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Shifting to critical empathy: Exploring the ideological becoming of secondary teachers during critical, dialogic professional development

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Shifting to critical empathy:

Exploring the ideological becoming of secondary teachers during critical, dialogic

professional development

A Dissertation Presented

by

MARIA MCSORLEY

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DEDICATION

To my students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the culmination of over a decade's worth of work with secondary teachers and students, and it would not have come to fruition without the influence, and love, of so many incredible people. I am grateful for this opportunity to reflect on some of their impact and honor all they have contributed to my life.

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thank you for always making me laugh, no matter the day (or the writing crisis), and

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literature and all it has to offer. It has been one of the greatest gifts of my life; one

that led me to teaching and later to pursue a doctorate. Your love gives me strength

and your passion for learning gives me hope.

ABSTRACT

SHIFTING TO CRITICAL EMPATHY:

EXPLORING THE IDEOLOGICAL BECOMING OF SECONDARY TEACHERS DURING

CRITICAL, DIALOGIC PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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The limited research concerning empathy within secondary education
continues to focus on student empathy, rather than shifting the gaze to teacher
empathy. Moreover, while teacher empathy is generally conceptualized as an
innately positive quality, skill, or disposition, the research (while limited) suggests
that empathy without deep understanding of social and structural inequity has
demonstrated risk. Teachers who, for example, develop and express empathy across
lines of difference without knowledge of systemic inequality (particularly about
how inequity shows up in schools) have the potential to oversimplify or overidentify
with an "other's" experience (Boler, 1999). This can lead to the false confirmation of
biased ideas or regressions to color-blind ideologies, which reproduce harmful
hegemonic beliefs and dominant ideas. For white teachers especially (who make up
~85% of the teaching population), many of whom have grown up, been educated,

and gone on to work in predominately white spaces, the development of a more

critical form of empathy is necessary. This dissertation theorizes a new vision of

empathy, which the author refers to as critical empathy. It then explores the

experience of twelve, white secondary educators as they participate in a researcher-

facilitated critical, dialogic professional development series, which was conducted

over the course of one academic year. Data from these PD sessions were analyzed

using a mix of constructivist grounded theory and critical discourse analysis, and

results are discussed in the form of two, separate articles. Findings suggest that

when the PD environment is structured as a third space and facilitated through the

lens of intergroup dialogue, teachers are able to develop greater degrees of critical

empathy. This indicates the need for more research concerning the ways in which

white secondary teachers are exposed to and have access to PD that provides the

space, time, and training needed to develop their critical consciousness, and thus

move towards more culturally responsive pedagogies.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In order to empathize with someone's experience, you must be willing to believe them

as they see it, and not how you imagine their experience to be.

Brené Brown

The word empathy has risen to a prominent position in the educational lexicon of 2021. While the word itself has been around in English for the past century, emerging from the German word "einfühling," meaning "feeling into," it has been the past two decades that have truly seen its steady rise in popularity and its entry into the sphere of education. Specifically, in the domain of preK-12 education, the discourse of empathy has grown in prominence since 1994, when the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was established. It is now found in realms such as social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum, design thinking (DT) frameworks used in STEM courses, teacher preparation programs, culturally relevant teaching practices, and in English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction.

Recent research has demonstrated the potential of empathy in promoting academic success (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011), the importance of empathy in teaching culturally diverse students (McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Damianidou & Phtiaka, 2016; Palmer & Menard, 2012; Warren, 2014), and the connections between empathy and democracy (Mirra, 2018; Cohen, 2006; English, 2016). However, at this time, there remains little consensus about what the

definition or role of empathy should be in preK-12 education – or in the U.S. writ large for that matter. The research concerning the conceptions of empathy within specific frameworks or areas, such as social-emotional learning (SEL), culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogy (CRP/CSP), teacher education, or English language learning, remains limited. And, empathy's connection to other areas of intensive research concerning, a) the rampant inequities still present in schools and communities, and b) the state of adolescent health and wellbeing in the United States, has yet to be explicitly made.

There has been significant research in the past two decades that has demonstrated the need for culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogies (e.g., Gay, 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017), more caring schools (e.g., Noddings, 2002, 2013), and increased social-emotional support for students – from elementary through secondary grades (e.g., Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007). Yet, as these calls have continued to come from universities and policy makers, concerning data, particularly about outcomes for adolescents, has also emerged. Specifically, this includes: the rising number of school shootings that are conducted by adolescent youth (U.S. Department of Education, 2004); the persistence of discriminatory discipline practices that disproportionately affect Black and brown adolescent youth (Skiba, Arredondo, Gray, & Rausch, 2016); the rising mortality rates of adolescents aged 10-19 due to drug overdose and suicide (despite the pattern of decline that occurred between 1999 and 2013) (National Center for Health Statistics, 2018); and the steady increase in the rates of major depressive episodes among teenagers since 2006 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). These data speak to an

overwhelming need to address how adolescent students in particular, including

youth of color and white youth, are experiencing care and connection at school,

which is generally seen as connected to the presence and expression of authentic

empathy.

1.1. Theorizing Critical Empathy

Yet, the limited research that exists at present concerning empathy within

secondary education continues to focus on student empathy, rather than shifting the

gaze to teacher empathy. While increasing students' abilities to empathize with

others like and unlike themselves, especially during their secondary years when

they are preparing to leave the public education system, is a laudable goal – I

question how this can be a plausible goal when the empathy of secondary educators

is not addressed first. Moreover, while teacher empathy is generally conceptualized

as an innately positive quality, skill, or disposition, the research (while limited)

suggests that empathy without deep understanding of social and structural inequity

has demonstrated risk. Teachers who, for example, develop and express empathy

across lines of difference without knowledge of systemic inequality (particularly

about how inequity shows up in schools) have the potential to oversimplify or

overidentify with an "other's" experience (Boler, 1999). This can lead to the false

confirmation of biased ideas or regressions to color-blind ideologies, which

reproduce harmful hegemonic beliefs and dominant ideas (Boler, 1999). For white

teachers especially (who make up ~85% of the teaching population), many of whom

have grown up, been educated, and gone on to work in predominately white spaces, I argue that the development of a more critical form of empathy is necessary.

The type of "critical" empathy I am theorizing throughout this dissertation is built from the integration of the concept of cultural competence and more conventional conceptions of empathy. Generally speaking, empathy has been defined as the ability to put oneself in another's shoes – or to take the perspective of another person. It has also been likened to the concept of the "Golden Rule" – or treating others as you would like to be treated. While this is an attractive aspiration, this is a reductive view of empathy that ignores the very real differences that exist between people in U.S. society today (Mirra, 2018). Women, for example, often experience lower wages, an inability to access appropriate health care, and greater threats of violence than men. Folks within the LGBTQ+ community also face greater threats of violence, experience greater levels of anxiety and depression throughout their lifetimes, and often have to make choices about how to present themselves – and their partners – in every public situation they encounter. And Black folks within the United States continue to face greater degrees of poverty, disproportionate incarceration rates for all offenses, and an exceedingly higher risk of *death* at the hands of police. Simply put, there are very real differences in how people experience life – and death – within this country. Therefore, if we are truly invested in the connection, care, and growth of all students, and teachers, these differences cannot be ignored. That is where cultural competence (CC), one of three key elements of Geneva Gay's (2018) three-part framework of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), becomes a needed addition to the conventional definition of empathy. CC has

been defined in a number of different ways and has often been likened to Freire's (1970) concept of *conscientization* – the process of developing critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action. For the purposes of this work, I draw on the concept of conscientization in defining cultural competence, and subsequently, critical empathy. First, I define cultural competence as:

1. having a firm understanding of one's own cultural and socialized identities as they are nested within the larger socio-historical context; and

2. the ability to analyze how one's own and others' social identities operate and are operated upon within structures and systems (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Gay, 2018).

Having a deep understanding of social systems and the ability to analyze how those systems operate and are operated upon is what sets a critical educator apart. Therefore, I argue that a radically new approach to empathy within secondary education is needed, one which fully integrates cultural competence with the conventional components of empathy – namely perspective taking and affective action. I see *critical empathy* as a multipart process (see **Figure 1.1.**), with each part informing and affecting the other, and define it as the:

a) *reflective process* of establishing who you are in relation to another person (or other people) within socio-historic structures;

b) *cognitive task* of taking the perspective of others in the service of identifying, understanding, and appreciating their emotions and ways of knowing; and

c) *affective response* to another person (or other people) in accordance with that person's (or people's) needs are as they are nested within social structures.
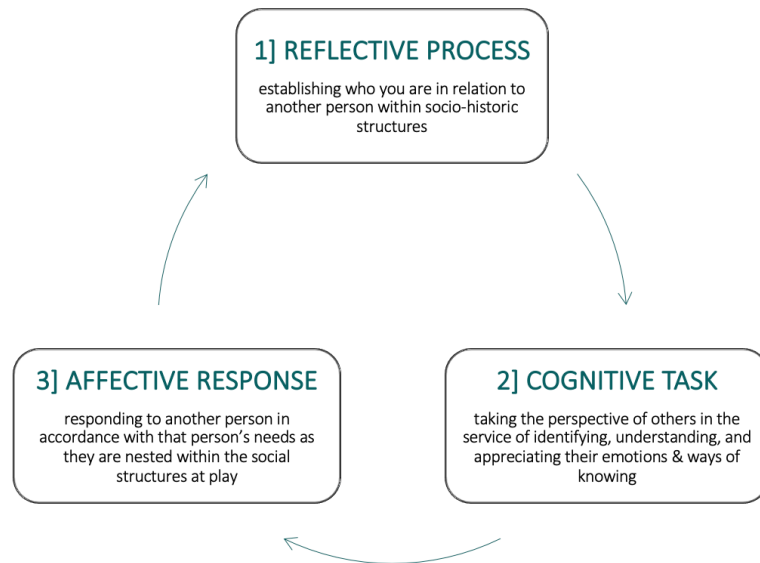
Figure 1.1. Multipart process of critical empathy

I expand on this definition, including the research and theory it is built upon, and how I arrived at it, later in this dissertation. However, here it is important to note that my definition has been ten years in the making – beginning with my time as a high school teacher and culminating with the completion of my doctoral studies.

1.2. Uncovering the Purpose of the Dissertation

I chose to leave my teaching position in 2017 for many reasons, including a deep longing for a critical community of educators, and my frustration concerning the clear lack of empathy within public education. While I didn't know at the beginning of my doctoral program that I would become the "empathy researcher" –

which is what people always seem to know about me these days at the university – I did know that I as a white teacher, who had grown up in a predominately white community and was teaching at a predominately white school, there was a lot to learn. I needed to learn more about the histories of education and the ways in which students of color had been and continue to be "othered" within public education. And I needed time, space, and support, as I continued to more completely unpack my own Whiteness (with a recognition that this is a life-long process). This was all true *despite* the fact that I had already earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in education – equating to hundreds of hours of classroom instruction about education.

Additionally, I spent hours of my life as a teacher sitting in professional development, faculty meetings, and staff meetings, listening to a random assortment of people speak on a variety of topics. Not one of them spoke about race, gender, or the needs of LGBTQ+ students. I had to seek out opportunities to learn about these topics on my own time – and on my own dime. The more I learned, the more I came to see the systemic problems inherent within predominately white schools and predominately white communities. While teaching, I found myself deeply frustrated with many of my colleagues, who were unwilling to even entertain the idea of shifting towards more critical, and culturally responsive ways of teaching, what I have come to see throughout my doctoral program is just how powerful the discourses of Whiteness are. So much so, that white teachers can spend their entire careers never talking about Whiteness – especially within predominately white schools. The resistance of white teachers to engage in the work of critical self-

reflection is well-documented (e.g., Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2016; Sleeter, 2016) and often looks like avoidance or silence rather than active resistance. Yet, the lack of support teachers receive in moving towards cultural competence is often overlooked. How can we expect our white teachers to teach in socially just and critically oriented ways when we do not provide the time, space, and support needed for them to do so?

The argument that we need to diversify the teaching population is a valid one, but we must also deal with the reality that is before us – including within predominately white schools where these issues are most often ignored (Bishop & McClellen, 2016; Picower, 2011). We cannot put the burden on the few students and teachers of color in these environments to explain oppression, racism, or cultural competence to us, and we cannot leave white teachers' hegemonic beliefs about learning and culture to go unchecked or unexamined any longer. We have done this for many years now, and it has allowed these dominant perspectives to maintain structurally biased systems (Villegas & Lucas, 2016; Sleeter, 2001; Picower, 2009; Leonardo, 2002), and perpetuate deficit views of students and families of color (Nieto, 2003). These views are presented not only to the few students of color in these environments, but also to the predominately white student body, who learn "important messages about what is means to be white and overrepresented" from their white teachers' and communities (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012), thus perpetuating harmful cycles. It is the interruption and dismantling of this cycle that I sought to interrupt when I began my doctoral studies – and it is the thread that carried me towards my dissertation research and the emergence of *critical empathy*.

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1.3. Finding the Thread

In many predominately white schools (including the one I taught at), administrators tend to be dismissive toward the need for CRP training (and critical discourse altogether), citing the homogeneity of their student population or a lack of 'diversity' (Bishop & McClellen, 2016; Picower, 2011). Due to this dismissal, most preK-12 teachers (myself included) working in predominately white districts do not gain experience participating in sustained, reflective PD that asks them to think in new ways about their sociocultural identities, the inequities of schooling, and/or their students lived-experiences, cultural capital, implicit biases, and needs (Kohli, et al., 2015). Without these opportunities, it seems unlikely (if not impossible) that teachers would feel confident enough in their knowledge and self-awareness to support students in their navigation of the socially constructed worlds around them or to engage thoughtfully and productively in difficult dialogues concerning race, gender, sexuality, etc.

To address this, I argue that teachers must be afforded authentic, sustained, and supportive opportunities to develop critical empathy – a combination of cultural competence and the conventional components of empathy – throughout their teaching careers. This is what I sought to provide as I developed and implemented the year-long professional development series that became the basis of my dissertation research during the 2019-2020 school year. Unlike the common one-and-done approach to teacher professional development that has been, and in many ways continues to be, used throughout the country, I sought to create

sustained time, space, and support for teachers to develop, practice, and experience

critical empathy – and thus make movement towards the interruption and

dismantling of harmful systems and practices. This type of movement requires real

vulnerability on the part of participants, and an environment that not only makes

room for that vulnerability but encourages it. In designing this PD space, I called

upon my training in Intergroup Dialogue (IGD), my experience as a classroom

educator, and my research concerning third spaces and empathy development to

design a PD series that would provide just that. An overview of the resulting PD

experience follows in **Table 1.**

Table 1.1. Overview of PD sessions 1-4

	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	CONTENT OVERVIEW	PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATION	INTENDED OUTCOME

SESSION 1
 	
IN-PERSON
	- *To build an understanding of who we are as a dialogue group through explorations of our commonalities and differences.*
	- *To understand how processes of socialization within institutional and cultural structures impact our personal and collective experiences as members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups.*
		1. Community building
		  - Four corners
		2. The cycle of socialization
		  - Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP)
		  - Social/personal identity
		3. Reflection on hopes and concerns for PD experience
			IGD
			- *Consciousness raising*: personal and social identity awareness
				Critical Empathy
				Reflective process: self- and other-awareness

SESSION 2
 	
IN-PERSON
	- *To explore the potential of dialogue and emotional awareness skills in engaging in difficult conversations.*
	- *To collectively witness and dialogue about the issues that are salient in this school, in the world, and in our personal lives.*
	- *Explore commonalities and differences of perspectives constructively within and across social identity groups.*
		1. Tools for entering difficult conversations: Part I
		  - Emotional awareness
		  - Defining dialogue
		2. Dialogue starter
		3. **Dialogue #1** – *Gender and sexuality in the classroom*
		4. Reflection on dialogue 1 and on 'tools for entering difficult conversations'
			IGD
			- *Consciousness raising*: social systems knowledge
			- *Building relationships*: engaging in sustained communication
				Critical Empathy
				- *Reflective process:* self- and other-awareness
				- *Cognitive task:* perspective taking for understanding

SESSION 3
 	
ONLINE
	- *To practice active listening and conscious communication as we dialogue about race in the classroom.*
	- *Explore commonalities and differences of perspectives constructively within and across social identity groups.*
	- *To consider possibilities for implementing culturally sustaining teaching practices.*
		1. Tools for entering difficult conversations: Part II
		  - Emotional self-management
		  - Whiteness & intersectionality
		2. Dialogue starter
		3. **Dialogue #2** – *Race in the classroom*
		4. Reflection on dialogue #2 and on 'tools for entering difficult conversations'
			IGD
			- *Consciousness raising*: social systems knowledge
			- *Building relationships*: sustained communication
				Critical Empathy
				- *Reflective process:* self- and other-awareness
				- *Cognitive task:* perspective taking for understanding

SESSION 4 ONLINE	- *To practice conscious communication as we dialogue about a hot topic specific to this school.* - *To consider possibilities for a more socially just schooling experience for all students.* - *To reflect on our experiences together this year as a dialogue group and consider the implications for teaching and learning.*	1. Dialogue starter 2. **Dialogue #3** – *Race in the classroom* 3. Dialogue about the PD experience 4. Reflection on the entire PD experience.	**IGD** - *Building relationships*: bridging difference - *Strengthening capacities to promote social justice*	**Critical Empathy** - *Reflective process:* self- and other-awareness - *Cognitive task:* perspective taking for understanding - *Affective response*: to others based on their needs

1.3.1. Critical empathy as a window/mirror

Heeding Boler's (1999) warning about the risk of "ahistorical passive empathy that does not challenge the world view of the person who feels it" (as cited in Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012, p. 19), *I conceptualize critical empathy as both a window and a mirror* (Bishop, 2012), *a process through which teachers can learn to see themselves and others in their complex wholeness.* In this way critical empathy can be seen as a significant part of the iterative learning cycle that CRP calls for and requires – and can be treated as a process to be developed, practiced, and deepened throughout a teacher's career. In light of this, I designed this critical, dialogic PD experience modeled on the framework of IGD – an intergroup learning model that engages participants in facilitated dialogue within and across difference, engages them in self and systems learning, and supports their unpacking of the sociocultural/sociohistorical forces at work within/beyond the space of the dialogue (Zúñiga, et al., 2007). For the purposes of this PD, I drew upon the structure and purpose of IGD, and included aspects of it such as the use of a small group structure, dialogic strategies, and a sustained approach. Additionally, I conceptualized and sought to organize this PD environment as a 'third space' (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999), or an 'in-between' where participants could "make sense of the (sometimes competing) discourses and systems which are prevalent in the other spaces they inhabit" (e.g., school, the community, places of worship, etc.) (McIntyre & Hobson, 2015, p. 5; Nyachae, 2018). According to Bhabha (1990), 'third spaces' are environments that welcome vulnerability and allow participants to engage with each other beyond the 'gaze' of

those within the other spaces they inhabit (e.g., outside the boundaries of both classroom teaching and home life). Therefore, due to the nature of 'third spaces' as places of open and authentic dialogue and engagement, they provide the fertile ground necessary for what Bakhtin (1981) called ideological becoming; or shifts/reorientations in people's way of seeing themselves and the social worlds around them (Nyachae, 2018). As CC requires an "unmasking" process, and thus a reorientation towards reality, I argue that the opportunity for teachers to experience ideological becoming is vital for the development of the CC component of critical empathy. In the two articles that follow this introduction, I articulate my theoretical foundations further, including Bakhtin's concept of ideological becoming, authoritative/internally persuasive discourses, and centripetal/centrifugal forces. However, here it is important to note that it was Bakhtin's theories that allowed me to make sense of the complexities of the PD space before, during, and after the series was complete – including the shift we had to make to the remote environment during sessions three and four due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.4. Two Articles Emerge

As I sought to make sense of this PD experience, I came to see the work in two distinct ways: one which examined the discourses that permeated the PD space; and one that analyzed the impacts of such a PD on white teachers working within a predominately white district. While both articles explore the same PD experience for the same participants, they take distinct angles and ask different questions concerning teachers' needs, ideas, experiences, and perspectives. Table 1.2 provides

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an overview of the twelve teachers who participated in the study and who were the

focus of both articles included in this dissertation.

Table 1.2. Self-identified Participant Demographics

PARTICIPANT*	SUBJECT TAUGHT	AGE	YEARS TAUGHT	GENDER IDENTITY	SEXUALITY	PARENT/ GUARDIAN
Henry Watson	English	44	18	Male	Heterosexual	Yes
Sarah Cook	Library	55	23	Female	Heterosexual	Yes
Zeus McCormick	English	47	25	Male	Heterosexual	Yes
Chloe Shafer	English	54	29	Female	Lesbian	No
Johnny Adams	Math	42	15	Male	Heterosexual	No
Mary Carter	SPED	28	6	Female	Heterosexual	No
Cora Russo	English	28	5	Female	Heterosexual	No
Paul Klein	English	47	25	Male	Heterosexual	Yes
Eliza Coughlan	English	56	18	Female	Heterosexual	Yes
Rosemary Turner	SPED	58	20	Female	Heterosexual	Yes
Franklin Jaegar	Hospitality	34	3	Male	Gay	No
Andrew Delanl	Culinary	36	10	Male	Heterosexual	No

*self-selected pseudonyms

In the first article, *"Why didn't I speak up?": Exploring the ideological becoming of*

secondary teachers during critical, dialogic professional development, I focused on the

discourses that permeated the PD space specifically, seeking to unpack the following

research questions:

1. What discourses do white, secondary teachers use, invoke, experience,

    and/or question during this type of professional development?

2. Does the use of and interaction with these discourses support ideological shifts towards more culturally competent pedagogies and beliefs?

Here, I centered the needs of secondary teachers concerning their professional learning and growth as I examined their dialogic experiences within all four of the PD sessions that were held throughout the school year. In so doing, I was able to make visible the often invisible discourses of both diversity and Whiteness that exist within one predominately white school, thus making clear the barriers to both components of critical empathy (cultural competence and the conventional aspects of empathy) that teachers often face in these environments. Then, in the second article, entitled, *Shifting to critical empathy: A critical, dialogic approach to professional development for white secondary teachers*, I shift my focus to the following research questions:

1. In what ways do predominately white schools and communities enable and/or inhibit a shift towards the enactment of critical empathy in secondary schools?

2. How does engaging in professional development intended to cultivate critical empathy impact white, secondary teachers' ideological selves?

3. Do teachers' conceptions of empathy become more critical as they participate in this type of critical, dialogic professional development?

Here, I theorize the concept of critical empathy more fully and center the experience of teachers within a critical, dialogic PD series. Specifically, I looked to see how participants ideologically responded to an environment designed to cultivate critical empathy. I focused my analysis for this article on both focus group sessions and all

reflective surveys that participants took at the end of each PD session, which provided a robust look at the emotional experiences of teachers. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, I was able to make sense of teachers' experiences – most of which affirmed the positive benefits of this type of PD – one in which participants had the opportunity to connect with each other, engage in the vulnerable acts of self-reflection and systems-inquiry, and move ideologically towards more critical teacher identities. Table 1.3 provides an overview of each article, including the data that was collected and analyzed during the 2019-2020 school year, the major theories utilized, and the methodologies implemented.

Table 1.3. Data collection and analysis by article

	Article1 *"Why didn't I speak up?":* *Exploring the ideological* *becoming of secondary teachers* *during critical, dialogic* *professional development*	**Article 2** *Shifting to critical empathy: A* *critical, dialogic approach to* *professional development for* *white secondary teachers*
Data Collected	- Audio recordings for PD Sessions 1-4 (12 hours total) - Researcher memos	- Audio recording of focus groups A & B (90 minutes each) - Reflective surveys from all four sessions (41 total) - Researcher memos
Theoretical Foundations	*Ideological Becoming;* *Centripetal/Centrifugal Forces;* *Authoritative/Internally* *Persuasive Discourses* (Bakhtin, 1981; Foucault, 1972)	*Ideological Environments;* *Ideological Selves* (Bakhtin, 1981) *Critical Empathy* (Gay, 2018; Freire, 1970; Mirra, 2018; Warren, 2015)
Methodology	*Critical discourse analysis* (Foucault, 1972; Gee, 2010; Jäger, 2001; Janks, 1997)	*Constructivist grounded theory* (Charmaz, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2007)

While the literature concerning secondary-teacher empathy has been

growing since McAllister & Irvine's (2002) landmark article, "The role of empathy in

teaching culturally diverse students," was published (e.g., Mirra, 2018; Warren,

2018), it has been slow at best. Yet, this research has found that teacher empathy

has a powerful impact on adolescent youth, especially youth of color, thus indicating

the need for research to explore how best to prepare and work with secondary

teachers to express and enact empathy in culturally proficient ways. This research

project is intended to amplify the needs of white secondary teachers working in

predominately white schools specifically through the lens of critical empathy

development. In this way, I hope to provide a template of sorts for researchers and

teacher-developers to create new opportunities for white educators to take on the

identity of critical educators.

1.5. References

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CHAPTER 2

ARTICLE 1: "WHY DIDN'T I SPEAK UP?": EXPLORING THE IDEOLOGICAL BECOMING OF SECONDARY TEACHERS DURING CRITICAL, DIALOGIC PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Introduction

Once teachers begin their careers in the classroom, they receive the most direct instruction and training as educators through ongoing professional development [PD]. Depending on the school district, grade level, and content expertise of teachers, these PD sessions generally have set goals with a certain amount of time allotted to fulfill those goals. In the traditional model of PD, school leaders do not consult with teachers before planning PD *for* them; rather, they dedicate the time to fragmented session topics that teachers generally have little to no choice or investment in (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Even if a topic is of interest to teachers, they are often provided little time or space to investigate or follow up on the PD experience, nor are they often provided with options for further learning (Kohli, Picower, Martinez, & Ortiz, 2015). As the wheel of school reform turns, these experiences can leave teachers increasingly disinterested, uninvested, and even cynical about the entire PD process (Meister, 2010; Fullan, 1991). But, as *the* designated space for professional learning and growth, this shift towards disillusionment and disinterest can be detrimental to school wide initiatives aimed at improving the lives and educational experiences of the students they serve.

This has been evident in the continued calls for the implementation of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy [CRP] in K-12 schools in the wake of both: the ever-growing demographic divide between a majority white teaching force and a rapidly diversifying student population; and the continued disparities between how white students and students of color experience and succeed in school. CRP has been theorized in a number of different ways (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 2014; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), with deference to context and students, but most commonly it is conceptualized through the lens of Geneva Gay's (2018) three-part framework. This includes holding *high expectations* for all students, developing *critical cultural competence*, and acting as an *agent of social justice*. While CRP has been called for across the spectrum of U.S. schools, not only in those schools that serve predominantly students of color (Colombo, 2007), the uptake and commitment to CRP in all schools, and in particular in predominantly white schools, has been slow and minimal overall (Albritton, Huffman, & McClellen, 2017). There have been some successful efforts to increase CRP through PD in schools (e.g. Colombo, 2010; McAllister & Irvine, 2002), and many teachers and schools do express interest in CRP today (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012), but more often than not, this interest continues to be "articulated around a need for effective strategies to engage students across difference" (p. 2). That is, teachers and schools express interest in: a) learning how to communicate with and effectively engage students across all spectrums of difference (e.g. race, gender, sexuality, language) in the learning process; b) learning how to teach students across all spectrums of difference to engage and learn with others who are different from them, and c) to participate in

unpacking difficult topics such as institutional and systemic oppression with

students.

However, a necessary precursor to implementing these strategies, generally

seen as the *outcomes* of authentic and effective culturally responsive teaching

(Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Warren, 2018) is the development of *critical cultural*

competence [CC] (Matias, 2013). For the purposes of this work, CC is defined as: 1.

having a firm understanding of one's own cultural and socialized identities as they

are nested within the larger sociohistorical context; and 2. the ability to analyze how

one's own and others social identities operate and are operated upon within

structures and systems (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Gay, 2018). This component of CRP

necessitates a significant level of vulnerability and trust, which takes sustained time

to develop, not one or two afternoon sessions fit in between many other competing

initiatives (such as reviewing standardized test data) as seen in the traditional PD

model (Nyachae, 2018; Colombo, 2007). The development of CC requires continuous

self-reflection, examinations of biased practices and policies, and the recognition

and analysis of difference. It asks teachers to move beyond an "awareness of what

[they] assume to be their students' cultures" (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012, p. 3)

towards a complex understanding of their own sociocultural identities – as teachers,

members of a particular race and culture, people with a particular gender identity

and sexual orientation, etc. – within the larger sociohistorical context (i.e. living and

teaching within the United States – a country with a deep history of racism and a

steadfast faith in meritocracy). It also often involves an "unmasking" process for

many teachers, as they come to see how institutions like schools continue to help

"reproduce existing social inequalities while giving the illusion that such inequalities are natural and fair" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, pp. 22-23).

However, in many predominantly white schools, where administrators tend to be dismissive toward the need for CRP training, citing the homogeneity of their student population or a lack of 'diversity' (Bishop & McClellen, 2016; Picower, 2011), this type of one-and-done approach to integrating CRP continues to be both common (Meister, 2010) and deeply ineffective. Due to this fragmented approach to PD, most K-12 teachers working in predominantly white districts do not gain experience participating in sustained, reflective work that asks them to think in new ways about their sociocultural identities, the inequities of schooling, and/or their students lived-experiences, cultural capital, implicit biases, and needs (Kohli, et al., 2015). Without these opportunities, it seems unlikely (if not impossible) that teachers would feel confident enough in their knowledge and self-awareness to support students in their navigation of the socially constructed worlds around them – i.e., to implement the principles of CRP in coherent and consistent ways.

This is particularly true for white teachers, most of whom have had similar segregated schooling experiences as their white students, "with less than 5% of their peers being from historically underrepresented groups" (Fry, 2007, p. 5). Scholars have noted that this isolation from diverse perspectives, coupled with lengthy exposure to a hidden curriculum imbued with Whiteness (e.g., Thomas, 2019; De Lissovoy, 2012), has left the majority of white folks with little lived experience or acquired knowledge of structural inequalities, such as institutional racism (Nyachae, 2018; Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Leonardo, 2002). Therefore,

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while white teachers' resistance to the vulnerable work of critical self-inquiry around issues of race, power, and privilege has been well documented (Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017; Reio, 2005; Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Matias, 2013; Yoo & Carter, 2017; Convertino, 2016; Colombo, 2010; Picower, 2009), and is a necessary area for growth, I argue that the limited or non-existent opportunities and supports white teachers have been given before and throughout their teaching careers to engage in such work amplifies this problem.

To address this, teachers must be afforded authentic, sustained, and supportive opportunities to develop CC throughout their teaching careers. Conceptualizing and organizing PD environments as 'third spaces' (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999), or 'in-betweens' where participants can "make sense of the (sometimes competing) discourses and systems which are prevalent in the other spaces they inhabit" (e.g., school, the community, places of worship, etc.) (McIntyre & Hobson, 2015, p. 5), is one promising way to provide these opportunities (Nyachae, 2018). According to Bhabha (1990), 'third spaces' are environments that welcome vulnerability and allow participants to engage with each other beyond the 'gaze' of those within the other spaces they inhabit (e.g., outside the boundaries of both classroom teaching and home life). Additionally, due to the nature of 'third spaces' as places of open and authentic dialogue and engagement, they provide the fertile ground necessary for what Bakhtin (1981) called ideological becoming; or shifts/reorientations in people's way of seeing themselves and the social worlds around them (Nyachae, 2018). As CC requires an "unmasking" process, and thus a reorientation towards reality, I argue that the

opportunity for teachers to experience ideological becoming is vital for the development of CC.

2.2. Purpose of the study

Therefore, the purpose of this study was twofold. First, it aimed to provide practicing teachers with the structural supports and space needed to develop cultural competence through a sustained, critical, and dialogic model of professional development, which was conceptualized and organized as a 'third space.' A cohort of twelve white teachers working in a predominantly white high school were brought together over the course of one academic year to: 1) learn about sociohistorical systems and sociocultural identities; 2) engage in personal self-inquiry and reflection about these systems and identities; 3) share emotions and personal lived experiences as sources of knowledge; 4) participate in facilitated and small-group dialogues about socially and politically charged topics relevant to teaching (such as implicit bias, sexism, racism, and the hidden curriculum of Whiteness); and 5) engage in group reflection, inquiry, and action planning. Using a cohort model and the foundations of intergroup dialogue [IGD] (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007) this PD began with an examination of the self and one's own sociocultural identities (such as race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), as they are nested within sociohistorical structures (such as the law, education, healthcare, etc.), looking deeply inward first, and then towards others (Freire, 1970) (See **Figure 2.1**).
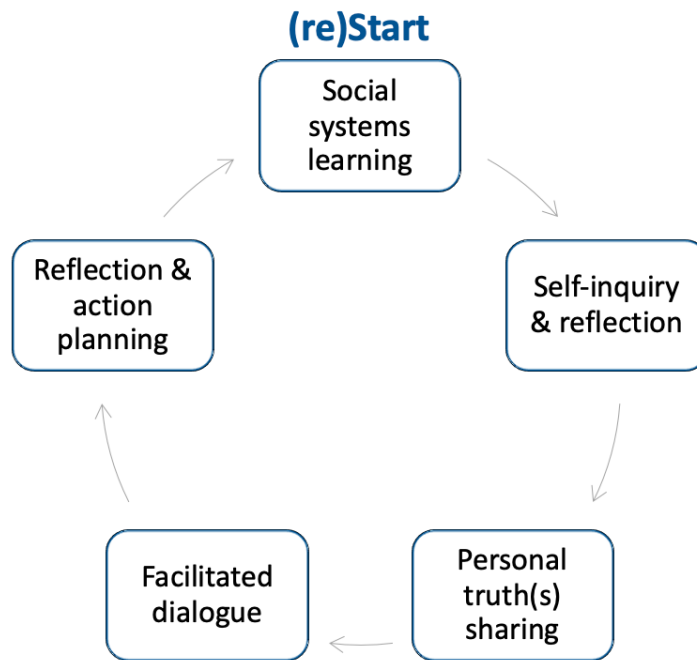
Figure 2.1. Progression of professional development

Additionally, as the development of CC requires a significant level of vulnerability and trust, along with a willingness to be honest with oneself and others (Matias & Zembylas, 2014), my purpose was also to deeply understand what happens within the 'third space' of a sustained, critical, and dialogic PD environment. Specifically, I sought to unpack, via critical discourse analysis (cda): a); the types of discourses white teachers took up, learned, invoked, or questioned during PD that was organized and facilitated as a third space, and b) the extent to which a PD organized and facilitated as a third space provided opportunities for white teachers to experience ideological becoming on trajectories towards developing and/or deepening critical cultural competence. The following research questions guided my inquiry:

3. What discourses do white, secondary teachers use, invoke, experience, and/or question during this type of professional development?

4. Does the use of and interaction with these discourses support ideological shifts towards more culturally competent pedagogies and beliefs?

2.3. Theoretical Framework

2.3.1. A critical dialogic approach to professional development

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature on teacher PD, Darling-Hammond, et al. (2017), identified seven elements of effective PD (with or without cultural competence as an aim): it is content focused; incorporates active learning; supports collaboration; uses models of effective practice; provides coaching and expert support; offers feedback and reflection; and is of sustained duration. According to the review, these seven factors result in the most substantial changes in teachers' practices and improve student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, et. al., 2017). Additionally, Colombo's (2010) work, which aimed to implement PD that specifically supported the cultural competence of "mainstream white teachers," observed three necessities of effective *critical* PD: the need for teachers to experience disequilibrium; the need for facilitators to make explicit connections between PD content and classroom contexts; and the need to regroup after each experience to discuss, debrief, and reflect. That is, white teachers benefited from the experience of being vulnerable, from having connections modeled for them by their facilitators, and from being actively involved in learning that brought them into deeper connection with their colleagues. Colombo's (2010) work highlights key

elements of supporting adult learners (i.e., teachers) in their development of cultural competence; namely, teachers' emotions, personal lived-experiences, and need for community, must be taken into consideration for learning to take place. Intergroup dialogue [IGD], a model of intergroup learning, integrates all three of these elements, engaging participants in facilitated dialogue within and across difference, *while* engaging in self and systems learning and unpacking the sociocultural/sociohistorical forces at work within/beyond the space of the dialogue (Zúñiga, et al., 2007). It therefore presents a promising framework for bringing the effective components of PD as identified by both Darling-Hammond, et al. (2017) and Colombo (2010) into secondary teacher development.

While IGD has rarely been used with K-12 educators as a form of professional development (e.g. Dessel, 2010), it has seen extraordinary success with undergraduate students and faculty members at large universities in developing cross-cultural skills and reducing prejudice (Zúñiga et al., 2007; Muller & Miles, 2017; Dessel & Rogge, 2008), and it has been successfully used with pre-service teachers in developing more race-conscious attitudes and cultural competence (Convertino, 2016; Murray-Everett, 2016). Perhaps one of the most profound reasons for its success has to do with what Dessel & Rogge (2008) found in their review of the literature concerning IGD: "dialogue processes ... have been shown to facilitate some of [the] crucial components of attitude change, namely critical self-reflection and perspective taking" (p. 213). As moving schools and teachers towards more culturally responsive teaching practices requires shifts in attitudes towards race, culture, and Whiteness (Leonardo, 2002), this indicates that using aspects of

IGD with in-service teachers as a form of critical PD presents a vital opportunity. This is even further supported by the fact that IGD's three main goals align closely with the three-part framework of CRP (see **Figure 2.2.**).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy [1]	CRP & IGD	Intergroup Dialogue [2]
Hold high expectations	Critical self-reflection and self-inquiry	Building relationships
Develop cultural competence	Self and systems knowledge building	Consciousness raising
Embody social justice attitude within/beyond school	Develop/deepen capacity for social justice	Strengthen capacity for social justice work

[1] (Gay, 2010)
[2] (Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007)

Figure 2.2. Alignment of CRP framework and goals of IGD

While participating in a complete IGD experience would be complicated for most in-service teachers, due to time constraints, the overwhelming requirements of the teaching profession, and a lack of trained facilitators, aspects of IGD, such as: learning about social identity and systemic inequality; sharing emotions and personal lived-experiences in a supportive environment; and engaging in facilitated dialogue about socially and politically charged topics relevant to teaching, can and have been brought into time spent on PD. In fact, Muller & Miles (2017) demonstrated that a modified (i.e. condensed) version of the "critical dialogic model (Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013) can still have positive outcomes for participants"

including "the development of critical social awareness" (p. 67). This was

demonstrated clearly in Dessel's (2010) PD work with teachers in a conservative

area of the United States. Using a modified version of IGD called "Fostering Dialogue

Across Divides" (designed by *Essential Partners*) Dessel ran three, three-hour long

dialogue sessions with in-service teachers and LGB (Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual)

community members in an effort to shift teacher attitudes towards LGB students

and families. While challenges to using this framework were plenty, the reduction in

biased attitudes and negative feelings towards LGB students and families indicate

positive movement towards culturally competent practices, which recognize how

schools can and do "reproduce existing inequalities" for culturally different 'others'

(Villegas & Lucas, 2016, pp. 21-22).

2.3.2. Critical dialogic PD as a 'third space'

One of the most important components to the successes of Dessel and other's

work using IGD (with any population) are the environments that are created for

participants to work and dialogue within (Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017;

Convertino, 2016). Due to the vulnerable nature of the IGD process, which

"integrates cognitive learning about identity, difference, and inequality with

affective involvement of oneself and others through sharing intimate personal

reflections and meaningful critical dialogues" (Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013, p. 5),

facilitating this work necessitates the creation of a safe and supportive environment.

That is, participants need to feel that vulnerability, honesty, and challenge (of their

own and other's beliefs, assumptions, and biases) are not only welcome, but are

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both safe *and* expected from all involved. In Dessel's case, her research also created

what I consider a 'third space' (Bhabha, 1990), in which participants (teachers and

community members) came together *outside* of their traditional environments in a

community-based setting to engage with different perspectives, discourses, and

ideologies concerning LGB people and their lived experiences. Through consciously

facilitated sessions, aimed at improving the lives, access, and inclusion of LGB

students and families, participants were encouraged to develop more complex

understandings of their own and others' sociocultural identities and the

sociohistorical forces that have and continue to impact them and others differently.

Beyond the gaze of both the general community and the school community, this

group of teachers and LGB community members were able to dialogue openly about

the discourses and perspectives they are exposed to and participate in, thus

providing opportunities for all to humanize themselves and each other.

According to Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda (1999) these 'third

spaces', or zones of development, make this type of learning and growth possible

because they embrace the use of "multiple, diverse, and even conflicting mediational

tools" (p. 286). That is, third spaces, by their nature, disrupt the standard activity

system – the "social practices that include the norms, values, divisions of labor, goals

of the community, and its participants enduring dispositions towards the social

practice" (p. 287). When a group of people are brought together in an environment

that embraces this disruption, such as in the case of Dessel's work with straight

secondary teachers and LGB community members, transformational learning and

the development of critical social awareness are possible (e.g. Jaber, Southerland, & Dake, 2018; Ullman & Hecsh, 2011; Guillemette, 2017).

Therefore, I conceptualized and organized the PD that is the focus of this study as a 'third space' – operating in between the 'official' discursive space of school and the 'unofficial' discursive space of home (Bhabha, 1994) in order to allow for the disruption of the standard activity system (Gutiérrez, 2008) of a predominantly white community. In so doing, I aimed to support the complex and vulnerable work necessary for the development and/or deepening of white teachers' critical cultural competence through the integration of: multiple and diverse discourses; opportunities for personal truth sharing and reflection; and in-depth self and systems learning that is beyond the spectrum of traditional PD. Through this experience, I was particularly interested in how teachers participated in these dialogues, what discourses they used, and what discursive moves they made as they engaged in a third space environment. I hoped that by participating in such an environment, teachers would be able to experience ideological becoming (Bakhtin, 1986), or shifts/reorientations in their ways of seeing themselves and the social worlds around them, that would lead to more culturally competent perspectives.

2.3.3. Ideological becoming in predominantly white spaces

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, our ideological self, "our way of viewing the world, [or] our system of ideas," (Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 5) comes to be through the process of ideological becoming. The ideological self is not constructed as a set

of "isolated concepts or ideas," but rather, the process of ideological becoming involves the self in its complex wholeness. For example, how a teacher develops her view, or perspective, of multicultural education, cannot be isolated from how she develops her views of ideas such as human success, love, culture, and identity. She is a whole person, with a "complex of ideas and concepts" that are interrelated, and which influence and are influenced by the social worlds that she experiences. Within each social world, including that of public school, there are two main categories of discourse that all people encounter: a) authoritative discourses, which "we encounter … with its authority already fused to it" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342), and b) internally persuasive discourses, which people individually manifest from 'within' based on their own lived experiences. The second category of discourses are considered internally persuasive due to the personal nature of them – that is, they are discourses that individuals believe in, utilize, and depend on based on their personal perspectives and lived experiences. While many people embody significantly similar, internally persuasive discourses due to their upbringings, peer groups, cultural experiences, and identities, the nuances of people's lives breed an infinite variety of internally persuasive discourses, which Bakhtin referred to as *heteroglossia*. Similar or disparate, these internally persuasive discourses, or "sea of many voices", represent the diversity of perspectives present in all environments (Bakhtin, 1981), and as we enter, experience, and participate in various environments, we respond to, take up, and revoice these discourses for our own purposes. Depending on both, our awareness and acknowledgement of the discourse(s) that are present, and our relationship to the people in an environment,

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our level of internal agreement or resonance with a particular discourse, whether it be authoritative or internally persuasive, may cause struggle or tension, which Bakhtin called ideological becoming. As we continuously interact with new discourses in new environments throughout our lives, we experience changes or shifts in our beliefs, priorities, values, and practices. That is, we ideologically "become" a new version of ourselves as we continuously interact with varied, and ever-changing, ideological environments.

The first category, authoritative discourses, have the most power to centralize particular ways of speaking, acting, and thinking about specific ideas or idea systems. That is, they have the greatest capacity to act as *centripetal* (i.e. centralizing) forces (Bakhtin, 1981). These discourses are ever-present in society and can be seen easily in the language of policies, laws, religion, and science. Policy mandates such as standardized testing and vaccine requirements, for example, are two ways that authoritative discourses maintain power in specific environments. Unlike authoritative discourses, the second category of discourse people encounter Bakhtin calls internally persuasive discourses. These discourses are always subject to change, are able to persuade people individually, and have the ability to disrupt centralizing forces. That is, they can act as *centrifugal* (i.e. diversifying) forces that attempt to promote multiple perspectives, ideas, and idea systems. While these discourses are often "denied all privilege, backed by no authority at all … [and] frequently not even acknowledged in society" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342), they are constantly presenting themselves as we self-reflect, communicate with others, and

consume content (i.e., media, text, news, etc.). For a visual representation of these forces, see **Figure 2.3.,** (Gíslason, 2019).

Centrifugal (away from a center)   Centripetal (towards a center)
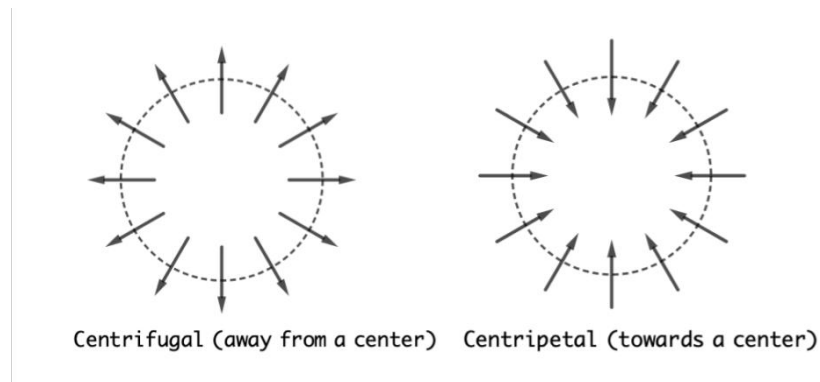
Figure 2.3. Centrifugal vs. centripetal forces

Within spaces that are characterized by homogenous identities, particularly those of historically advantaged social groups (such as white people or men), the opportunity to engage in productive struggle with a 'diversity of discourses' is often limited (Picower, 2011). In these environments, authoritative discourses are therefore, more often than not, able to maintain their centralized power with relatively little effort and are able to "silence diversity" (Bishop & McClellen, 2017, p. 130). For teachers working in predominantly white schools, their opportunities to experience ideological becoming that moves them towards more culturally competent values, beliefs, and practices (through interaction with a "diversity of voices") is limited, mostly due to the re-segregated nature of public schools (Johnson & King, 2019; Rothstein, 2013). This often leads to white teachers and students putting an undue burden on the few students and teachers of color to explain oppression, racism, or cultural competence to them, and/or to be the 'multicultural voices' of the school. Left unchecked and unexamined, white teachers'

hegemonic beliefs about learning and culture often act as authoritative discourses, reaffirming dominant perspectives that maintain structurally biased system (Villegas & Lucas, 2016; Sleeter, 2001; Picower, 2009; Leonardo, 2002). These discourses perpetuate deficit views of students and families of color (Nieto, 2003) and are translated not only to the few students of color in these environments, but also to the predominantly white student body, who learn "important messages about what is means to be white and overrepresented" from their white teachers' discourses (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012), thus perpetuating harmful cycles.

Therefore, if we hope to answer the calls for CRP in *all* of our schools, the ideological selves of teachers prior to and during PD, as well as the authoritative and internally persuasive discourses they have access to and use, must be considered. This is of particular importance given the well-documented resistance of white teachers towards the cultural competence component of CRP (e.g. Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2016; Sleeter, 2016), which has been connected to the influence of white guilt (Leonardo, 2009). Providing opportunities for white teachers working at predominantly white schools to engage in critical dialogue through the creation of a 'third space', in which a diversity of voices and perspectives is encouraged through non-racial identity markers (such as gender, sexual orientation, age, parental status) is one promising pathway towards the perspective shifts embodied in ideological becoming, thus supporting teachers' movement towards more culturally competent ideologies. (See **Figure 2.4.** for my Theory of Change).

CRITICAL & DIALOGIC PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Third space

Learn about socio-cultural identity & systemic inequality

Share emotions & lived-experiences across difference

Participate in facilitated dialogue about charged topics

Engage with a diversity of internally persuasive discourses

Bring awareness to the presence of authoritative discourses

Ideological becoming

Develop/Deepen Cultural Competence

Figure 2.4. Theory of Change 1

In short, bringing together a group of white participants who have a shared racial history is multi-purposed. First, it creates an environment that dissolves some of the anxiety white participants feel in speaking about topics such as institutional racism, especially when they may not have the language or knowledge to do so with ease or depth of understanding (Matias, 2013; Marx & Pennington, 2003). This is *not* to relieve white people of their culpability in structural racism, but instead as a way to open the door for more honest dialogue through the curbing of defensive behaviors that often arise from white guilt and discomfort (Matias & Zembylas, 2014). Second, it prevents white people from using the experiences of people of color as the *only* source of developing their cultural competency (Glazier, 2009). This dynamic continues to place the undue burden on people of color to "teach" white people about constructs like race and is based on the false assumption that white people are racially ignorant. However, as Leonardo (2009) points out, "for a group that

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claims racial ignorance, whites can speak with such authority and expertise when they do not like what they hear" about race (p. 112). Lastly, in putting the burden on white people, it recognizes the harm and injury done to people of color by asking white people to engage in critical self-inquiry and the development of cultural competence on their own (Tatum, 2019). By bringing together a group of white teachers to engage in this type of critical work, a reliance on other resources, such as participants' lived-experiences of gender, sexual orientation, parental status, and age, as well as the writings, teachings, and voices of people of color (via film, text, and audio recordings) is paramount to developing and deepening cultural competence.

2.4. Context and participants

This study is part of a larger research project that looked at the effects of a critical dialogic approach to PD, in connection with the development of critical empathy in white secondary teachers. Data collected for the larger research project included: pre- and post- quantitative data based on the Interpersonal Reactivity Index [IRI]; audio and field notes from four researcher-facilitated dialogue sessions; audio and field notes from two focus groups; post-session reflective surveys; and session artifacts. This portion of the study focuses specifically on the audio and field notes from the four, three-hour, researcher-facilitated dialogue sessions that were conducted over the course of the academic year (2019-2020) during regularly scheduled PD time. Due to the impact of Covid-19 (the disease caused by the coronavirus) only the first two PD sessions were able to be held in-person. For the

health and safety of all, the final two sessions were held remotely using Zoom, a video conferencing tool. Challenges and benefits to this necessary transition to an online forum, and suggestions for hosting critical and dialogic PD in a remote setting are addressed in the conclusions.

Despite the change in format, the four-stage critical dialogic model of IGD was still used as the foundation for all four sessions, with modifications to accommodate constraints and to directly address the needs of practicing teachers at the time. The typical four stages of the IGD model are: 1) beginnings: forming and building relationships, 2) exploring differences and commonalities, 3) exploring and discussing hot topics, and 4) action planning and alliance building (Zúñiga et al., 2007). While all four stages were included in this series, the focus was on stages two and three: the exploration of commonalities and differences; and the exploration and discussion of 'hot topics' (i.e. socially and politically charged topics such as racism on campus or transgender rights).

2.4.1. Research site

In-person components of the study (the first two PD sessions and both focus groups) took place at the same regional high school in New England that enrolls approximately 1,200 students in grades 9-12, which I will refer to as *Quills Regional High School.* Quills is a rather unique public school in New England, as it houses both academic and vocational divisions. However, like many suburbanized schools in the United States, Quills serves a predominantly white student body (90%) with a relatively low percentage of families who are considered economically

disadvantaged (20%). Additionally, the teaching population at Quills is almost

completely white, with only three teachers of color (2% of the total teaching staff)

and aligns with the national ratios of male to female teachers according to the

National Center for Education Statistics (SASS, 2018) with 40% male teachers and

60% female teachers. While both remote PD sessions did not take place within the

Quills' school building, as it took place on Zoom, it is important to note that all

participants remained practicing teachers at Quills for the duration of the study.

2.4.2. Participants

Participants self-selected into the research study after a brief presentation

about the PD opportunity was made during a faculty meeting at the beginning of the

school year. A cohort of twelve white teachers resulted. While the participants all

self-identified as white, there was a diversity of ages and genders in the group, as

well as some diversity of sexuality and parental status. **Table 2.1** provides the

subjects taught and self-identified demographics of each participant gathered

during pre-PD one-on-one meetings I had with each participant.

Table 2.1. Self-identified participant demographics

NAME*	SUBJECT TAUGHT	AGE	YEARS TAUGHT	GENDER IDENTITY	SEXUALITY	PARENT/ GUARDIAN
Henry Watson	English	44	18	Male	Heterosexual	Yes
Sarah Cook	Library	55	23	Female	Heterosexual	Yes
Zeus McCormick	English	47	25	Male	Heterosexual	Yes
Chloe Shafer	English	54	29	Female	Lesbian	No
Johnny Adams	Math	42	15	Male	Heterosexual	No

Mary Carter	SPED	28	6	Female	Heterosexual	No
Cora Russo	English	28	5	Female	Heterosexual	No
Paul Klein	English	47	25	Male	Heterosexual	Yes
Eliza Coughlan	English	56	18	Female	Heterosexual	Yes
Rosemary Turner	SPED	58	20	Female	Heterosexual	Yes
Franklin Jaegar	Hospitality	34	3	Male	Gay	No
Andrew Delanl	Culinary	36	10	Male	Heterosexual	No

*self-selected pseudonyms

2.4.3. Data Collection

During the pre-PD one-on-one meetings I had with participants, University approved informed consent forms, which including details and space to agree to audio recording for all four PD sessions, were provided and discussed. All participants had an opportunity during that time and during the month leading up to our first PD session in early December 2019 to ask questions about the process, audio recording, and the intended goals of the series. Before the first PD session, all twelve participants signed the informed consent forms and agreed to audio recording and transcription with a clear understanding that they could change their mind at any time during the process (concerning all or some of their audio contributions).

Audio data for all in-person portions were recorded using two researcher-owned recording devices, both with password protection. For the two remote PD sessions, audio was captured using the Zoom conferencing software, which was directly downloaded to a password protected folder on a researcher-owned, password protected computer. While Zoom records both audio and visual data,

audio and video were separated using Adobe Premiere Pro video software and only

the audio was used for data analysis. Participants were made aware of this

difference in how they were being recorded prior to the necessary shift to remote

PD during the COVID-19 pandemic, and those who were able to participate agreed

to this new approach via email correspondence.

After all four sessions, audio data was catalogued based on the time stamp

and activity (e.g. opening round, break-out discussion, full-group dialogue, etc.) from

all recording devices or software used. Objective summaries were written and

attached to each activity in the catalogue, with audio lengths ranging from <5 – 30

minutes per activity. Participants whose voices were present in each activity were

noted accordingly. Complete session audio, which were individually between three

and three and a half hours long, were all roughly transcribed using a digital

transcription service called HappyScribe as a means of reference. However,

transcripts of audio segments that were selected as moments for in-depth analysis

were completely verified and corrected independently by the researcher. The

selection process for these audio segments in particular is discussed later in this

document.

2.4.4. Researcher positionality

As a trained IGD facilitator, I acted as the primary and only facilitator of all

dialogue sessions as well as the researcher. While it is uncommon for IGD sessions

to only have one facilitator, the constraints of public-school environments along

with the population of teachers at Quills made it necessary to have only one

facilitator. Additionally, as a former teacher at *Quills*, I had a particular familiarity with the school; its structure and daily functioning, as well as the demographics of the student body. This connection is of course, twofold. On the one hand, it provided me with what Fairclough (1992) referred to as "members' resources" – knowledge about teachers' daily experiences that would otherwise be unknown – while it also encouraged greater trust in me as a facilitator as participants knew that I had not only been a teacher, but I had been a teacher at their school. On the other hand, knowing Quills so deeply presented the possibility of bias, as there was a potential for me to be influenced by my own experiences at the school in my facilitation. In addressing this possibility, I critically self-reflected before and after each session concerning my emotions and perspectives of the dialogue and participants, keeping a log of my personal experiences in order to help me better understand my own biases/judgements. In this way, I worked mindfully to mitigate my roles as facilitator and researcher. I also made a conscious decision to include member checking as a means of triangulation and as a check on my dual role as researcher and facilitator as I analyzed the data.

Finally, it is important to identify who I am and what I brought into the dialogue space as our personal sociocultural identities also present the possibility of bias. I am a thirty-one-year-old, white, female, lesbian, who is a native English speaker and a non-parent. As a white woman I have and continue to experience the unearned privileges afforded to white people in a racialized society, and no matter how much I have deepened my knowledge of the stratified social structures that we exist within, I am keenly aware that blind spots will be revealed throughout my

lifetime. As a lesbian, and as one of the very few teachers who were 'out' as

belonging to the LGBTQ community at Quills while I was teaching there, I was able

to bring a different perspective to our dialogue sessions, which were made up of

mostly heterosexual folks. Therefore, throughout this experience, I continued to

unpack my blind spots and perspectives via additional research and reading,

through a critical friend group – with colleagues who were doing similar work – as

well as through my critical self-reflection logs as a means to mitigate my own biases.

2.5. Analytical approach and stages of analysis

2.5.1. Defining discourse

Linguists and discourse analysts have defined and theorized the concept of

"discourse" in a variety of ways. According to Foucault (1972), discourse is a way of

speaking, acting, and writing *about* a topic or idea that is institutionally acceptable

during a particular historic and cultural episteme (or moment in time). Discourse,

he argued, constructs knowledge about specific ideas or topics, and thus governs the

ways people behave, think, and even feel/express emotions about given topics or

ideas (Foucault, 1972). That is, discourses, which construct *knowledge*, regulate and

maintain *power* over how people behave, think, and even feel/express emotions

(Foucault, 1972). Gee (2014), added to this conception, articulating the multifaceted

nature of discourse. He classified discourse into two 'types', which he called Big "D"

Discourse and little "d" discourse. Big "D" Discourses, he claimed, are the socially

produced ways people speak, act, think, interact, behave, listen, etc. when

embodying a given social identity (i.e. teacher, woman, father, Black man, nurse,

etc.), or find themselves within specific social contexts (i.e. in a courtroom, classroom, mosque, etc.). Little "d" discourses, however, are the everyday behaviors, words, actions, etc. that people perform that (re)constructs the big "D" Discourses. For example, a judge wearing a black robe while in the courtroom, or a woman kissing her romantic, male partner when she leaves the house are both examples of little d discourses that (re)construct and reinforce big D discourse within society writ large. Similarly, Fairclough (1992), the founder of Critical Discourse Analysis [CDA] articulated that discourse is not simply a matter of choice *or* a matter of social construction: it is both a constitutive and a constituting force, one that both constructs the world and is constructed by it – just as we individually enact particular discourses and are acted upon by other discourses. Due to the need for a consistent conceptualization of discourse for the purposes of analysis, I draw on the work of all three of these scholars in defining **discourse** as: *a social practice that does ideological work within a specific context, which is constructed by and constructs a way of speaking, acting, emoting, and writing about a topic or idea.*

2.5.2. Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis [cda] "stems from a critical theory of language which sees the use of language as a form of social practice," and seeks to understand how discourse is "implicated in relations of power" (Janks, 1997, p. 329). It is concerned primarily with "the way social-power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk, 2003, p. 352), and whenever possible, it aims to do so "from a

perspective that is consistent with the best interests of dominated groups" (van Dijk, 2011, p.96). This underlying theory of cda is mostly consistent across analysts as it is deeply rooted in critical aims of social equity and deconstructing power. However, as with the many conceptualizations of 'discourse', there are many varied and vastly different approaches to conducting cda as an analytical method. Therefore, in an effort to conduct as rigorous and multidimensional of an analysis of my cohort's discursive participation as possible, I merge aspects of various scholarship in conducting a critical discourse analysis of the data. In this way, I follow van Dijk's advice that "good CDA should be essentially diverse and multidisciplinary" (p. 96), rather than standardized.

First, I ground my analysis in Foucault's (1972) definition of discourse as knowledge/power highlighted above, acknowledging that power circulates within all environments through discourses, which constructs knowledge and thus maintains power over institutionally acceptable ways of being, acting, and thinking within those environments. Second, I connect this definition to both Gee's concept of Big D discourses and Bakhtin's concept of centripetal forces. Big D Discourses, according to Gee, maintain power over acceptable ways of acting, thinking, behaving, dressing, speaking, and even feeling/expressing emotions while inhabiting a particular Discourse (i.e., teacher, student, judge, etc.). Similarly, centripetal forces seek to centralize ways of being and doing and can be easily seen in the authoritative discourses of policies, laws, religion, and science. However, Gee's concept of little d discourses, and Bakhtin's concept of centrifugal forces push against these centralizing and powerful discourses, providing opportunities to

break apart, and thus (re)construct discourses. Throughout my analytical process, I sought to make visible the ways power circulated in the space of the PD environment via participants discursive choices - how they used, took up, invoked, and questioned Big D/authoritative and little d/internally persuasive discourses.

2.5.3. Analytical Process

In specifically structuring my analytical process, I used Jäger's (2001) concepts of *discourse strands* (i.e., "flows of discourse that center on a common topic"), and *discourse positions* (i.e., people or group's ideological perspective concerning given discourse strands) in order to organize how participants experienced, used, and responded to the variety of discourses present. By identifying discourse strands and discourse positions I observed how participants assimilated, rejected, questioned, and/or maintained certain perspectives and ideologies across our sessions. The integration of these concepts provided me with a robust framework with which to answer both of my research questions by unpacking how teachers: a) took up, used, resisted, questioned, or invoked specific discourses strands, and b) (re)negotiated their relationships with themselves and each other within the environment of a third space, with a special emphasis on moments of possible ideological becoming.

The first phase of my analytical process included initial passes through the data using Gee's (2010) discourse analysis tools (see **Figure 2.5.** for a visual representation of this process), during which I reviewed all four PD-session audio (full group and break-out group data) multiple times, listening for macro-level, big

"D" Discourses (e.g. the U.S. is a post-racial society, race is political, the classroom is apolitical, teachers are role models, white people are fragile, etc.). Segments were coded within my audio catalogue identifying any Big D discourses that emerged during this macro-level process.

During phase two, I began using Dedoose, a digital data coding application, to code and catalogue what Jäger (2001) refers to as *discourse fragments*, or moments of talk that are thematically cohesive, which, when combined, make up *discourse strands*. There were two categories of discourse fragments that I catalogued during this phase of analysis. The first focused on moments of discourse that were implicitly or explicitly related to the development of CC. That is, they demonstrated self-reflection, examinations of biased practices and policies, and/or the recognition and analysis of difference. The second focused on moments that demonstrated significant tension within and between participants. These fragments were identified as a means to make visible how participants' discourses pushed up against centripetal and/or centrifugal forces within the PD environment, thus indicating ideological becoming. These moments were marked by participants expressing strong emotions, questioning the thinking of others or themselves, or verbally expressing the experience of stress or tension. The discourse fragments identified at this stage ranged in length, from a few seconds to five minutes, and as is typical of discourse, often included *entangled discourses* – or multiple discourse strands within the same discourse fragment. As such, some discourse fragments were catalogued under multiple potential discourse strands.

PHASE 1
Macro-level analysis: **big "D" Discourses**

PHASE 2
Micro-level analysis of discourse fragments that are reveal moments of tension **and/o**r implicitly/explicitly relate to the development of CC in that they demonstrate:
- Self-reflection and/or self-awareness
- Examinations of biased practices and policies
- Recognition/analysis of difference

PHASE 3
Patterns within fragments are collapsed into **discourse strands and sub-strands**

(re)Define discourse strands

Generate subthemes

Return to discourse fragments

PHASE 4
In-depth analysis of **selected fragments** through the unpacking of finer linguistic details, including rhetorical moves, turn-taking, hedging and modals, and moments of laughter.

Figure 2.5. Analytical process

During phase three, as I began to see patterns take shape, I collapsed discourse fragments into discourse strands, and identified any entanglements within those discourse strands. During this recursive phase, I iteratively reviewed fragments related to each discourse strand for relevance and connection to each strand, thereby transforming my understanding and definition of the strands, including the generation of sub-strands. Throughout this process, I made note of fragments that seemed worthy of closer analysis for a few reasons: the fragment contained expressions of tension and/or strong emotion within or between participants, indicative of ideological becoming; the participant(s) explicitly addressed their own or another person's CC or the concept of CRP; or the

participant(s)' talk indicated something significant about the space of the PD (including the facilitation of it). Throughout these analyses, I recursively looped back to phase three, making adjustments to discourse strands and sub-strands as new understandings emerged.

The fourth and final phase included micro-analyses of discourse fragments, which I refer to as key instances, unpacking how the some of the finer linguistic features of selected fragments both constructed, and were constructed by, the discourse strands they aligned with. Linguistic features that I found salient to this analytical phase included: rhetorical moves (e.g., questioning, agreeing, reinforcing, distracting, connecting, repeating), turn-taking (e.g., pausing, taking up or ignoring a certain topic, interrupting), local semantic moves such as hedging (e.g. words or phrases such as "might be" or "sort of") and modals (e.g., possibly, definitely, maybe), and moments of laughter. These discourse moves provided valuable insight into the often "hidden" ways that power circulates in "face-to-face discourse" (Fairclough, 1992), thus providing a robust analysis of the discursive participation of white teachers in this type of PD environment.

2.6. Findings

Throughout the course of this year-long professional development, the "standard activity system" (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999) was able to be disrupted, as participants explored their shared humanity in ways they had never before had the opportunity to do with their colleagues. This led to participants being able to make visible the often, invisible authoritative discourses

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within the school environment (which were, in many ways, tied to hegemonic, racist, sexist, and classist visions of schooling and reality). That is, the space acted as a centrifugal force – breaking apart powerful discourses that kept teachers isolated and scared to speak up. The space also acted as a centripetal force, as participants began to coalesce around the need for more training like this, more authentic conversations about needed changes in the curriculum, and a more focused approach from administration (and real prioritization) of these issues. Four main categories of discourse emerged from the data, including the discourses of diversity, Whiteness, progress, and identity. However, for the purposes of this paper, I focus on the two that are most connected to the development/deepening of cultural competence, the discourses of diversity and Whiteness. Within the findings, I describe and discuss the ways in which participants unpacked, questioned, made visible, and pushed against the limits of what was allowable to say within the confines of these discourses, and I explore the trajectory of participants' ideological becoming in so doing.

2.6.1. Discourses of diversity

As this PD experience was organized and facilitated in ways that hoped to provide space for teachers to dialogue about the experiences and needs of diverse identities – and included topics such as social identity, implicit bias, Whiteness, socialization, and levels and types of oppression – I expected to see discourses emerge that, at the very least, centered diverse identities and their experiences as topics worthy of conversation and dialogue. Given the structure of the environment,

with a facilitator and participants, I also expected a certain level of discursive role-playing to occur, where the teacher-participants acted out their part in the experience, offering answers or thoughts they felt were "appropriate" or "correct" in the eyes of the facilitator. That is, within a PD environment such as this one, there were certain discourses that would have been perceived as authoritative, as it was aimed at moving teachers towards greater degrees of cultural competence. Therefore, I expected to hear participants take up and use these authoritative discourses (brought in by the facilitator) as a way to demonstrate alignment with the discursive environment. While there might have been some of this present, the way in which participants reflected on their school demonstrated an authentic engagement with a variety of discourses they were unearthing together. The extent to which these discourses were made visible, articulated, and engaged with in a predominantly white school speaks to their power within the environment at Quills, and within the larger context of public education in the United States. Over the course of the year-long professional development, teachers used, questioned, invoked, and took up three specific and interrelated discourse strands connected to the big D discourse of diversity: 1. we are not diverse – this is a white school, 2. nondiverse (read "all or mostly all white?) schools aren't oppressive, and 3. diversity is not a priority.

2.6.1.a. We are not diverse – this is a white school

Out of all of the discourse strands that connected to the concept of diversity, the one most often heard from participants was one that claimed an actual lack of

diversity within Quills High. That is, participants articulated ways that the whiteness of the school and the school community were foundational to their district's identity, in effect, overshadowing and erasing other forms of difference that were present – both consciously and subconsciously. This strand is deeply connected to the discourses of Whiteness that will be discussed later in this paper, but here, it is critical to unpack the significance of a discourse of diversity that uses a white majority as a rationale for not centering (or even seeing/hearing) the voices and experiences of students who embody marginalized identities (e.g. Black, woman, LGBTQ+, etc.).

Based on Bakhtin's theories, I would expect to see discourses do ideological work as centrifugal and centripetal forces. As the language invoked here – we are not diverse – in effect erases all forms of difference and recenters white as the main identity of the school, it acts as a centripetal force. Invoking it, therefore, acts as a powerful way to keep people from thinking or acting otherwise, as demonstrated by the administration of Quills. It is a powerful tactic that works in two ways. First, it assumes that diversity of any kind – but especially racial diversity – brings problems or "issues" along with it, rather than seeing this as a strength or asset. Second, it shuts down any competing discourses that would claim otherwise, thus providing a way out of doing anything to care for the marginalized identities that exist in the space. In the fragment below, one of the most vocal participants, Eliza, a white cis-hetero woman and parent with two decades of teaching experience, names this discourse as one that is circulated and reinforced by the principal of the school.

However, while she depicts his use of the discourse as a means of avoidance and erasure, she questions the validity of it and pushes back against it as well.

> I, you know, one conversation that I've had with people in administration since I started at [Quills] was that I don't, you don't have to have a diverse school to to have standards and and, you know, guidelines around issues of race and diversity and social justice. That, even though we might not be as diverse here, we're living in in a diverse world and we're preparing students for that. And yet because, for a lot for a long time, the response was always like, "well, listen, we're basically a white school, so we don't have to deal with this, you know, we'll deal with that later."

Here, Eliza shares her experience with the school's principal by expressing both what she has said to him in the past, and ventriloquizing his response, including the phrase, "we're basically a white school." This statement acts as the centripetal force that the principal's argument is built upon – "so we don't have to deal with this, you know, we'll deal with that later." The ventriloquized speech expresses both, how dismissive Eliza feels the principal's discourse is to diverse identities (especially racial identities), as well as how entrenched and pervasive the authoritative discourse that claims diversity to only be present in "other" than all or mostly all white spaces. That is, Eliza's discourse acts as a centrifugal force, as she generates an alternative way to discuss the population of Quills and their needs – including the fact that even though they might not be diverse at Quills, they are "preparing students for that". Even as she does so though, she continues to take as true that diversity implies something *different* or *other* than a homogenous, white community, thus demonstrating the power of this hegemonic and authoritative, Big D discourse of diversity. She does not claim that the school is diverse via other social identities (such as gender, sexual orientation, language spoken, etc.), nor does she

claim the importance of caring for the needs of students of color. Rather, she

questions the validity of the argument that simply because Quills isn't diverse,

doesn't mean that "issues of race and diversity and social justice" should be ignored.

In effect, Eliza's use of this authoritative discourse, "we are not diverse", interrupts

its centripetal power by providing other possible discourses to be taken up.

However, her commitment to the discourse that defines diversity as *other* than

homogenous (or mostly homogenous) white communities, illustrates how her little

d discourse continues to be shaped by a Big D, authoritative discourse outside of

herself. Therefore, while the third space environment of the PD provided Eliza with

the opportunity to make present other discourse options, it is also clear that even

this environment is nested within larger systems and structures that act as

powerful, centripetal forces.

2.6.1.b. Nondiverse (read "all or mostly all white") schools aren't oppressive

Built upon the authoritative discourse that claims a lack of diversity without

racial diversity, a connected discourse strand emerged from the data, which claimed

that issues related to diversity such as racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. simply

cannot be present in homogenous (read *all or mostly all white*) spaces. That is, when

all school and community members are white (or mostly white), the school doesn't

need to concern itself with students, teachers, or family members experiencing

oppression of marginalization. They do not need to address inequities in their

practices or policies, and they do not need to concern themselves with the few

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students of color they do serve – because their community is not oppressive, and it is certainly "not racist." (Leonardo, 2009; Sue, 2015).

This discourse strand, which dismisses any ways in which those with diverse identities experience oppression or marginalization, was consistently brought into the dialogue of the PD in one of two ways – as a way to name its authoritative power and, often simultaneously, as a way to demonstrate its mistruth. As Eliza describes it, "I don't even want to tell you how many times I have just gotten the 'turnaround Eliza and walk the other way. I don't want to hear it anymore.' You know, like, or 'it's not an issue at our school' ... It's not? You know, when you're like, I have documented evidence." Here, Eliza is referencing her experiences with the principal once again, recounting that while she has tried "many times" to enter into conversations concerning the ways students with marginalized identities experience intolerance and oppression at the school, he has demonstrated no interest in engaging in them, or even seeing the existence of them. Rather, he uses the discourse, "it's not an issue at our school" as a way to maintain the status quo within their predominantly white community. This discourse is of course amplified through the positions of power he embodies not only as a white, cis-hetero male, but also as the principal of large, regional high school.

Andrew, a culinary teacher who is also a white, cis-hetero male, echoed Eliza's point during the third session, sharing about how often instances of racism and other forms of oppression are often overlooked or ignored at Quills due to the powerful hegemonic nature of the school community. After returning from a breakout room discussion, Andrew shared,

We talked about kind of our school, how we tend to have these blinders. A lot of times it is not necessarily that we're incapable or we don't want to have these conversations. But I think that from an administrative standpoint is it's almost like they think that, 'oh, this couldn't possibly be happening here.' So a lot of things kind of tend to go unresolved or unnoticed … And I think that that's been one of the issues. Having these discussions, you know, from the top down is that there's, um, there's this unwillingness to admit it could possibly be happening because our kids are so great, you know. And I think for me, that's one of the major issues. You know, I see it, that and some of the teachers who are people who are in positions of power, maybe even hold these viewpoints, which I think also hinders the conversation.

Here, Andrew both unpacks why the school does not engage in real conversations about instances of racism and other forms of oppression, and offers a critical perspective concerning the teachers and staff at the school – all but three of whom are white. First, an applied look at the pronouns Andrew uses helps to unpack how he makes sense of multiple and competing discourses within the school. When he begins, he invokes the first-person plural pronoun, "we" first as a way to speak for those in his breakout room discussion, and then to represent the whole "school" – presumably all staff and teachers (including himself). After this though, when he shares that "it's not that we're incapable or we don't want to have these conversations," it would seem that the population represented by this "we" has shrunk, and now excludes the administration – as they are soon after identified using the third person pronoun, "they." This transition does discursive work, separating those in the PD session from the administration. In effect, Andrew claims that while we (teachers within the PD session) *are capable* and *want* to have these difficult conversations, those in the administration think that "this couldn't possibly be happening here". That is, as he switches to the first-person singular pronoun, "I," to speak from his own perspective, he focuses on the administrators' discourse as

separate, and as one that is unwilling to even "admit" that "it" (i.e., forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.) could be happening at Quills. Those within the PD session though, including himself, he claims do "see *it*" and want to engage in conversation about *it*.

However, even as he seeks to separate himself and his immediate colleagues from the authoritative discourse that claims that their non-diverse (read all or mostly all white) school is not oppressive, his language demonstrates the power of this discourse as he becomes increasingly vague. Here, an analysis of deictics is helpful in understanding what happens for Andrew as he attempts to push against this authoritative discourse, which seeks to erase all difference outside of race, and blind people to the reality that people with marginalized identities face within the public-school system. As teacher-participants were just engaged in small group discussions about how the levels and types of oppression (interpersonal, institutional, and cultural) manifest at their school prior to Andrew's comment, it can be assumed that he is referencing topics related to that discussion here. However, rather than using specific language, such as institutional oppression, dominant culture, unconscious bias, or any of the "isms" (racism, sexism, etc.) – all of which were identified in a video the group watched prior to their discussion and were on the document they were using, he uses deixis, including *this*, *it*, and *these,* instead to refer to oppressive ideologies or actions: the administration can't admit *this* is happening; I see *it*; some folks in power who hold *these* viewpoints. In using this vague language to refer to manifestations of oppression, Andrew demonstrates the centripetal power of the discourse that claims there can be no oppression within

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non-diverse (read all or mostly all white) communities – as even naming the specifics of the experiences he "sees" is a challenge. The experiences of people with marginalized identities become nebulous and the freedom to name people's viewpoints specifically (especially when they are oppressive), becomes taboo. However, despite the challenge, Andrew does demonstrates a shift in his own perspective, indicative of ideological becoming, and by the end of his comment, he is naming how this discourse "hinders the conversation," demonstrating a perspective similar to what Eliza expressed earlier – that those in positions of power at the school continue to utilize the whiteness of their school as a rationale for ignoring not only instances of oppression, but systemic inequities present in the school as well.

This does not merely demonstrate how powerful – and harmful – a definition of diversity as other than all (or mostly all) white, it also explicates a real resistance on the part of administration to considering evidence or arguments that run counter to their views, and to seeing, hearing, and caring for those with marginalized identities (students and teachers alike). One clear example of this lack of care was articulated by Chloe, a white, twenty-year veteran of Quills who identifies as gay. Chloe shared a number of experiences she had over her time working at Quills, each one including a run-in with the same authoritative discourse – *white schools aren't oppressive*. During the closing round of our second session together, she shared the following:

> *Chloe:* I don't know, I'm conflicted because, I mean, I have a couple of students right now that are like flamboyantly happy and proud to be gay and waving their flags and stuff. And then on the other hand – which is great - and

then I've got, I've had personal issues with parents. One in particular this semester where a student was taken out of my class because he found out I was gay, or assumed, I had never said, I don't say anything. And the kid was taken away out of my class.

JT: and they let him do that?

Chloe: That was the suggestion by the administration. That was the solution. Yeah. So there's so many mixed messages - and you know, I'm like celebrated half the time. And the other time I'm like, oh, what can't I say? What shouldn't I say? You know, how do I play this situation here? It's, it's hard, yeah.

The effect of the powerful administrative discourse can be seen in this exchange, beginning with Chloe's recognition of the conflicting experiences she's had and sees at the school. That is, there are students that are "proud to be gay", demonstrating feelings of ease and comfort with being themselves – "flamboyantly happy" and "waving their flags" – suggesting a certain level of inclusivity present within the school environment. Yet, at the same time, the moment "one parent" has an "issue" with her personal identity as a gay woman, she does not experience support, care, or even acknowledgement of her marginalized identity by her administration. Rather, the issue is erased when the student is simple "taken out" of her class. In so doing, the discourse, *white schools aren't oppressive*, is reified through erasure, and Chloe is left to question how to navigate the space as a person with marginalized social identities. This authoritative discourse thus demonstrates its role as a centripetal force within the community, one that continuously works to keep all school members (students and staff) within one paradigm of reality, seeing their school and community in one particular way, including its diversity and oppressive behaviors and ideologies. Operating within this environment, students may feel safe to express themselves, and teachers may feel free to identify as gay. However, if

anyone voices an issue with those marginalized identities (or in some cases simply notices a diverse identity) or the expressions of them, the "solution" is to reify hegemonic, authoritative discourses that (re)construct a specific ideology, one in which non diverse (read all or mostly all white) schools are not oppressive.

The question that Chloe's colleague, Johnny, asks after hearing the initial part of the story, "and they let him do that?" also points to the quiet way discourses such as these operate under the surface in predominantly white communities. Johnny assumes that "they" (i.e., administration), might have "let" the male student leave her class – perhaps by choice. However, it was actually the administration's "solution" to what they saw as a problem. This reaction to the situation brings to light the powerful impact of authoritative discourses that exist within and beyond the school in two ways. First, the parent's perspective was not only an internally persuasive discourse. Rather, it was one aligned with the powerful discourse of heteronormativity, which acts as a centripetal force within society and that has and continues to cause significant harm to those in the LGBTQ+ community – and to those who identify as heterosexual. Second, the administration's response to the parent's concern simply upheld this discourse. Whether this was due to a level of sympathy with the parent's concern (the discourse of heteronormativity is a powerful centripetal force after all), or a desire to avoid conflict, either way the outcome reified the discourse that their white school isn't oppressive. As participants brought authoritative discourses such as these to the surface throughout the PD experience, they created opportunities to disrupt a status quo

that upholds hegemonic ideas about diversity and oppression within their predominantly white community.

2.6.1.c. Diversity is not a priority

      While the first two strands of diversity contribute to this strand, it also stood on its own, marking what can be considered an "unmasking" process as participants came to see just how deprioritized marginalized identities (past and present) were at their school, a process Freire referred to as conscientization (1970). This discourse was amplified through the connected strands that iterated both a lack of diversity at the school, and a lack of issues concerning diverse students, families, and teachers within the Quills district. After all, if a school isn't diverse, and oppression doesn't happen there, why would it need to be a priority?

      While inclusivity was internally persuasive for many participants in the group prior to the PD experience, what became visible during this PD was both the presence and effect of a top-down authoritative discourse that deprioritized the inclusion of marginalized identities – their present experiences and their histories. Two participants in particular, Franklin and Eliza, invoked this discourse in two separate fragments, demonstrating new recognition of it and providing opportunities for it to be questioned and/or challenged. During the closing round of the second session, Franklin, a white male hospitality teacher who identified as gay, shared, "It's mentally draining to talk about these topics. It's frustrating and discouraging and can be downright negative. But I'm glad that we have this forum to do it just because it doesn't really happen anywhere else, I don't think." Here,

Franklin highlights the mental and emotional exhaustion that accompanies this type of work, which I talk more about in a subsequent paper, while he also notes that "it doesn't really happen anywhere else." That is, despite the hours that are devoted to PD, faculty meetings, and department meetings throughout the school year, diversity as it related to the experiences and needs of marginalized identities isn't "really" a part of the conversation. Eliza also, an active advocate for social justice work within and beyond the school building, came to a similar realization during the fourth and final session, sharing:

> I also don't think that Mike [the principal] would be like if a group of 10 or 15 teachers came together and said, we want to form a committee that meets to talk about ways that we can be more culturally and racially sensitive in our school and inclusive. I think he would be fine with that. I hope that he would be fine with that. But um you know, I think we're never in a situation where we're even allowed, except for maybe this right now, allowed to have the conversations that would get people to come together.

While Eliza begins by suggesting that the principal, Mike, would "be fine with" teachers convening a committee to focus on this work, she immediately second guesses the thought, and instead replaces it with a mere "*hope* that he would be fine with that." Interestingly enough though, her original thought did not invoke the principal's actual *support* for the idea, but rather, his tolerance of, or mere lack of disapproval of it (i.e., he would be "fine" with it). After Eliza shifts to hoping (for Mike to be "fine" with it), she again interrupts her own idea, revealing the effects of this authoritative discourse that deprioritizes inclusivity: "we're never ... even allowed" to engage in conversations concerning ways to become a more inclusive and "culturally and racially sensitive" school. In this way, Eliza highlights one critical way authoritative discourses push other discourses to the margins, by keeping

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people isolated from others with similar internally persuasive discourses. In this case, keeping those who hold ideologies that prioritize authentic inclusion of diverse students, ideologies, and beliefs – and recognize its need in teaching at predominantly white institutions were kept apart and the conversation silenced. Doing so also prevented those without strong inclinations towards prioritizing diversity in teaching from coming into contact with a range of discourses beyond the authoritative one, thus maintaining the status quo.

Finally, there were two clear indications of the lack of priority diversity takes within the school. First, Cora's statement during a breakout room during the final session, makes tangible the effects of this discourse. While working with a small group on a document called "Taking Stock and Taking Action" (See **Appendix A**), Cora, a white cis-hetero female, reflects further on what Quills as a community does to care for, celebrate, teach, and include students of color:

> Yeah, and it's funny because just going back to youth of color, I don't know why I've made that transition, but like when Eliza was talking about the reading poem thing, I always think it's kind of like silly when schools only are like, oh, we're celebrating African-American History Month and it's like only during that month. But like, we don't even do it during those months. So, frankly, we don't even do that. You know.

Her repetition of the phrase "we don't even do that/it" here, in reference to events such as Black history month, has a number of effects. First, it establishes a minimum of what can and should be done to care for students of color and to support all students unlearning of white supremacy – to celebrate "African-American history month." Second, it compares Quills to this minimum, demonstrating that what can be considered the minimum of care is not "even" met. As she does this, she

maintains the use of the first-person plural, "we," thus including herself as a culpable member of this inaction. She doesn't seek to distance herself from the reality she is coming to unmask. Rather, she reflects on the reality before her as a member of it, owning her complicity as a teacher at the school – one who also thought that celebrations of this kind were "silly." Cora appears to be making visible two internally persuasive discourses, which in some ways compete with each other. The first claims that celebrations of specific marginalized identities only during given months is "silly" – a word that signals naivety and a lack of seriousness. The second claims the importance of caring for, celebrating, and including those with marginalized identities – which presents a level of tension with the first discourse. That is, naming one way the school and they as teachers deprioritize marginalized identities (i.e. ignoring national opportunities to celebrate them), affects the way Cora understands her own perspective, offering her the opportunity to shift her thinking about the way the school – herself included – ignores diversity and the oppression that exists along with it. This realization provides fertile ground for her to experience ideological becoming on a trajectory towards critical cultural competence as she questions both her own and the school's perspectives.

Lastly, Eliza highlights this de-prioritization during the final PD session of the year as well, making it clear how important it is for those with the most power to use a discourse that explicitly marks the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. In simple language, she shares: "That we say, sort of state publicly, and to ourselves, like, these are priorities for our school. This is a part of our school's identity and our school culture. That, that social justice issues are important to us.

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And, you know, it might take us a while to get there. But first of all, like, it matters and stating that." Like Cora, Eliza uses the first-person, plural "we" throughout this statement, including herself as a member of the school and therefore a part of the discourse that is heard from the public and students. In so doing, she seeks to build solidarity with her colleagues in the room – welcoming all participants to see and take up an explicit discourse that upholds the importance of "social justice issues." To amplify her call for solidarity here, she sets up the authoritative discourse as one that doesn't make these issues a priority, rather than stating they are doing something wrong. She offers an alternative discourse, one that is internally persuasive to her, rather than attempting to tear down a discourse of others – in this case those who have more power in the school. That is, she doesn't explicitly state that the school thinks social justice issues don't matter. Rather, she states that the school needs to state that they *do* matter and that they are "priorities for our school." In comparison to her statements from the previous session, concerning the fact that teachers aren't "allowed" (i.e., by administration) to enter into conversations about these issues, the tone here is more empowering. It sets up the administration as part of the school, rather than setting them up in opposition to teachers, and her statement acts more like a rallying cry for participants to take up. However, the fact that the school, via the discourse of the administration, has not stated publicly or internally that these issues matter or that part of their school culture includes a commitment to issues of social justice, remains a powerful influence on what is allowable to say within the school environment.

2.6.2. Discourses of Whiteness

While deeply entangled with the discourses of diversity, the discourses of Whiteness are distinct entities, and therefore must be addressed separately. This is especially true given the purpose of the PD series and the specific needs of white teachers. As the PD experience unfolded over each of the four sessions, it became clear that participants were often encountering tension with an authoritative discourse that ignores the existence of systemic racism and other forms of oppression within the United States. In some instances, it was the words and/or actions of the sitting U.S. president (Donald Trump) that were invoked to demonstrate participant's confusion with the current state of the nation. Other times, they expressed frustration with their colleagues – fellow teachers – whom they believed to be educated people, and therefore free from the tentacles of racism, bias, or oppressive thought. In each of these instances, participants found themselves struggling with their own internalization of three distinct discourses of Whiteness: 1. We are a post-racial nation; 2. CRP is political; and 3. Whiteness is not real.

2.6.2.a. We are a post-racial nation

The internalization of this discourse is part of the framework of Whiteness (Matias, 2013), which denies the existence of oppression in any form in the United States – which, in effect maintains the status quo of white supremacy. When white folks unmask this discourse as a part of their experience as educators – particularly at predominantly white institutions – dissonance is not only expected, it is

necessary to induce the attitude shifts required to disrupt the status quo. In the following examples, participants wrestled with this authoritative discourse and came to question the validity of a discourse that claims the nation as post-racial (a period of time free from racial prejudice), bringing up examples of teachers, students, community members, and administrators who continue to hold hegemonic, bigoted, racist ideologies.

To explore this dissonance more deeply, I first turn to the second PD session, during which time participants were invited to engage in an activity about privilege, self-reflect, and then participate in an active listening session with two of their colleagues. It was during this session in particular, that folks begin to unearth this authoritative discourse, specifically by focusing on a shared experience they had as a faculty the previous academic year. After a particularly troubling incident, in which the boys' soccer team yelled racial slurs at another team, the Action Defense League (ADL) was hired to speak to both the players and the entire teaching staff (separately). Two individuals, a Black woman and a Jewish man, were brought in from the ADL to speak to the staff during a regularly scheduled PD session, with a focus on the N-word, its legacy, use, and traumatic history. It was during this full-staff PD (which included over one hundred teachers), that many participants in my study (seemingly for the first time) realized that their beliefs about racism and social justice did not align with that of some of their colleagues or administrators. Below are a few representative examples of how participants spoke about the incident:

Andrew: It was unbelievable. And that's the thing, it's, I compare it the people who believe that the earth is flat. Like there's scientific evidence saying that it's round. Just like there's facts, the statistics don't lie, you know, like being suspended, incarcerated, pulled over, like. So for these people, when I started hearing them say, "oh, I feel like you're up there attacking us just for being white," to me, that was like you, it's probably nice that you feel uncomfortable right now because that's how other people feel every day, and it's like thank you for finally showing up to the conversation, but they couldn't get past it.

Henry: I think that was it last year, the professional development, the ADL and, you know, I thought it was mostly positive and good, but then inevitably and I don't remember who asked this, but somebody is like, how come black people can use the N-word, but we can't. And I feel like we're still asking that question? Like that question has been answered and addressed and discussed in so many dynamic ways for decades now. And still, there's always that one white person that shows up as like, how come I can't use the N-word if they use the N-word? And I just feel like the discourse hasn't advanced. And and how to how how do you how do you advance it? Why? Why isn't it more advanced than it already is?

Mary: Yeah. Well, that's what I was going to say when it talks about like leaning on colorblind ideology. I think that's like when I try to have discussions about race around like literature and stuff. That's always where kids go. And I think that like in that PD, that I think, Henry, that you had mentioned, that was what was happening there. Right. Was this like kind of colorblind mentality, like "we're not racist." And "why can't we say the N-word?" and stuff like that?

While each participant spoke about the incident in a slightly different way, the dissonance they expressed was quite similar. Andrew found himself aghast at his white colleagues' reactions, stating how "unbelievable" it was to him and demonstrating how dissonant it was for him to hear his colleagues speak in a way he believed at the very least unlikely. Henry, also, while he notes an expectation that a white person would "inevitably" ask about the use of the N-word, simultaneously expresses confusion about why the "discourse hasn't advanced." Finally, Mary, while she doesn't express shock or surprise, does note just how triggered some folks

became during the PD, sharing the fact that many white teachers were still leaning on a "kind of colorblind mentality" and claiming themselves as unequivocally "not racist." Compelling about each of these reactions to the PD – and to the reactions of their fellow white teachers – is a clear indication that within education, the powerful, authoritative discourse of being a "post-racial" nation is both deeply engrained and deeply problematic – affecting the ways people feel they can speak, act, and even teach. That is, the white teachers who spoke up against the presenters, felt emboldened to do so. They felt well within their discursive boundaries to: ask a Black woman and Jewish man why they couldn't use the N-word as white people; claim they were "attacked for being white"; and declare that they were in fact, "not racist" – implying that they felt they were being called "racist."

The ways in which participants reacted to and reflected on the discursive content and moves of their colleagues demonstrates both, varying levels of dissonance with the authoritative discourse, and varying degrees of understanding of how the discourses of Whiteness affect individual and group behavior. First, Andrew points to individuals – the ones who feel "attacked" – as the wielders of the discourse, and thus as the problems to be solved. He demonstrates an understanding of racism through an interpersonal lens, focusing on the individual, rather than the system, and he expresses gratitude that these individuals are finally experiencing what "other people feel every day." He does not, however, identify the very real differences between feeling attacked for have privilege as a white person and being, for example, racially profiled while driving a car (or going for a run, or sleeping in your bed, etc.). The effect of Andrew's statements is a continued

centering of racism within individual actors and actions, rather than within larger systems and policies – which is a tool of the larger discourse of Whiteness (Matias, 2013; Leonardo, 2009; Winans, 2010). While different in their approach, both Henry and Mary also highlight individuals as hosts of oppressive ideology, which is expressed through their discourse. Henry's comment, "there is always that one white person," again places the root of racism and racist ideology within individual people and their actions. Yet, at the same time, his recognition of the fact that there is "always that one white person" is indicative of a powerful authoritative discourse that continues to circulate and act as a centripetal force in U.S. society. His following comment, which pulls back to a more macro view, recognizes this by highlighting the fact that the "discourse" has not advanced. In effect, when Henry shifts his perspective of racism from individual to societal, he experiences ideological becoming on a trajectory towards critical cultural competence.

Furthermore, as he pulls the responsibility away from the individual, he exposes an authoritative discourse of Whiteness – one which aims to silence claims of racial inequality on a systemic level. Each time this particular incident was brought into the space of the PD, what was questioned was a long-held and powerful belief, that the nation has "advanced" to a place where racism doesn't exist – at least not in the highly-educated, Northeast in a public school that serves predominantly white students. Therefore, when participants brought this discourse to the surface during the PD, they provided themselves and each other the opportunity to question, unpack, and disrupt this powerful discourse, and in effect, widened the

range of what was acceptable to say about race in America in their specific, suburban context.

2.6.2.b. CRP is political

Secondly, discourses related to culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) within the space of a predominantly white school and community also emerged as a discourse of Whiteness. However, while this was expected given the nature, structure, and content of the PD series, the way it emerged, as a political entity that was dangerous to take on in public schools, opened new pathways of analysis. As a reminder, this year-long PD series took place during the academic year of 2019-2020, a tumultuous and challenging time in the U.S., particularly for teachers and students. Additionally, this was a time when the discourses of the 45th president (Donald Trump) concerning teaching, social justice, equity, and systemic oppression permeated many facets of people's lives. This was especially true during the second half of the PD, during which the corona virus pandemic had just begun to take hold in the U.S. While this discourse, which ties CRP (and any race talk) to a political leaning, is not new, the discourse of 45th president, along with the challenges involved in the early stages of a global pandemic appeared to have amplified the strength of the discourse. This was seen throughout participants' talk, in particular during the third and fourth PD sessions, both of which took place on Zoom. Additionally, when the discourse of CRP as political was invoked, a heightened level of emotion was almost always present in the voice of the speaker. As such, it was

common for the speaker to share a tension or a struggle concerning this discourse in the space of both the classroom and the school as a whole.

Chloe, for example, invokes this discourse during the very first session, demonstrating a focus on it, and a desire to both understand it, and find ways to break it apart. After taking part in a community building activity called "Step in: Step out", she reflects emphatically on how this particular activity could be helpful "these days":

> I'm just saying *these days* because I think kids are so tense about political correctness that they are afraid to voice or to say what they want to. They don't rock the boat. They don't want to upset anyone. They don't want to offend anyone. You know like we're doing Fences right now in class we're having kids read *Fences* and no one will read the N-word and, which is ok, that's fine. And we already had that discussion. But I do have two black students and they giggle every time one of the non-colored students, or you know when the white pasty-faced kids, when they trip up you know, they get to that line and they don't know what to do with it. And so they skip right over it, you know, which is fine. That's fine. But the, but the two kids of color are laughing about that. And so I think we should have a conversation. Why? You know, but, but I know the kids are like very, get very upset about political correctness. And I think this would help alleviate some of that.

Here Chloe is making some of the effects of this discourse clear, pointing to students' struggle to participate in dialogue concerning the N-word, which has become entangled with the powerful discourse of political correctness (which has been circulated as an attempt to silence attempts to move towards more inclusive and sensitive language). What's more, Chloe expresses a desire to "have a conversation" about how students, white students and students of color, are responding to the presence, use, and non-use of the N-word within the context of the play they are reading (*Fences*, by August Wilson), but does not seem able to do so. She points specifically to white students' fear and "upset" when it comes to political topics as

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the main reason for her struggle to bring this conversation to the floor. That is, while she was able to have "that discussion" – presumably about whether or not students would read the N-word out loud – she feels unable to have the one that naturally follows, which situates the word in its sociohistorical context and concerns how students respond to, use, choose not to use, and are affected by the N-word. This points to the powerful effect of this discourses of Whiteness, which work to silence dissension and questioning of the status quo. In fact, the transformation of race talk, CRP, the N-word, and any other topics related to social justice, into political topics is one of the main ways that Whiteness has continued to operate in such powerful ways. When something is considered political, it is considered "up for debate" – and a matter of personal opinion or perspective. It therefore does not belong in the space of public education, which is meant to be a politically neutral institution that does not indoctrinate students into one political leaning or another (which is another big D discourse). However, here we see how this transformation presents a significant struggle for teachers, like Chloe, who recognize that there is a problem – that there is something to have a conversation about and to unpack. The two students of color in her class (proof that there is actually racial diversity at the school) "giggle" when the N-word is, in essence, erased from the discourse of the text via a lack of conversation about it, and at the same time, her white students are learning to stay silent, to ignore and move past difficult conversations in an effort to not "rock the boat." As Chloe points out, her white students "don't know what to do with it" – the N-word that is – which is indicative of a deep lack of both racial literacy and knowledge of racial history. This is a part of the discourse that was

brought up earlier by Henry, Andrew, and Mary concerning teachers' anger and confusion about why they (as white people) can't use the N-word. And this is one of the main effects of the discourses of Whiteness, to maintain a status quo that continues to privilege some (white folks) over others (everyone else). In this case, the white students in Chloe's class are granted the privilege to "get upset" and to ignore the oppressive ideologies and histories attached to the N-word: "they skip right over it and that's fine. That's fine." But, her Black students' reactions to the non-use of the N-word though – their giggling – is held up as the *reason* to have a conversation about it: "But the, but the two kids of color are laughing about it. And so I think we should have a conversation." From the research it is clear that these two Black students are without a doubt having discussions about the N-word and its interconnected histories of oppression with their families and peers – and facing systemic oppression on a daily basis. However, white students are more often than not, moving through their schooling experience without ever learning about, questioning, or unpacking the effects of white supremacy, including its legacies, in or out of school. Therefore, while it would benefit all students to engage in deeper, complex discussions of race in America, Chloe's concern, arising from her two Black students' laughter, highlights the powerful centripetal force of this discourse – that race talk is political.

2.6.2.c. Whiteness isn't real

Similar to the way in which Chloe finds herself unsure of how to engage her students in a conversation about the N-word, participants also shared about their

personal struggles to speak up when presented with discourses of Whiteness. As white teachers at a predominantly white school, many of these teachers had lived their lives, and experienced educations quite similar to that of their current students. Therefore, while they expressed interest in the work of social justice, they too had been predominantly influenced by the discourses of Whiteness for much of their lives. A prime example of this came from Paul, a white, cis-hetero male, who demonstrated early on in the PD experience that he was invested in growing his self-awareness and building his repertoire of critical skills as an educator – which were in their infancy despite his longevity as an educator at Quills. Towards the end of the second session together, during which discussions about the ADL meeting emerged, Paul shared the following with the full group:

> I feel like, don't we just, we just don't have conversations about identity in general. Because a number of things that we've already talked about here, you know, I never thought about that in high school. I never thought about that in college. I never thought about that probably for the first 15 years or even 20 years of teaching.

Paul's articulation of the lack of conversations about identity and other topics discussed (such as privilege, power, and systemic oppression) in the PD invokes the powerful centripetal force of Whiteness. This force ignores – and thus pushes to the margins further – diverse identities within the school and community, while it maintains the status quo by encouraging white people not to question their racialized identities or lived-experiences. Paul, an English teacher, demonstrates this exact process, coming to terms with the fact that he "never thought" about these topics throughout the majority of his life or his career as an educator. As a white person and a man, he didn't have to – and the education system didn't force him too,

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including his teacher preparation program. This speaks to both the centripetal

power of the authoritative discourse within the school (and within education writ

large) and to the centrifugal power of this PD space. Here, he felt safe to share his

honest reflections and shifting perspectives with his colleagues, including myself – a

former colleague and facilitator of the PD – and to begin to ask questions about

pathways towards more culturally conscious and competent ways of teaching and

learning. However, his recent shift also demonstrates the fact that for the first

twenty years of his teaching career, he was not attuned to the ways in which the

curriculum he was teaching, nor the way he was teaching it, very likely perpetuated

hegemonic systems that privilege some over others. The discourse of Whiteness that

claims its own lack of existence, has and continues to impede teachers' (most of

whom are still white) abilities to develop critical self-awareness, which in turn

affects how they are able to discursively embody the role of educator.

This is particularly true in predominantly white schools that have not made

explicit commitments to becoming more inclusive, socially just institutions. As

participants surfaced throughout the PD experience, the authoritative discourse that

circulated within Quills did not prioritize diversity, nor did it recognize or

acknowledge oppression as being present or possible within the school or

community. As such, there was no impetus for change or analysis of the status quo.

Participants came to see the effects of such stagnation as they recounted their

experiences with white colleagues and administrators who wielded this

authoritative discourse of Whiteness. While working on the "Taking Stock and

Taking Action" document, Andrew once again brings up the ADL PD meeting once

again. This time, Cora feels called to shares the personal details of her lived

experience of that moment in response:

> **Andrew**: Yeah. I think the whole ADL thing that we had last year. Oh, my God. I felt I felt bad for those people. I felt embarrassed about some of the outspokenness of people.

> **Cora**: Which is, I think it's so interesting that like, I was sitting there, in that, like literally, like feeling, like I could feel like my heart was racing. I was like, so upset, but I didn't say anything. You know, and I've thought about that afterwards, like a few times, like, what the hell's my problem? Why didn't I speak up? But it's like interesting that it's all, it seems like these people with this, who really want to defend their whiteness are always the ones that are like, more outspoken, like because that's the norm. But it's harder to stand up for the opposite, I think.

Cora highlights the powerful effect of this discourse to silence any suggestion that

Whiteness – and its effects – are real. That is, Whiteness, when equated with an

ideology, is something people can either "buy into," and thus see how it operates in

insidious ways – for both people of color and white people. Or, people can choose

not to believe in such a reality, believing instead that the U.S. is in fact a post-racial

nation, one where white people do not have any unearned advantages over other

people. What Cora is unearthing here is a group of people – who are educators –

who operate from a very different ideological viewpoint from herself. When Cora

witnesses her colleagues act in this way, and "defend their whiteness," her internally

persuasive discourse, which validates the existence of Whiteness, is silenced by the

powerful authoritative discourse that works to cover its tracks at all costs. This

discourse acts as a true centripetal force, one that is amplified by both anger and

fear. In the face of such a powerful discourse, Cora notices that her heart is racing,

yet she doesn't "say anything." Instead, she finds herself in anger after the fact:

"what the hell's my problem? Why didn't I speak up?" As she continues to unpack this experience though, what she comes to recognize is how much easier it is to be "outspoken" when your ideas are considered the "norm." The norm here being the authoritative and powerful discourse that claims – Whiteness isn't real.

2.7. Discussion

First, it is necessary to note that while these powerful authoritative discourses about Whiteness and diversity circulate within Quills, they also circulate within the broader social system and will continue to even as people find ways to push against them, redefine their own perspectives, and change the way they use language. This is part of the centripetal nature of authoritative discourse – part of its ability to maintain control over the way people talk, think, and behave concerning certain topics – despite changes that happen over time and historically. However, in naming, discussing, providing alternatives, and practicing with different discourses (those that diversify the way people think, speak, and behave) many participants within the PD environment were able to experience ideological becoming on trajectories towards greater cultural competence. In the following section I expound on: 1. how the discourses of diversity and Whiteness circulate within society writ large; 2. how these discourses manifested within the PD space; and 3. the ways some participants experienced ideological becoming within the third space of the PD.

2.7.1. Seeing diversity

Historically, diversity has been defined as dangerous – as something to be feared and something that brings problems. Take for example the U.S. policy stance that sought to "kill the Indian and save the man" through assimilation schools for Indigenous peoples in the late 1800s (Churchill, 2004). So dangerous were other ways of thinking and being (beyond white, European, protestant man), that the U.S. attempted (and were successful in many cases) to destroy the culture of thousands of Indigenous people. As another example, consider the response to Japanese Americans during World War II, during which time the U.S. – through policy decisions – rounded up and interred thousands of Japanese American people (most of whom were American citizens). In both cases, there was little if any outcry against such actions, thus demonstrating the power of this authoritative discourse – which associates fear, danger, and problems, with difference. Over time, this discourse has morphed and adapted, yet this connection between diversity and problems remains.

When it comes to the discourses of diversity that circulated within Quills – and within the larger community – it is clear that this connection remains intact. It is perhaps the most powerful force behind the discourse that claims a lack of diversity all together at Quills, which both of the other discourses are built upon. This discourse, which claims that diversity only exists with racial diversity and therefore there is no diversity at Quills, erases all other forms of difference. This eliminates the need for those in positions of power (administration, teachers, staff) to do anything to address the needs of those with marginalized identities – or to even see

oppressive policies, actions, language, and curricula. This discourse – and its ramifications – is not unique to Quills – it still exists in U.S. society writ large and can be seen today, for example, in antidiscrimination laws that don't include protections for transgender people, healthcare policies that do not recognize same-sex partnerships, online spaces that are not accessible to those with visual impairments, and the list goes on. And even within this definition of diversity as racial diversity, there is untruth in how it is applied, as exemplified within Quills. That is, while the authoritative discourse that circulates through Quills claims that it not a diverse (read *all or mostly all white*) school, there *are* students of color that are a part of the community (made clear by both state school data and Chloe's comment about the two students of color in her class). This discourse not only erases all other forms of difference it also collapses all members of the community into one bucket of Whiteness and ignores the small number of students who are not. By doing so, it eliminates the possibility that there will be any *problems* that need to be addressed – as diversity brings problems.

For participants in this PD session, coming to see these discourses of diversity as part of their school culture was not only enlightening, it was also an opening towards greater self and systems awareness. It provided them with the opportunity to make connections between administrative decisions and perspectives and then to share alternative perspectives – thus providing robust ground for ideological becoming that moved towards critical cultural competence. One of the most significant moments of this came from Eliza, who, reflecting on the fact that the school administration has never stated publicly a commitment to

diversity, inclusion, and equity, shares an alternative discourse for the school. In recognizing the discourse of diversity that equates recognizing and including difference with problems, she identifies the necessity to do so as a pathway towards solving problems (which are already there, they are simply being ignored and allowed to continue). That is, by acknowledging its own diversity (including and beyond racial diversity), the school would be able to care for its students and teachers authentically, rather than ignoring experiences of oppression that exist within the school.

2.7.2. Seeing Whiteness

In a similar way, the discourses of Whiteness that participants unearthed during the PD also circulate within the larger U.S. context – and have for centuries. These discourses, the central force of which claims racial superiority over all other races, have morphed and adapted over the years – in many cases responding to new centrifugal forces (which began as centripetal forces) that have called for equality in different ways (e.g., the abolitionist movement, Civil Rights movement, Black Lives Matter movement). However, despite these forces, the discourses of Whiteness have maintained a high level of control over how people within the U.S. talk, think, and behave today when it comes to race and racism (Leonardo, 2009). Consider for example, the fact that while slavery has officially been over for two hundred and fifty years, the U.S. prison system has been defined as the modern form of slavery – incarcerating four times as many Black people as it does white people (Vaught, 2017).

That is not to say that these discourses are not pushed against via alternative discourses such as those that *name* white supremacy and white privilege. Yet, while centrifugal forces continue to push against Whiteness as an organizing force, seeking to change oppressive policies, schooling decisions, healthcare, and the law, disparities between white people and people of color remain entrenched. One way that Whiteness continues to do this is through the discourses that were seen within the space of this PD. The powerful discourses that claim the U.S. as a post-racial nation, combined with the politicization of topics of race and oppression, and a complete denial of Whiteness as an entity all contribute to its ability to maintain control over how people – especially white people – talk, think, and act about race. Within the PD, it was made clear that these discourses manifested themselves within school personal, presenting significant challenges when it comes to having authentic and honest conversations about systemic oppression (such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism). It is perhaps not surprising then, that for many participants in this PD, coming to see how Whiteness operates within their school was challenging to see and unpack.

For example, each time the problematic encounter with the presenters from the ADL was brought into the dialogue, many participants expressed their surprise, frustration, and anger. Some, such as Cora and Andrew, had previously operated under the assumption that their peers came from the same perspective as themselves, understanding that this country is not in fact post-racial and that Whiteness as a powerful force does in fact exist. When they witnessed their colleagues' reactions to a deep-seated fear of white people – being called or seen as

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a racist (Leonardo, 2009; Sue, 2015) – they found themselves confused, embarrassed by their peer's reactions (e.g., Andrew), and angry at themselves for their inaction (e.g., Cora). The space of the PD environment allowed these responses to surface and be discussed, providing fertile ground for alternative discourses to surface and be shared with others. These alternative and internally persuasive, discourses acted as catalysts for ideological becoming on trajectories towards critical cultural competence for many participants within the PD cohort. Henry, for example, who voiced a significant struggle in understanding why the discourse hasn't "advanced", also reflected on the Whiteness of the English curriculum on two different occasions. The first time, he reflects on that fact that "when we teach books in the curriculum written by like say African American writers, they're almost always stories of like, you know, racism, oppression" – and yet he recognizes that "there are other stories of like, say, black life that aren't about being under the foot of white oppression. There's a dimension to the art there that we're not exploring because we assume a black narrative has to be a narrative of oppression." Both time he shares, he makes visible the invisible curriculum of Whiteness that operates within Quills – and within the larger community. In so doing, Henry begins to connect the little d discourses of curricular choices to the big D discourse of Whiteness, that has yet to "advance" – even within a place of academic learning such as a school – and his recognition of such provides others in the group with the opportunity to do the same.

Additionally, he sheds light on another way in which Whiteness operates, by silencing difference. Whiteness seeks to collapse difference into sameness,

specifically a sameness that embodies the hegemonic white, Eurocentric, Protestant

ways of existing that have been set as the "norm" in the U.S. for centuries.

Throughout the PD experiences, unmasking the powerful centripetal force of silence

that Whiteness engenders was one of the most significant experiences of ideological

becoming for many participants. Sarah, for example, a white cis-hetero female and

veteran librarian at Quills, made an important connection between former President

Trump's supporters, many of whom were silent in the face of his discursive attacks

against Asian and Asian American people at the onset of the pandemic, and the

silence of her school's administration when it came to issues of diversity at the

school. During the third PD session, the first online session, she shares:

> If the rest of the administration that is standing up there with Trump and not
> saying anything, speaking out is just a further perpetuation. I think that that
> sort of says, you know, that this is OK. And then whether they believe or not,
> unless they speak out against it. And that sort of sort of reminds me of things
> that have happened historically in the past as well, then it just says it's easy
> for people to get the message about like all of these people believe this.

Here, Sarah is naming the centripetal force of Whiteness that silences all

perspectives that would seek to dismantle or interrupt it. So powerful is this force

that those in actual positions of power, such as politicians and school

administrators, do not speak out against the "norm" of Whiteness. And, as Sarah

shares, in not speaking against, they "perpetuate" the ideology. As a quieter member

of the PD cohort, Sarah's contribution during this third session brought a

significantly different discourse into the space, and its thread was picked up and

alluded to throughout this session by the other participants.

2.7.3. White Resistance

Encounters with a diversity of perspectives – such as those that Henry and
Sarah brought to the space – appeared to support the engagement of some, while
disengaging others. That is, while many teacher-participants demonstrated
ideological becoming on trajectories towards greater critical cultural competence as
they encountered these diverse discourses (and unpacked their own perspectives),
others found and took opportunities to opt out of engaging with other perspectives
or exploring their own. Zeus and Johnny, for example, two white cis-hetero male
teacher, only participated in two out of the four sessions, opting out of both online
sessions. While there were other factors at play for our final two sessions, due to the
impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, Zeus and Johnny were the only two participants
who did not attend either of the final two sessions (and Zeus never responded to
any email outreach concerning it). For both in person sessions, Johnny was also late
to arrive to the sessions and Zeus was late to return from scheduled breaks.
However, while Johnny did demonstrate engagement during the times that he was
present with the rest of the cohort (he asked open-ended questions of his peers,
participated in the active listening sessions, and took time to thoughtfully respond
to activities we engaged in), Zeus was not as engaged, and in many ways, he was
actively resistant.

One clear example of this was during the active listening activity participants
were asked to engage in during session two, during which each group member plays
the role of speaker, listener, and observer as they share (without interruption)
about a particular topic – in this case it was concerning privilege. After being given

clear instructions (in written and verbal form) concerning how to engage in this activity, Zeus found multiple opportunities to derail the protocol, avoid having to be in the role of the speaker, and input his opinions of his two female group members instead. At the very beginning of the activity, Mary begins in speaker role, and shares, "Understanding my privilege was when I was teaching was teaching in South Africa," to which Zeus immediately and emphatically replies, "Oh, come on, how are we going to top this story?". When Mary is done speaking, he takes the opportunity as the listener (who is supposed to be sharing back what they heard in their own words, without judgement or appraisal), to instead share his appraisal of her as a member of their staff: "I could feel your passion um for what you experienced, in just your you know, your body language and your voice and your tone. And that confirms what I've thought about that you're dedicated, and smart. And that you're and that you're a good addition to [Quills], that's all I have to say."

Then, when it finally is his turn to be the speaker (which the third group member Chloe, reminded him he still had to do), he speaks for less than the two minutes allotted, and then shifts right back into asking Chloe pointed questions about the thoughts she was sharing during her time as the speaker. During his time as speaker he shares, "these are all things I think I'm conscious about very much, but I can see how you can be at a school like this and not be aware of those things." The word "things" here is a stand-in for privilege – specifically the impacts and allowances of privileged identities that the group had just been looking at in an activity called "Beads of privilege." Zeus's sense of himself as a person knowledgeable and aware of the impacts of privileged identities – while his actions

simultaneously demonstrated otherwise – provides an important lens into

resistance towards the development of critical cultural consciousness. While he

admits that he felt "a little guilty" during this activity, he remains convinced of his

own consciousness and resists opportunities to engage with other's perspectives or

examine his own. This type of active resistance from white people, especially white

men, has been well-documented in the literature (Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017;

Reio, 2005; Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Matias, 2013; Yoo & Carter, 2017; Convertino,

2016; Colombo, 2010; Picower, 2009), and the third space of this PD was not

immune to it. However, as Zeus did not return to the final two sessions, it is

impossible to say what the overall impact of such an experience would have been.

The fact that the PD space actually became more intimate and vulnerable during the

final two sessions though (which will be explained in the next section), could have

pushed him towards greater resistance or, perhaps, towards a willingness to engage.

2.7.4. Third Space

While the PD environment during the first two sessions and the last two

sessions varied, in some ways dramatically, the creation of this space to engage in

this type of PD acted as a third space across the different environments (in-person

and online). As the facilitator and researcher, I admit that I had some trepidation

about transitioning this critical, dialogic approach to an online environment for the

final two sessions. How would participants respond to the digital space? Would

navigating Zoom become a barrier to participation? Would folks even be interested

in joining an online PD session? How do I facilitate appropriately when I cannot hear

what is going on in every breakout room, nor can I "visit" each group's discussion without being obviously intrusive? All of these questions and more became a part of the research journal I kept leading into the third session. However, despite my concerns about this new terrain and how to support teachers on their vulnerable trajectories towards greater critical cultural competence, the final two sessions were filled with rich dialogue, authentic sharing and reflection, and a new level of equal participation among those who attended.

Participants, who joined our Zoom meeting from their own homes, seemed to experience a level of ease and comfort from the online environment as we delved into topics of racism, implicit bias, and social justice in the classroom – all topics that have been shown to cause discomfort and even resistance from white teachers (e.g., Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017; Matias, 2013; Picower, 2009). Moving between full group discussions to individual reflection to small group breakout rooms – where participants could freely speak to their group members without fear of being overheard by myself or another group – participants had space and time to engage with the content in a different way than can happen in person. At any moment, they had the ability to turn their camera off, mute themselves, or get up and walk away. While these actions happened very rarely during both sessions, it is an important factor to consider – that the level of control participants had may have contributed to their deep engagement. In this way the online space actually became more of a third space than the PD environment created during the first two in-person sessions. Participants came together completely outside of their school environments and joined each other in a digital space, from their own homes. Here,

in this secure Zoom room, there was no chance of being overheard from other

teachers or administrators, providing fertile ground for the disruption of the

standard activity system – the "social practices that include the norms, values,

divisions of labor, goals of the community, and its participants enduring dispositions

towards the social practice" (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 287). As this digital terrain is new

for so many, it follows that there would be a dearth in the literature concerning

online, critical PD for teachers. Yet, the success of the transition during this PD

demonstrates a line of additional inquiry that could, and I argue should, be made. In

order for white teachers to experience the perspective shifts needed to experience

ideological becoming on trajectories towards great critical cultural competence,

space needs to be made to support this vulnerable work. Moving PD such as the one

described here online is one possible way to make real, systemic change towards

the inclusion of CRP in all schools.

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TAKING STOCK & TAKING ACTION

PART I: What is already happening? (i.e., strengths)

Consider the many communities [Quills] serves – in what ways does the school care for, include, celebrate, and/or serve its **marginalized** communities specifically?

Community	Care for, include, celebrate, and/or serve?
Youth of color (Black, Latinx, Indigenous peoples, Asian, etc.)	
English Language Learners	
LGBTQ+ youth (transgender, gay, non-binary, etc.)	
Youth from lower income households	
Youth with disabilities (physical, learning-based, etc.)	
Youth of non-Christian faith systems (Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, etc.)	

PART II: What might be needed? (i.e., areas for improvement)

Considering the *Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards*, what are some possible **action steps** the school (i.e., administration, teachers, students, and community members) could take to move towards a **socially just school culture** that sees, values, and honors all students and families?

Community	What might be needed?	What could be done?
Youth of color	*(Example: a space for youth of color to share their experiences of schooling)*	*(Example: provide an optional affinity space for youth of color that is run by an adult of color in the community)*
White youth (e.g. What might white youth need to learn about themselves?)		
LGBTQ+ youth		
Heterosexual and Cisgender youth		

PART III: What might teachers & school leaders need?

Considering what you know about your school and community, what might teachers and school leaders need (*to do, learn, experience, etc.*) in order to move towards a school culture that is more **socially just and culturally responsive**?

	Need to do, learn, experience, practice, etc.
Teachers	
School leaders	

CHAPTER 3

ARTICLE 2: SHIFTING TO CRITICAL EMPATHY: A CRITICAL, DIALOGIC APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR WHITE SECONDARY TEACHERS

3.1. Introduction

Teacher empathy has long been seen as a necessary disposition of the teaching profession. Ever since the psychologist Edward Titchener translated the German word *einfühling*, meaning "feeling into," into the modern-day English word in 1909, theorists and philosophers across disciplines have been interested in how teachers take the perspective of, care for, and respond to the needs of their students (e.g., Rogers, 1959, Noddings, 1986). By the 1990's interest in empathy had surged in the United States, spurred in part by Daniel Goleman's (1995) landmark research on emotional intelligence (EQ). However, despite the scholarly interest, "empathy's functions [have] been beset with definitional concerns, methodological problems, and theoretical controversies" (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009, p. 86), leaving it vulnerable to critique. As debates continued over its meaning and function, a wave of education reforms came crashing down on schools across the country in the wake of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001), slowing further research in the field to a slow drip. So much so, that in a recent review of the literature, Berkovich (2018) found only three studies concerning the empathy of K-12 teachers published between 1996-2007.

Almost two decades later, however, empathy's place in the education lexicon has once again surfaced. With an increased focus on social and emotional learning curriculum (SEL) (spurred in large part by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning or CASEL), calls for greater support of mental health in schools, and a paradigm shift regarding the 'education debt' owed to students with marginalized racial identities (i.e., Black and Latinx students) (Ladson-Billings, 2006), empathy is steadily reentering the curriculum and the research literature. However, the bulk of new research and SEL programs remain focused on student empathy (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009), rather than on teacher empathy, with a specific focus on the empathy development of pre-K and elementary grade students. Only in the past five years has *teacher* empathy truly gained the renewed, albeit limited, scholarly interests of researchers and educators.

This is especially true when looking at the research and training of secondary teachers (Swan & Riley, 2015), a particularly troubling truth in light of the fact that middle and high school students are going through extraordinary physical and mental changes, including: puberty and physical maturation; racial and ethnic identity development; the formation of their prefrontal cortex (Jensen & Nutt, 2015); gender and sexuality awakening; and identity separation from their parents or guardians. As a main socializing force of students (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012), secondary teachers have a significant responsibility in supporting their students' social and emotional needs, which calls for empathy. Yet, the most important "need" articulated since NCLB continues to be students' *academic* needs, as demonstrated by ever-mounting pressure to get high school students especially,

to pass state and national standardized tests. This remains true today, even as alarming statistics about the state of adolescent mental health continue to be revealed. A stunning example of this is the suicide rate among teenagers, which has exceeded its highest levels in the United States since 2000, with a 47% increase between 2000 and 2017 (Miron, Yu, Wilf-Miron, and Kohane, 2019): *one in six* high school students reported "seriously considering suicide" in 2017 alone. Among LGBTQ youth, the rate is *three* times higher than that of their heterosexual and cisgender peers (CDC, 2016).

Compounding this dire need for empathy in our teaching and learning environments is the continued demographic divide between students and teachers. Yet, it is this disparity that also allows us to see most clearly that empathy, as it has been conventionally conceptualized, is not enough (Mirra, 2018). Most commonly, even today, schools espouse the conventional and reductive view of empathy – conceptualizing and mobilizing it as a way to encourage "niceness" and the "golden rule" (Mirra, 2018, p. 4) – and to "walk a mile in another person's shoes". While this can be seen as an admirable goal, this definition depends on a falsehood, that individuals are "devoid of context," and thus are able to actually experience what other people (with divergent identities) experience. However, as Mirra articulates, we are "constantly negotiating our positions in society" because our "individuality is couched within overlapping social constructs including race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, that have historical, economic, and political ramifications" (p. 6). Therefore, we must be willing and able to "deconstruct what we take for granted in order to truly seek to "feel into" someone else's experience" (p. 5) – a vision of

empathy that goes far beyond niceness or the golden rule. It is from this place, of

understanding and a willingness to see the stratified systems we live within and

perpetuate, that a needed, reconceptualized form of empathy, which I call *critical*

empathy, can emerge. And with a teaching force that hovers between 85 – 90%

white and female, and a student body that is steadily diversifying across all

categories (i.e., race, native language, gender identity, sexuality, etc.) this shift in

how we think about and mobilize empathy is necessary.

One only needs to look at the resilient education debt (originally and by some

still referred to as the 'achievement gap') (Ladson-Billings, 2006), to see a few of the

damaging side-effects of teachers' conventional vision of empathy: Black and Latinx

students continue to be suspended and expelled at disproportionate rates – adding

considerably to the perpetuation of the school-to-prison pipeline (Vaught, 2017);

white students continue to score higher on standardized state and national tests

(NCES, 2017) and graduate from high school at higher rates than their Black and

Latinx peers – allowing white students greater access to higher education and

higher paying jobs with better benefits; and teacher retention rates in urbanized

schools mostly serving low-income students of color continue to decline –

disrupting the learning relationships students build over time (Darling-Hammond,

2003). Despite the decades-long call for the application of culturally responsive

pedagogy (CRP) in schools (Gay, 2018) to address this "debt," it remains entrenched,

in some ways stalled by the challenges involved in helping teachers develop one of

the core elements of CRP, cultural competence (CC). CC has been defined in a

number of different ways and has often been likened to Freire's (1970) concept of

conscientization – the process of developing critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action. For the purposes of this research, I draw on the concept of conscientization specifically in defining cultural competence as:

3. having a firm understanding of one's own cultural and socialized identities as they are nested within the larger socio-historical context; and

4. the ability to analyze how one's own and others' social identities operate and are operated upon within structures and systems (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Gay, 2018).

I argue that CC is the missing and needed component of what I theorize as *critical empathy* (which I define later in this paper).

Yet, resistance on the part of white teachers and administrators has often been a very real barrier to the development of cultural competence, particularly within predominantly white schools and communities (e.g., Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Matias, 2013). However, while it is a troubling truth that there is a well-documented history of white teachers struggling (and outright refusing) to engage in the critical self-reflection and inquiry necessary to achieve and enact cultural competence (Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017; Reio, 2005; Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Matias, 2013; Yoo & Carter, 2017; Convertino, 2016; Colombo, 2010; Picower, 2009), they generally have had little, if any, real time, space, or support to do this vulnerable work. In a similar way that secondary students' emotional well-being is currently relegated to mostly inauthentic and separate SEL curricula, secondary teachers' emotional needs when it comes to engaging in critical self-reflection concerning topics such as institutional racism, structural oppression, or implicit

bias, is often ignored (Matias, 2013). I argue that these disparities significantly inhibit teachers' ability to develop and enact not only cultural competence beyond a mere "ethnic tidbits" approach (Convertino, 2016), but in turn, *critical* empathy as well. In order to truly support all of our secondary students' academic, social, and emotional needs (across the many intersecting social identities they embody), secondary teachers' need integrated approaches to developing this form of empathy, which recognizes the very differences between people's lived experiences.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to provide such an approach and then to analyze both, how this type of PD impacted white secondary-teachers' ideological selves, as well as how these teachers can and did shift their understanding of empathy as it has been conventionally conceptualized. Through a year-long professional development series, teachers were provided space, time, and resources to cultivate what I call *critical empathy,* which synthesizes the conventional components of empathy and the cultural competence element of CRP. This PD aimed to engage white teachers directly in the vulnerable work of critical self-reflection and inquiry required of cultural competence and empathy in four ways: self and systems learning; facilitated dialogue; focus groups; and reflective writing.

This study is part of a larger research project that looked at how the same group of white, secondary teachers experienced and discursively participated in a critical, dialogic approach to professional development. However, the research questions that guided this portion of the project were focused on critical empathy:

4. In what ways do predominately white schools and communities enable and/or inhibit a shift towards the enactment of critical empathy in secondary schools?

5. How does engaging in professional development intended to cultivate critical empathy impact white, secondary teachers' ideological selves?

6. Do teachers' conceptions of empathy become more critical as they participate in this type of critical, dialogic professional development?

The remainder of this paper is organized in the following way: first, I briefly review the literature on teacher empathy; next, I discuss the need for a new theory of empathy in education; then, I expound upon this new theory and articulate how I conceptualize *critical empathy*; and finally, I share the methodology and findings from the empirical study.

3.2. Theoretical framework: Conceptual foundations of empathy

According to Berkovich's (2018) review of the literature concerning K-12 teacher empathy since 1975, there are four main categories of empathy: empathy as a state; trait; form of communication; and a relationship. Two of these, empathy as a state and as a trait have roots in psychology literature, including social and development psychology, while the other two, empathy as a form of communication and as a relationship, have roots in the occupational (health care and social work) literature, and are deeply tied to current trends in empathy research in education.

3.2.1. Empathy in psychology

According to Berkovich, those studies "belonging to the empathy as **state** theme adopted the idea that the empathy of K-12 teachers is a fluid ability that can be contingently activated *only* in certain situations or with specific individuals" (italics added, p. 3). Martin Hoffman (2000), a renowned child psychologist and foremost researcher on empathy's relationship to psychology, identifies five 'types' of empathy – or responses to an 'other'. He defines the base motive of all five of these types as: "an affective response more appropriate to another's situation than one's own" (p. 4). For Hoffman, these 'responses' are states of being that *only* occur in 'certain situations'; they are the ways human beings act when they are in connection with or in the presence of other human beings, especially those in trouble or distress.

When empathy is conceptualized as a **trait**, it is seen as an "inborn, natural ability or tendency, which cannot be taught, but can be identified and strengthened" (Berkovich, 2018, p. 3). Davis (1983), the developer of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index [IRI] – a measurement tool for empathy – conceptualizes empathy as *both* a trait and a state, or as he describes it, "reactions of one individual to the observed experiences of another." In developing the IRI, Davis identified four aspects that he believed best represented the multidimensional nature of empathy: perspective taking; empathic concern; fantasy; and personal distress. Fantasy has to do with one's response to imagined situations (such as those seen and experienced in books and movies), while personal distress has to do with how individuals respond to their own, personal needs and stress. In measuring these four aspects, Davis argued

that one can make visible individual differences in empathy, highlighting his conception of empathy as a *reasonably stable trait* that varies individually across *situations*. His Index has been the most widely used measure of empathy in the social psychology literature since its creation.

3.2.2. Empathy in education

Carl Rogers (1959), whom much of the research and discussion concerning teacher empathy specifically revolve around, focused on the therapeutic relationship between patient and therapist. To Rogers, empathy was both the **state** a therapist practiced when they felt *as* their patient, but it was also a process of **communication** – or a "multistaged experiential process" (Duan & Hill, 1996, p. 263). This process, of "temporarily living in" (Rogers, 1975) a client's experience of life involved, "sensing the client's inner world *and* communicating that sensing" (italics added, Duan & Hill, 1996, p. 263). That is, it was not enough for a therapist to simply feel what a client felt, but it was necessary for the therapist to communicate this understanding to the client. In education research today, the teacher is often considered synonymous with the therapist in this conceptualization (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009). Nel Noddings (1986), for example, who studies the impact of care in schools, articulates the need for teachers to practice "mental engrossment" – or the process of coming to understand students' needs by feeling *from* their perspective. By doing so, she argues teachers can demonstrate care for the needs of their students as they communicate this understanding.

Furthering Roger's conception are education researchers (e.g., Warren, 2015, 2018; Mirra, 2018; Cooper, 2010), who have taken up (e.g., Whitford & Emerson, 2019), expanded on (e.g., Jaber, Southerland, & Dake, 2018), and questioned (e.g., Boler, 1999) Rogers' two-part conception of empathy – which included a cognitive component (including perspective taking) and an affective component (including the demonstration of care). Others, such as Cooper (2010) expanded on Rogers' conception, defining empathy as:

> A quality shown by individuals which enables them to accept others for who they are, to feel and perceive situations from their perspective and to take a constructive and long-term attitude towards the advancement of their situation by searching for solutions to meet their needs. (p. 14)

Here, Cooper expands on Rogers' by adding both, a level of 'acceptance' for the 'other,' and a 'constructive attitude' towards the other's situation, while continuing to include feeling and perceiving from the other's perspective in the definition. This conception is foundational to more recent scholarship that has conceptualized teacher empathy through a critical theoretical lens.

3.3. Theoretical foundations: Theorizing critical empathy

3.3.1. Critical theory, empathy, and education

Education scholars who have begun to vision teacher empathy through a critical theoretical lens highlight that teachers need to: a) be self-aware and self-reflective, and b) have a clear understanding of the socio-historic influences that are present in and beyond schools (e.g. McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Warren, 2014, 2018;

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Whitford & Emerson, 2019). These scholars draw on critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), whiteness studies (Leonardo, 2009), critical consciousness (Freire, 1970), and culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2017) as they frame and define empathy within the space of secondary teaching and learning. While the scholarship is still limited at this time, and definitional concerns continue, those who are critically conceptualizing empathy are demonstrating the possibility of a shift in the discourse of secondary teacher empathy in the 21st century.

McAllister & Irvine (2002) for example, theorize empathy as a need in the teaching of culturally diverse students, and implemented a professional development series for in-service teachers as a way to foster empathy as an "implicit part of being caring, supportive, and responsive teachers with their culturally diverse students" (p. 442). Similarly, Palmer & Menard-Warwick (2012) took a small group of pre-service teachers to Mexico for a cultural immersion experience aimed specifically at fostering what DeStiger (1999) defined as "critical empathy":

> The process of establishing informed and affective connections with other human beings, of thinking and feeling with them at some emotionally, intellectually, and socially significant level, while always remembering that such connections are complicated by sociohistorical forces. (p. 240)

Additionally, Ullman & Hecsh (2011) theorize empathy as the "ability to witness [an other's] pain, and to think about what one's roles might be in relation to that pain" (p. 611) – drawing attention to the role of self-reflection in empathy.

More recently, the work of Mirra (2018) and Warren (2014; 2018) have engaged with both DeStiger (1999) and Ullman & Hecsh's (2011) critical conceptions of empathy. Mirra (2018) defines what she calls Critical Civic Empathy [CCE] as being motivated by mutual humanization and oriented towards social and political action, arguing that mutual humanization must be the goal of CCE, because "we cannot fully realize our own humanity unless and until we recognize and honor the full humanity of those who differ from us" (p. 10). Warren (2018) also contends that we must recognize the humanity of others and theorizes empathy, through the act of perspective taking, as a pathway towards the deconstruction of hegemonic ways of knowing and implicit biases, especially for white teachers. Through this process he argues that teachers can develop critical pathways towards the enactment of culturally responsive teaching practices.

3.3.2. Defining critical empathy

Due to the definitional concerns related to the study of empathy identified by Feshbach & Feshbach (2009), I contend that a new theory of empathy in education is needed; one that integrates the cognitive, affective, and socio-historic components related to inter- and intra-personal relationships. I draw on Carl Rogers (1975) client-centered model of therapy, Nel Noddings' (1986) theory of care, and bell hooks' (1994) theory of engaged pedagogy in defining both the cognitive and affective aspects of critical empathy in education; while I draw on the work of critical education scholars, Mirra (2018), Warren (2018), Gay (2010), and Freire (1970) in defining the socio-historic aspects. However, rather than separating these

into categories, these components are woven into a multipart process that I call

critical empathy – with each part informing and affecting the others (see **Figure

3.1.**). I define *critical empathy* as the:

d) *reflective process* of establishing who you are in relation to another person

(or other people) within socio-historic structures;

e) *cognitive task* of taking the perspective of others in the service of identifying,

understanding, and appreciating their emotions and ways of knowing; and

f) *affective response* to another person (or other people) in accordance with

that person's (or people's) needs are as they are nested within social

structures.
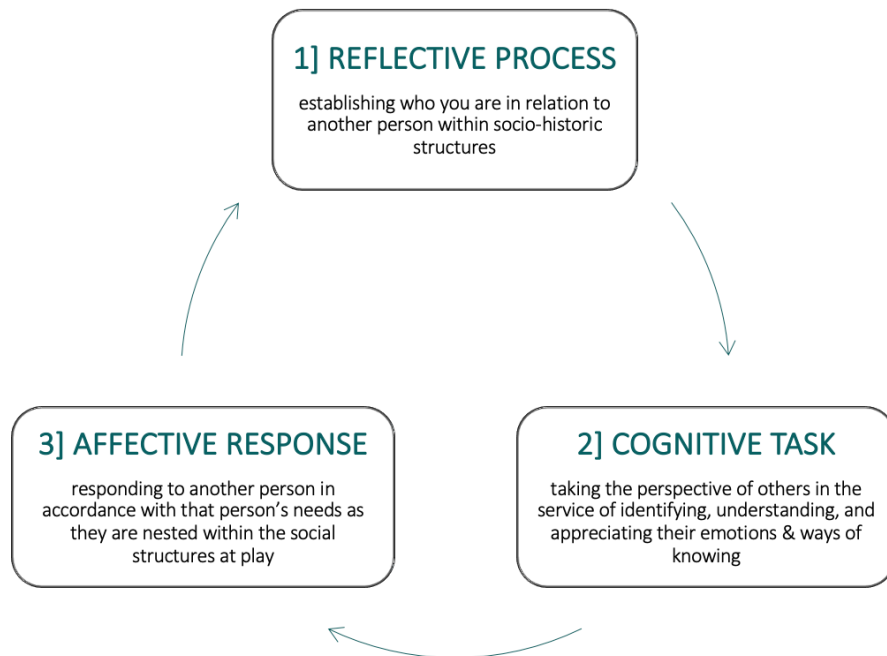
Figure 3.1. Multipart vision of critical empathy

3.3.3. The ideological environment(s) of predominately white communities

Bakhtin (1981) argued that human beings come in contact with "existence" through ideological worlds, or environments. These *ideological environments* vary across cultures and epistemes and are thought to have varying effects on people's ideological selves – their ways of viewing the world around them. These environments include groups of people who come together for specific purposes (such as family units, friend groups, or a class of students), and include places where people gather and live (such as schools, places of worship, towns, and Zoom rooms). According to Bakhtin, "the ideological environment … mediates a person's ideological becoming," the process through which people develop their way of viewing the world, or their "idea systems." This occurs through individual's interactions with two main categories of discourse (Bakhtin, 1981): a) authoritative discourses, which "we encounter … with its authority already fused to it" (p. 342), and b) internally persuasive discourses, that represent the diversity of perspectives present in all environments. As we enter, experience, and participate in various ideological environments, we assimilate these two categories of discourse differently. Depending on our awareness and acknowledgement of the discourse(s) and our relationship to the people in the ideological environment, our level of internal agreement or resonance with these categories may cause struggle or tension, which Bakhtin called ideological becoming.

The first category, authoritative discourse, has the most power to centralize particular ways of speaking, acting, and thinking about specific ideas or idea systems. That is, they have the greatest capacity to act as *centripetal* (i.e.,

centralizing) forces (Bakhtin, 1981). These discourses are ever-present in society and can be seen easily in the language of policies, laws, religion, and science. A powerful example of an authoritative discourse in public education today is that of standardized testing – more specifically, the necessity of testing to determine students' learning and teachers' proficiency. *No Child Left Behind* (2001), a policy decision made and implemented under the George W. Bush administration, amplified and centralized this discourse – helping to solidify it as the authoritative discourse it is today. Nearly every child, teacher, school administrator, and parent in the United States today knows this discourse, and while many do not agree with it, it is encountered with an "authority already fused to it," making it difficult to see, let alone to deconstruct or interrupt. Therefore, despite some teachers' desires to teach in socially just ways, that integrate the needs and perspectives of their diverse students, and support diverse demonstrations of learning, modern teachers might very well feel "handcuffed by mandates that are often in conflict with their own desires to work for more just societal conditions for their students" (Picower, 2011, p. 1106). That is, mandates like standardized testing requirements, are a powerful way that authoritative discourses maintain power in specific ideological environments.

Unlike authoritative discourse, the second category of discourse people encounter Bakhtin calls internally persuasive discourse. These discourses are always subject to change, are able to persuade people individually, and have the ability to disrupt centralizing forces. That is, they can act as *centrifugal* (i.e., diversifying) forces that attempt to promote multiple perspectives, ideas, and idea

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systems. While these discourses are often "denied all privilege, backed by no authority at all … [and] frequently not even acknowledged in society" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342), they are constantly presenting themselves as we self-reflect, communicate with others, and consume content (i.e., media, text, news, etc.). Those teachers who choose to integrate critical pedagogy into their curricula, for example, hold ideologies different than the authoritative discourse that requires teachers to focus on "approved" (by state and local authorities) academic curriculum only. As these teachers mobilize critical pedagogy in their classrooms (e.g., through the deconstruction of media representations of Black men; highlighting the impact of climate change on economically disadvantaged peoples; or analyzing the ways women are represented in literature) they present an internally persuasive discourse to both their students and their colleagues that has the ability to interrupt the authoritative discourse of approved, academic content only. This different perspective presents an opportunity for others (students, parents, administration, fellow teachers) to experience struggle or tension between the authoritative discourse and an internally persuasive discourse, which, according to Bakhtin, is the most effective interaction in promoting learning (Freedman & Ball, 2004) and the development of the ideological self. For a visual representation of these forces, see **Figure 3.2.** (Gíslason, 2019).

Centrifugal (away from a center)   Centripetal (towards a center)
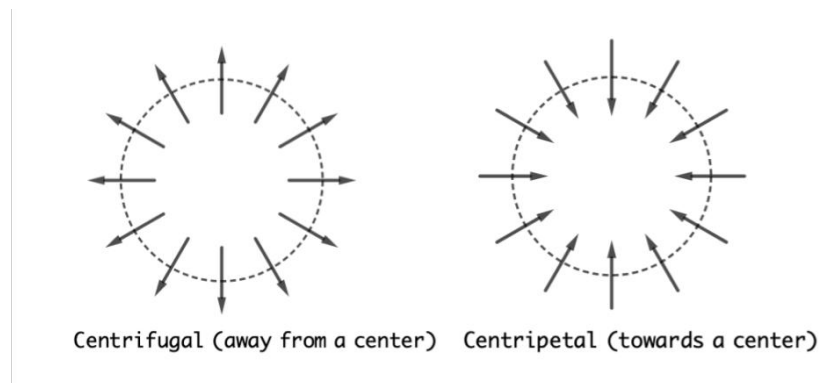
Figure 3.2. Centrifugal vs. centripetal forces

Within spaces that are characterized by homogenous identities, however, particularly those of historically advantaged social groups (such as white folks or men), the opportunity to engage in productive struggle with a diversity of discourses is often limited (Picower, 2011). In these environments, authoritative discourses are therefore, more often than not, able to maintain their centralized power with relatively little effort and are able to "silence diversity" (Bishop & McClellen, 2017, p. 130). For example, people with different ideological perspectives and lived experiences living and attending schools in "homogenous communities with powerful hegemonic structures and voices" (p. 130) are more easily shunned, excluded, and/or silenced (Albritton, Huggman, & McClellen, 2017). In predominantly white and Christian communities, this can be seen in the way that the perspectives of the few people of color or LGBTQ people who reside there are frequently dismissed, ignored, or even turned against them (e.g., when parents of youth of color are described as "blowing things out of proportion" when advocating for their child after a racist incident). At the same time, the perspectives of white youth are infrequently challenged or even brought into contact with other perspectives in school: "the hidden curriculum of whiteness saturates everyday

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school life ... and state sponsored curricula fail to encourage students of all racial backgrounds to critique white domination" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 83). In predominantly white and Christian communities, this can and has resulted in the perpetuation of curricula and school policies that reaffirm racist and heterosexist beliefs (Picower, 2011), which, in turn, pose significant barriers for teachers to challenge the status quo (created and supported by authoritative discourses) and to teach in ways that affirm the lives and integrate the perspectives of diverse youth. For white teachers especially, who have also "had very little, if any, training in working with culturally and linguistically diverse learners, benefit from white privilege, [often] hold deficit-oriented beliefs toward young people of color" (Glenn, 2012, p. 327), and frequently grew up in similar environments as their white students, this poses an even greater barrier.

Therefore, within the ideological environment of predominantly white schools, I argue that a different ideological environment needs to be created, with the distinct purpose of supporting white teachers to: a) bring awareness to their own identities and the Whiteness of school curricula and policies, b) engage in struggle with a diversity of authoritative and internally persuasive discourses, and c) practice critical empathy for those like and unlike themselves. Intergroup dialogue [IGD], a model of intergroup learning, integrates all three of these elements, engaging participants in facilitated dialogue within and across difference, while engaging in self and systems learning and unpacking the sociocultural/sociohistorical forces at work within/beyond the space of the dialogue (Zúñiga, et al., 2007). It therefore presents a promising framework for

teachers to engage in this vulnerable work and shift towards more critical

perspectives of teaching – and empathy – within secondary education, via

ideological becoming. **Figure 3.3.** provides a visual representation of my theory of

change using IGD as the foundation of a new ideological environment.

Critical & Dialogic Professional Development

Learn about social identity & systemic inequality	Share emotions & lived-experiences across difference	Participate in facilitated dialogue about charged topics

Ideological environment

Components of Intergroup Dialogue

Ideological becoming

Develop cultural competence	Demonstrate care for others' needs	Practice perspective taking

CRITICAL EMPATHY | Reflective process | Affective response | Cognitive task |

Figure 3.3. Theory of Change 2

While IGD has rarely been used with K-12 educators as a form of professional

development (e.g. Dessel, 2010), it has seen extraordinary success with

undergraduate students and faculty members at large universities in developing

cross-cultural skills and reducing prejudice (Zúñiga et al., 2007; Muller & Miles,

2017; Dessel & Rogge, 2008), and it has been successfully used with pre-service

teachers in developing more race-conscious attitudes and cultural competence

(Convertino, 2016). Even though participating in a complete IGD experience would

be complicated for most in-service teachers, due to time constraints, the

overwhelming requirements of the teaching profession, and a lack of trained

facilitators, *components* of IGD, such as: learning about social identity and systemic

inequality; sharing emotions and personal lived-experiences in a supportive

environment; and engaging in facilitated dialogue about socially and politically

charged topics relevant to teaching, can and have been brought into time spent on

PD. In fact, Muller & Miles (2017) demonstrated that a modified (i.e., condensed)

version of the "critical dialogic model (Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013) can still have

positive outcomes for participants" including "the development of critical social

awareness" (p. 67). Providing opportunities for white teachers working at

predominantly white schools to engage in critical dialogue in an ideological

environment marked by a diversity of voices and perspectives (including a diversity

of gender identities, sexual orientations, ages, etc.) is one promising pathway

towards the perspective shifts embodied in ideological becoming, thus supporting

teachers' movement towards more critical and culturally competent ideologies.

Additionally, the process of both, sharing personal experiences, and listening

actively to others' experiences, invites participants to demonstrate care for others

and to practice perspective taking. Therefore, I theorize that through this

experience, teachers' conceptions of empathy will shift towards the three-part

process of critical empathy via ideological becoming.

3.4. Methodology

As part of a larger research project that looked at the discursive events

within a critical, dialogic PD environment, this study focused on how white

secondary teachers in one predominantly white high school experienced shifts in

their ideological selves towards more critical forms of teaching, including more

critical conceptions of empathy. Data collected for the larger research project, conducted during the 2019-2020 school year, included: audio and field notes from four researcher-facilitated dialogue sessions; audio and field notes from two, ninety-minute focus groups; forty-one (41) post-session reflective surveys; and session artifacts. This portion of the study focuses specifically on the audio and field notes from both focus groups (held in-person at the school), and all post-session reflective surveys. Due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic only the first two PD sessions were able to be held in-person. For the health and safety of all, the final two sessions were held remotely using Zoom, a video conferencing tool. Despite the change in format, the four-stage critical dialogic model of IGD was still used as the foundation for all four sessions, with modifications to accommodate constraints and to directly address the needs of practicing teachers at the time. The typical four stages of the IGD model are: 1) beginnings: forming and building relationships, 2) exploring differences and commonalities, 3) exploring and discussing hot topics, and 4) action planning and alliance building (Zúñiga et al., 2007). While all four stages were included in this series, the focus was on stages two and three: the exploration of commonalities and differences; and the exploration and discussion of 'hot topics' (i.e., socially and politically charged topics such as racism on campus or transgender rights). As a trained IGD facilitator, I acted as both researcher and facilitator for all study-related interactions.

3.4.1. Research site

In-person components of the study (the first two PD sessions and both focus groups) took place at the same regional high school in New England that enrolls approximately 1,200 students in grades 9-12, which I will refer to as *Quills Regional High School.* Quills is a rather unique public school in New England, as it houses both academic and vocational divisions. However, like many suburbanized schools in the United States, Quills serves a predominantly white student body (90%) with a relatively low percentage of families who are considered economically disadvantaged (20%). Additionally, the teaching population at Quills is almost completely white, with only three teachers of color (2% of the total teaching staff) and aligns with the national ratios of male to female teachers according to the National Center for Education Statistics (SASS, 2018), with 40% male teachers and 60% female teachers. While both remote PD sessions did not take place within the Quills' school building, as they took place on Zoom, it is important to note that all participants remained practicing teachers at Quills for the duration of the study.

3.4.2. Participants

Participants self-selected into the research study after a brief presentation about the PD opportunity was made during a faculty meeting at the beginning of the school year, and a cohort of twelve white teachers resulted. While the participants all self-identified as white, there was a diversity of ages and genders in the group, as well as some diversity of sexuality and parental status. **Table 3.1** provides the

subject taught and self-identified demographics of each participant gathered during

pre-PD one-on-one meetings I had with each participant.

Table 3.1. Self-identified participant demographics

PARTICIPANT*	SUBJECT TAUGHT	AGE	YEARS TAUGHT	GENDER IDENTITY	SEXUALITY	PARENT/ GUARDIAN
Henry Watson	English	44	18	Male	Heterosexual	Yes
Sarah Cook	Library	55	23	Female	Heterosexual	Yes
Zeus McCormick	English	47	25	Male	Heterosexual	Yes
Chloe Shafer	English	54	29	Female	Lesbian	No
Johnny Adams	Math	42	15	Male	Heterosexual	No
Mary Carter	SPED	28	6	Female	Heterosexual	No
Cora Russo	English	28	5	Female	Heterosexual	No
Paul Klein	English	47	25	Male	Heterosexual	Yes
Eliza Coughlan	English	56	18	Female	Heterosexual	Yes
Rosemary Turner	SPED	58	20	Female	Heterosexual	Yes
Franklin Jaegar	Hospitality	34	3	Male	Gay	No
Andrew Delanl	Culinary	36	10	Male	Heterosexual	No

*self-selected pseudonyms

3.4.3. Data collection

During the pre-PD one-on-one meetings I had with participants, University

IRB approved informed consent forms, which including details and space to agree to

audio recording, were provided and discussed. All participants had an opportunity

during that time and during the month leading up to our first PD session in early

December 2019 to ask questions about the process, audio recording, and the

intended goals of the series. Before the first PD session, all twelve participants

signed the informed consent forms and agreed to audio recording and transcription with a clear understanding that they could change their mind at any time during the process (concerning all or some of their audio contributions). Audio data for all in-person portions were recorded using two researcher-owned recording devices, both with password protection. Data for this portion of the study included: audio and field notes from both focus groups (both ninety minutes each); participant generated artifacts; and open-ended portions of post-session reflective surveys from all four sessions. Focus group audio was transcribed verbatim using a digital transcription tool and independent, researcher verification, and all IRB procedures for securing informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and keeping data secure were followed. Appendix A includes all focus group questions.

3.4.4. Data Analysis

Given that there is limited research on both critical visions of teacher empathy and the use of critical, dialogic models of PD within predominantly white schools, I used a grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis (Charmaz, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2007), seeking to make sense of the ways that participants experienced the PD space, as well as how or if they experienced ideological shifts in the process. Charmaz's (2005) revisioning of grounded theory, as constructivist grounded theory, "lies squarely within the interpretive approach to qualitative research with flexible guidelines, a focus on theory developed that depends on the researcher's view, learning about the experience within embedded, hidden networks, situations, and relationships, and making visible hierarchies of power,

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communication, and opportunity" (Creswell, 2013, p. 87). That is, rather than using the traditional approach to using grounded theory to study a single process (Corbin & Strauss, 1967), I conducted an analysis of the data from a social constructivist perspective, (Charmaz, 2005) which "includes emphasizing diverse local worlds, multiple realities, and the complexities of particular worlds, views, and actions" (Creswell, 2013, p. 87). From this perspective, the role of the researcher is not minimized, but rather recognized as an active part of the research process.

In order to conduct a robust analysis from this perspective, I began by applying open and axial coding, allowing categories of data from both focus groups and all post-session reflections to emerge throughout the data collection and analysis process. In order to organize categories into themes, and to identify patterns, constant comparison (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was implemented throughout the data analysis process as well. This analysis helped to determine the perceived effectiveness of the PD sessions, while it also provided deeper insight into teachers' conceptions of empathy and their ideological shifts over time. Instead of seeking to assemble a single theory, as is traditionally done in grounded theory, I sought to make sense of the phenomena present in this PD environment, including that of empathy and cultural competence, as they are nested within complex and dynamic social systems (i.e., public school, predominantly white community, professional development space). In this way, I leaned on the data analysis approach of Charmaz (2005) rather than the traditional, systematic, and singular approach of Corbin & Strauss (2007). This included the use of member checking, which I used throughout the data analysis process for any moments of talk that were unclear and

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critical to the data analysis process, and/or for moments that were revealing in some way of a participant's identity.

3.4.5. Researcher positionality

As Charmaz (2005) articulates, the researcher is not a separate entity from the research process – and as such it is necessary for me to identity my positionality within this complex research system. As a trained IGD facilitator, I acted as the primary and only facilitator of all dialogue sessions as well as the researcher. While it is uncommon for IGD sessions to only have one facilitator, the constraints of public-school environments along with the population of teachers at Quills made it necessary to have only one facilitator. Additionally, as a former teacher at *Quills*, I had a particular familiarity with the school; its structure and daily functioning, as well as the demographics of the student body. This connection is of course, twofold. On the one hand, it provided me with what Fairclough (1992) referred to as "members' resources" – knowledge about teachers' daily experiences that would otherwise be unknown – while it also encouraged greater trust in me as a facilitator as participants knew that I had not only been a teacher, but I had been a teacher at their school. On the other hand, knowing Quills so deeply presented the possibility of bias, as there was a potential for me to be influenced by my own experiences at the school in my facilitation. In addressing this possibility, I critically self-reflected before and after each session concerning my emotions and perspectives of the dialogue and participants, keeping a log of my personal experiences in order to help me better understand my own biases/judgements. In this way, I worked mindfully

to mitigate my roles as facilitator and researcher. I also made a conscious decision to include member checking as a means of triangulation and as a check on my dual role as researcher and facilitator as I analyzed the data.

Finally, it is important to identify who I am and what I brought into the dialogue space as our personal sociocultural identities also present the possibility of bias. I am a thirty-one-year-old, white, female, lesbian, who is a native English speaker and a non-parent. As a white woman I have and continue to experience the unearned privileges afforded to white people in a racialized society, and no matter how much I have deepened my knowledge of the stratified social structures that we exist within, I am keenly aware that blind spots will be revealed throughout my lifetime. As a lesbian, and as one of the very few teachers who were 'out' as belonging to the LGBTQ community at Quills while I was teaching there, I was able to bring a different perspective to our dialogue sessions, which were made up of mostly heterosexual folks. Therefore, throughout this experience, I continued to unpack my blind spots and perspectives via additional research and reading, through a critical friend group – with colleagues who were doing similar work – as well as through my critical self-reflection logs as a means to mitigate my own biases. While I am unsure of the impact it had overall, the greater the diversity of voices within a dialogue, the greater the opportunity for participants to engage in ideological becoming (Bakhtin, 1981), which can lead to the perspective shifts needed for the enactment of critical empathy.

3.5. Findings

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach to data analysis, two main themes were assembled: the first coalescing around the effects of predominantly white communities, and the second concerning the developing, ideological selves of teachers. See **Figure 3.4.** for a visual representation of this analysis.
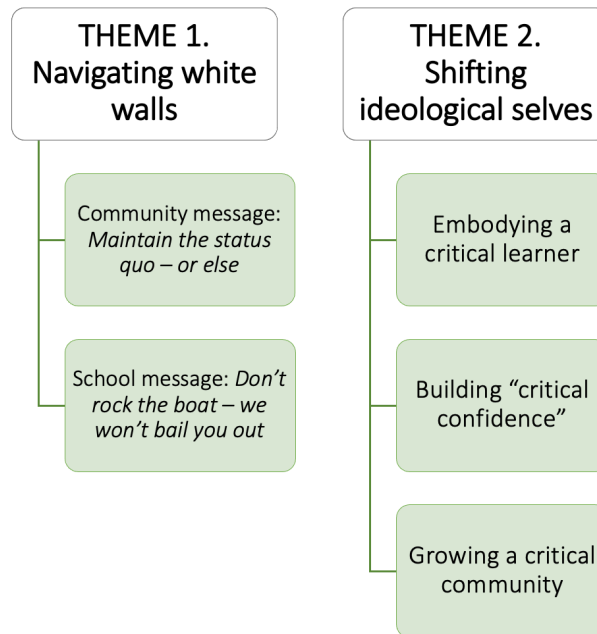
Figure 3.4. Major themes identified

Both the community and the school itself posed significant challenges to the development of critical empathy – a form of connection, care, and teaching that that is beyond the conventional conception of empathy. However, in facing these challenges, and bringing them to light with each other, participants began to demonstrate the three parts of critical empathy: the *reflective process* of establishing who you are in relation to another person (or other people) within socio-historic structures; the *cognitive task* of taking the perspective of others in the service of

identifying, understanding, and appreciating their emotions and ways of knowing; and the *affective response* to another person (or other people) in accordance with that person's (or people's) needs as they are nested within social structures. In fact, over the course of this year-long PD series, participants demonstrated both a willingness and an interest in engaging in critical topics, seeking to unpack the ways in which they experienced and participated in oppressive systems as individuals, and as teachers. As they did, it became evident that this environment was providing them with the time and space to process their previous experiences within Quills, to evaluate current conditions, and to consider future possibilities for their teaching and the school writ large. In so doing, participants were able to experience shifts in their ideological selves as they cultivated or deepened the cultural competence component of critical empathy, which I came to define as the development of "critical confidence." Simultaneously, teachers began to recognize and coalesce around the critical community of educators that was being built, and increasingly stepped into the role of critical learners throughout our work together. These themes, which will be discussed further in the following section, all emerged within the context of Quills itself - a predominantly white school within a predominantly white community. The following sections take a closer look at: 1) the navigational challenges teachers encountered in trying to teach in more critical and culturally competent ways within this predominantly white community; and 2) how teachers' ideological selves shifted towards the critical within this context. In the discussion section that follows my findings, I expand on the ways that many teacher participants demonstrated critical empathy throughout the PD series, as well.

3.5.1. Navigating White Walls

Both the school and the community presented barriers to structural change within Quills High School. While there were similarities and overlaps between the two, what emerged most prominently were the contextual effects of having a predominantly white school nested in a predominantly white community. Three main factors that contributed to these barriers within the community included institutional racism, fear mongering, and "PC" policing, and the main message teachers felt from the community was, simply put – *maintain the status quo – or else*. Within the school itself, participants also noted the effects of both, continued personal and institutional racism, as well as a leadership team that lacked a critical mission or vision for Quills. As the PD progressed, it became increasingly clear that leadership was beholden to the status quo the community affirmed, one which upheld Whiteness, perpetuated curricula and school policies that did not affirm students of color, and neglected to challenge white students' perspectives of the world around them. This posed significant barriers for teachers to challenge the status quo and to teach in ways that affirmed the lives and integrated the perspectives of diverse youth. In its most simple form, the message heard and felt by participants from the school was, *Don't rock the boat – we won't bail you out*.

3.5.1.a. The Community: Maintain the status quo – or else

During both focus group sessions participants focused on the impact of the white community they taught within. Specifically, they focused on the fear that they felt in teaching against a status quo of traditional, white, "American" society from

families in the area. Andrew, a culinary arts teacher, returned to this topic a number

of times during one of the focus groups, demonstrating a real barrier for him in

moving his teaching and his interactions with students in more critical directions. At

one point late in the discussion, he finally disclosed the emotion behind this:

> I have anger, but there's also fear and not like I'm afraid to discuss it. It's it's
> fear about what the situation is in this community. Um and I hate going back
> to politics, but it's very hard to talk about racism right now without talking
> about the political scene. And so you have a lot of these, like I said, kids
> coming in parroting, parroting, these viewpoints, that you can see when
> they're walking around interacting with people, they obviously don't share
> on a value value-based level. And they're just like saying these things. It's like
> you understand it. But so the fear is having that conversation and then
> having to deal with the fallout with the parents and administration ... And so
> having that discussion or trying to have those discussions, for me, there is
> some fear. I don't want to have to deal with your racist parent next, you
> know, because the racist things you're saying are not coming from you at this
> point ... And so to have that discussion, you're going to go home and say, well,
> Chef said that you're saying these things or you know what I mean? Like, I
> don't want have to deal with their parents. I really have given up on those
> people because they're already too old. But maybe your kid has a shot of
> being an understanding human. So that for me, I don't know, there's that.

Andrew's fear of both teaching and speaking with students in more culturally aware

and critical ways came from what he knew about many families in the district,

gleaned from the viewpoints he has heard his students "parrot" (i.e. regurgitate

what they heard at home). For context, Andrew is not afraid to speak his mind.

Throughout the PD experience he openly expressed his opinions, sharing a desire to

grow in his awareness as a white man, and a desire to shift the culture of the school

towards criticality and socially just teaching practices. However, here, he notes a

level of "fear" in having these discussions, leading him to shy away from having

honest conversations about the racist beliefs and behaviors still rampant in the food

industry with his students – because he doesn't want to have "to deal with [their]

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racist parent next." Andrew's statement is one that encapsulated a significant line of

conversation that happened throughout the PD experience, one in which

participants spoke about the backlash they had seen or experienced towards critical

pedagogy and inclusive practices. It was this type of backlash – which some might

call fear mongering – that acted as a centripetal force, leading even folks like

Andrew (a teacher who voluntarily signed up for this PD series) to feel safest when

they maintained the status quo in their teaching and interactions with students,

rather than "rocking the boat."

Mary, one of the younger teachers in the study, who attended Quills as a

student and had returned to teach there years later, echoed this experience,

identifying ways in which the community silenced attempts to shift Quills towards a

more critically aware institution. During the focus group, she shared:

> Talking about, well I live in Sturbridge, and like students, families, friends,
> like just the dialogue where it's like actually polarizing, like I'm seeing people
> moving more, and in this town did go red, they did go Trump. And like, it's
> like, I'm seeing it, I'm seeing it being more polarizing ... I'm also noticing a
> trend in this community of people who are like the anti-hypersensitive
> people who are like, "I'm going to reject anything you say that is ... when
> you're trying to have social awareness, I'm going to be like, *Stop it!* Like stop
> trying to, you're too, everyone's too sensitive." It's like so common around
> here.

Like Andrew, Mary also notes the political tension she feels in the community, which

as she shares, "did go Trump" (meaning the town voted for Donald Trump in the

2016 presidential election). The polarization she feels and articulates is one of the

contributing factors in the fear that folks like Andrew experience as they seek to

teach in ways that disrupt a status quo that upholds Whiteness, including a post-

racial view of the U.S. and a system that continues to advantage some over others

(and kills and disproportionately imprisons some at higher rates). For in doing so, in attempting to disrupt, community members have responded with aggression and anger towards teachers and the school – which Mary articulates when she describes community members' reactions to "social awareness." Significant about these attempts to silence by calling those who seek critical self and systems awareness (i.e., cultural competence), "too sensitive," is the fact that the town itself manifests and enacts racist actions. As Andrew explains,

> When I start to think about these kids, like now, like I have kids who are driving, it scares the hell out of me that they are letting you operate this vehicle. But it's saddening to know that you're going to have a completely different experience just driving in the town where you live than anyone else will. I feel like, how can that not weigh on them? Like, it's awful that they even have to consider it on their daily commute. Like, I've never had to think about that. My inspection stickers' like 4 years old at this point, I'm never getting another one. I've been pulled over a couple of times for it. I say I teach at this school and that I just drive back and forth to the town, dump into the school and … and they just let me go. And they just let me go. If I was Puerto Rican, Spanish, Black, or person of color, that would not be the case. I mean, I would like to think it would, but it definitely would not be. It definitely would not be.

That is, folks like Mary and Andrew are not in fact being, "too sensitive." There are very real issues of racism and discrimination happening within the town – impacting all students who live and attend school there, including students and families of color and white students and families.

3.5.1.b. The School: Don't rock the boat – We won't bail you out

Another piece that emerged from the data is the fact that these issues, of racism, discrimination, and bias, do not end at the school doors – despite how vehemently the school's administration seeks to avoid discussions about systemic

oppression, discriminatory practices, and biased behaviors on the part of white teachers and students. Due to a lack of critical leadership or a school mission that centers racial/social justice and cultural competence, more often than not, the very real inequities and injustices that occur within the school building simply go unnoticed or ignored by those in power. This includes the behaviors of white teachers, some of whom Paul described as "straight up racists and misogynists" who are afraid of "losing power." While this may feel like extremist language, what Paul was really trying to express is the fact that there are white male teachers within Quills who have continuously been allowed to act in ways that perpetuate racism and sexism within the school, and stunt real growth towards cultural competence from occurring. Throughout the PD experience, this stagnation of the school's mission became a central topic of conversation, encouraging participants to ask difficult questions about their school, its teachers, and their students.

In one moment of brave questioning during a focus group, Henry, a white male teacher who consistently demonstrated the type of vulnerability needed for critical self-reflection, asked: "So what's racism like? I feel like I sequester myself in my room too much, and I don't witness racism happening. I know that that structural racism isn't something you always witness and stuff like that. But like what is racism like at [Quills]? Like what form does it take? How does it manifest itself?" While the question might sound curt, from Henry's previous and sustained engagement, it was clear that this was a genuine question – he was truly seeking to understand what he came to realize he hadn't seen. Three people in the focus group of five quickly responded with examples they had either witnessed first-hand or

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heard about from students. Chloe responded first, sharing what one of her Black students had chosen to shared with her:

> I had a conversation with one of the students and she told me, when we were doing *Fences* … we had a conversation and um and she said, "You see us Ms. St. Jean? If you walk down the hallways, do you see us? You will see us together, people of color, together. And it's because we do get looks, we do get comments once in a while and it's a safety thing." And that's what she felt, she really did feel that, and I said, "do you feel afraid here?" and she said "no, not really afraid, but just, it's more comfortable to just, you know, hang out with other Black students and just kind of avoid whatever might come at us."

This desire on the student's part, to "avoid whatever might come at us," is a clear response to the avoidance of the issues that permeates the school culture, beginning with the clear lack of critical leadership. Just as people of color have had to learn to respond differently than white people when they are pulled over by the police for their own safety, students of color have had to learn how to respond to their predominately white peers and teachers in order to stay safe and avoid "whatever might come at [them]" at Quills. One such (horrific) example of what has *come at them* was shared by Mary during the same discussion:

> It was like my first year here, and it was one of the last days of school and there was a baby fence from Mrs. Merriam's room and there was a group of white students telling the Black students to stand behind the fence and taking pictures of them and I. So, so this happened. And so I remember being horrified, I pulled them all aside, tried to do like like, why is this just unacceptable, awful, whatever, whatever … And sure enough, we get to the next school year and one of the African American students that was behind the fence is now at a school in [city name], a private school in [city name], like no shit. Why would you send your child back to this school? And that's the same group of friends that I would pull on all the time over using the N-word to each other. So, but I would I'm like hypersensitive to it. So I'm like picking them out and dialoguing as I walk through the halls, where other people might be avoiding it.

While Chloe's student may not feel "afraid" of physical harm within Quills, she clearly has good reason to be afraid of humiliation and degradation such as was carried out by this group of white students. And, as Mary notes, this was not the first or only time this group of white students had demonstrated their lack of understanding or disregard for their peers of color. Yet, when teachers such as Andrew or Mary attempted to have conversations with students concerning topics of race, oppression, or bias, they expressed feeling limited or no support from the administration. As Andrew describes it: "The anxiety I think comes from – where is administration going to stand on that? Like, are they going to support me? Probably not against parents." It is an administrative perspective such as this that allows actions such as these to continue to happen, particularly in places out of "sight" of most teachers and administrators in the building (e.g., hallways). Places like these are where students are often their most authentic selves, as they are free from the oversight of teachers and other adults in power and they act in ways they have learned to act – or have learned to protect themselves. Throughout the PD experience, this lack of support teachers felt to address these types of actions and beliefs continued to emerge as the school's centripetal commitment to the status quo (approved of by many of the loudest members of their predominately white community) became clearer to participants.

3.5.2. Shifting Ideological Selves

However, within the space of the PD environment, participants demonstrated three main shifts in their ideological selves, all of which indicated

movement towards the enactment of cultural competence and what I define as critical empathy – which will be explored further in the discussion section of this paper. First, for some teachers, this experience was one that allowed them to truly step into the role of a *critical learner*, immersing themselves in self-reflection and self and systems inquiry. In general, these teachers were those who were relatively new to topics related to oppression, equity, and social justice. This space for them became a safe environment to ask questions, to express and feel emotions, and to be vulnerable with their peers. Paul, a white, cis-hetero male teacher who had been teaching in the same way for over twenty years, is a prime example of this type of engagement within the PD. The second way that participants experienced perspective shifts was through the development of what I will refer to as critical confidence – or an increased ability to teach and speak in culturally competent ways – stepping further into the identity of a *critical educator*. Participants who were further along in their development of cultural competence and/or who had had previous training in the subject (whether independent learning or group training) were most likely to experience this shift. Cora, a white cis-hetero female and self-identified critical educator, is a prime example of a participant who demonstrated the development of increased critical confidence. Lastly, the majority of participants experienced a shift in their ideological selves as they came to see themselves as part of a *critical community*, as well, one in which they were able to "go there" with difficult topics related to oppression, equity, and social justice. Here, participants expressed feeling connected to each other and feeling real support for the work they know needs to be done within the school writ large and within their own

classrooms as well. Even folks like Eliza, who has been involved in and leading

similar training for many years, shared how much this space had shifted her

experience as an educator within Quills, helping her to not feel so alone in her

perspective. In each of the following sections, I have chosen to use one participant to

highlight the perspective shifts that occurred in order to more closely explore the

phenomenon.

3.5.2.a. Embodying a Critical Learner

Paul has been teaching English for the past twenty-five years at Quills, and

for the majority of that time, he has been teaching it in much the same way. As a

white, cis-hetero male living in a predominantly white community, he hasn't been

forced to consider the impact of his identities on his students, or the Whiteness of

the curriculum, or the ways in which students and families of color experience

discrimination within the district. His perspective aligned with the authoritative

discourse of U.S. society writ large, which upholds Whiteness – commonly through

the myth of being a post-racial nation. However, it became quite clear after the

second PD session in particular, how much the PD experience was shifting his

perspective. On his reflective survey that day, he shared:

> Thanks so much for this opportunity. I've always considered myself open-
> minded and inclusive, but over the last couple of years I've come to realize
> that I had unconscious biases and prejudices that were hindering my ability
> to reach all of my students. *Breathe for Change* was a start in opening my
> eyes to a lot of this and now your professional development and training are
> continuing to help me evolve in overcoming/understanding those biases and
> prejudices.

Breath for Change is an organization that was brought into Quills the previous school year for two PD days – one optional and one that was mandatory for the entire district. According to participants who attended, the mandatory one was a "disaster" (Cora), mostly due to a lack of leadership who were committed to disrupting the status quo form of schooling. Paul, however, voluntarily went to the first optional training, and along with a few other teachers in the school then followed up that training by attending the 200-hour certification program the organization offers. It was this experience that began to move him down the path of self-reflection and introspection, which was then extended further in this critical, dialogic PD series. By the end of the second session together, it was clear that Paul was shifting and stepping into the role of a *critical learner* in both his actions and his reflections. In fact, after everyone left the room that afternoon, Paul returned as I was cleaning up. He paused as he walked in the room, but then took a deep breath and asked me if I happened to have any additional resources on gender – which had been the main dialogue topic that day. Specifically, he shared that he was interested in resourses on gender so he could educate himself further. Then, on his reflective survey for that session which he completed later that day, he shared:

> I felt guilty during the gallery walk. The mental health and gender pronoun stations made me realize just how little I knew about the struggles that LGBTQ students face. I'm starting thinking about all those students who I might not have realized were struggling or who I was unable to connect with due to my own preconceptions, prejudices and/or lack of understanding. It felt good to be able to talk about it and to realize that I'm not alone. I also realized that despite how overwhelming it all feels the only way change is going to happen is by acknowledging my "failings" and/or lack of knowledge and to become more educated, change/modify curriculum where possible, and to be more observant to my student's needs.

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Paul's acknowledgement and ownership of his own lack of knowledge indicates a significant shift in his ideological self. After learning about the reality of many LGBTQ+ students and engaging in dialogue with his peers about it (three of whom are part of the LGBTQ+ community, myself included), he stepped into a space of ownership. He shifted the gaze inward and sought out additional learning, choosing to return in person to ask for support – from someone who belongs to that community and someone he previously taught with. While there were others in this PD who also stepped into the role of critical learner, Paul's shift demonstrates the clearest example of ideological movement. In this space he grew to ask challenging questions and to share openly about his lack of knowledge in front of his peers, which he admits he wouldn't have been able to do in a larger group: "I wouldn't have been able to disclose my fears and lack of understanding about issues of gender," but in the space of the PD, "I had no fears or anxieties about verbalizing my struggles to the group." This willingness, to share one's lack of knowledge – especially as a white male in U.S. society – is not to be overlooked. It is an act that helps to demonstrate real movement towards an internally persuasive discourse that no longer aligns with the authoritative discourse of U.S. society that upholds the hegemony of male power.

3.5.2.b. Building Critical Confidence

Participants who were further along in their development of cultural competence and/or who had had previous training in the subject (whether independent learning or group training) were more likely to demonstrate shifts in

their identities as *critical educators*. In order to do so, they deepened and/or built

what I refer to as critical confidence, or an increased ability to speak and teach in

ways that push back against the status quo, ask difficult questions, and to integrate

greater critical pedagogy into their teaching. Cora, one of the younger teachers

within the PD cohort, is a prime example of this type of participant, who

experienced the development of greater critical confidence. From the first session to

the last, both her ability to voice her perspective to her peers, and her commitment

to dismantling oppressive systems, increased dramatically. Her responses to the

reflective surveys for sessions one and four help to demonstrate this shift:

> **Session One Reflective Survey Response:** I have never identified as a "shy"
> person, but when I am in groups of my colleagues, I am often surprised by
> how reserved I am. I felt this often when being invited to share, I suppose
> because I am self-conscious about what others will think about what I have to
> say. I generally assume that anything I have to add to the conversation is too
> obvious and therefore not worth saying and/or will just make me look
> stupid. I'm not as articulate as I'd like to be, which I think is also a side
> effect...

> **Session Four Reflective Survey Response:** Personally and professionally, I
> feel more confident in sharing my thoughts with my colleagues after this
> experience.

This type of movement, from feeling shy and unable to share due to self-limiting

beliefs, to feeling far more confident personally and professionally to share her

thinking with her colleagues, is a significant shift in Cora's ideological self. This was

quite clear in her participation in both the focus group and the final two PD sessions

as well. She even responded to one of her colleague's concerns in speaking to other

teachers about critical topics during our focus group, sharing how much she has

shifted her perspective. Rather than staying quiet or choosing to ignore situations,

Cora claimed ownership of her actions and a new level of responsibility as a critical educator:

> I feel more of a responsibility to stand up against racism now instead of like, I've always been kind of like righteous, just about like, oh, I learned about this stuff - I get it I understand Whiteness. But like still I didn't say anything in that awful PD, right? Like, it's just like kind of just by being silent I'm being really complacent and I'm actively like trying to, like, shift that mentality. So I think it's like seems really scary because I don't like confrontation, but I feel like I'm at a point where I'm like a little bit sick of it, too, just that I would I would go there if, if it came up, but not with not comfortably for sure.

The combination of this PD space, along with her own independent learning, really propelled Cora on a trajectory towards greater cultural competence, and in turn greater confidence as a critical educator as well. Throughout the PD series, Cora continued to share her process with us, pointing out her moments of self-reflection, struggle, and progress. She involved us in her growth, and in so doing found a stronger voice as a critical educator – not just in the classroom, but in the hallways and teachers' rooms as well. It was here specifically, that she had the opportunity to practice both, "having conversations" about difficult topics before doing so in the classroom, and being an active listener with her colleagues and her students. She shared, "I am trying to become a better active listener in my classroom … trying to think more before I react in conversations that are difficult … and it's working." For participants like Cora, this space appeared to act as a place for them to root down and find solid footing as they stepped into their critical educator identities more strongly. They left feeling more "equipped" (Chloe) to engage in conversations about race, privilege, and oppression in their classrooms, as well as more committed to doing so. As white teachers often have little, or no, opportunities to engage in PD

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aimed at developing cultural competence, this space opened doors for participants who struggled to embody critical educators in the past – despite their desire to do so. Furthermore, as participants like Cora and Chloe stepped into these critical identities more strongly, they provided powerful, internally persuasive discourses for others within the PD to hear and engage with. Centrifugal forces such as these have the potential to break apart long-lasting and authoritative policies, practices, and curricula.

3.5.2.c. Growing a Critical Community

The final theme that was assembled as a part of the ideological shift's teachers experienced during this PD series was the development of a critical community. As Eliza, a teacher with "extensive training" in social justice education, shared at the conclusion of all four sessions, "I don't feel so alone. Others share the same commitment to social justice as I do." This wasn't something that she had experienced before at Quills, so for her, despite her previous training and knowledge in the content, it was the opportunity to "connect with others who have similar interests and priorities [that] was key ... and made [it] worth it." Eliza's experience wasn't unique though. Every teacher, in fact, who participated in all four PD sessions, shared a similar sentiment at some point – whether it was during a closing round during a live session, during a focus group, or on a reflective survey. It was the most common theme across the spectrum of participants, and one that I will discuss the *impact* of further in the discussion section. The following exchange, however, during one of the two focus groups, encapsulates participants' feelings

about this PD space as an ideologically critical community in which they could share

openly, ask questions, take risks, and be vulnerable in this challenging work:

> **Paul:** I've like, I think it's been amazing. It's like the perfect size because I think everybody has had you know, it's a safe place. Everyone, my feeling is that people feel safe here to talk about it and share their thoughts and their experiences, especially on some of the more difficult topics.

> **Rosemary:** I agree. I think that it's been for me, the environmental culture has been very supportive, and I have felt safe, I have felt safe to go to places that were uncomfortable, but knowing it was ok to do that.

> **Sarah:** Yeah, I've I've enjoyed it a lot, you don't always have those opportunities to talk about that stuff with staff members.

> **Paul:** And I also think that in like today's society that I don't think in a large group I would disclose to the faculty my fears and lack of understanding about issues of gender and I had no fears or anxieties about trying to verbalize my struggles with understanding it to the group.

> **Sarah:** Yes. So it was a place you could take risks.

> **Cora:** And I feel like even from like the first to the second time, like I personally felt more comfortable, like doing it like in the room with people and participating and stuff like that. And so it, which I think is just, it just like speaks to the nature of like sharing and doing those kinds of activities, it gets more comfortable as you go.

For participants like Eliza, this was the first time they felt a mass of support from

teachers in the building, beyond the few that they knew about (and spoke in

"secrecy" to as to avoid detection from administration and other teachers). For

others, it was a brand-new experience to even be in a community of educators

speaking about critical topics. In both cases, the PD space became one in which

participants could safely move ideologically towards a more critical perspective of

teaching and learning. That is, this space acted as both a centrifugal force – breaking

apart authoritative discourses that uphold the status quo through the introduction

of diverse voices and perspectives into the space – and as a centripetal force – as it

brought teachers together in their thinking about the necessity of critical education.

3.6. Discussion

Teachers' movement, towards more critical and culturally aware

perspectives of teaching and learning, deeply contributed to participants

development and enactment of the three-part process of critical empathy as well,

including reflective practice, cognitive perspective taking, and affective action

(**Figure 3.1.**, p. 112). However, depending on where on the continuum of cultural

competence teachers were when they began the PD, different components of critical

empathy were developed more throughout the experience. As demonstrated in

Figure 3.3. (p. 118), those who attended all four sessions were engaged in three

main tasks: learning about social identity and systemic inequality, sharing emotions

and lived experiences across difference, and participating in facilitated dialogue

about difficult topics.

For some participants, like Paul or Sarah, who arrived with very little

training or experience learning about social identities and systemic inequalities, the

most significant movement they made was in developing their cultural competence

through their engagement in the reflective process of critical empathy by learning

about social identities and systemic inequality. For others, like Cora, Chloe, or

Henry, who had had some significant training in these topics already, this became a

space for them to demonstrate care for their own and others' needs through sharing

and questioning, and to really practice perspective taking and engage in difficult

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dialogues. For this group of teachers, their movement was mostly in the development of greater cognitive abilities – taking the perspective of others in service of identifying, understanding, and appreciating their emotions and ways of knowing – as well as affective action – responding to others in accordance with their needs as they are nested within social structures.

However, it must also be noted, that there were two teachers who, when given the opportunity to opt out (due to the move to a remote environment when the Covid-19 pandemic began in March 2020) chose to do so. Both of these teachers, Zeus and Johnny, began the PD with little to no training in the area of cultural competence, and during the two sessions they were present for often found ways to distract others and to disengage from the process. This type of white resistance is well documented in the literature (e.g., Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2016; Sleeter, 2016) and it is one worthy of further analysis. However, due to the limited data from these two participants, their disengagement is beyond the scope of this paper. For those who did participate in all four sessions, though, there is evidence to suggest that the PD – at the least – provided participants with the time and space needed to experience shifts in their ideological selves towards more critical and culturally aware teachers and individuals.

3.6.1. A gateway to reflective practice

For participants like Paul, Rosemary, and Sarah – all of whom had been teaching for over twenty years – this PD experience was one that allowed them the space to really engage in the vulnerable work of critical self-reflection (in many

cases for the first time in their teaching careers). As I've already discussed, there were many times throughout the four sessions and the focus group that Paul demonstrated his engagement in the reflective process of critical empathy. He showed up for each session and focus group with a clear desire to learn, an openness to new knowledge, and a willingness to look at himself critically. While not as pronounced as Paul, participants like Rosemary and Sarah also demonstrated the greatest growth in the reflective process component of empathy, as well – which takes empathy beyond its conventional conception that: 1) relies heavily on the Golden Rule; 2) ignores the very real differences between people's experiences of life; and 3) often (re)centers Whiteness. As Mirra (2018) explains, schools often take this "reductive view" of empathy, not recognizing how much "our individuality is couched within overlapping social constructs … that have historical, economic, and political ramifications" (p. 6). However, during this PD, participants were engaged specifically in the task of examining social identities and systems and the ways they impact individuals' divergent lives, thereby increasing the likelihood of an integration between social constructs and empathy.

As Rosemary shared on her final reflective survey, "This PD has affected me both personally and professionally. It has made me look further into my own belief systems and biases. This is making me a better teacher. I am able to also examine the community I work in and the strengths and weaknesses too." This type of self-reflection and awareness was evident in Rosemary throughout our time together, beginning in the very first session. She was willing to "go there" as she explained, because she felt like the environment that had been built was "understanding and

safe," which was not something she felt in the school writ large. From Rosemary's perspective, this PD space did that for her – allowing her to lean into the reflective process, looking at her own "belief systems and biases" more closely and coming to a better understanding of who she is in relation to other people within socio-historic structures. This then set the stage for her to take the perspective of and respond to others (including her diverse students) from a more critical and self-aware position – thus demonstrating a shift in her conception of empathy. As one of the most challenging parts of helping white people to unpack Whiteness and critically self-reflect is the emotionality of the process (Matias, 2013), the fact that this space felt welcoming of difficult emotions was key to Rosemary's growing self-awareness – and an aspect of the PD that warrants further research.

3.6.2. Making sense of another's "shoes"

There were other participants within this PD whose growth centered mostly around the cognitive task of taking the perspective of others in the service of identifying, understanding, and appreciating their emotions and ways of knowing. Rather than delving significantly into the reflective – and more emotion-laden component – of critical empathy, these participants were more open to the intellectual process of developing cultural competence. However, while perspective taking is the cognitive task involved in critical empathy, it cannot be separated from its affective counterpart of reflective practice. Henry, an English teacher with eighteen years of experience teaching, shared his experience with this entanglement

as he reflected on a slightly tense discussion concerning the English curriculum that occurred during session two:

> Well it was interesting to me what we were doing, it's like on paper, right? I'm a person who believes in rational discourse and exchange of ideas, and there's no reason to get emotional, especially when discussing abstract ideas like the role of literature in education. And yet while you you're saying that stuff, I felt my blood pressure rise and beat faster. And I was like, there's so many like forceful rhetorical modes I could go into right now. But then, you know, and then I've got a brother who's an accountant and a brother who's an electrician. And whenever we get together, they're like, "You know, the work we do actually matters in the world. We're actually part of the economy and you read books and talk about feelings." So I went a bunch of places with that. And like, it's different than like the ideal is on paper. You know, I think this is maybe why rational political discourse is so hard. We're all sort of you know, um programmed emotionally and loaded up with baggage on these things. Like you're totally fine to have said what you said. Those writers can take it. I can take it. So this is the way I regard it as, like, you know, I was trying to sort of, learn about my own reactions from that.

What's so compelling about this reflection is that *as* Henry is coming to understand another's perspective, he is also taking note of his *own* reaction to that perspective, thus blending the cognitive and reflective components of critical empathy. He is also doing so in a vulnerable manner, sharing his previous experiences with his brothers who have spent years making him feel like his work doesn't matter. That is, rather than responding to Andrew – who was speaking about the need to let go of the "classics" within the English department – from a place of anger or frustration, Henry spent time looking inward and making connections to how he has come to see and understand his own identity. He cares deeply about his work in the classroom, and about his students' intellectual and emotional growth. Yet, he has spent years being told from other men that his "emotional" work of teaching – which is tied to his identity – simply doesn't matter in the world. However, because Henry

was able to call on his self-awareness and challenge himself to reflect on his own

reactions, he was able to truly take the perspective of another – to seek to

understand and appreciate Andrew's perspective.

It was this process that Henry was able to use later on during the same focus

group when Mary, a much younger teacher, expressed frustration with herself

concerning her dichotomous identity (as both a Catholic and an LGBTQ+ ally) in

high school.

Mary: Isn't that so contradictory?

Henry: Well I mean, a lot of religious traditions will emphasize like love and acceptance, even while they put an asterisk next to it and say, although this particular lifestyle is damned. Go back and see, love and accept, but it's a little bit …

Mary: Yeah, because I did think …

Henry: Well there is a lot of of a disparity, it's a oh, what's the word? Cognitive dissonance. But people exist in cognitive dissonant states. And it enabled you to be a good student and connect with this teacher. And not be like the student [Chloe] had this semester, who's coming from a religious tradition and background that doesn't emphasize the asterisk, the the love.

Mary: And for me, at the time, it was about marriage, like that was my philosophy. I didn't care about that, even dating.

Henry: And even Obama was, when he was reelected the first time, he was like, we can have same sex unions, but we can't have marriage.

Chloe: Yeah, right.

Henry: He evolved.

Prior to this moment, Mary had been trying to make sense of her experience as a

student at Quills years earlier, during which time she was a student in Chloe (a gay

woman's) English class. As a Catholic, she held dueling beliefs, that gay people (like

Chloe) should not have access to the sacrament of marriage, but that they should be protected and treated the same as all other people. Today, her beliefs are quite different. Yet, as she spoke during the focus group, it was clear that she was trying to express what this experience was like, without the words or language to do so. Henry took the opportunity to truly make sense of her perspective and experience, sharing back with her not only the language to describe it (i.e., cognitive dissonance), but then also sharing an example that aligned with her ideological shift later in life (i.e., President Obama's evolving perspective on gay marriage). This type of response, in which Henry took Mary's perspective in order to make sense of and appreciate her way of knowing, is demonstrative of a more critical conception of empathy – one that moves beyond the conventional conception that centers "niceness" (Mirra, 2018). Henry could have simply acknowledged what Mary shared, and moved on – but he doesn't. He takes the opportunity to identify and truly understand her perspective. And for many participants involved in the PD, this opportunity truly gave them the chance to engage and strengthen this cognitive aspect of critical empathy.

3.6.3. Stepping towards affective action

Finally, there were some participants who began the PD having already engaged in significant work around critical self-reflection and who demonstrated the greatest growth in their affective actions. Cora, for example, one of the youngest members of the group, was previously and simultaneously engaged in personal and professional learning around topics of cultural competence and critical pedagogy.

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For her, this space really became one that allowed her to practice what she was learning about difficult dialogue, including active listening and other forms of affective action. One clear example of this was demonstrated during the focus group, during which time a conversation that had arisen during session two reemerged. Chloe had shared her experience that school year with a student being removed from her class due to his family's discomfort with their son being taught by a gay woman. In the following exchange, Cora truly takes the perspective of Chloe as she seeks to respond to her experience in a way that affirms Chloe's needs as they are nested within social structures.

> **Paul**: Or when Chloe disclosed to us student getting pulled out of the class,
>
> **Rosemary**: Yeah, I was shocked
>
> **Cora**: Hmm.
>
> **Paul**: And I get why, but it's just I still you know, I think how. In some ways, how progressive Quills can be but that we still have those issues like bad crop up where, and I think [the principal] did the right thing, pulling him out because it protected her in just, I don't know if I would -
>
> **Cora**: But did Chloe want that? I don't know. I feel like -
>
> **Sarah**: I feel like he shouldn't have been pulled
>
> **Cora**: - or it should've been Chloe's decision … because it's like, I I don't know, I like thinking of empathy like, I don't know how I would feel if the administration was like, we're taking this kid out of your class because they don't like the way you are, you know, like.
>
> **Rosemary**: Yeah. That's the message, right?
>
> **Cora**: Yeah. Because you're not, like not, like ok.
>
> **Paul**: But you don't want to be under scrutiny everyday,
>
> **Sarah**: Or quoted at home.

> **Cora**: Well, I mean, but then so like again, I feel like it should have been left to Chloe to decide what like, because I could totally see that perspective like I might in the same situation be like, yeah, get this kid out of here. Um, but for not for it not to be her choice, it's kind of like, kind of a slap in the face.

Here Cora expresses all three components of critical empathy as she reflects on the fact that she does not share Chloe's identity and therefore cannot know completely how she would have felt in this situation. Yet, she seeks to understand Chloe's perspective and then examine how the situation could have been handled in a way that truly cared for Chloe's needs as a gay woman, a teacher, and an individual. While Cora did not express this directly to Chloe – as she was in a different focus group – she speaks back to those in her focus group, including Paul. In so doing she helps to present a new perspective, one that demonstrates greater knowledge of cultural competence, and reconceptualizes empathy to include such knowledge. Moments like these happened more frequently later in the PD series, indicating the strength of using a longer, cohort model of PD to support teachers' growth and development in this area.

3.7. Implications

Three categories of growth emerged from the data, all of which point to teachers' developing more critical attitudes towards teaching and learning. First, they engaged in the reflective process of honestly establishing their identities in relation to other people. Second, participants practiced taking the perspective of others, witnessed others doing the same, and in some cases experienced others taking their perspectives as well. And finally, the majority of teachers had the

opportunity to enact, witness, and/or receive affective responses to their lived experiences that recognized their needs as socialized individuals during the PD itself. Within a predominantly white community and a predominantly white school that seeks to maintain the status quo and silence dissention or questioning, this environment became the embodiment of a third space (Gutiérrez, 2008; Bhabha, 1994), outside the boundaries of school and community. In an ideological environment that encouraged critical reflection and sought to cultivate critical empathy, the majority of teachers were able to shift their perspectives of themselves towards more critical educators and learners who had a base of support around them. This has important implications for the ways that PD is developed and facilitated within predominantly white schools, indicating the need for cohort models that center teachers' lived experiences and emotional needs, and recognize and honor the continuum of cultural competence. Continuing down a path of one-off professional development and hoping for systemic change isn't realistic, and if we truly want to find ways to shift the culture of our schools and dismantle white supremacy – for the benefit of all students, white and of color – we must turn our attention to a sustained model of professional learning. Critical, dialogic approaches that are aimed at the cultivation of critical empathy within predominantly white schools is one promising pathway to this future.

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Shifting to critical empathy:

Using intergroup dialogue to enter difficult conversations

Focus Groups A & B – Tuesday, February 11, 2020

A. General responses

1. How did you feel after our last professional development session?
2. How has this PD felt similar to or different from other PD you've participated in (inside or outside of school)?

B. Participation & engagement

3. How have you felt about your own level of participation and that of your peers?
4. Were there any moments of tension or strong emotion you noticed or felt during our last session? If so, how did you notice yourself and/or others responding in those moments?
5. Were there moments when you felt empathy from others in the room (for yourself, your colleagues, or others) during either of our last PD sessions?

C. Application & transferability

6. Have you noticed any changes in your behavior and/or thoughts since our last session (inside or outside of school)?
7. Have you noticed any changes in your teaching, classroom culture, relationships with students and/or colleagues, etc. since our last session?

D. Future sessions

8. What emotions arise for you when you consider discussing how race presents itself and/or influences classroom dynamics, curriculum, and/or school culture?
9. What struggles or successes have you had in drawing attention to racial or ethnic differences in the past (with students, staff, administration, guidance, and/or parents)?

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

When I began my doctoral studies back in the fall of 2017, I was seeking a

way to build more critically empathetic secondary spaces – though at the time, I

didn't have the language to explain it. After teaching in public high schools for seven

years, I was at a stopping place – not quite burnt out, but not quite alive either. It

was as if the joy that I had when I entered teaching – a joy spurred by an intrinsic

and deep desire to connect with and care for young people as they began to navigate

the adult world – had been slowly, but methodically, stripped away. I felt raw, yet

numb. And the worst of it was that it felt as though it was by design. That feeling led

me out of the classroom and into academia, for a chance to reconsider how we care

for secondary teachers and adolescent students – including those who have been

and continue to be marginalized, especially within predominantly white spaces. And

here, I would be remiss not to share that my coming out a year earlier, as a part of

the LGBTQ+ community, had played a considerable role in my decision to leave the

classroom as well. As I shared throughout these papers, there was good reason to

keep that part of my identity quiet within the community I was teaching in at the

time – and the community I was raised in (which is similar in many ways to Quills).

Yet, the most authentic support I received in making the choice to come out came

from my students, past and present (news does travel fast in the age of social media!). It was this support – this desire to care and connect – that drives me today and was the driving force behind this project.

4.1. Implications

When it comes to developing critical, dialogic, and sustained models of PD for secondary teachers, this research is a beginning – built on decades worth of work by numerous scholars, most notably bell hooks, Paulo Freire, Geneva Gay, Linda Darling-Hammond, Nicole Mirra, Chezare Warren, Nel Noddings, Cheryl Matias, Ximena Zúñiga, and Zeus Leonardo. In the pages that follow, I have synthesized four main implications of this research as a way to support the ongoing work in the field of secondary teacher development – and more so to support the needed shift in predominantly white school districts towards more critical approaches to teaching, learning, and community development. These implications include: 1) predominantly white school districts need support in developing critical empathy; 2) the structure, practice, and priorities of PD in predominantly white districts need to shift; 3) online spaces deserve our attention; and 4) shifting towards critical empathy engenders possibilities.

4.1.1. Predominantly white school districts need support to develop critical empathy

There has been significant research concerning the professional, critical development of white teachers working in schools that serve mostly Black and

brown students (e.g., Delpit, 2016; Emdin, 2017; Moore, Michael, & Penick-Parks, 2018; Howard, 2016), yet there continues to be a dearth in the literature when it comes to this type of development for white teachers working in predominantly white schools. As this and previous research has demonstrated (e.g., Matias, 2013), this dearth is connected to a multiplicity of factors, including white communities' dismissals of the need for CRP, the false belief that the U.S. is a post-racial nation, active aggression towards critical pedagogies, and a deep fear of disrupting the status quo. Yet, in these spaces, where Whiteness permeates the hidden curriculum (Leonardo, 2009), including the school culture, teachers need active and authentic support in their movement towards more critically aware forms of teaching and learning. This is especially true given what I uncovered during this research, including a white community that sought to silence dissent or divergence from the status quo, a school district that echoed the community's messaging, and the presence/power of teachers within the district who continued to hold prejudiced views of diverse students and families.

As I shared in article one, in these predominantly white spaces white students learn powerful and damaging messages about what it means to be white and overrepresented from their white teachers and administrators (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012). Without opportunities to unpack their own Whiteness, or to make sense of the diverse, divided, and unequitable country they inhabit, there is little chance for systemic change to happen – as there is little opportunity for them to dismantle their own internalized white supremacy. Doing so would not only benefit white students' social, emotional, and mental health and wellbeing in the

future, but it would also contribute to the overall dismantling of white supremacy as a structure. This begins with predominantly white schools' acknowledgment of the need for systemic change and commitment to being a part of the solution, and it all starts with white administrators being honest about what is happening within their schools, including the harm that is enacted on their Black and brown students (as I discussed is happening within Quills). This step is crucial in making real movement towards cultivating a more critical teaching force – one that asks difficult questions of their schools and communities, makes meaningful and needed changes to their curriculum, and actively seeks radical inclusivity. School districts need not wait until a "problem" arises – and finds its way into social media – to act in predominantly white schools. The problems are there. School leadership needs to pay attention to them and make a choice about how to address them. In the case of this research, that meant having a principal who was willing to allow me (a former teacher at the school), to come in and run a year-long critical, dialogic PD series with twelve of his teachers. He needed to say yes and to trust that what was happening in that space was productive *and* necessary. However, schools aren't generally approached by outside organizations to do this kind of work – they have to go looking. And to do so, means they have to first, make diversity, equity, and inclusivity a priority.

4.1.2. The structure, practice, and priorities of PD in predominantly white districts need to shift

In making cultural competence, and CRP as a whole, a priority, the one-off approach to PD also needs to shift towards more sustained models of training and development. While it might be appropriate to run a one-time training on how to use a digital technology, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, it is not an appropriate method for creating systemic change. While there has been some movement in regard to how PD is structured within K-12 education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009), the movement has been slow at best, and most schools continue to expose their staff to many one-off PDs. As Henry shared on his final reflective survey, "I can't remember 95% of past PD opportunities because they are either too anodyne or perfunctory. I seldom get to know colleagues better through them or am encouraged to reflect on our particular school culture and instructional practices specifically." Henry has been teaching at Quills for *twenty* years and has been through *hundreds* of hours of professional development – and yet, he remembers so little of it because of the nature of the typical PD they experience. In this PD environment however, he felt able to connect to his peers and to reflect on their school culture and practices together in meaningful and supportive ways. Shifting towards a more sustained model is supported by the research (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Colombo, 2010), and there are organizations out there that are able and ready to support districts in their aim. Yet, these are often few and far between, and districts don't always have the funds to pay for support they fundamentally need or the community support to go looking for the support.

However, schools often have resources within their own schools to help their teachers develop critical empathy and to shift their perspectives of teaching and

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learning towards more socially just approaches. As Mary pointed out during her focus group, she has offered numerous times to run PD on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy – which she has previous experience doing. Eliza, who has been involved in the *National Writing Project* for decades, has offered to lead PD on topics concerning social justice and inclusivity for Quills teachers, as well. When district leaders have given teachers surveys at the beginning of the school year about what they would be willing to lead PD on, both of these teachers offered their help. Yet, year after year, the district has ignored their offers – demonstrating how little of a priority they are willing to make the pursuit of inclusivity via training in cultural competence and CRP as a whole. Mary and Eliza have all participated in training that they could bring to the district, and they could be given (paid) time and space to work together with other district teachers to build a sustainable and effective program from the ground up - by their own people. With some support from an outside entity (such as a consultant or an organization who specializes in dialogic, critical work), these teachers could be given a platform to change the school culture.

These are the types of resources that schools can, and I argue, should be tapping into in their efforts to move towards becoming more inclusive and socially just institutions. Teachers like Mary, Eliza, and Cora have had to find avenues outside of their districts (and beyond regularly scheduled PD) to learn about CRP and to find critical communities that support their efforts in the classroom as they seek to challenge the status quo, and help their students do the same. But within the school itself, they have often felt isolated, ostracized, and even afraid to speak up against those with louder (and authoritative) perspectives. Within predominantly

white schools, this indicates a real need for leadership to take the reins on developing and upholding a vision that prioritizes the development of critical empathy and the dismantling of oppressive systems. Both internal and external pressure from folks with critical perspectives can impact this movement and prioritization, but a forum for connection – a way to see each other through the smog of Whiteness that permeates these districts – is needed. Third spaces, such as the one that was created for this research project, provide a promising pathway towards this type of connection, and the critical mass needed to make real change.

4.1.3. Online spaces deserve our attention

While this PD was designed to act as a third space, outside the boundaries of both home and work, the first two sessions were held at the school itself. That is, no matter how separate we were as a cohort from the rest of the school staff, we were still in the building. There was always a possibility, however slight, that a teacher or administrator who was not part of the PD could walk by the room and hear something a participant shared. And then there was also the feeling of being in the school building as well – still connected to the daily experience of teachers' work. Attempts to persuade the administration to allow our group to meet in a local coffee house were quickly squashed at the beginning of this research project, though – due to concerns over 'fairness' for other staff members who were not in our PD cohort – so we found ourselves in the school, in a conference room on the third floor. Then, COVID-19 hit, and the expectations of schooling, work, human connection, everything changed. In response, we moved our PD online to Zoom for the final two

sessions – an almost unthinkable move for both myself and school administrators prior to the pandemic. Yet, here we were, looking at each other on the screen from the comfort of our homes – dogs, cats, kids, partners, and all in the background.

Prior to this move, participants were attending our sessions during regularly scheduled PD, when their peers were in other PD the district had put together for them. However, these final two sessions were different in this regard as well. I decided to hold them as planned, on the same days and times when the district had originally scheduled PD. Yet, due to the pandemic, the district wasn't requiring teachers to attend anything during those times. Nevertheless, almost all of the teachers in the cohort returned for both of the final sessions. And while there were two white cis-hetero men who opted out (and did not respond to any form of communication thereafter), the rest of the teachers in this cohort attended on their own volition. And while there was a level of trepidation and concern about this move (myself included), the online space quickly and easily became one that facilitated deep conversation and connection, and a real openness to vulnerability.

There was no longer any possibility that a teacher or administrator who was not a part of the PD would hear or see anything happening within this PD. There was also no concern that another group would be able to hear what participants were saying or asking during small group conversations as they were in separate Zoom breakout rooms. And while their small group conversations were recorded for the purpose of my research – they could easily trust that these recordings were only for my academic use. They could also trust that I hadn't heard anything they said during the actual live session – it wouldn't be until I listened to the recordings later that I

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would hear it. In these ways, the online space truly became what Bhabha's (1990)

envisioned as a third space, one beyond the boundaries of the traditional spaces of

work and home. In this online environment, teachers participated *from* their own

homes, but joined each other *within* a separate space created just for this activity.

Here they were able to be at ease – or "casual" as one participant referred to it. It

became *our* space, in a way that the conference room on the third floor never could

be – as it was constantly being used by others in the school. As one participant

shared on his reflective survey at the end of the first remote session:

> It worked out surprisingly well! I don't think too much was lost ... I was
> worried that we would use the PD time to just express ourselves on the
> recent move to online instruction. I'm impressed with how Maria let us speak
> to our current situation, then led us into discussions that helped us examine
> issues of bias in our school culture. It was actually quite refreshing to be
> examining our school culture this way, rather than commiserating on the
> current situation with online instruction.

This environment was one that *held* teachers in a way that the conference room

could not, making it worthy of further research as a new approach to helping white

teachers engage in the vulnerable process of critical empathy development. While it

is outside the scope of this project, it is significant to share here that I have actually

continued this type of work in an online environment with a small consulting team

of fellow UMass doctoral candidates. Similar to my research, our consulting work

began in person, and then swiftly shifted to online as the world closed down in

March 2020. Over the past year we have been hired to develop and facilitate PD

series for five different school districts across New England using critical, dialogic

approaches – and all of our sessions have been online. We haven't done the actual

research yet, but the feedback we have received continues to motivate us in this

work, as we continue to uncover the benefits of online, critical PD – and glean best practices as we progress. During these sessions, we integrate opportunities for teachers to: turn their videos off and self-reflect; engage in truly anonymous sharing activities; and connect with their peers in small groups (completely beyond the gaze of others in the group – including us). In so doing, teachers continue to show up from their own spaces in vulnerable and honest ways. They use the chat box to ask difficult questions and respond to each other as they share. They gain access to digital documents that they can easily bring into their classrooms. And they have opportunities to practice engaging in difficult dialogues before they happen in the classroom. In short, there is something vastly different about bringing this work, of critical self- and systems-learning, online. It is this pathway – towards significant, radical, and authentic change in our predominantly white schools especially – that I am motivated to follow post-graduation.

4.1.4. Shifting towards critical empathy engenders possibilities

Intertwined with this shift to the online environment, is the shift towards cultivating something beyond the conventional form of empathy. As other social and emotional wellness movements (e.g., mindfulness) have been hijacked as ways to increase test scores and decrease behaviors deemed "problematic"– researchers and teacher educators must be attuned to the ways that empathy is being brought into the discourse of K-12 education. Defining empathy only through the lens of the Golden Rule, what Boler (1999) refers to as "ahistorical passive empathy," does not support the development of a critical lens towards oneself, others, or our shared

histories. Empathy of this kind has very real limits that must be recognized and validated in order to thoughtfully support and guide white secondary educators on their journey towards culturally responsive teaching. For, as Marx & Pray (2011) make especially clear, "Whites living in a racially hierarchical society such as the US cannot truly 'walk in the shoes of' or 'feel with' a person of color because they will never experience the multiple dimensions of living a racially minoritized, racially marginalized life" (p. 510). That is not to say that white teachers cannot learn to take the perspective of a person of color in service of identifying, understanding, and appreciating their emotions and ways of knowing – but it does mean that to do so *without* a clear understanding of who they are in relation to another person within socio-historic structures (i.e., the reflective process of critical empathy) is highly problematic.

Providing white secondary teachers with the opportunity to engage in three of the main components of Intergroup Dialogue, appears to be one effective pathway towards supporting their development of all three aspects of what I have theorized as critical empathy. That is, as participants learned about social identity and systemic inequality, they were able to engage in *reflective* practice. As they were invited to share emotions and lived experiences across difference, they practiced engaging in both *cognitive* perspective taking and *affective* responses. And when they took that learning and those experiences into our difficult dialogues, they engaged in the giving and receiving of both the cognitive and affective components of critical empathy. While this looked different for every participant, wherever they were on the spectrum of cultural competence and self-awareness at the beginning of

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the PD was welcomed, accepted, and given an opportunity to grow. Even for participants like Eliza, who had been through extensive training in this topic already, the act of experiencing this learning with her colleagues in this way provided her with something she didn't have before – a community to make change with. This is not to say that every member of this cohort is now prepared to teach through a critical lens or be the voice of social justice in their school. The two male teachers who dropped out of the cohort completely (without contact) continue to demonstrate the resistance of white teachers when confronted with the work of critical self-reflection. However, it does give me hope.

4.2. Final Thoughts

When I began this research project back in December of 2019, the United States was still being led by a white cis-hetero male president who actively sought to silence those who demonstrated any form of empathy for the situation of others – especially those who experience marginalization and oppression (see the video of him mocking a reporter with a disability for one finite example - out of the many). Almost a full year later, though, the newly elected President Biden and Vice President Harris, chose this as their opening message to the people of the U.S.: "The people have chosen empathy." I do not have all the words to express how I felt (as a woman) when I first saw Vice President Elect Kamala Harris walk on stage with this message beside her – the first woman, the first Black woman, the first Indian woman, to be elected to this office. But if I had to it a name – I would call it radical joy. Yet, if these past five years have taught us anything, it is that white supremacy is

still firmly rooted in a country that clings to the notion of being post-racial. We are

not. We have much work to do. Redefining how we conceptualize and operationalize

empathy through a critical lens is one step on that pathway.

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