events like abolitionism, women's suffrage, and the Civil Rights Movement are often sanitized and whitewashed, leaving no room for discourse and multiple perspectives (King, 2015; Lowen, 2008; Swalwell, 2015; Woodson, 2015).

One example of a problematic social studies textbook is *Our Virginia: Past and Present* (2010), the fourth grade Virginia Studies textbook. Civil War historian Carol

Sheriff critiqued *Our Virginia*, which her daughter read in school, for being historically inaccurate and disingenuously racially inclusive, and for perpetuating common misconceptions about the Civil War (Sheriff, 2012). Sheriff concluded that this Virginia studies textbook, one of three state-approved textbooks for the course, was not reviewed properly. In fact, there were no professional historians on the review panel of any of the Virginia studies textbooks approved in Virginia, nor the fifth grade U.S. history textbooks used in Virginia (Sherriff, 2012). This is all to say that textbooks, while useful in helping teachers construct a cohesive curricular narrative, are often oversimplified to the point of inaccuracy, and riddled with misinformation.

While many teachers know that using textbooks is problematic because textbooks put forth a whitewashed narrative, they often use the textbook anyway because they feel that they have no other easy options to meet the standards and teach the content. In my research I am interested in seeing how teachers navigate the use of textbooks and other mass-marketed curriculum. Social studies scholars have examined the ways that social studies can move towards a more inclusive and anti-racist subject by applying critical race theory to curricular and pedagogical analysis of the discipline (Howard, 2003; King, 2014, 2015; Santiago, 2019; Tyson, 2003; Woodson, 2015)

Critical Race Theory and Social Studies

It took social studies scholars a long time to take up the work of applying critical race theory to the field of social studies education. In 2003, Ladson-Billings published *Critical Race Theory Perspectives on the Social Studies: The Profession, Policies and Curriculum* as an attempt to invigorate social studies scholarship towards studying race

and racism as it plays out in all aspects of education. She wrote about her disappointment in the field of social studies for not taking up issues of race and racism and called out racial silencing in all areas of the field, including the curriculum.

Several scholars took up her call to study race and racism in social studies education. Howard (2003) argued for the importance of giving students the space to study race in their social studies classes, saying “social studies educators have a moral imperative to address racism for the sake of strengthening and preserving democracy...Social studies educators need to view the quest for racial equity as not a potential area for inquiry, but as a democratic obligation” (p. 39). Tyson (2003) also linked social studies education to culturally relevant pedagogy and critical race theory.

In 2004, Howard studied how one teacher situated the study of race in her American history class and provided several recommendations for moving social studies discourse forward in the study of race and racism. His finds were: problematize biological definitions of race and move towards understanding race as a social construction, acknowledge the historical legacy of racism and the way it shapes people’s lives today, engage students in critical conversations about race and racism, commit to developing students into democratic citizens who work for equity and justice (Howard, 2004, p. 499). My study builds off of these four tenants of race-conscious social studies to examine how teachers actually enact these practices in their curriculum.

It still took social studies scholars some time to take up the work of theorizing about racial discourse in social studies education, but now there is a breadth of scholarship on the matter. This review is not exhaustive, but I will highlight prominent

scholarship in the field of critical race theory in social studies education. Some scholars have focused on how Black people and their experiences are represented in textbooks and social studies curriculum, concluding that they are often oversimplified, victimized or excluded altogether (Anderson, 2013; Au & Brown, 2014; Au, Brown, Calderon, 2016; Brown & Brown, 2015; King, 2014, 2015). Other scholars have focused on the representation and inclusion of Latinx people and experiences concluding that they are also often oversimplified, victimize, excluded, or essentialized in a way that erases their unique history and groups them monolithically with other people of color (Nieto, 2004; Santiago, 2019, 2020). An (2016) and Chan (2007) have studied curricular representation of Asian-Americans in U.S. history, concluding that not only are Asian-Americans underrepresented in curriculum, they are also understudied in the academic scholarship. American Indians were treated in textbooks as historical things of the past, without a connection to the present day (Shadowwalker, 2012). Chandler (2010) also found that race was rarely mentioned when discussing indigenous and colonizer interactions.

Scholars have also examined state standards, analyzing the ways that the standards promote the master narrative, or include non-white histories. Journell (2008, 2009) studied the ways that African Americans and American Indians were represented in state standards. In his study of standards from nine states, Journell found that the standards tended to focus on Black oppression or liberation, with largely no mention of broader contributions to American society and culture. Similarly, he found that state standards tended to exclusively focus on the victimization of American Indians in the past, rather than their contributions to society through the modern day. While my study

does not specifically examine standards, standards are relevant to my work because teachers use standards as a basis for the curriculum they choose to create and enact (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Ball & Cohen; Ross, 2006).

My study agrees with Anderson (2011) who said that standards “do not necessarily represent the enacted curriculum, they must be taken seriously as socio-cultural artifacts or lenses into what American society collectively believes is most important for children to learn about our past” (p. 81). I also agree with Heilig et al. (2012) who found in their analysis of Texas 11th-grade U.S. History standards that standards may appear to address race, while in fact marginalizing or essentializing it. They called this the “illusion of inclusion,” which I believe translates to how some teachers in my study talk about race and racism in their curriculum; indirectly talking about race and racism, only focusing on heroes from a specific race without actually discussing the implications of their race, and focusing on the ways that the U.S. government has been an agent of social change, instead of a perpetrator of systemic inequality (Heilig et al., 2012). In my work, I acknowledge that standards put forward the whitewashed master narrative of history and argue that teachers may use the standards as an excuse for not talking about race and racism in their courses.

The school in my study does not mandate the use of textbooks because of the ways that they problematically discuss race and racism amongst other issues. Because of this, I am curious about how the teachers in my study use other resources to teach about race and racism. Do they seek out resources that offer vastly different Although some works of prominent historians have been adapted for uses in schools such as Takaki’s *A*

Different Mirror, Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, and Dunbar-Ortiz's *An Indigenous People's History of the United States*, not all teachers have found those works, or ones like it, and made use of them in place of textbooks.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Social Studies

Just as it took scholars a long time to take up critical race theory in the realm of social studies education, it also took them quite some time to seriously take up culturally relevant pedagogy in social studies research. After Ladson-Billings' (2003), Howard's (2003) and Tyson's (2003) call to action for scholars to take up the work of theorizing and analyzing race and racism's impact in social studies it was still several years before much scholarship was published in social studies education that utilized culturally relevant pedagogy as a framework.

Several scholars have analyzed the impacts and efficacy of centering race and racism in history classes for a variety of students. Epstein, Mayorga and Nelson (2011) found in their study of urban low-income Black and Latinx high school students that using culturally relevant pedagogy had several positive effects on their understanding of race, racism and agency in American history. Using culturally relevant pedagogy to teach about race and racism allows for students to gain more complex views of race and racism beyond just recognizing heroes, acts of violence and individual victimization. Martell (2013, 2016) also noted positive effects for both students of color and White students when he centered race in his U.S. history curriculum using a culturally relevant pedagogy framework.

However, not all instances of teachers centering race and racism in the classroom were positive. Chikkatur's (2013) study of an African-American History class in a racially diverse classroom concluded that the course failed to give students a critical framework for understanding the ongoing impacts of race and racism in society. In Chikkatur's study the teacher was unprepared to teach the course, had hesitations about discussing race in a critical way, and was not given enough emotional support from the school to assist her in the emotional labor she was undertaking. Clearly it is not enough for teachers to just discuss instances of race and racism in history and social studies--harm can be done to students when these topics are discussed too callously. Scholarship has shown that teachers need to be intentional, have adequate knowledge and be competent in culturally relevant pedagogies in order to effectively teach about race and racism (Chikkatur, 2013; Epstein et al., 2011; Martell, 2013, 2016; Washington & Humphries, 2011). Along those lines, Milner (2015) suggested that teacher education curricula needs to shift to include more coursework that prepares teachers to discuss and teach race in a critical way, such as sociology, cultural studies, Africana studies, social work, and anthropology. If teachers do not have adequate preparation for teaching about race in a critical way, they will cause more harm than good to their students (Milner, 2015). The implications of my research fit within this conversation because it could shed light on future directions for pre-service teacher training and professional development to prepare teachers for critical race conversations in their pedagogy and curriculum.

Racial Literacy

The idea of racial literacy was coined as a critique of racial liberalism. Guinier (2004) said racial literacy is a “dynamic framework for understanding American racism” and should be employed as a tool in all facets of American life by people of all racial backgrounds (p. 114). According to Guinier, the three tenants of racial literacy are: acknowledging that while individual agency plays a role in perpetuating racism, racism is, at its core, a structural phenomenon; analyzing the intersection of race and power dynamics; identifying the ways that race intersects with gender, class and sexuality.

Scholars in education have employed racial literacy to make sense of the ways teachers and students talk and learn about race in a school setting. Skerrett (2011) studied the ways that two English teachers engage in racial literacy instruction. In her study she identified three approaches to racial literacy: “incidental and ill-informed, apprehensive and authorized, and sustained and strategic” (p. 313). A teacher whose racial literacy was “incidental and ill-informed” might only address racism as an aside from the regular curriculum, or as a “warm-up” activity preceding other topics (p. 322). They also might only discuss race when students bring it up first. A teacher in this category may lack the skills and knowledge necessary for critical racial literacy instruction. According to Skerrett, using this method of racial literacy sends students the message that “race and racism are illegitimate or inconsequential educational topics” (p. 321). A teacher in the “authorized and apprehensive” category may feel uncertain about discussing race with their students, and may rely on limited curriculum texts that actually discuss race to authorize the conversation. In my study, I would add that a teacher whose racial literacy

is “apprehensive and authorized” only teaches about race when there is an explicit mention in the standards (p. 319). This approach limits students’ growth and knowledge because their teacher is not willing to discuss race unless it is explicitly authorized by the curriculum. Skerrett found that teachers in this category took on issues of race more readily when a figure of authority gave them resources to do so. The final category in Skerrett’s study was “sustained and strategic” (p. 325). A teacher in this category utilized racial literacy daily as a core “diagnostic tool” that guides their curriculum, philosophies and pedagogies. Teachers in this category used discussions of race to help students critique power structures and oppression, and some teachers helped students pursue their own activism work. Skerrett concluded that more professional development opportunities were needed to enhance teachers racial literacy, and provide them with a unified discourse with which to center their curriculum on race

Epstein and Gist (2015) built off of Skerrett’s (2011) study to examine the ways that humanities teachers employ “sustained and strategic” iterations of racial literacy in their curriculum and pedagogy. They found that teachers who employed such strategies built upon and extended students’ prior knowledge about race and racism by challenging their preconceived notions and countering deficit views the students may have held about other racial groups. Epstein and Schieble (2019) expanded on the ways that white teachers evade race and make race visible through racial literacy strategies. They found that even the white teachers with highly developed practices of sustained racial literacy displayed racial biases, or at times avoided certain topics. They concluded that teachers

need continuous professional development support and resources to sustain and further their racial literacy practices.

My work builds off of these studies of the ways teachers enact racial literacy in their curriculum and pedagogy. I employ Skerrett's (2011) racial literacy identities to make sense of the perceptions teachers in my study have about centering race and racism in their curriculum, and I draw similar conclusions that Skerrett (2011), Epstein and Gist (2015) and Epstein and Schieble (2019) drew about the need for sustained professional development. My study links racial literacy scholarship to scholarship that critiques common sense ideology as a justification of oppression in order to understand the complexities of how and why teachers choose to teach race-conscious social studies classes.

The Gap

My study expands on the body of scholarship that analyzes ways teachers enact critical race theory in their curriculum through culturally relevant pedagogy and racial literacy. Through examining teachers' perspectives on centering race in their curriculum, my study sheds light on ways that teachers justify the content of their curriculum and how that may or may not be race-conscious. My study does not address the intersection of race with other oppressed identities such as gender, sexuality and class. I have chosen to center my inquiry around race in social studies curriculum because I agree with scholars (Au, 2012; Crocco, 2012; King, 2019) who argued that quality social studies curricula that include a diversity of perspectives and narratives is paramount in

dismantling racism and educating all students to make positive changes in their communities.

Summary

In Chapter Two, I situated my study within the literature about critical race theory, culturally relevant pedagogy and racial literacy, and their applications in social studies education. My work expands upon existing knowledge about the ways teachers enact racial literacy and critical race theory to center race in their social studies curriculum in order to answer the following research questions: how do social studies teachers center race and racism in their curriculum? I also hope to answer the following secondary questions: how do teachers enact racial literacy when teaching race-conscious social studies and how do teachers justify teaching race-conscious social studies? In Chapter Three, I describe the methodology and theoretical framework for my qualitative case study.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the perceptions that social studies teachers have about centering race and racism in their curriculum. The intersection of anti-racist teacher identities and the impact on curricular choices is an underdeveloped area of study. In this study, I conducted interviews, classroom observations and document analysis of curricular materials with seven social studies teachers from the same secondary school. This study links previous research about anti-racism and critical race theory in social studies education to research about anti-racist social studies curriculum by investigating how the choices teachers make about their curriculum is affected by their relationship to anti-racist work. To this end, my research questions are: how do social studies teachers center race and racism in their curriculum? My work also addresses the following secondary research questions:

1. How do teachers enact racial literacy when teaching race-conscious social studies?
2. How do teachers justify teaching race-conscious social studies?

In the rest of this chapter, I explain the approach and design of my study, the setting and participants, and my data collection and analysis tools.

Study Rationale

My study is situated in the context of critical race theory, culturally relevant pedagogy, racial literacy and their applications in social studies education (Chikkatur,

2013; Guinier, 2004; Howard, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2003, 2014; King, 2014, 2015; Martell, 2013, 2017, 2019; Paris & Alim, 2014). By examining how social studies teachers center race and racism in their curriculum, I hope to identify barriers that prevent teachers from employing race-conscious curriculum, and entry points that allow teachers to create and access race-conscious curriculum. The findings from my work have the potential to inform pre-service teacher education in social studies and professional development for social studies teachers, as well as future directions for scholarship interested in normalizing race-conscious social studies curriculum.

Research Paradigm

I have chosen a qualitative research approach for my study. Creswell (2013) defined qualitative research as an inquiry approach that seeks to explore and understand “the meaning individuals ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). A qualitative framework for research fits best with my study because it acknowledges the nuances of human experiences and perspectives, and allows for the researcher to ascribe multiple meanings to make sense of phenomenon. While my study is grounded in critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), the other theories I employed in my data analysis emerged as I inductively created my framework of analysis (Creswell, 2013).

My work is framed within both a constructivist and transformative worldview. Within the paradigm of constructivism, I work under the assumption that the perspectives espoused by the teachers in my study are informed by their positionality in the world, and that my interpretation of their perspectives is couched within my positionality (Crotty, 1998). In order to unpack the ways the identities and background of my subjects inform

their perspectives on centering race and racism in social studies curriculum, I employ a framework of critical whiteness (Grinage, 2020; Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013; Picower, 2009). I also use a constructivist approach to position myself in the study, because I am an insider in my study as a colleague of the participants.

In addition to employing a constructivist approach to my research, I also employ a transformative worldview in my research as I engage in an analysis of racism, a critical social issue. While the five of the seven people in my study are white and do not experience racism, all of the participants of my study work with students who experience daily individual and structural racism. I believe that the ways teachers employ curriculum to help students learn and analyze race and racism have critical social and political implications that could either further justice, or further oppression (Mertens, 2010).

Choice of Method

I have chosen a case study framework for my research. According to Yin (2018), “the desired case should be a real-world phenomenon that has some concrete manifestation” (p. 31). The phenomenon in my study is the agency individual social studies teachers have at Valleydale Secondary School to make critical decisions about how they center race and racism in their curriculum. This phenomenon can be best described in case study research because I collect detailed information through multiple data collection procedures in order to understand the teacher's perspectives (Yin, 2018). In my study, I will be studying each teacher as a unique case so that I can understand their experiences as individuals. After analyzing each teacher as an individual, I will

compare their experiences and perspectives to draw broader conclusions about how teachers center race and racism in social studies, and implications for future work.

Setting and Participants

My research was conducted at Valleydale Secondary School (name has been changed). Valleydale Secondary School is a public school that serves sixth through twelfth graders. Valleydale is located in an inner-ring suburb of a large midwestern city, and serves students who live in Valleydale, in the neighboring city, and in neighboring suburbs. Valleydale serves approximately 1,000 students in grades six through twelve. The students are racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse: forty-three percent of students are Black (the district does not differentiate between African Americans and first or second generation African immigrants), twenty-two percent Latinx, seventeen percent Asian-American, sixteen percent White and one percent Native American. English-language learners make up twenty-one percent of the student population. In total, eighty-five percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunch in the district, although that number is slightly higher at the secondary school.

I have been a teacher at Valleydale for three years, and have worked in some capacity with all of my participants. There are eight social studies teachers in the Valleydale department, including myself, and I interviewed six of them. I asked each person that I interviewed, if they would be a part of my study during an in-person conversation. One member of the department declined to be a part of the study, but he was mentioned several times by other teachers in my study. I answered many of the interview questions (see Appendix A) in the introduction to my study, so as to position

my own perspective. I will discuss how I position myself as an insider later in this chapter.

The teachers in my study teach a variety of social studies courses and all of them have played a large role in the creation of the curriculum they use. Valleydale does not use standardized social studies curriculum or materials in any of the classes, although most of the classes have approved sets of textbooks that they may use. See *Table 1* for more information about the teachers I studied.

Table 1

Summary of Participants

Teacher	Race (self-described)	Grade(s) Currently Taught	Years Teaching	Years at Valleydale	Subject Currently Taught
Nea Ngo	Asian-American	Sixth Grade	2 years	1 year	State history
Self	White	7th Grade	3 years	3 years	American history
Carly Odin	White	Eighth Grade	6 years	6 years	Global studies
Trevor Potts	White	Ninth Grade	7 years	8 years	Human geography
Katherine Goodwin	White	Tenth Grade	19 Years	19 years	World history
Hannah Donahue	White	Eleventh Grade and Twelfth Grade	17 years	17 Years	American history, Sociology, Psychology, Civics
Roy Oliver	Multi-racial Asian-American and White	Sixth Grade and Ninth Grade	11 years	2 years	Youth Research Elective

The teachers I interviewed have a variety of teaching experiences: from one-year to twenty-years. Many of the teachers I interviewed have spent their entire careers at Valleydale Secondary School. While I did not focus on how years of teaching experience influences teacher perspectives about centering race and racism in curriculum, interviewing teachers who have different experience-levels may provide implications for both pre-service teacher education programs and continuing education professional development.

Researcher role and assumptions. It is important to acknowledge that I am a member of the group of teachers I am studying. My case study is set in the school that I currently teach in. Because I am so close to the people I am studying, I must acknowledge the biases I may bring into this research. Before I began my research, I already had perceptions and judgments about the teachers in my study. I will be going into my research with these biases and assumptions about the way they teach and their attitudes towards anti-racist work based on my experiences working with many of them for several years. In order to mitigate my personal biases, I balance participant-observations with use of direct quotations from interviews, and summaries and analysis of curriculum documents.

In order to navigate my role as an insider in a case study, I draw on Yin (2018) who named participant observation as one of six major forms of valid data in case study methodology. He wrote about the distinct opportunity participant-observation offers to case study evidence collection, saying, “the ability to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone ‘inside’ a case rather than external to it. Many have argued that such a

perspective is invaluable in producing an accurate portrayal of a case study phenomenon” (p. 117).

While conventional case study asserts objectivity, and sees potential bias as a weakness (Yin, 2018), I also draw on Smith (1999) who wrote about decolonizing methodologies and the importance of representation in research of colonized peoples. Smith (1999) wrote, representation in research with Indigenous communities “spans both the notion of representation as a political concept and representations as a form of voice and expression” (p. 150). While I am not specifically researching colonized people, I situate my work within Emdin’s (2016) assertion that Black and Brown urban youth are “neindigenous” and share experiences that are “deeply connected to the indigenous experience” (p. 26). I assert that the urban youth Valleydale teachers work with are “neindigenous”, and thus teachers are neocolonialists. Therefore, effective research that will ultimately serve the students whose minds and bodies are oppressed and controlled by schooling must be decolonized.

I aim to decolonize my research by positioning myself using Smith’s (1999) frameworks for case study. I argue that the perspectives I share in my data analysis are important parts of identifying ways that curriculum that inadequately centers race and racism perpetuate harm and oppression. An outsider may miss the importance of seemingly neutral statements from my participants, but as an insider, I share a context with my participants that allow for a more nuanced interpretation of the data. Smith (1999) wrote of critical questions that Indigenous communities and activists often ask when constructing knowledge. One of Smith’s critical questions is especially relevant in

my argument for the importance of interrogating participant neutrality as a potential form of oppression is this: “whose interest does it [research] serve?” (p. 10). Ultimately, I hope that my research serves the interests of my Black and Brown students who need social studies curriculum to be a space that interrogates race and racism, and represents their heritages.

Methodology

My case study will rely on data gathered in interviews, classroom observations and document analysis of curricular materials. Additionally, I also rely on participant-observation that occurred at non-planned times throughout the duration of my study. I inductively build on my data and theoretical framings throughout the course of my data analysis, and seek to balance broad conclusions about social studies curriculum with the validity and importance of individual stories (Creswell, 2018, p. 4).

Interview. Each of the people in my study participated in one interview that lasted twenty to forty-five minutes. The interview was semi-structured and focused on how teachers perceive the importance of race and racism in social studies broadly, and in their own classes and curriculum. The interview questions can be found in *Appendix A*. During the interview I recorded participants using the Google Pixel Recorder (™) app. I also jotted down brief notes of my questions and impressions during the interview.

Classroom Observation. I planned to conduct 2-3 classroom observations of teachers in my study. Teachers in my study knew that I was interested in observing a lesson that centered race or racism, but they had the freedom to invite me to observe in any class regardless of the materials covered. Due to school closures because of

COVID-19, I was unable to conduct classroom observations (see limitations in Chapter five). See *Appendix B* for the classroom observation template that I planned to use to collect data about my observations.

Document. The teachers in my study were asked to share at least one curricular material that they used in their class to teach about race and racism. The purpose of collecting these documents was to better understand how the teachers in my study actually enacted centering race and racism in their curriculum, as opposed to just how they perceived it.

Data Analysis

After I collected my data, I followed Creswell's (2018) procedures for analyzing qualitative data. First I transcribed the interviews utilizing the transcription tool of the Google Pixel Recorder (™) app, and typed up my interview notes and other field notes. Then, I read through the transcriptions and edited obvious errors that the software made when automatically transcribing the audio. Before I read through my data, I noted several expected codes: common-sense, reference to standards, explicitly anti-racist practices and the centering of student identities and experiences. These expected codes were based on my framework of critical race theory and culturally relevant pedagogy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Next, I read through all of the data from my interviews, field notes and document analysis and began to use open codes to identify themes in individual interviews, taking notes in the margins. I then reread the codes and looked for broader themes across the

interviews. Since the unit of my case study is the individual teacher, I framed my analysis of the codified themes through an analysis of individual teachers' stories.

I employed a post-structural approach to analytical theory and inductively added theoretical frameworks to make sense of my data. As I began to analyze my data, I intended to utilize Kumashiro's (2015) framework of common sense to understand why teachers decided to center race in their curriculum or not. Kumashiro described common sense as the idea of "what schools *should* be doing" not what they "*could* be doing" (p. xxxv). Using common sense as a justification for maintaining the status quo is a tool of oppression because it normalizes "instances of religious intolerance, racial discrimination, gender inequity, economic bias" using a moralistic language about the purpose of school and "the way things are supposed to be" (p. xxxvi). Because of conversations I have had with several of the teachers in my study after we read part of Kumashiro's work in a professional development workshop in the Fall of 2019, I predicted that several of them would use language about what social studies teachers "should teach" because of "what it has always been" to justify not centering race in their curriculum.

After my initial data analysis, I realized I needed to apply more than Kumashiro's (2015) framework of common-sense to understand the ways my participants were thinking about centering race in their curriculum. In order to understand the ways that certain white teachers in my study justified how they centered race in their curriculum I employed Picower's (2009) tools of Whiteness, which she says are "designed to protect and maintain dominant and stereotypical understandings of race" (p. 197). I choose to

utilize Picower's (2009) tools of Whiteness because the teachers who had more problematic perceptions of centering race and racism in their curriculum were white, and used language about their position as a white woman to describe some of their curricular choices. I also utilized Skerrett's (2011) racial literacy teacher identities to identify how the teachers in my study use racial literacy to discuss race in their curriculum, or how they avoid or minimize doing-so. Combining Picower's (2009) tools of Whiteness and Skerrett's (2011) racial literacy identities allowed me to unpack the complex ways teachers in my study talked about centering race and link that to their identities.

I also employed Leonardo and Zembylas' (2013) theory that Whiteness is a technology of affect to understand the ways that the white teachers in my study employed their emotions and white privilege to justify the ways they centered race and racism in their curriculum. Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) introduced the idea of a "white intellectual alibis," or a White person who attempts to project a non-racist persona rather than actually aligning themselves with anti-racist work. (p. 150). I used their framework to identify instances of performative non-racist "image management" and differentiate those instances from genuine anti-racist work.

Finally, I also applied Grinage's (2020) critique of neoliberal multiculturalism in a professional development workshop to the ways certain teachers in my study centered race in their curriculum. Grinage analyzed the way a professional development study employed superficial multiculturalism to "persuade white teachers to embrace a non-critical definition of racial equity" (p. 1). I apply this idea to how some teachers in my study justify a non-critical or non-existent approach to teaching about race. Rather

than centering their curriculum around a critical interrogation of race and racism in the past and present, some teachers in my study avoided directly talking about race in class in favor of focusing on shallow aspects of multiculturalism, like the culture ABCs (see Carly Odin).

I utilize the works of the aforementioned scholars to create a theoretical framework for my data analysis that elucidates the ways teachers center race in their classroom, and the justifications they have for doing so.

Validity. I used multiple validity procedures to interrogate the validity of my findings (Creswell, 2018). First, I seek to center my positionality and biases as an insider because I am a member of the studied group. I also triangulate my data sources by drawing on interviews, classroom observations, participant-observation and document analysis of multiple teachers. I also utilized member-checking by asking follow-up questions after my initial interviews to make sure I understood the teacher correctly. Additionally, when constructing the analyses of teachers, I make sure to present negative or discrepant information that runs counter to my hypotheses, based on my prior experiences with them as coworkers, about how their perceptions of center race in their curriculum. Finally, I analyzed my data using critical race theory, racial literacy theory and whiteness theory to add an essential framework that corroborates my findings.

Ethical considerations. The Hamline University Internal Review Board (IRB) approved this study. Valleydale School District also approved this study. I keep names and any other identifying characteristics of the people in my study, and the school they work at anonymous. Participants in my study consented to the research, and were able to

remove themselves from the study at any time, although no one chose to do that.

Additionally, I would like to note that one of the members of my review committee was a participant in my study.

Summary

In this section, I have described my study, reiterated the rationale for it, explained the setting and participants, described the methodology and theoretical frameworks for my study and explained my approach to data analysis. In Chapter Four, I explain my findings in order to answer my research question: How do social studies teachers center race and racism in their curriculum? How do teachers enact racial literacy when teaching race-conscious social studies? How do teachers justify teaching race-conscious social studies?

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the results of my study. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the ways that the Valleydale Secondary School social studies teachers' center race and racism in their curriculum, and how they enact racial literacy to justify their work. My research questions were: how do social studies teachers center race and racism in their curriculum? How do teachers enact racial literacy when teaching race-conscious social studies? How do teachers justify teaching race-conscious social studies?

In order to answer that question, I interviewed six teachers and two curriculum administrators and gathered samples of their curriculum materials in a midwestern, inner-ring suburban public school called Valleydale Secondary School. Because of COVID-19 school closure, I was unable to conduct the classroom observations I described in my methodology. I am an insider in this study because I work at Valleydale in the same department as the participants of my study. In this chapter, I explain the findings from my interviews, document analysis and participant-observation.

From my data analysis, several themes emerged about why teachers chose to engage deeply with race and racism in their curriculum or why they did not. The eight individuals I interviewed all had different experiences and perspectives about how and why they discuss race and racism in their curriculum. The two curriculum coordinators were very clear about their support of centering race in social studies curricula, and had

much to share about how they try to support teachers in doing-so. In contrast, three of the teachers I interviewed, Carly Odin, Hannah Donahue and Katherine Goodwin were uncertain about how their curriculum could center race. I classified Odin, Donahue and Goodwin using Skerrett's (2011) racial literacy teacher identities as being "reluctant" and "emerging" in their practices of race-conscious curriculum creation because they had limited and/ or inconsistent evidence of centering race in their curriculum. The other three teachers, Trevor Potts, Roy Oliver and Nea Ngo all described thoughtful and consistent practices of centering race in their curricula. I classified Potts, Oliver and Ngo using Skerrett's (2011) racial literacy teacher identities as being "sustained" and "grounded" in their practices of race-conscious curriculum creation because they had abundant evidence of centering race in their curriculum throughout the year.

While I do highlight the perspectives of the five people interviewed who see a clear link between antiracism work and social studies curriculum, I focus the bulk of my analysis on the teachers who demonstrated "reluctant" and "emerging" practices of race-conscious curriculum, Odin, Donahue and Goodwin. In focusing on the teachers who are more anchored to traditional standards, that focus on white narratives and soft multiculturalism, I hope to shed light on why teachers do not consistently center race in their curriculum despite administrative support to do-so, and departmental colleagues who are already doing it.

In the following chapter, I analyze each person I interviewed one at a time, using their pseudonym. I begin with the Curriculum Coordinators to set the tone for how the department is being led and guided.

The Curriculum Coordinators

Jessica Cortland

Jessica Cortland has been at Valleydale Secondary School for her whole career. She started her career as a social studies teacher and has also been an instructional coach and a curriculum coordinator. Currently, she is the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the district. She described her job as the following, “I get to work with teachers, including social studies teachers and building administrators to regularly revise and improve curriculum district-wide.” I interviewed Cortland after I had interviewed all of the other teachers in the study. I was curious to see how her perspective on antiracism in social studies curriculum would differ, or echo what the teachers I interviewed said. From the beginning of our interview, it became clear that Cortland believed that a teacher’s social studies curriculum should be explicitly anti-racist. She said,

You can’t tell the story of the past without acknowledging the common thread that runs through everything in history, which is race and racism. You are not equipped to be a teacher of history if you are not willing, ready and able to relate your coursework to the idea and the specific instances of systemic racism, and the impact of race on our history. If you do not do those things, you are perpetuating the white supremacy of our traditional history storytelling.

She explained that teachers often teach from their own experience as a student, and from a place of adhering to standards. This echoes the idea that teachers’ adherence to the common sense idea of what they *should* be teaching gets in the way of unpacking the oppressive structures that drive history (Kumashiro, 2015). This adherence to common

sense about what history should be limits teachers from expanding their curriculum beyond the master narrative and into a counternarrative, antiracist realm (Brown & Au, 2015).

As for her role in helping teachers pursue antiracist curriculum aspirations, Cortland sees it as twofold. First, she works with teachers to find appropriate resources for their classrooms that fit “the values and vision for instruction at Valleydale” which she described as,

...decentering the colonial perspective as much as possible and really ensuring that the whole history is told, and that we’re telling the story not from those in power, but from as many primary sources and perspectives as possible, and constantly searching for the missing narrative.

She said that the widely available curricula from high-frequency educational publishing sources often do not fit that model of social studies, and so she tries to help teachers look elsewhere. She also explained that supervisors and administrators must “look for opportunities and support teachers in attending opportunities that provide them with the chance to engage in professional development which gives them an opportunity to learn deeply the missing pieces of history from their own education.”

I have worked closely with Cortland in developing curriculum for my own class. She was the person who told me when I first started at Valleydale that my class had no resources because they could not find a middle-school American history textbook that mirrored Valleydale’s commitment to racial equity. In my experience working with Cortland, it was always clear to me that she believed in the importance of a critical

race-conscious social studies curriculum. However Cortland's job is very challenging because she is the sole director of curriculum for the elementary, secondary and alternative secondary school in the district.

Elise Middler

Elise Middler is the curriculum coordinator for Valleydale Secondary School. Previously, she worked as the school's librarian. She explained her job as, "I support teachers with sort of the backend stuff of what they teach, what materials they use, and how to get those materials straight into their classroom." Middler reports to Cortland and works closely with her to provide teachers with curricular materials, and professional development opportunities. I have worked closely with Elise Middler on curriculum for my own class, and am close friends with her outside of work. I was curious to see what she would say about social studies curricula and antiracism in our interview, and how that would be reflective of the work we have actually done together.

In my experience working with Middler, she has been passionate about finding resources for students that reflect the multicultural history of the United States and examine the deep systemic oppression of our nation. She is also insistent on making sure that the curriculum we create can be clearly tied to the standards one way or another, even if that means focusing more on white narratives. For example, when Middler and I were creating a thematic unit about American identity with a focus on immigration, Middler insisted that the mid-unit assessment focused on European immigration, because those were the examples in the standards, even though that is less relevant to our students than African, Latinx or Asian immigration.

Middler was clearly torn between wanting to be explicitly in support of antiracist curriculum and wanting to make sure that standards are being met. She said,

To me, race and racism is the biggest issue society is dealing with and that's what social studies is all about. It should be at the core of, and truly inform the curriculum we use and what we teach. I sometimes feel like standards are still reinforcing the cannon idea of what American history should be. And, well, the standards give us a kind of guide to make sure that we are covering the things that kids need to learn, so I think that a teacher can work within those to make sure that all stories are being told, and that we are teaching kids to be critical thinkers and civically engaged.

Her belief that race and racism should be at the core of social studies curriculum echoes the antiracist ideas of the interviewees Oliver, Potts, Ngo and Cortland. Her belief that the existing standards should also be at the core of social studies curriculum complicates her commitment to antiracist teaching, however, because current social studies standards reinforce the master narrative of history and are justified with common sense thinking (Cuenca & Hawkman, 2019; Kumashiro, 2015).

When I asked Middler how she could help a teacher who is not sure how to center race and racism in their curriculum because of their perceived limitations in the standards, she said:

I feel like there are so many organizations doing the work to support teachers and figure out ways to make sure that the social studies curriculum is representative and social justice oriented. So, part of what I'm doing is wading and weaving

through all of the resources that are coming through and connecting teachers to professional development that might be relevant to them.

She told me that there are new professional development opportunities focused on highlighting Dakota and Ojibwe perspectives, and she makes sure that she connects that opportunity with Nea Ngo, who teaches the sixth grade course.

Next year the social studies department at Valleydale will be completing a curriculum review cycle. The curriculum review committee will be led by Cortland and Middler and have teacher, student and parent participants. One way that Middler hopes to help teachers adopt more antiracist curricular resources is by incorporating texts and histories suggested by Valleydale students and families. Middler also said that she hopes to move teachers away from teaching “bad history.” She said in her opinion “bad history” is “things like heroizing Christopher Columbus, or American exceptionalism.” She said that teachers can avoid perpetuating those history myths by putting primary sources from diverse perspectives in front of students and allowing them to make their own conclusions.

After I wrote this section I had a conversation with Middler where she told me that she has been rethinking her emphasis on state standards, and was interested to see how the standards might change in the upcoming state standard review cycle . She said, “So many of the standards focus on things that kids just don’t need to know. I have been thinking about that a lot since the death of George Floyd.” Middler’s new articulation of de-emphasizing standards bodes well for her and Cortland’s ability to push Valleydale social studies teachers to address race from a more critical standpoint in their curriculum.

Neither Middler nor Cortland spoke of supporting soft- or neoliberal-multiculturalism approaches to social studies curriculum (Grinage, 2020). Rather they both promoted a deep analysis of systemic racism through learning from diverse perspectives and directly addressing race (Grinage, 2020). Both Middler and Cortland mentioned standards, but did not think that standards should keep social studies teachers from centering race and racism in their classes because standards are broad and can easily encapsulate themes that are not explicitly stated in the standards.

Reluctant or Emerging Practices of Race-Conscious Curriculum

In this section, I discuss the three teachers I interviewed who were either reluctant to center race in their curriculum, or whose practices of centering race were emerging and inconsistent. I will explain their opinions about centering race and racism in their curriculum through Picower's (2009) tools of Whiteness, Kumashiro's (2015) framework of common-sense, Grinage's (2020) critique of neoliberal multiculturalism and Leonardo and Zembylas's (2013) theory of Whiteness as an intellectual alibi.

Carly Odin

Carly Odin has been teaching at Valleydale Secondary School for the full six years that she has been a teacher. Odin teaches eighth grade Global Studies. Odin has a reputation from students as being a very kind teacher who makes social studies interesting and fun, and as a teacher who is not fully supportive of the anti-racist direction Valleydale has taken its school-wide curriculum and pedagogy in the past two years. On two in-service days this past school year, when teachers had the option of selecting several professional development opportunities, Odin did not attend any of the optional

professional development sessions critiquing racism in schools. All of the other social studies teachers in this study attended the sessions critiquing anti-Blackness in schools and common-sense rhetoric as a tool of oppression.

I have noticed Odin's hesitancy to address issues of race in a direct way in the past two years that Valleydale has begun to center anti-racist practices. At one point last year, I had a meeting with her and Nea Ngo, another teacher in the study, about aligning the middle school social studies curriculum. Ngo and I talked about our interest in incorporating Black feminist theory into our middle school social studies courses, but Odin was not interested in joining the work, saying she would rather just focus on the curriculum she has. Her skepticism for anti-racist frameworks came through in our interview, and there were many points where I felt like she was giving a highly-scripted response to my questions.

In my interview with Odin, I was struck by how she rationalized her decision to not focus more on race, racism and anti-racist work in her curriculum. When I asked Odin about how race and racism play a role in social studies classes she said,

I think it has a huge role. I think it has the biggest role out of all of the classes at school and has the best opportunity to have those conversations. A lot of the times when we do hear from students, they are saying that they want to hear their own identities and perspectives in their classes. I can see how that would be really relevant in history, but I find it challenging to talk about in Global Studies, since we don't really talk about history in depth. I really don't teach about race, because I just teach based off of the Minnesota standards, and race and racism is not

anywhere in the standards. If race or racism is brought up in class organically, we would talk about it, but I'm not expected to reach race and racism because it's not anywhere in the standards.

Odin at once acknowledged the centrality of race and racism to social studies courses, while simultaneously disavowing its purpose in her own class. Citing the state standards, Odin said that race and racism do not fit into global studies curriculum. By using the state standards as justification for not talking about race and racism in her class, Odin employed the tool of inaction known as "out of my control" (Picower, 2009). Instead of looking at how race and racism could fit into the broad language of the global studies standards, Odin takes the standards literally when she creates her curriculum. This also reflects Skerrett's (2011) racial literacy identity of "incidental," or only talking about race if it's brought up by students. Instead of creating opportunities for students to critically interrogate race and racism in global studies, Odin chose to leave it out.

When I looked at the global studies state standards to see if they really were devoid of race and racism. I found that there were indeed zero mentions of race or racism in the standards, benchmarks and examples from the state Department of Education document explaining the standards. There were, however, two mentions of colonialism, one mention of westernization, nine mentions of capitalism, one mention of political and civil rights, and eight mentions of economic and social disparities, all of which are issues that are steeped in racist ideologies (Andreotti, 2011). There is also a full strand of eleven standards devoted to world history. Any of those eleven standards could be the baseline for teaching about race and racism in a global context.

Although Odin does not think that the state standards necessitate race and racism be taught in her class, she does acknowledge that students want to learn about race and racism. She tries to validate students' desires to learn about race by finding ways to include her students' identities in her global studies curriculum. Odin described the main way that she does this,

We spend a lot of time talking about culture at the beginning of the year, and to define it I have them look at the different letters of the alphabet. So like "A" is for art, "F" is for family, and so on. And then I have them write about themselves in their own culture. A student suggested that instead of just writing about it and sharing with a partner, we make it more of a project with a visual poster and more sharing. I thought that was a good idea because it could be more visual and something that I can keep in class. Maybe I would have every kid make a poster with the letters of their name and correspond that with the parts of culture form the cultural alphabet.

Though this story, Odin made it seem like talking about student identities, which would include race, is a sidebar component of her curriculum. The cultural alphabet, while not inherently a bad idea, is very much an example of "benevolent multiculturalism" and exploiting individualism by highlighting student backgrounds in an artificial, performative way (Grinage, 2020). Odin's discussion of race as a sidebar to the main curriculum is another example of how she embodies Skerrett's (2011) "incidental and ill-informed" practice of racial literacy.

Neither Jessica Cortland nor Elise Middler spoke about interpreting standards literally or using standards as an excuse to not talk about race and racism. It is curious to me that Odin read the standards so literally given that the two people who oversee social studies curriculum creation do not advocate for such a literal interpretation. Odin would be a prime candidate for the professional development opportunities that Cortland and Middler talked about being available for teachers to broaden their own knowledge of their content, so that they could make their curriculum more explicitly anti-racist (Skerrett, 2011).

Later in our interview, Odin acknowledged that social studies classes should be anti-racist, but that it is hard work for the teacher. She said that history textbooks are “written from, you know, a narrative of a white man, and that’s a perfect opportunity to bring in other perspectives, but that’s going to be a lot of work for the teacher.” She also talked about what it means to be anti-racist,

I think as a white woman for me I see it [anti-racism] as being open to having those hard conversations because students want to have those conversations. For me to be anti-racist I need to be able to be vulnerable myself, and have a space for students to feel comfortable sharing their ideas.

Odin clearly understands that race and racism are salient issues in her students lives, and wants to be open to talking about those issues. However, she seems uncertain how to insert those discussions into her curriculum in a strategic and sustained way so rather leaves it up to chance (Skerrett, 2011).

As Odin talked more about the work she does with her curriculum, I was struck by the time and effort she puts in year after year to make her curriculum better. She talked about using Teachers Pay Teachers to find new ideas, fiction like *The Red Pencil* and nonfiction like *I am Malala*. Odin's goals in finding a variety of sources beyond the textbook are to include more stories about the human experience. To this point, she said "global studies is more about facts and physical geography than people, but kids are more interested in people than facts."

Odin clearly understands that she could be incorporating race and racism in her curriculum in order to be an anti-racist educator, however she is stuck in a state of inaction. On the one hand, she employs a tool of Whiteness, "out of my control" by focusing on what the standards literally say and using them as an excuse for not teaching about race and racism. She is also steeped in the "common sense" of what global studies should be, instead of imagining what it could be.

She also talked about being open to ideas from students, and always looking for ways to improve her curriculum, so why does she not take more action to actually make her curriculum anti-racist? From my brief analysis of the global studies standards, it appears that Odin could insert more strategic discussions of race and racism in the following ways:

1. "Describe causes of economic imbalances and social inequalities among the world's peoples in the post-colonial world and efforts made to close those gaps" (State Standards, 2011, p. 93). In addressing this standard Odin could teach students about how globalization, capitalism and the resulting economic and

social disparities are fueled by white supremacy and cite specific examples such as the exploitation of Pacific Islanders' labor to extract natural resources from the land.

2. "Describe the locations of human populations and the cultural characteristics of Africa South of the Sahara, including the causes and effects of the demographic transition since 1945" (p. 87). While this standard uses coded language to talk about the impacts of European colonialism on African nations, Odin could directly talk about the racist motivations for colonizing Africa and the long-lasting impact of colonialism.

Perhaps when the state standards are revised in the upcoming year the global studies standards will more explicitly address race and racism, pushing Odin to adjust her curriculum. Either way, it is clear that Odin is willing to do continual work on her curriculum, but needs extra guidance in how to center race and racism.

Hannah Donahue

Hannah Donahue has been teaching at Valleydale Secondary School for the full seventeen years that she has been a teacher. She has taught many social studies courses at Valleydale, but at the time of our interview, she was teaching 11th grade American history, 12th grade civics, and sociology and government electives. Donahue is a veteran teacher, who is friends with other veteran teachers, many of whom ascribe to traditional ideas of what curriculum and pedagogy should be (Kumashiro, 2015). I do not know Donahue as well as I know the other teachers in this study, so I cannot share insights into her relationships with students and faculty as I could about other teachers in this study.

I will analyze the tension of Donahue's performative allyship and genuine attempts to incorporate race-conscious curriculum using Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) framework of whiteness as a technological praxis, Picower's (2009) tools of Whiteness and Kumashiro's (2015) common sense frameworks.

In our interview, I sensed that Donahue thought there were right and wrong answers to my questions and that she tried to give me the right answers and use buzzwords that were, in her mind, related to anti-racism. Most of the buzzwords that she used to talk about how she centers race and racism in her curriculum were from Hollie's (2017) culturally and linguistically responsive teaching program (CLR), a professional development product that Valleydale has invested heavily in the past few years. Some of the words that she used repeatedly in our interview were, "culturally and linguistically responsive", "validate and affirm," "building and bridging," "VABBing," even when they were out of context (Hollie, 2017). While CLR is not inherently flawed, it is ineffective if only utilized as performative buzzwords. Grinage (2020) wrote about a professional development program that sounds a lot like Hollie's CLR, and his critique of the program is that it offered White educators a path towards performative racial equity that is not grounded in anti-racist philosophies, but is, rather, shrouded in superficial multiculturalism that perpetuates common sense norms and oppression. Donahue's continual use of Hollie's (2017) CLR buzzwords made me question the depth at which she employed anti-racist practices in her curriculum.

When I asked Donahue about how race and racism plays a role in her social studies course she said

I think it's absolutely necessary. In most of the subjects that I teach, I'm always aware of it [race] and I'm always trying to give sort of the perspectives and the lenses on why we are here, and why we are the way we are. Especially with our students, it would be a disservice to just give the history of old dead white guys because it's not the full story. We also have discussions about how people in power get to determine the narrative, and then if there are things we don't hear about why is that? Was it just that it wasn't documented, or was it actively repressed or suppressed? I guess I don't have a deeper answer than just, you have to [talk about race and racism].

From this comment in the interview, it is clear that Donahue believes teaching about race and racism is important. When she said, "especially with our students" she was indirectly talking about the fact that most Valleydale students are people of color. She was direct, however, when she acknowledged that traditional history focuses on white men. Donahue acknowledged that racism is a systemic issue that is salient in both the past and present, a key part of racial literacy and culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Skerrett, 2011).

One example Donahue gave of how she centers race and racism in her Civics class is when she taught about Reconstruction. She said,

I showed a video about Reconstruction a couple days ago because I wanted to specifically point out to them the connection of everything they saw in the movie shows that the idea of creating a better society and creating equality for the freedmen was shot from the get-go because you had a president that was trying to

undermine it and you had a racist system because yeah, there were people in the South who wanted to keep a class system where Black people were at the bottom. And then we looked at voter turnout data today and the overall data by age and then by race. And then we talked about, so if people don't vote in these groups, do you think politicians listen to them? So how do you change that, and we also talked about how there is an element of racism in that system too, like they're not going to listen to your voice if you don't come out and vote, but then what are all those things that keep people from voting in those groups, and it's a chicken or egg thing.

Donahue's example of teaching about Reconstruction in this way was a good example of how she checks the boxes of centering race and racism in her curriculum, but her underlying motives for doing so are not for the liberation of her students, but rather to enhance her performative value signaling, or non-racist "image management" (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013, p. 151). Although I did not get to observe Donahue in the classroom during my study, I have seen her teach before and know that she relies on centering her own knowledge and expertise and spends a lot of time lecturing her students about the content. As a self-proclaimed nerd (she called herself that three times in the interview), Donahue enjoys talking about what she knows, and oftentimes she centers her own identity giving students knowledge about race and racism, even though she is a white woman.

After Donahue talked about how she connects Reconstruction to present day voting issues, she talked about how race and racism is brought up by her students,

...horribly frequently, to the point where I have to actively point out, “it’s getting better” and I don’t want to be too negative, because it’s really hard when we’re just talking about all of this horrible stuff that has happened in history, and all of the issues that we have with government. Sometimes I really feel like I have to point out that there has been progress even though our government isn’t perfect and hasn’t always been responsive to minorities. I try to make sure that we don’t always get so mired in thinking everything’s shot to hell.

On the one hand, Donahue seems to be saying that she does not want her curriculum about race and racism to only fit into the victimization narrative, which can be very harmful for students (King, 2014). But, on the other hand, Donahue was not able to give other examples of how she centers race and racism in her curriculum beyond the “horrible stuff,” nor was she able to give examples of how she empowers students to act against the inequities of our racist systems.

Donahue shared curricular materials with me that she uses to teach about the Civil Rights Movement. She shared a jigsaw activity where students read an excerpt of a Stokely Carmichael speech, an excerpt of a Malcolm X speech, or the Black Panther Party *Ten Point Program*, and discussed regional differences during the Civil Rights Movement and the pros and cons of a nonviolent approach. The activity was based on primary sources, and elevated Black voices to tell the story of the Civil Rights Movement. Although the lesson was about a predictable time in history when it is easy to center race, it was clearly a strong choice that checked all of the boxes of being race-conscious.

One example that shows the complexity of Donahue's perceptions about centering race and racism is when she talked about Black History Month. She said,

It's Black History Month right now and I don't traditionally do anything for Black History Month. My argument to kids when they ask, and they do ask, is to say I don't like the tokenism of only studying it during this one month. My hope is that, if I've been doing my job, you're going to feel like we've been talking about these things all year. Plus I have very mixed feelings about the idea of celebrating this one month but then what about American Indian students and Asian-Pacific Islander students? If we're going to do it then we should really do it for all groups. I think maybe next year I will try to do more of a focus on each of those groups during their month. I know that students want to do Black History Month, and ask why aren't we getting that? But I want it to be more equitable and I do think that we focus a little bit too much at our school on Black kids.

When Donahue began telling this story, her words reminded me of King and Brown's (2014) work about Black History Month, which critiqued the ways Black History Month allows educators to teach Black history in a non-critical way that focused on oversimplified and ahistorical heroes. While Donahue's critique of Black History Month is supported by academic work, based on her description of her students' reactions to not celebrating Black History Month in her classes, it seems like she is not effectively countering Black History Month with an interrogation of Black history all year. She also said that she does not teach Black History Month because she feels that it's unfair to teach that but not teach any other cultural history months because it feels tokenizing.

Leonardo & Zembylas' (2013) concept of the "white intellectual alibi" can be applied to Donahue's insistence of aligning herself with "non-racism" instead of with actual critical movement towards anti-racist projects (p. 150). Donahue is signaling that she values teaching Black history throughout the year, even if her actions, and her students' responses to her actions indicate she may not always be doing that.

At another point in our interview, she acknowledged that students think learning about race is important, but she framed herself as an expert, even though she is White and her students are mostly non-white. She said, "Our students are aware of the racism in the system, and want to talk about it, but even when I bring up certain things they get shocked and appalled. They certainly have their experiences with racism and prejudice and all that but not necessarily an understanding of it. That's my job." Donahue is again cultivating a complicated image of being a non-racist teacher who knows a lot about racism, without interrogating her own positionality as a White woman, and what that might mean for the content (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013).

Several times in our interview, Donahue framed herself as doing the good work of teaching about race and racism in her classes, in comparison to some of the other teachers at Valleydale (both social studies and not). At one point in our interview, when I asked her about how she teaches about racism, she instead talked about a conversation that she had with another social studies colleague (the only person in the department who did not want to take part in this study). I have changed this person's name for the sake of his privacy, even though he is not a part of this study. Brad Vaughn has taught at Valleydale

for nineteen years and is often the head of the social studies department. Donahue told a story about him:

Vaughn and I have been having a lot of conversations about whether we should teach students to question the narratives created by people in power. We end up getting into these really intense discussions about Reconstruction, and what happened to, you know... and how all of this now influences who can buy land in the South. Some people don't teach about race in their classes, but I think you have to.

Donahue told me she enjoys these intellectual debates with Vaughn, who she sees as more conservative than she is. Leonardo and Zembylas said, "whites have built anti-racist understanding that construct the racist as always someone else.... Whiteness is able to bifurcate whites into "good and "bad subjects" (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013, p. 151). During our interview, Donahue sometimes talked about what other teachers were doing wrong, instead of what she was actually doing in a way that seemed like she was trying to position herself as a "good white in here" as opposed to a "bad white out there" (p. 156).

Although Donahue is clearly doing good work in the realm of deconstructing the master narrative during certain points in history, she also talked a lot about how social studies classes should not be solely focused on anti-racism and dismantling the master narratives because, in her words, "students are still going out into a system that is not anti-racist, so we need to prepare them for that by sticking to some more traditional educational curriculum. We can't just blow up the whole system here and expect that students will survive in a broader world that is still racist and set up in an unequal way."

Here, Donahue employs several of Picower's (2009) tools of Whiteness as a way to justify her common sense approach to teaching American history and Civics (Kumashiro, 2015; Picower, 2009) . The first tool that she enacts is the “out of my control” tool, by saying that the world is racist, so there is no point in making her curriculum too anti-racist, because that does not reflect what the world is actually like. The second tool she uses is “I just want to help them”, because she wants to help prepare them for the racism they will inevitably face in the real world by replicating that in the content she teaches in the classroom.

Donahue’s pessimism and complacency for the racism in the world, as well as her lack of motivation to prepare students to challenge the world’s oppression, was disheartening, especially in comparison to some of her strong content-based examples of centering race in her curriculum (teaching Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement).

Donahue also utilized the “out of my control tool” to justify why she does not teach more about race and racism, blaming the state standards (Picower, 2009). She said, I think social studies is great for having conversations and trying to be more representative, and we can do those things to a certain extent, but I also think that we still need to teach the curriculum that the state has told us to if we are going to be held to that standard. If they [the state] doesn’t care, then fine, let’s totally blow it up, but if we’re going to have certain content standards that outside forces are enforcing, then we have to teach that whether or not it’s anti-racist.”

Donahue, like Carly Odin, appeared to be very concerned about following the standards so as to not get in trouble, even though Jessica Cortland and Elise Middler believe that the standards make plenty of space for anti-racist curriculum and that it is necessary for a social studies teacher to center race and racism in their content. Donahue has also been at Valleydale for seventeen years and is not at risk for losing her job. Her unwillingness to question the systems of power is not passive, but it is complicated. She clearly possesses racial literacy, because she understands that racism is a systemic problem, so why is she hesitant to make broader changes that truly challenge racism in social studies curriculum (Guinier, 2004; Skerrett, 2011)?

Katherine Goodwin

Katherine Goodwin has been teaching at Valleydale Secondary School for the full nineteen years that she has been a teacher. She has taught tenth grade world history for ten years. Goodwin is a veteran teacher who is friends with other veteran teachers who are steeped in common sense thinking about schooling and curriculum. She is also in the process of unpacking the ways that she and others may be replicating oppressive systems through their curriculum and pedagogy through personal reflection and conversations with like-minded individuals (Kumashiro, 2015). Goodwin was asked to be a member of a grassroots coalition of staff, administrators and teachers at Valleydale who are attempting to start a radical redesign of school practices towards an explicit anti-racist, anti-oppressive stance. Other members of the coalition include Trevor Potts, Roy Oliver, Nea Ngo and me. Goodwin has stated several times during coalition discussions that she is trying to listen and process what people are saying about how Valleydale's schooling

practices are oppressive without taking up too much reflection space herself. Goodwin is highly empathetic and thoughtful, and she is clearly working through how to shift her curriculum and pedagogy to center race more explicitly.

She has been one of my role models at Valleydale since I started there because she is caring and compassionate for students and staff. She is beloved by students who have had her because she is a good listener and is genuinely caring. She is highly self-critical because she cares so much about her students' well-being. Her self-criticism came through at times during our interview when she described her racial literacy abilities as worse than they actually were. During our interview Goodwin said, "I always want to learn new ways to be better, to show up better for our kids. I think that means rethinking what I've been teaching in social studies for forever." The tension between her career-long commitment to the common sense of what social studies and global history curriculum should be, and the anti-racist work that she is beginning to actively engage in, including the creation of race and racism centered curriculum, came through in our interview.

When I asked her about how she thought race and racism could be centered in her class she really did not mention race or racism in her response. Instead she said,

As a social studies teacher, I think it's my job to arm them [students] with knowledge, and really empower them as individual students. Even if they don't like history that much I feel a responsibility to give them the right knowledge that when they go out into the world they have a base of history and can talk intelligently about it. I care more about their ability to analyze an event and talk

intelligently about it, than whether they can remember dates and places, but they do need a critical base of knowledge. But it is a constant battle between doing that, and saying, does this really matter? I don't know if this [the topic she is teaching] matters to you [students] at all.

When I redirected her to talk about centering race and racism in social studies, she still had trouble articulating a connection:

I think that school is a ticket to more opportunities in the future, so I see my job as moving them [students] forward and opening up opportunities for them through not only the knowledge that they gain my class, but also just the credit they receive in taking my class. I want them to know that as 10th graders, part of their journey is to do well in this class, gain skills and then move forward and give themselves more opportunities. I don't know if that relates to race or racism necessarily, but I think that with the population that we work with, convincing them and helping them understand if they do well at this point in their life, you're going to have these opportunities in front of you.

It is clear from this part of the interview that Goodwin cares deeply about her students and their success. While she did not talk about specific ways her class could center race, she implied that race was a salient issue for her students when she said “with the population that we work with,” because most of her students are people of color. I found her avoidance of directly stating that her students and their families have been impacted by racism problematic. Without stating that she is actively trying to work against racist structures to help her students succeed, she employs one of Picower's performative tools

of whiteness, “*I just want to help them*” (Picower, 2009, p. 209). Although it is of course a teacher’s job to help students, the notion of helping becomes problematic when a white teacher believes that their sole role when working with students of color is as “the giver” and the students of color are only “the recipients” (p. 209).

Picower (2009) argued that using the tool of “*I just want to help them*” releases the participant from a personal duty to utilize racial literacy practices in the classroom to address how racism plays out in the pedagogy and curricula of classrooms, and instead fall back on a deficit perception of students’ experiences and abilities. While I do not think that Goodwin only sees her students through this type of deficit framework where they are the receivers and she is the giver of knowledge and skills, those ideas are wrapped up in how she thinks about the classes she teaches. While other teachers I interviewed (see Trevor Potts, Roy Oliver and Nea Ngo) talk about learning from their students’ experiences and knowledge as a way to shape the curriculum, Goodwin did not mention that at all in our interview.

Later in the interview, I asked Goodwin about how she brings in students’ identities to the curriculum and explained: “I often ask them what does this remind you of, or how does this event connect to your own life and identity? I do this usually at the beginning or the end of a unit.” While Goodwin cares a lot about what her students have to say, this strategy of indirectly addressing issues of race is a demonstration of how certain aspects of her racial literacy practices are incidental as opposed to strategic (Skerrett, 2011).

Goodwin also struggles with her navigating how her identity as a white woman might impact her relationship with her students. She said,

I view my students equally in terms of having a growth mindset that all kids are capable. And I'm treating kids with that type of equity and giving them the equal opportunity to do well, but I also just wonder about being a white female teacher, and what that means for my students. Sometimes I feel like it's such a barrier. I feel like no matter how hard I try, I'm never going to get past, or they're never going to be able to see past the fact that I'm white. I'm never going to have certain connections with them.

Although Goodwin has taught at Valleydale for nineteen years, she still describes uncertainty in her ability to build connections with her non-white students. In some ways, it felt like Goodwin was using this as a justification for not talking about race and racism more in her classes. Picower's tools of Whiteness would classify this rationalization as "*I can't relate*" or, the idea that because her identity and background is different than many of her students, she can not and should not engage with them on certain topics, like race and racism (Picower, 2009). This analysis fits just based on what she said, but since I know Goodwin I think it is more complicated than that. Goodwin is actually very good at relating to her students, and kids either look forward to having her in tenth grade, or cite her as one of their favorite teachers after they move on from tenth grade. This is not an accident, and even though she thinks "she can't relate," I think she actually does a good job of creating a caring and safe space for her students to share with her. Students seek her out to share about challenges they are experiencing, many of which are tied to the

oppression they have experienced as people of color, which Goodwin has not experienced as a white woman. Even though she thinks she can't relate, students still see her as an empathetic listener and someone they trust. Goodwin is highly self-critical and self-reflective when it comes to thinking about her positionality as a white woman.

Although Goodwin is grappling with her use of several tools of Whiteness that prevent her from honing her racial literacy practices in her world history curriculum, she also shared several examples of how she does center race and racism in her curriculum. She said that in creating curriculum for world history, "I am mindful of stereotypes and biases around certain areas of the world. I've tried to be really careful when we're studying certain things that I introduce a variety of perspectives." One example she gave was her unit about imperialism in Africa:

I think the kids are really tired of hearing about how and why people came in and took over Africa, and about how Africa is still suffering because of it. So I try to offer different perspectives of how this strong continent is resourceful and how there were strong leaders they [Africans] had throughout history. So I'm trying to offer them different perspectives than they might see either in the media or from other classes. Right now I'm teaching them about Mansa Musa.

Goodwin is aware of the harmful stereotypes and historic tropes students are often exposed to when a teacher attempts to teach about non-white history and is actively working to not perpetuate victimization narratives (King, 2014). This example also shows how she builds off of students' culture to teach them something new that may challenge beliefs they previously held about African history (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Epstein &

Schieble, 2015). From this example, it is clear that she does not teach about African culture using the superficial multiculturalism Grinage (2020) warns against, and instead she wants students to foster a deep understanding of history from the African continent.

Later in our interview she also acknowledged that standards should not dictate whether or not a teacher can center their curriculum on race and racism, or make their curriculum anti-racist. She said,

I think that people have different ideas, and there is a pressure to do things a certain way. But I think part of that is questioning, is that pressure coming from in the department from other teachers, or is it coming from our bosses? I don't know and I can't remember a time in my career where a principal sat with me and said you have to teach this, or that, ever. So, as a department what expectations are we putting on each other? No one is sitting there and telling me what to do, but I do think that we have varying levels within the department about beliefs around what we are supposed to teach in terms of content. There are some people who feel really strongly about the content that these kids need to know to be successful, and some people that feel very differently, and I'm kind of in the middle of both of those philosophies.

Goodwin identified a rift in the social studies department at Valleydale, saying that some teachers feel strongly certain content should be taught because that is what the standards say, and that is what "these kids need to know," and other teachers disagree and think the content that is taught should be reframed. Goodwin situated herself in the middle of this social studies debate about the common sense of social studies curriculum (Kumashiro,

2015). On the one hand, she acknowledges that kids need to know certain things in order to be successful in the world as it exists. On the other hand, she knows that certain aspects of what the social studies teachers at Valleydale teach is not relevant to the students we serve, and may even be harmful. When I read Goodwin's interview I noticed how often she used indirect language, and what she perceived as a shared understanding between me and her in place of directly naming race and racism as oppressive forces that impacted students lives inside and outside of the classroom. Goodwin's reliance on indirectly addressing race and racism indicate that she needs further professional development support to move into a more confident strategic and sustained racial literacy practice in her world history class (Skerrett, 2011).

It is clear from this interview, and from other conversations with Goodwin that she is in the process of unlearning and unpacking the ways that she has been complicit in furthering the whitewashed master narrative of world history, and figuring out how to move forward from there (Brown & Au, 2015). Goodwin is working to untangle her commitment to what she thinks students need to learn, based on her common-sense understanding of schooling, what students need to succeed in life, and teaching students meaningful world history content that goes against the master narrative.

Grounded and Sustained Practices of Race-Conscious Curriculum

The teachers in this section of my paper, Trevor Potts, Roy Oliver and Nea Ngo, all had many examples of how they center race in their curriculum. I will explain and analyze the ways that they center race in their curriculum, explaining their successes and challenges using the same theoretical framework as the previous section.

Trevor Potts

Trevor Potts has been teaching at Valleydale Secondary School for seven years of his eight years of being a teacher. Potts is a white male who is beloved by his students, past and present. Students see him as a laid back teacher who is able to be vulnerable and open to his students so that they, in return will be open with him. He has also worked hard to cultivate his image as an anti-racist teacher, and maybe even as a “good white person” (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013, p.151). Early in our interview he self-identified as an “anti-racist educator,” saying that it is important to “name that early and often for my students, and show them through explicit actions”. Potts often collaborates with his coworker and close friend Roy Oliver, and has similar views about race and racism being integral parts of his social studies curriculum. Potts teaches ninth grade human geography, so much of his curricular work with students is centered around investigating how power dynamics are evident in our place and geography. When I asked him how he includes his students’ identity in the curriculum he spoke to the challenge of finding all-inclusive narratives, but how the lack of certain perspectives are learning moments in his class too:

It’s hard to find narratives that fit everybody and part of that is an important people because if there isn’t a narrative for everybody then, instead of saying ‘well it doesn’t exist,’ a better thing to do would be to say to students, ‘why is this so hard to find and then unpacking that so we can help students see and unpack those power dynamics.

As a human geography teacher, Potts tries to find narratives from every continent for students to learn about. However, he noted that it can be challenging to find narratives outside of what is stereotypical. For example, he noted it can be hard to find non-traditional stories about the Asian continent to teach about. He said that he first and foremost “breaks down the specifics and nuances of China and other regions so that there’s more clarity when discussing ‘Asia’ as a region. I hardly ever use ‘Asia’ but more specifically say a country’s name, or ‘the southeast region of Asia’ or ‘island countries in the Pacific region of Asia’, because students like to blanket Asian culture.” He gave another example about how he teaches about people and places in Asia, “We look at the huge exponential growth of KFC in China and Southeast Asia as an example of globalization and compare it to the agricultural footprint and the changes that happen when economies grow and desire more protein-based diets.” Potts clearly tries to be intentional about how he exposes students to parts of the world that are often simplified and stereotyped. Instead of settling into the “common sense” of what is usually taught in human geography, and thus what is widely available, Potts challenges himself to find alternative resources for his students (Kumashiro, 2015). When Potts is unable to find resources that represent a particular narrative students are interested in he, like Oliver, uses the absence of those materials as a learning moment to prompt students to investigate and discuss power dynamics.

In addition to finding resources that highlight narratives of cultures from around the world that go deeper than “soft multiculturalism” or stereotypes would, Potts also uses technology to allow students to investigate real world problems related to race and

racism (Grinage, 2020). For example, after Donald Trump was elected in 2016, Potts had his students use maps and ArcGIS technology to examine where Trump voters lived, and how racial isolation correlated with those communities. While Potts explained this unit of study, he also touched on one issue of why social studies teachers sometimes do not talk about race: they feel like they cannot be partisan (Matias, 2014). In response to that, Potts said “I think in some ways I align with the idea that it’s not our [educators’] responsibility to tell kids how to think or what to think, but I do think it’s important to say that I think this and I will sometimes give my opinion because I think there’s a time when it’s important to step out of this certain role of having all of the answers.”

In addition to addressing race and racism through units of study that are clearly related to the human geography standards, Potts also teaches a more explicit unit on race and racism that enriches his human geography course while not tangibly relating to the state standards. In this unit, students write a racial narrative about their own lives and discuss the meaning of phrases such as structural racism, individual racism, de facto racism. They also deconstruct what a “race riot” means, discussing both the stereotypical examples of the Watts Riots and the riots following Rodney King’s death and also how, throughout history, most “race riots” were led by whites targeting Black people. He also leads students through the athletic hall of fame at Valleydale to look at how the racial demographics of students have changed over time-- the suburb that Valleydale is in used to be very white, and has shifted to becoming more racially diverse in the past 20 years. Potts says “the purpose of this unit is really to connect with the kids and begin naming my class as an antiracist space”. Potts shared the materials he uses for this unit, including

a journal prompt asking students to rate their comfort level with talking about race and racism, various short readings about intersectionality, an activity about implicit bias, vocabulary work about language used to describe various forms of racism, and even an activity where students define racial-language commonly used at Valleydale by students (like light-skinned, ghetto, cracker, thug). The unit culminates in students writing a short racial autobiography where they discuss their earliest experiences with race, their most recent experience with race, and how those experiences have impacted their life.

Potts' race and racism unit is thorough and direct in its confrontation of how race and racism impacts society in general and students at Valleydale. Even though this unit does not directly tie to a standard in his human geography course, Potts did not employ Picower's (2009) tool of inaction "out of my control" to cite standards as a justification to not teach about race and racism, as Donahue and Odin do. Instead, he made sure that he took control of his curriculum so that he could center race and racism in the ways that he knew his students wanted and needed. The race and racism unit is also a way for Potts to get to know his students on a deeper level, including parts of their identities that they may not be willing to share unprompted. By giving them time and space to interrogate their racial experiences, Potts does the opposite of employing Picower's (2009) tool of inaction "I can't relate," and instead creates a trusting space for his students to share with him and each other so that Potts can understand and learn more about them.

While it would be easy for Potts to employ many of Picower's (2009) tools of Whiteness to not teach about race and racism, and justify those decisions using Kumashiro's (2015) common-sense rhetoric, he has chosen to not do that. Potts is a great

example of a white educator who has taken a lot of time to question the ways that he has been told to teach, and interrogate how the curriculum he has used in the past perpetuated racism and oppression. Potts is very articulate when he talks about the anti-racism work he does in his course and curriculum, but I sometimes wonder if he is as principled in his actions as he is in his talk. He, like Donahue, is very focused on image-management, and appearing as a “good white person” (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013). Unlike Donahue, however, Potts is more authentically aligning himself with anti-racism projects, as opposed to settling into “non-racism” that sometimes melds into a performative faux-anti-racism, as evidenced by his curricular choices that center race and racism (2013).

Roy Oliver

Roy Oliver has been teaching at Valleydale Secondary School for two years, and has been a teacher for eleven years. Oliver is half white, a quarter Chinese and a quarter Japanese, and identifies as multiracial, but also acknowledges that he is white passing. Although he has only been at Valleydale for two years, he is a well-known figure amongst students and seen as a very progressive teacher. High school students who want to make changes at Valleydale gravitate towards Oliver and he frequently supports student activists by giving them space in his classroom every lunch hour and helping them further their projects. At Valleydale, he has taught traditional social studies courses as well as youth participatory action elective courses that center on student activism. He frequently collaborates with his colleague and close friend Trevor Potts. In our interview, he said, “I think that race and its intersections are the core components of how we need to

teach the [social studies] materials.” It was clear throughout our interview that Oliver sees his purpose in teaching social studies as helping students understand the world they live in through a critical lens that centers racism and others forms of oppression.

Throughout our interview, Oliver explained how important it is to his teaching practice to structure curriculum around what students are asking to learn about. He said,

I have learned a lot about my own limitations, especially coming to Valleydale and being surrounded by brilliant Black and brown young people... that has pushed me in the best ways to see how little I actually know. And so, I try my best to actually not try and make those [curriculum] choices for students and really just try to tune into, okay what are you telling me that you want or need, and here’s an idea of how I can make that show up.

Oliver made it clear that an anti-racist social studies teacher needs to be adaptable to the questions students have and find ways to guide students to answers through best practice methods like primary source analysis, interrogating the master narrative of traditional textbooks and reading academic works (King & Chandler, 2016).

He gave an example of how he centers student questions and concerns in the curriculum he accesses and creates:

Last year there was a group of juniors in the U.S. history class and they were like ‘we never learned anything about Native American history’, which obviously isn’t true, right? But, what I was taking from that was, ‘we never learned anything deep or connected to the present about Native American histories.’ I thought, that was a really interesting point and as I asked those students during the moment that

we were having a conversation what do you mean, they said ‘we don’t know anything about the people who lived on this land’ and so I thought, okay well that’s really easy to solve, I know all these resources that we can actually tap into.

So I went and got the text *What does Justice Look Like* [Waziyatawin, 2008].

Oliver listens to his students’ input and finds ways for his curriculum to reflect what they want to learn. In this particular example, he found a way to build upon what students already knew, and push them to a deeper place of knowing by reading a Dakota author’s perspective on liberation and freedom, instead of just furthering the white-centered victimization narrative (King, 2014).

Oliver draws from primary sources from the Stanford History Education Group, the Black Lives Matter At School Curriculum website, current events, academic literature from his own library, and even traditional textbooks. Oliver said,

...the more primary sources we use, the better because [when using primary sources] there’s no one telling us how to interpret these things, and so then that concern around the master narratives or absent narratives becomes something that we can talk about. Then we can construct our own narrative and question, why is that in the textbook?

Oliver uses traditional textbooks as a way for students to question the white-washed master narrative, rather than learn “historical facts” (Woodson, 2015).

During his unit on slavery, he and students discussed the connections to police brutality and mass incarceration using primary sources. Then, he had his students examine the section about slavery in the U.S. history textbook another Valleydale teacher

was using. He asked students to find the number of pages that slavery was listed on. He said that students were surprised at how little slavery was mentioned, and then the class discussed why. Oliver's use of textbooks to guide students towards questioning the master narrative, rather than validating it shows how a teacher can question the common sense rhetoric of social studies curriculum (Kumashiro, 2015).

Nea Ngo

Nea Ngo has been a teacher for two years and, and has taught for one year at Valleydale Secondary School. Ngo is an Hmong-American woman and a refugee. She is the only woman of color in the social studies department at Valleydale. Ngo teaches sixth grade state history. I have only known Ngo for less than a year, but was part of her hiring committee and was deeply impressed by her ideas about teaching ethnic studies and critical race theory to sixth graders. As someone who did not see herself reflected in her k-12 social studies curriculum, inclusion and representation of people who are similar to her students is very important to her and the way that she teaches. Ngo will be the first to tell you that she did not get to implement all of her ideas in the classroom this year because of the unexpected challenges that come with being a newer teacher. However, her ideas for making the state history curriculum more focused on accurate racial history that centers Native Americans and other people of color from the state as opposed to just whitewashed hero narratives, came through in our interview in a powerful way.

Ngo decided to become a social studies teacher after she took a class on race and the law in college, and she realized,

It was the first time that I saw myself reflected in the history and the work that was being taught, and I realized that social studies is just much bigger than the things that I was taught in high school. When I was in college and I was able to relate the materials and the history that I was being taught to my experience and understand how society works, I grew to love it [history].

Through her experiences with ethnic studies and critical American history in college, Ngo said, “I came to understand that at the root of social studies, it’s just studying about our society and our place and our identity in the world, and I want to be able to teach that for younger kids in their earlier years because I found the value in it so late in my life. I think it is important for students to be able to get that earlier in life.”

Ngo teaches state history to sixth grade students and has been working on adapting high-school and college level ethnic studies curricula to fit the needs of her young students. In Ngo’s classroom, it is very important for students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum in a way that is deep and non-stereotypical (Woodson, 2015; King, 2014; Brown. She said,

I think the purpose of class is for students to be able to study themselves and their history because once they understand themselves and their ancestor’s contributions to history, they make bigger connections as they move forward in life and realize that they can make contributions to society too.

One way that she provides this perspective for students is by finding texts that students can relate to. Like Potts and Oliver, she does not rely on the textbook that is technically part of her course. The textbook for the state history course is one written by the state

historical society. Ngo uses it as a loose guide for topics but prefers to teach with primary sources that represent multiple perspectives, especially those that are not traditionally represented in textbooks like Native Americans and people of color (Brown & Brown, 2012; Journell, 2011; King 2014; Woodson, 2015). For example, when Ngo taught about the prominent treaty between the U.S. government and two bands of Dakota people in the 1850s she used a primary source from a settler's perspective and from a Dakota's perspective. Like Oliver, Ngo emphasized the importance of analyzing power dynamics between the settler and the colonist in the United States, using the lens of critical race theory (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). Her goal in providing multiple perspectives for her young students is to guide them to questioning power dynamics, and why people act the way they do. She also adapts sources she read in college and graduate school for her young students.

Ngo's goal in providing primary sources written from multiple perspectives is to guide students towards "examining the truth" in history. She said that if she taught just from her class's textbook, she would only be giving students "history from a white person's perspective, and that norm is rooted in race and racism." While Ngo, like Oliver and Potts, was clear about now wanting to tell students what to think, but rather give them the tools to analyze history and draw their own conclusions said that she does see her role as a social studies teacher "to be able to bring those truths, which is the fact that society is built on race and racism, into the classroom so that students can understand the past." Next year, Ngo hopes to teach more using the works of Black women and find ways to adapt Black feminist theory for her sixth graders. Although Ngo's personal

curriculum library is still developing because she is a novice teacher, it is clear that she is working towards accessing and creating a robust anti-racist curriculum rooted in counternarratives opposing the white master narrative (Brown & Au, 2014).

Ngo's framework for adapting ethnic studies texts from college and even graduate school to fit the needs of her sixth-grade students is something that all educators who are interested in taking up anti-racist work in their curriculum should consider. Although she is still working on changing and building up her anti-racist curriculum, Ngo's purpose for teaching social studies is centered in that work.

Summary

In Chapter Four I discussed the results of my study. I highlighted key parts of my interviews with six social studies teachers and two curriculum directors at Valleydale Secondary School, and I discussed the curriculum that they shared with me. Through my analysis I began to answer the research questions that guided my study: how do social studies teachers center race and racism in their curriculum? Secondly, how do teachers enact racial literacy when teaching race-conscious social studies and how do teachers justify teaching race-conscious social studies?

I began the chapter by discussing how curriculum administrators Jessica Cortland and Elise Middler emphasized the importance of centering race and racism in social studies. Despite administrators' support for centering race and racism in social studies courses, there were several teachers in my study who did not consistently center race in their curriculum, or who had complicated and problematic perspectives about doing-so. I identified several major themes about where teachers found challenges in enacting

race-conscious social studies curriculum, and where teachers found success in centering race in their curriculum. The themes are as follows:

1. Teachers who described strictly adhering to what the literal wording of the state standards said showed less evidence of teaching with a race-conscious curriculum.
2. Teachers who centered their own content-knowledge expertise in the classroom showed less evidence of teaching with a race-conscious curriculum. Teachers who talked about centering student knowledge and expertise in their curricular and pedagogical approaches had more evidence of teaching with a race-conscious curriculum.
3. Teachers who talked about social studies curriculum as a tool with which to counter the master narrative and engage in counter storytelling that highlights marginalized voices had more evidence of teaching with a race-conscious curriculum.

In Chapter Five I will discuss these major learnings in more depth, as well as directions for future work and the limitations of my study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Introduction

In the final chapter of my thesis, I focus on the conclusions I have made from my research, as I sought to answer the following research questions: how do social studies teachers center race and racism in their curriculum? Secondly, how do teachers enact racial literacy when teaching race-conscious social studies and how do teachers justify teaching race-conscious social studies? I begin the chapter with a discussion of my major finding and how my findings can be situated in the existing literature. I will then discuss the implications of my study. Finally, I end the chapter with a reflection about the limitations of my study, directions for future work, and what I learned.

Discussion

Through my research I identified five major findings about the ways the participants of my study centered race in their curriculum.

- 1. Teachers who described strictly adhering to what the literal wording of the state standards said showed less evidence of teaching with a race-conscious curriculum.** Carly Odin and Hannah Donahue both spoke often about how important standards were to how they conceptualized and framed their curriculum. Odin said that she did not explicitly cover race and racism unless it was brought up by students, because the standards do not include language about race. When I checked the state standards for her course there was no mention of race or racism, but there were mentions of concepts such as globalization,

westernization, colonialism, social and economic disparities and capitalism, all of which are concepts rooted in racism in White supremacy. Hannah Donahue shared examples of centering race in how she teaches about Reconstruction and the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement. Racism is explicitly mentioned in the state standards for covering those topics in American history. However she also said that she does not cover race in other parts of American history where she maybe could because she is not told to by the state standards. Katherine Goodwin said she often thinks about whether the state standards actually make space for important narratives that students need to learn about, and knows that some of her colleagues feel that following standards is one of the most important parts of their job. She acknowledged that she is processing how limiting the standards can be, but is not sure exactly what direction to move beyond them. Neither Trevor Potts, Roy Oliver or Nea Ngo mentioned state standards, but all three described in detail the ways that they center race in their curriculum.

My work expands on the findings of several scholars who have examined state social studies standards and found that they often perpetuate whitewashed master narratives that exclude or essentialize people of color by showing how teachers make curricular decisions based on the language of standards (Anderson, 2011; Cuenca, 2019; Heilig et al., 2012; Journell 2008, 2009). The teachers in my study who had the least evidence of a race-conscious social studies curriculum were the most reliant on the standards. If standards allow social studies teachers to not teach about race, then the standards must either be examined and redefined, or

schools must provide teachers with professional development opportunities and support to critically examine the standards and find ways to center race in their curriculum regardless of what the standards say.

2. Teachers who centered their own content-knowledge expertise in the classroom showed less evidence of teaching with a race-conscious curriculum.

Teachers who talked about centering student knowledge and expertise in their curricular and pedagogical approaches had more evidence of teaching with a race-conscious curriculum. Odin, Donahue and Goodwin all spoke of how they see themselves as the givers of knowledge to students. In doing this, they risk centering themselves as White women in a way that takes away from the narratives they are exposing their students to. Odin, in particular, shared that she wants to teach students interesting stories about global studies, but since she has decided to not center race in her curriculum, they will not learn stories about race in global studies. She shared that some of her students have expressed the desire to talk more about race, and that she is open to doing so, but is not sure where to start because of the standards. She could employ a more student-centered approach to creating a curriculum that centers cultural knowledge students have while also challenging ways oppression shows up in their own cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Parims & Alim, 2014). Donahue talked about how she feels like her job is to both tell students about how racist the past was, and remind them of the progress that is being made. By centering her own perceptions of race: that racism is an issue in the present but was far worse in the past because

of racial progress that has been made, she takes away an opportunity to learn from students' experiences with race that could add to the curriculum.

On the other hand, Potts, talked about using what students share about the experiences with race and racism to frame his curriculum. His example of having students write a racial autobiography early in the year, and using what he learned from them to inform future lessons is a strong example of using student knowledge and experiences to center race in social studies curriculum. He also talked about how he chooses topics in human geography that center students' cultural knowledge about certain parts of the world, but also challenges them to think outside of stereotypes. Oliver explained that most of the curricular decisions he makes are based on what students want to learn. For example, when his students told him that they never got to learn about Native Americans in American history, he inferred that they wanted to learn about Native Americans in a deeper, more critical way than they had in other classes, so he brought in resources to do that. Nea Ngo talked about the importance of centering students' identities and experiences in the content that she teaches in state history— she wants to make sure that students learn about people who have similar backgrounds to them.

The findings from my work build off of ideas in culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies that express the importance of centering students knowledge and cultural capital in curriculum and pedagogy (Chikkatur, 2013; Epstein, Mayorga & Nelson, 2011; Martell, 2013; Washington & Humphries,

2011). Since students at Valleydale are 84% students of color who have likely experienced individual or systemic racism, a course that centers race in a critical way would undoubtedly provide opportunities for students to make personal connections and share their expertise.

- 3. Teachers who talked about social studies curriculum as a tool to engage in counter storytelling that highlights marginalized voices and opposes the master narrative had more evidence of teaching with a race-conscious curriculum.** All of the teachers that were interviewed except for Carly Odin spoke of using their social studies curriculum to, in some way, challenge conventional ideas about their content. While Hannah Donahue talked about doing this through her units about the Civil Rights Movement and Reconstruction, she did not give examples outside of those units, both of which naturally center race and racism even from a conventional standpoint. Katherine Goodwin discussed the ways she tries to challenge what students think they know about African leaders by focusing less on victimization narratives, and more on stories of strong leaders and communities. Goodwin and Donahue both acknowledged that there are also times in their classes when they felt like it was important to teach students more conventional content so that they would be prepared for the real world, or life after Valleydale. The notion of non-critically teaching about the master narrative in order to prepare students for oppression they might face in their futures does not line up with a truly race-conscious curriculum (Chikkatur, 2013; Howard, 2004).

Potts, Ngo and Oliver only talked about teaching students counternarratives, or critiquing master narratives (Dover, et. al., 2016). They did not think that students needed to be prepared for the real world by learning about ahistorical or misrepresentative ideas. Both Ngo and Oliver specifically said that they tried to teach using counter narrative methods, and had students critique the course textbooks using counter narrative. Potts, Ngo and Oliver all shared detailed examples of how they center race in their curriculum, and in most of those examples they were facilitating student analysis of flaws in master narratives.

Implications

My work has implications for the direction school districts and other organizations which support social studies teachers could take professional development opportunities. Additionally, I believe that my work could be used to inform pre-service social studies programs to better address challenges that could prevent teachers from centering race in their social studies curriculum. The following are key implications from my work:

- 1. Professional development and pre-service opportunities for social studies teachers need to be grounded in creating a race-conscious curriculum.** In order for teachers to effectively create a race-conscious curriculum, professional development opportunities must focus on teaching educators about topics in history they may be unfamiliar with, and providing time and resources to adapt new learnings into curriculum for their students. These types of professional development opportunities should be mandatory for social studies teachers, not

opt-in. Valleydale's professional opportunities for social studies teachers are almost always opt-in, and most teachers in the department choose not to go, even if they would learn something new. Professional development opportunities should also facilitate opportunities for teachers to critique textbooks and the master narratives of their content area so that they can offer their students the same opportunities.

All of the teachers in my study said that their pre-service education told them that textbooks were not always accurate, but very few of the teachers in my interview felt that their pre-service programs gave them sufficient tools and knowledge to create a race-conscious curriculum. Pre-service social studies teacher education must provide students with time to develop curriculum skills, specifically by learning how to effectively center race.

- 2. Professional development opportunities and pre-service education for social studies teachers need to teach educators how to analyze state standards for opportunities to center race in the curriculum.** While standards may not provide specific mentions of race and racism, we know that race is a constant theme of history and social science, so teachers must be taught to find ways to address it within the standards. Districts should also work with social studies teachers who are concerned about meeting standards to find ways to center race within the standards. The teachers in my study had various perceptions about the importance Valleydale administrators placed on standards-- some were hyper-aware of the standards and worried about getting in trouble for not teaching

them explicitly, and some did not mention them at all. School districts should work to clarify the ways that teachers are expected to use the standards, and find ways to guide teachers towards utilizing open-ended interpretations of standards that center critical analyses of race and racism.

- 3. State social studies standards need to be rethought so that they include more explicit examples of race-critical social studies.** While my second implication says that teachers need to find ways to work within state standards to teach about race, I also believe that standards need to be radically redesigned so that teachers are unable to use them as a crutch for not talking about race. There is so much scholarship that indicates state standards are biased, Euro-centric, and whitewashed (An, 2016; Anderson, 2011; Chandler, 2010; Journell, 2008 & 2009; Shadowwalker, 2012). Teachers certainly feel the pressure of state standards differently. Some teachers in my study hold a lot of fear about getting in trouble for not covering every aspect of the standards. Other teachers in my study interpret the standards loosely and find ways to make their content fit regardless of the wording of the standards. The state in which Valleydale is located has a social studies standard revision process in the upcoming year. It will be interesting to see how and the standards shift to promote race-conscious social studies, instead of race as an afternote or a sidebar.

Limitations

My research question asks: how do teachers center race and racism in their curriculum. I analyzed data from semi-structured interviews, curriculum document

analysis and classroom observations. However, because Valleydale Secondary School closed for COVID-19 precautions on March 16, 2020, I was unable to complete classroom observations. My first classroom observation with the teachers in my study was scheduled for the week after March 16. Since my study was founded on triangulating around those three data sources, and I only had substantive evidence from two data sources, my understanding of the ways the teachers in my study centered race and racism in their curriculum was only based on what they chose to share with me. Without classroom observations, during which I would have been able to observe their practices in action, my data is based on their own retelling of their practices (interviews), and a curated selection of their practices that they were willing to share with me (curriculum documents). Because I was unable to witness the teachers from my study enact a race-conscious curriculum, my conclusions are based more on how they are able to talk about themselves and their practices rather than their actual practices.

Future Work

Future studies of how social studies teachers center race in their curriculum could include a more thorough analysis of the curriculum documents teachers use, especially at a setting like Valleydale where there are no mandated curricula. I only analyzed one to three documents that the teachers in my study provided me with, but a more thorough analysis of how race is depicted and discussed in teachers curricular materials would provide more insight into what race-conscious social studies could be. Although work has been done analyzing textbooks' depictions of race, most of the teachers in my study said they rarely used a textbook, and instead sought out other resources for their students

(although those resources are not necessarily more representative). Future work could also examine how teachers teach intersections of oppression, such as race and gender, race and class or race and sexuality, and how they utilize curriculum to do-so.

Another area for future work is how social studies teachers specifically use student interests and questions to shape their curriculum. Although work has been done on youth action research, I would be interested to see how those concepts could be applied to a more traditional social studies class setting. The teachers in my study who had the most evidence of centering race in their curriculum were the ones who talked the most about utilizing students' input, backgrounds and identities to inform their curriculum, so a more in-depth study could be conducted to better understand that process.

Conclusion

My interest in beginning this project stemmed from the frustration I felt about the lack of curricular support for social studies at Valleydale Secondary School. I was upset that I began my job with virtually no resources to teach my classes, let alone any resources that centered race and racism. I found it challenging at first to sift through the wealth of American history curriculum that only focused on white heroes and narratives, but eventually I found solid resources that allowed me and my students to critique the master narrative of American history, and dive deeper into counternarratives that centered women and people of color.

This past November I attended the College and University Faculty Association conference at the National Social Studies Convention. I learned from the work of the

many scholars I cite in my study, and began to reflect on the divide between academic research on social studies education, and what is actually taking place in the classroom. There is significant scholarship about how social studies could be taught through anti-racist, anti-oppressive lenses, yet so little of that has been meaningfully distilled to social studies teachers who are not involved in academia. In reflecting on the curricular journey I have been on, and continue to be on, as I continually search for better resources that allow me to center Black, Latinx, Asian and Indigenous people and narratives from American history, I became curious about how other teachers in my department worked within those same challenges.

As I began my interviews, I became more interested in what the teachers' perceptions were about centering race in the curriculum, and less interested in the resources they used to center race (although that is still an area of interest for me). I found it curious that teachers in one department at school that is very committed to anti-racist work had such a variety of perspectives about centering race in the social studies curriculum. There is still so much work to be done in order to move forward from the barriers teachers experience that prevent them from center race in their social studies curriculum, but I am heartened by the ways teachers at my school are already doing that work.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Questions

Teachers

1. How long have you taught? How long have you taught at this school?
2. Why do you teach social studies?
3. What is the purpose of social studies, in your opinion?
4. How do you include your students' identities in your curriculum?
5. What curricular materials do you use?
6. How do you decide what curricular materials you will use?
7. How does race play a role in social studies for you?
8. How does racism play a role in social studies for you?
9. How does your work as a social studies teacher relate to race and racism?
10. What does it mean to be anti-racist?
11. Do you believe that social studies classes can be an anti-racist space? Why or why not?
12. What would your dream social studies course look and feel like?
13. What curricular materials do you wish existed for you?
14. To what extent do you create your own curriculum?
15. Do you think your pre-service education prepared you for the curriculum writing you do?

Curriculum Administrators

1. To what extent are you involved with social studies curriculum in this district?
2. How does/ should race and racism factor into social studies education?
3. What is the role of a social studies teacher in anti-racist work?
4. How do you find curricular materials for teachers?
5. How should a social studies' teacher relate their courses to race and racism?
6. What does it mean to be anti-racist?
7. How do you support social studies teachers in finding/ creating anti-racist curriculum?

APPENDIX B: Teacher Classroom Observation Form

Teacher Pseudonym: _____

Grade/ Subject: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Content Covered	
Description of lesson & learning strategies	
Anti-racist strategies	
Teacher Questions and Language	
People/ Events Discussed	
Other observations & notes	