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BEING AND BECOMING ACROSS DIFFERENCE: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF EXEMPLARY WHITE TEACHERS IN RACIALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of

the Graduate School of Leadership & Change

Antioch University

In partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

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January 2023

BEING AND BECOMING ACROSS DIFFERENCE: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF EXEMPLARY WHITE TEACHERS IN RACIALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

This dissertation, by Jane S. Feinberg, has
been approved by the committee members signed below
who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of
the Graduate School of Leadership & Change
Antioch University
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dissertation Committee:

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Harriet Schwartz, PhD

Christine Sleeter, PhD

Maureen Walker, PhD

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ABSTRACT

BEING AND BECOMING ACROSS DIFFERENCE: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF EXEMPLARY WHITE TEACHERS IN RACIALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

Jane S. Feinberg

Graduate School of Leadership &Change

Yellow Springs, OH

Of the roughly 3.5 million public school teachers in the United States, approximately 80% are White. In contrast, about 51.7% of the nation's students are African American, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian. This mismatch is expected to grow, as the number of BIPOC students in our nation's public schools continues to increase. Studies have shown that strong positive relationships are essential for learning, but often, the relationships between White teachers and BIPOC students are strained at best, leading to poorer learning outcomes. The purpose of this Constructivist Grounded Theory study was to explore an understudied question: How do White teachers who have been deemed *exemplary* by educators and parents of Color perceive their relationships and experiences with BIPOC students in an educational system and a society that often marginalizes them? Open-ended interviews were conducted with 19 middle and high school teachers in Massachusetts. Dimensional analysis revealed Being-and-Becoming Across Difference as the core dimension. Five primary dimensions were identified: Reflecting, Relating, Embodying Humility, Affirming Culture, and Holding Hope. Results of this study suggest that significant changes are needed in the recruitment and hiring of White teachers, and that pre-service and in-service professional development must support White teachers in far more robust and sustaining ways than currently exist. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA, https://aura.antioch.edu/, and OhioLINK ETD Center, https://etd.ohiolink.edu.

Keywords: teacher-student relationships, implicit bias, deficit thinking, pathologizing practices, teacher expectations, teacher identity, critical whiteness studies, white teacher identity studies, relational-cultural theory, critical race theory, CRT, cultural relevance, asset-based pedagogies, adaptive leadership, middle and high school

Dedication

To Chenda, my beloved daughter and greatest teacher

Acknowledgements

If we are fortunate, we meet many kinds of teachers throughout our lives. Some are granted the formal title and others model for us outside the classroom. I have been blessed to encounter both kinds of teachers, all of whom have influenced me in ways that have been profound and life-changing. My dissertation is, in part, a debt of gratitude to those teachers and to the central importance of the teacher-student relationship in a young person's growth and development.

To the K-12 teachers who inspired me. Sally Dahlke, my fourth-grade teacher, who encouraged me to keep writing poetry; Hattie Steinberg, storied high school journalism adviser, whose appointment of me as editor-in-chief of the newspaper remains a highlight of my life all these decades later; and Barbara Smigala, an iconoclastic and thoughtful English teacher who helped me take my own ideas seriously.

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To my esteemed Dissertation Committee. First, to my Chair, Dr. Elizabeth Holloway. I asked Dr. Holloway to be my Chair early in the doctoral program because her work and her teaching were compelling to me, and I felt understood and seen by her. Dr. Holloway exemplifies what Aristotle termed phronesis—the gift of practical wisdom. As an experienced dancer, she regularly brings that artfulness to her work. Thank you for being my dissertation dance partner—knowing precisely when to lead and when to follow.

Moving alphabetically now to the other members of my committee:

To Dr. Harriet Schwartz. I met Dr. Schwartz when she filled in for Dr. Holloway at one of our residencies, and I knew then and there that I wanted her in my life. I quote liberally from Dr. Schwartz's book, *Connected Teaching*, in my dissertation, and in many ways, her work in higher education has been an inspiration to me and emboldened me to address the relational dimensions of teaching in the K-12 realm. Over the years, she has become a trusted ally—whip-smart, grounded, and kind—who, in serving as one of my mentors in the doctoral program, knew just how to steer me clear enough of my inner demons to get the work done.

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To Dr. Maureen Walker. I met Dr. Walker through Dr. Schwartz at a gathering at Wellesley College a half-dozen years ago. When I first met Dr. Walker, I felt a soul kinship that I could not quite explain, but that I continue to cherish. Her scholarship on race and power, her storytelling acumen, her truth-telling, and her model for racial healing, have greatly informed my research and enriched my life. I learned from Dr. Walker that power is not an inherently dirty word and that its pro-social use is necessary for effecting change for the common good. Her spiritual energy and vibrant sense of humor have sustained me.

I am grateful to other faculty in the Antioch Graduate School of Leadership and Change (GSLC), especially Dr., Laurien Alexandre, founder and dean of the school—and my advisor and first point of contact with GSLC. Your faith in me has meant the world and, on the eve of your retirement, it must be said that you have artfully and lovingly created an educational experience that is both relational and rigorous, two attributes that conventional education programs often consider at odds. You nurture our intellect while also tending to our souls.

Other professors whose perspectives and immense talents I deeply appreciate: Dr. Philomena Essed, Dr. Mitchell Kusy, and Dr. Jon Wergin. Dr. Victor Friedman served as my mentor on a series of papers that introduced me to research that has been seminal to my thinking; he has also become a dear friend.

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To my Coding Team—Dr. David Lawrence, Dr. Kelly Bleach, and Dr. Kelly Meehan—for analyzing my transcripts and offering your pithy perspectives and insights. Dr. Meehan also served as a trusted advisor and cheerleader, someone whom I could call when I was stumped or needed advice. I also extend heartfelt thanks to Dr. Jeanine Soucie, who walked me through the mechanics of coding with patience, compassion, and good humor; and to Dr. Bill Taylor, whose holiday greetings and numerous acts of kindness always warmed my heart.

To the 19 participants in my study who have taken up residence in my head and heart for the past year and a half. Your willingness to share openly about your triumphs and tribulations as white teachers of BIPOC students has truly served as a source of inspiration to me. I am

confident that readers of this dissertation will feel similarly. You are as different from one another as your respective fingerprints, and yet each of you, in your own way, made it clear that you are a work-in-progress. If you are reading these words, I hope you will see yourself in the other participants' experiences and feel validated by the findings of this study. Thank you for making the time for reflection during a chaotic and unpredictable moment in our nation's history. I am grateful to have been a channel for your extraordinary energy, creativity, and passion.

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To Chenda, my extraordinary daughter, whom you will read more about shortly. In the years during which I have studied at Antioch, she has grown into a beautiful young woman who has creatively woven together her multiple identities and is finding her place in the world.

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PREFACE

When I began the Antioch doctoral program more than seven years ago, there was nary a hint of the coming global pandemic. The fledgling Black Lives Matter movement was sounding the alarm about police brutality against Black, Brown, and Indigenous Americans, and a businessman best-known for his reality network television show was campaigning for President of the United States. What has transpired since is nothing short of cataclysmic. We are living in a transitional moment, the old-world order all but vanished, and the liminal space created from its disappearance providing no clear guidance. Uncertainties about the social, economic, and natural world and the growing inequities have destabilized society, sowing widespread chaos and turmoil around the world.

In the United States, a norm-shattering one-term Presidency helped seed a once-in-a-generation sense of urgency among those who seek to make good on the promise of "justice for all." This new energy was best captured by the so-called Summer of Racial Reckoning when, in 2020, on the heels of the brutal murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, a nationwide, multi-racial movement seemed to materialize overnight with mostly peaceful protests in dozens of American cities. The reckoning was societal, but it had an enormous impact on American schooling. Many educators, for the very first time, began to interrogate their own complicity with a system that is anything but race neutral. Prior to the summer of 2020, the predominantly White educators in the professional development network I direct in Massachusetts, the Essex County Learning Community (ECLC), were not yet convinced that their increasingly diverse districts needed to prioritize culturally responsive and sustaining practices or begin the long journey of racial identity development. They considered such work a "nice to have," not a "must have." Although the network's charge is intersectional—to support

the most marginalized and minoritized students in the County's roughly two dozen districts—its members were singularly focused on students with learning disabilities and on multi-tiered instructional and social supports. The summer of 2020 changed all that. What loomed in the background became decidedly foreground. Their hunger for understanding has only grown since then.

It is my belief that most White educators want to do the right thing by students of color but that they have been limited by living in a White bubble for most of their lives and thus are not equipped for the complexity they face in the classroom. Moreover, the American education system, for the most part, favors efficient technical solutions and market-based interventions that can be sold or scaled—and schooling is trapped in a frame of compliance—a rigid system of rules and mandates that can be quantitatively measured. In such an environment, it is almost impossible for White educators to take the kinds of risks required for the changes in mindset and practice that will equip them for teaching effectively across difference. The ECLC has positioned itself as a judgment-free space away from the daily tumult in schools, a place for renewal, reflection and dialogue, intellectually rigorous learning, and collegiality with fellow educators who live in adjacent communities, but with whom they rarely come in contact. When judgment recedes, trust grows. And when trust grows, so does the desire for new learning. It is exhilarating to watch this unfold.

The 19 White teachers you will meet in this study have somehow carved out such a space for their personal and professional growth. They would bristle at anyone calling them heroes like the ones portrayed in so many Hollywood movies, and while they were as distinctive from one another as their fingerprints, the common threads among them stood out. Their voices and perspectives are the life force of this study. I feel immense gratitude to each teacher for making

the time and letting me into their psyches and busy lives; they were generous in sharing their stories and candid in ways that exceeded my expectations. I trust you will find them as inspiring as I did. At a time when public education is under siege, these teachers give me reason to be hopeful.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

A few summers ago, before the start of the worldwide pandemic, I sat in a popular coffee shop in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with my cousin Rachel, whom I had not seen in some time. A few minutes into our catch-up, my phone rang. It was my husband, Rich; apparently, our eighteen-year-old daughter had tried to call me, but my ringer was off at the time. What I learned from Rich sent my heart racing and my stomach churning. Our daughter, who was finishing up three weeks of an on-campus program for incoming freshmen, was kicked out of the program on its penultimate day, making it impossible for her to say goodbye to the friends she had just made. She was calling from campus police; a few minutes earlier, three officers had descended upon her dorm room, telling her to quickly pack up her belongings. She was calling to say that I had to pick her up immediately, per the officers' instructions.

Our daughter, a beautiful and bright, 4'11", brown-skinned young woman whom we adopted from Cambodia when she was an infant, seemed genuinely puzzled and clearly traumatized by the incident. "Should we call Ayanna?" she asked me in front of the campus police officer who had greeted me at the door; his eyes widened when he processed that this young woman's mother was White and that her family might have a personal connection to a popular Black Congresswoman. I was trying to get a handle on what happened and did not have the presence at the time to answer my daughter's question. When I asked to use the restroom, having driven an hour in heavy traffic, another officer politely escorted me to what she called the "nice bathroom."

Over the next few days, we learned that our daughter had whispered something mildly unflattering to a friend about a young White man in the class who had disrespected the teacher on multiple occasions. Someone overheard her comment and swiftly texted the young man.

When the class ended, he confronted her aggressively, blocking her from leaving the classroom. Startled and scared by his ferocity, she kicked his backpack. The teacher tried to bring the two students together for a conversation, but only our daughter was willing to stay. Apparently, the other student had different plans. He marched to the campus police to say that he felt “unsafe” if our daughter remained on campus, which prompted the police to summarily remove her.

Explicit and Implicit Bias

Almost exactly a year later, this incident came back to me in living technicolor, when, in the summer of 2020, Amy Cooper, a White woman in New York City, called the police on Christian Cooper, a Black man and avid birdwatcher, whose only “crime” had been to calmly ask her to put her dog on a leash, as was required in the section of Central Park they were in. “I’m going to tell them there’s an African American man threatening my life,” she declared in a self-aware declaration of privilege while telling a 911 dispatcher that she was in grave danger (Armus, 2020, para. 4). Though her act reflected a “White-damsel-in-distress” trope, it was not dissimilar from the situation our daughter experienced. The young man knew precisely what he was doing; we can be almost certain that such an incident would not have been visited on a 4’11” White female student. To keep himself out of trouble, the young man threw our daughter under the proverbial bus. The campus police followed suit, becoming complicit in a needless racial incident.

Such incidents were not entirely new to our family. Since she first entered elementary school in our leafy, predominantly White New England suburb, our daughter was entangled in episodes that I always wondered about—teachers not giving her the benefit of the doubt, trips to the principal’s office that seemed excessive, and in her sophomore year, a suspension for an offense that was not similarly issued to her White classmate. Teachers and administrators, no

doubt, believed they had our daughter's best interests in mind, and there was no explicit racism in evidence. But it is clear to me in hindsight that implicit bias (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Greenwald & Krieger, 2006) was simmering under the surface and that our daughter's K–12 education experience was littered with microaggressions (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Sue, 2006) and everyday racism (Essed, 1991). Her experience haunts me, not only for its negative impact on her learning and development, but also for the harm that is done to millions of Black, Brown, and Indigenous (BIPOC)[1] children who attend public schools in the United States and are educated by a teaching force that is largely White, female, middle-class, and mostly unaware of the bias they bring into the classroom (Benson & Fiarman, 2020; Warikoo et al., 2016). My daughter's educational journey and my professional work with mostly White teachers in Massachusetts have prompted me to hold up a magnifying glass to the relational dynamics between White teachers and BIPOC students in public middle and high schools in Massachusetts. I have chosen teachers, as opposed to others within the educational system, because they have the closest proximity to students, and because research consistently shows that the teacher has the single biggest impact on student learning (Chetty et al., 2011; Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2013; Marzano, 2007; Marzano et al., 2001; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Jacob & McGovern, 2015).

How White Teachers Construct Race

Over the last several decades, the literature on White teachers of BIPOC students has blossomed (Battle, 2017; Cochran-Smith, 2000; P. Cooper, 2003; Delpit, 1988, 1995, 2006, 2012; Emdin, 2016; Frankenberg, 1993; Garza & Garza, 2010; Gay, 2002, 2018; Goldenberg,

---

[1] In this study, I often use the acronym, BIPOC, to refer to Black, Indigenous, and people of color. When I am reporting on other studies, however, I will use the same identity description as referenced in the study.

2014; Henfield & Washington, 2012; G. Howard, 2006, 2016; T. C. Howard, 2019; Hyland, 2005, 2009; Jupp, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1995, 2006, 2014, 2021; Landsman, 2005; Leonardo & Boas, 2013; Lynch, 2018; Marx, 2003, 2008; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Matias, 2013, 2016b; McIntosh, 1988; McIntyre, 1997a; Milner, 2008; Moore et al., 2017; Nieto, 1999; Picower, 2009; Sleeter, 1992, 1994, 2005, 2011; Tatum, 1997). In examining how White teachers construct race (Sleeter, 2005), the literature has described their persistent struggles to reach their BIPOC students, how those struggles manifest in the classroom, and how the students are harmed by an orientation that consistently, if unwittingly, brands BIPOC students and their families as "less-than" (Valencia, 1997). These struggles are a tragic outcome of centuries of "deficit thinking" in America life (García & Guerra, 2004; Milner, 2008; Valencia, 1997, 2010) that renders people of color deficient. Such thinking, embedded deeply in American culture, pervades America's schools and classrooms. Schools and educators falsely attribute achievement issues to "low IQ" (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994, 2010; Jensen, 1969), a "culture of poverty" (Payne, 2005), or "bad" family values (Lewis, 1961). When teachers carry such entrenched mental models—consciously or unconsciously—into their classrooms with BIPOC students, there is a collision of sorts, what is often referred to as a cultural mismatch (Au & Jordan, 1981; Foster, 1993; Goldenberg, 2014; Heath, 1983; T. C. Howard, 2001; Kleinfeld, 1975; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2010).

> Cultural mismatch theory suggests that when critical components of teaching and learning between student and teacher are not culturally congruent, there can be negative outcomes for students. The cultural discontinuity that many African American students encounter in schools is a contributing variable to the academic underachievement and social maladaptiveness that plagues many of them. (T. Howard, 2001, p. 181)

Positive White Teacher Outliers

A small subset of the scholarship on White teachers of BIPOC students focuses on the outliers in the teaching profession, experienced White teachers who have been identified by

communities of color as working effectively with BIPOC students (Boucher, 2016; P. Cooper, 2003; Delpit, 1995; Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Gay, 2010; Foster, 1991, 1993; Harding, 2005; Hill, 2009; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990; Lee, 1995). These studies build on the foundational work of BIPOC scholars who have identified the characteristics, dispositions, and behaviors of exemplary BIPOC *and* White teachers (Cholewa et al., 2012; Farinde-Wu et al., 2017; Foster, 1992; Harding, 2005; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Irvine, 1990; Jupp et al., 2019; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990; Lee, 1995; Milner, 2006; Mitchell, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999). Such studies of "positive deviance" (Pascale et al., 2010) merit greater attention.

Utilizing the methodology of Constructivist Grounded Theory, I ask "How do White teachers understand their experiences and relationships with BIPOC students?" By exploring the contexts, social processes, and conditions that enable some White teachers to be particularly effective with BIPOC students, I describe what happens in "the space between" these teachers and the students in their charge (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000). It is critically important to elevate these models of excellence so that a larger population of White teachers might be more successful with their students of color than is currently the case.

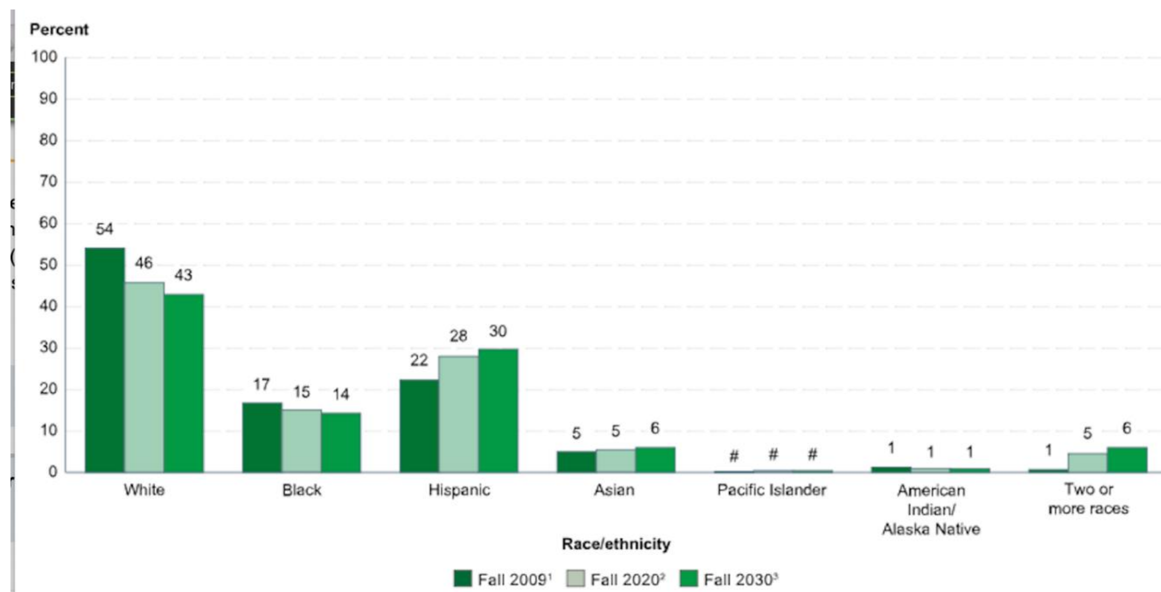
A Glaring Mismatch

The data are stark and telling. Of the roughly 3.5 million public school teachers in the United States, approximately 80% are White—and 78% of these teachers are women, most of whom were raised in suburban, middle-class households. In contrast, about 51.7% of the nation's students are African American, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian—with the percentage of Hispanic students growing at the steepest rate (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). The number of BIPOC students in our nation's public schools continues to grow as the

population at large becomes increasingly more diverse and as many White families opt out of public education. The mismatch is even more severe in urban areas. As of 2016, according to the Council of the Great City Schools, which represents 68 urban school districts across the United States, of the 7.2 million students who attend urban schools, 78% are BIPOC students. Conversely, data from NCES (2020) show that 72% of the teacher population in these schools is White, and 99.7% of White students attended a district where the faculty was as White as the student body.

Figure 1.1

Percentage Distribution of Student Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2009, Fall 2020, and Fall 2030



In Massachusetts, the gap is even greater: According to 2021–22 data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), of the 896,103 students enrolled in the state's public schools, 56% are White, as compared to 87.2% of teachers; 23.1% of students are Hispanic, as are just 5.4% of teachers. In addition, 9.3% of students are African American, as compared to 4.8% of teachers (DESE School and District Profiles, n.d.).

Figure 1.1

Massachusetts Race/Ethnicity Data: % of Total Enrollment and Total FTEs

	2021-22		2017-18		2014-15		2011-12		2007-08		Difference 2021-22 vs. 2007-08	
	Students	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students	Teachers
African American	9.3	4.8	9.0	3.9	8.7	3.4	8.3	3.3	8.1	3.3	+1.0	+1.5
Asian	7.2	1.8	6.9	1.5	6.3	1.3	5.7	1.2	4.9	1.1	+2.3	+.7
Hispanic	23.1	5.4	20	4.1	17.9	3.4	16.1	3.3	13.9	3.1	+9.2	+2.3
White	55.7	87	60	90	63.7	91	67	92	70.8	92	**-15.1**	**-5**
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.1	0.06	0.1	.05	0.1	.07	0.1	.07	0.1	.03	=	+.03
Multi-Race, non-Hispanic	4.3	.6	3.6	.5	3.1	.4	2.5	.4	1.9	.5	+2.4	+.1

[3] https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=00000000&orgtypecode=0&
[4] All data pulled from DESE School and District Profiles and State Profile reports w3sw3

Moreover, 26% of Black students and 21% of Latino students in Massachusetts attend a school without a single same-race teacher (The Education Trust, 2020). In addition, about three in four White students in Massachusetts attend a school without a single Black teacher, and two in three attend a school without a single Latino teacher (The Education Trust, 2020). In Boston, the largest city in the commonwealth, BIPOC students now make up 86% of the district, and

while the Boston schools consisted of roughly 60% White students in 1974, they are now only 14% White (Boston Public Schools, 2019). Despite Boston's multi-pronged efforts to diversify the teacher workforce, approximately 60% of teachers are White (Boston Public Schools, 2019). In other words, the Massachusetts teacher workforce constitutes an "overwhelming presence of Whiteness" (Sleeter, 2001, p. 101).

What accounts for this discrepancy? Ironically, the US Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 to end de jure segregation in America's public schools led to unintended consequences, as tens of thousands of Black educators who were employed at Black-only schools were laid off by White superintendents. Before *Brown*, in the 17 states that had segregated school systems, 35 to 50% of the teaching force was Black (Fenwick, 2022). While the White leaders in the newly desegregated schools agreed to integrate their schools in accordance with the law, they balked at giving authority to Black educators over White ones: "The expulsion of Black principals and teachers was … so pervasive and destabilizing that, even a half-century later, the nation's public schools still have not recovered" (Fenwick, 2022, Preface, xxiii.).

There is also evidence of bias in schools' hiring practices (Dubois & Schanzenbach, 2017), as Black and Hispanic adults who are interested in the teaching profession face obstacles at every turn. While the gap between White adults and adults of color are minimal at college enrollment, it grows at every subsequent step in the path toward teacher certification. Compounding the problem is that a smaller proportion of the Black and Hispanic populations earn college degrees, fewer are interested in pursuing education because of new economic opportunities, and when those who do attend college and graduate with a degree in education, they are hired at lower rates than their White peers (NCES, 2022). Thus, the pool of available

teachers of color barely supports the current level of diversity in the teacher workforce (Dubois & Schanzenbach, 2017). Furthermore, “the chances of success for districts’ laudable goals to build a teaching corps that mirrors their student populations crumble in the face of reality—even looking forward nearly fifty years” (Putman et al., 2016, p. 2) because even though the number of teachers of color has doubled over the past few decades, the increases have failed to keep pace with the population of students of color, which now represents more than half of the student population in the public schools (NCES, 2022). By some estimates, even the most ambitious agenda to diversify the teaching profession is not likely to reach parity for Black teachers and students until 2044; for Hispanic teachers and students, in 2060 (Putman et al., 2016). According to the latest figures, more than 40% of public schools in the United States have no BIPOC teachers on staff (Bireda & Chait, 2011).

When BIPOC students are placed in a classroom milieu in which White values and assumptions prevail and their own values and cultures of origin are frequently misunderstood, demeaned, or rendered invisible (J. Banks, 2001; Pollock, 2004, 2008; Ullucci & Battey, 2011; Valencia, 1997), students of color are set up to absorb the deficit messages. The cultural mismatch between teacher and students often fosters a distrust and distance that leaves students feeling disconnected from their teachers—and themselves (D. Davis, 2009). As Adrienne Rich (1985) observed: “when someone with the authority of a teacher . . . describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing” (p. 199). For many students, the impact of such messages leads to understandable resistance or disengagement; others internalize what they experience and lose confidence in themselves as learners. The teacher-student mismatch, therefore, only replicates and perpetuates existing inequalities and the pernicious effects of institutional racism. To diminish the negative

impact of cultural mismatch, we must therefore learn more about the White teachers of BIPOC students who have been identified as exemplary. Who are they and what do they know that can be shared widely with their White colleagues and supervisors, as well as with policymakers?

Reframing the Achievement Gap

Entrenched and unexamined stereotypes held by White teachers can explain a multitude of both conscious and unconscious transgressions: disrespectful treatment of students in class, disproportionate referrals to special education services (Blanchett, 2009), fewer referrals to Advanced Placement and other higher-level courses (Darling-Hammond, 2015; T. C. Howard, 2003; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002), and disproportionate disciplinary action, including detention, suspension, and adjudication (Anyon et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2010; Milner, 2013; Noguera, 2008), all of which feed the "school to prison pipeline" (Archer, 2009; Kim et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2014; Wald & Losen, 2003). With implicit and unconscious bias being the rule rather than the exception, it is no surprise that race-based disparities in education have budged so little in the last 40 years, even though legislation such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top were designed with the explicit intention of "leveling the playing field" (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Viewed in this light, the so-called "achievement gaps" may be more accurately viewed as gaps in White educators' racial knowledge and awareness, and school environments that are based in White middle-class norms and values that closely mirror the larger society outside of the schoolhouse (Milner, 2010). What is "at risk," then, is not the individual students, but rather the *relationships* between teachers and students that are tainted by the broad brush of racism. In this study, I have gained a better understanding of these relational dynamics and how the field of education, through its teachers, might begin to repair the harm done. Taking a cue from Walker

(2001), I address how race might cease to be an “agent of disconnection” and instead open the door for deeper and more authentic relationships between White teachers and BIPOC students.

The Social Nature of Learning

Human beings are hard-wired to connect. Research shows that people cannot reach their full potential until they are in healthy connection with others (Banks, 2015; Lieberman, 2013; R. Ryan & Deci, 2000). Just 20 years ago, this fact was well understood by only the most cutting-edge researchers studying human development and neuroscience. For almost a century, ideas about human development and growth in the Western world have largely centered on the individual and on the idea of “complete psychological independence” (Banks, 2015, p. 2).

These hyper-individualistic ideas are embedded in American culture, in step with the assembly line of the Industrial Revolution where everyone has a prescribed role or, further up the organizational food chain, where the idea of the “self-made man” makes invisible the numerous contributions of others to an individual’s success (Comer, 2004; Gladwell, 2008). As might be expected, these ideas have also permeated the American educational system, where student achievement is viewed primarily as an individual pursuit, focused on preparation for an autonomous future in a globally competitive marketplace (Krieg, 2016). From this perspective, the purpose of an education is to “fill the minds of individual students and we presume that a knowing mind is good preparation for a successful future” (Gergen, 2009, p. 241). In the classroom, the teacher is presumed to be the one holding the knowledge; students are the recipients of that knowledge and mandated to regurgitate it in written form. That some students do it well and other students flounder is treated as part of the natural order. The former *smart* students move on to higher education and into professions that provide a life-sustaining income;

the latter may struggle to find a secure place in society, having been deemed inferior by a punitive system that honors only one way of knowing and being.

A Relational Approach. A relational approach to education eschews this rigid template. It rejects what Freire (1970) calls the "banking concept" of education (p. 2) and the notion that "knowledge is an individual possession, or that education is about 'filling' or 'fashioning' minds" (Gergen, 2009, p. 240). A relational model of education, as suggested by Gergen (2009), has an altogether different purpose:

> The primary aim of education is to enhance the potentials for participating in relational processes. . . . The aim, then, is not that of producing independent, autonomous thinkers—mythological creatures at best—but of facilitating relational processes that can ultimately contribute to the continuing and expanding flow of relationships within the world more broadly. (p. 243)

A relational model of learning is a "radical departure from most mainstream educational research and practice, which is designed to enhance the individual's mind" (Wortham & Jackson, 2012, p. 254). This dissertation embraces a relational approach, beginning with the assumption that an individualistic orientation to learning will never move the needle in the American educational system because learning is a complex *social* process (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, learning *sticks* when two human beings develop a positive connection to one another. When that encounter is compromised in some way, so is the learning (Klem & Connell, 2004). As esteemed psychiatrist and child development expert James Comer (1995) states, "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship" (Public Lecture).

The Teacher-Student Relationship

The social nature of learning is borne out by a vast literature on the teacher-student relationship in K–12 education. Given the inherently qualitative nature of the topic, it seems highly ironic that the lion's share of this research is quantitative. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence to suggest that teacher-student relationships influence social and cognitive outcomes as

early as preschool and continue to influence students' social and intellectual development throughout childhood and adolescence (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Bryk et al., 2010; H. Davis, 2006; Hattie, 2009; Reyes et al., 2012; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2015). A smaller subset of this literature addresses the teacher-student relationship as it pertains specifically to students from marginalized and minoritized populations. For example, writing about White teachers and BIPOC students, Milner (2019) coined the term "relational efficacy" to define "teachers' confidence in their ability to develop the knowledge, insights, understandings, mind-sets, skills, abilities, and ultimately practices necessary to connect with, care about, and empathize with students and co-create learning contexts where students feel safe, affirmed, whole, and loved" (p. 8). I delve more deeply into this literature in Chapter II.

Ranking and Sorting: The Neoliberal Agenda

Despite the scholarly attention to the relational dimension of schooling, the K–12 education system in the US has, during the same period, marginalized these dimensions, favoring instead an emphasis on carrots-and-sticks accountability systems and a "methods fetish" (Bartolomé, 1994) that have kept schools, teachers, and students under close watch and had the unintended impact of narrowing the curriculum to a drill-and-kill frenzy, especially around English language arts and mathematics (Roffey, 2010). This technocratic stance grew out of concerns about America's global competitiveness, beginning with Sputnik, the satellite sent into space by the Soviet Union in 1956 that galvanized US leaders to wonder what had gone so wrong with the American education system. Seeking to reclaim the US position on the world stage, policymakers recommended that schools become more rigorous, that they adopt new standards, and that rigid metrics evaluate teachers.

This crisis trope would continue with the release, in 1983, of "A Nation at Risk," which declared that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people" (US Department of Education, 1983). What the report de-emphasized was that "more students than ever were graduating from high school and attending college, and that top US students led the world in academic achievement" (Kamenetz, 2018). Thus, the angst expressed by leaders was more likely attributable to the growing democratization of education. By the 1980s, college was available to a much larger swath of the population and many more people were taking the SATs and applying to colleges, including more people of color, more low-income students, and other historically disadvantaged groups (Kamenetz, 2018).

The trend toward standardization (Gerstle, 2022; Lakes & Carter, 2011; Slater & Griggs, 2015; Sleeter, 2019) intensified when President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind bill into law in 2002, requiring every state to test every child every year in third through eighth grade in math and reading, and once in high school. Similarly, President Barack Obama signed into law the Race to the Top initiative, a $4.35-billion program aligned with the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009, in response to the Great Recession of 2008. The accountability framework of all these landmark pieces of legislation reflected and reinforced a neoliberal agenda that emphasizes "privatization, market-based competition, and accountability; it frames education as a private commodity rather than a public good" (Sleeter, 2019). As a result, for many teachers, the joy of teaching and learning has often been replaced by "teaching to the test" (Au, 2016; Hursh, 2004), subjugating the interpersonal aspects of classroom life to the margins. This phenomenon has been a significant contributor to high teacher turnover in public schools and higher-than-ever levels of stress reported by teachers (Greenberg et al., 2003;

Kyriacou, 2001; Lever et al., 2017), a phenomenon that significantly worsened during the pandemic (Diliberti et al., 2021). One need not be a psychologist or education scholar to understand the negative impact these developments could have on teacher-student relationships, especially when there is a racial divide.

Hints of Progress. With the passage, in 2016, of the Every Student Succeeds Act (US Department of Education), the tide has shown some initial signs of turning. The legislation stipulates, for the first time, that states be held accountable to a "fifth indicator" of school quality beyond the traditional measures of proficiency on annual assessments, grade point averages, high school graduations rates, and progress of English learners in achieving English language proficiency (Klein, 2016). Many of the most-often discussed "fifth indicator" possibilities include student engagement, educator engagement, and school climate—all of which touch the relational aspects of teaching and learning.

Similarly, there is growing national interest in *social-emotional learning* (SEL), "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (www.SEL4MA.org). These so-called "soft skills" have always been of prime importance to professionals in the field of youth development—in after-school, summer, and community-based programs that are, by design, relational. Historically, though, such skills have been downplayed in the classroom, with a tendency to separate the social and emotional aspects of learning from the academic and cognitive, even though neuroscience makes it clear all the developmental domains are inextricably linked (Osher et al., 2020). Relationships based on a reciprocal "serve-and-return" dynamic set learning in motion and enable it to stick (Knudsen et

al., 2006). The good news is that, for the last decade or so, educators and policymakers have been touting SEL as foundational to student success. Districts have launched SEL initiatives, and social media continues to buzz with SEL-related activity. The bad news is at least twofold. First, SEL has become a brand of sorts, losing its meaning, and turning the framework into a checklist that teachers need only follow like a paint-by-number exercise in the classroom. Second, although the SEL model features "relationship skills" as one of its five areas of competence, it is positioned as co-equal to other elements, as opposed to being the "active ingredient" (Li & Julian, 2012) that propels learning and development. An even sharper critique comes from Hammond (2020):

> Yet, there are ways in which this information about social neuroscience and social-emotional learning (SEL) have been used to further pathologize and stigmatize students of color and other diverse students because they may express and manage emotions in culturally congruent ways that are different from the dominant culture. These differences are often not seen as differences at all, but deficits in their moral, social, and behavioral character (Gorski, 2010). There are those well-intentioned educators who, looking through a deficit lens, see SEL as a "treatment" for diverse students who need "character training" that promotes compliance rather than to offer support for authentic self-regulation. (p. 154)

In summary, while there is some progress on the relational front in K–12 education, the foregrounding of relationships in the classroom will likely remain an uphill battle in our Western-normed, hyper-individualistic, and fiercely competitive American institutions.

Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There

In examining the relationships between White teachers and BIPOC students, it is important to state directly that this study is not intended to blame or shame White teachers. First, we know from developmental and neuroscience that shame and blame close the doors to learning; simply put, it is virtually impossible for any human being to learn while walking on eggshells. Second, most White teachers come into the classroom with a lifetime of experiences, most of which have taken place almost exclusively in White surroundings. Thus, they

understandably enact what is top of mind, a default position that reproduces the racism that plagues the wider society. Teachers also inherit the legacy of several centuries of racist policies and practices that have inundated the nation's schools and are often held responsible by the larger society for situations that are beyond their control. However, as Milner (2020) states: "I do believe that most teachers can and must put forth more energy and effort to become more effective in the classroom with their students. Thus, educators, particularly White teachers, must critically examine their own biases, privileges, assumptions, worldviews, inconsistencies, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, and other forms of oppression on their journey to teach better and to teach more effectively" (p. 2). Citing an African proverb, Milner (2020) urges White teachers to "start where you are, but don't stay there" (p. xiii).

Methodological Fit

As a student of the qualitative and constructivist tradition, I employed the methodology of Constructivist Grounded Theory to conduct open-ended interviews of White middle and high school teachers of students of color in Massachusetts who were identified as exemplary by educators or parents of color. Specifically, I looked to recruit White teachers who have been in the profession for at least five years, as researchers estimate that between 40 and 50% of teachers quit within five years (Haynes et al., 2014). Making it past the five-year mark is thus an indicator of longevity in the profession. Additionally, in middle and high school, students often lose much of their curiosity for and engagement in learning (Hargreaves, 2000). This phenomenon can be attributed in part to the fact that the learning environments in the upper grades are less personalized and developmental, with each teacher held responsible for many more students. There is also a faulty assumption that building relationships is less important as students get closer to college and/or the workforce. I therefore hypothesized that much could be learned from

White middle and high school teachers who push through the structural barriers to engage older BIPOC students.

Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology is an especially appropriate fit for the primary aim of this study: to look at lived experience and how teachers make meaning of it, arriving at theory in an incremental and organic process gleaned from evidence on the ground (Birks & Mills, 2012; Charmaz, 2000, 2014, 2016; Gibson & Hartman, 2013; Holloway & Schwartz, 2018). The methodology also uncovers the perceived actions and interactions—the primary social processes—that occur between White teachers and BIPOC students.

Recognizing the inherently political nature of schooling (Freire, 1985; Palmer, 1997, 2017) and the vital importance of the larger context within which teachers work, I also draw on Critical Theory (CT) and one of its offshoots, Critical Race Theory (CRT), both of which recognize the interplay of individuals and social and historical forces and are primarily concerned with the problem of emancipation from "the things that enslave" (Gibson, 2007, p. 14). CRT has five major tenets, all of which are relevant to this study: (a) the view that racism is ordinary and not aberrational; (b) the idea of an interest convergence; (c) the social construction of race; (d) the importance of storytelling and counter-storytelling; and (e) the notion that Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation. The foundational idea of CRT is that race is a social construct that has rationalized or justified much of the oppression inflicted on people of color, particularly notions of the "natural" superiority of White people and the notion that the United States is a meritocracy. As applied to education, CRT argues, for example, that *Brown v. Board of Education*, despite its stated intentions of creating more equitable schooling for students of color, went a long way to doing just the opposite: maintaining the status quo. Dixson and Rousseau (2005) explain that *Brown* "failed to substantively improve the education

of African American students because it represented a restrictive rather than expansive view of equality" (p. 20). And as Tate et al. (1993) suggest, "What was needed was a vision of education that challenged the fundamental structure of schools that reproduced the same inequitable social hierarchies that existed in society. That the *Brown* decision failed to disrupt these structures is evidenced in the enduring inequities in the educational system." (p. 267). CRT is an important sensitizing concept for studying the relationships between White teachers and BIPOC students because schools and classrooms are structured according to White-normed pedagogies and practices and White behavioral expectations. It is difficult to imagine BIPOC students learning well in such an alien setting unless their teachers take it upon themselves to put relationships at the center and radically reimagine their everyday interactions with their students.

Another sensitizing concept in this study is Relational-Cultural Theory, considered by the American Psychological Association to be one of the ten foremost theories of human development of the 20th century. Relational-Cultural Theory grew out of a branch of feminist psychology that upended the conventional wisdom about healthy human development (J. Miller, 1976, 1986). At its essence, the theory posits that what male psychologists had labeled women's weaknesses could be seen as strengths: hypersensitivity might be viewed as authenticity, merging as empathy, and dependency needs as a drive to connect (Robb, 2007). Healthy connection, not autonomy, is seen as central to human growth and development. In this sense, Relational-Cultural Theory serves as a necessary corrective to the hyper-individualism that is pervasive in K-12 education and is more in sync with the collective and relational values of many BIPOC communities.

Participant Recruitment

Central to the validity and credibility of my study is the method by which I recruited exemplary teachers. In the interest of efficiency, it would have been tempting to reach out to national and state organizations that sponsor "teacher of the year" awards and select from their list of "winners." Such a strategy would have been highly problematic for this study, as the definition of an exemplary teacher can vary widely; the likelihood of a White-normed definition was great, which would run counter to my goals. Instead, inspired by the "community nomination" recruitment method of scholars on whose shoulders I stand (Foster, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1998, 2014), I turned to several high-profile educational leaders in Massachusetts to recommend BIPOC administrators who might look favorably on my study. I then approached those administrators—mostly BIPOC principals—to recommend exemplary White teachers. For triangulation purposes, I also asked BIPOC principals to seek nominations from BIPOC educators and parents. The pandemic made the search for participants extremely time consuming, given the pressures that educators endured. Most of my emails and phone calls were not returned, but I eventually recruited 19 participants. Most participants work in urban schools consisting of predominantly BIPOC students. Five participants teach in the suburbs where they work with students who participate in a program known as the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO). The program was created in 1966 by parents "to provide the opportunity for children from racially segregated schools in Boston and children from racially isolated schools in the suburbs to learn together in an integrated public-school setting" (https://metcoinc.org/about/metco-history). More on the composition of the study sample can be found in Chapter III.

Scope of the Study

Massachusetts was the site of this study, not only because it is where I live and work but also because of its storied place in the history of education and its legacy with respect to race. The nation's first public school—Boston Latin School—opened in 1635 in Boston, Massachusetts, and the commonwealth is home to 114 colleges and universities, including nine research institutions, making education part of the lifeblood of the Massachusetts economy and a powerful influence on the zeitgeist. Sadly, Boston, the capital of the commonwealth, is also remembered for its "forced busing" policy, a court-ordered mandate in the 1970s to desegregate the city's schools. The early years of busing, despite the public images of mayhem and violence, did help move the Boston Public Schools toward equity (Y. Miller, 2019). In later years, however, policies established by White business leaders and school administrators gradually eroded the defining principles of the law such that 40 years later, the Boston schools are now more segregated than ever (Ciurczak, 2020; Schneider et al., 2020). As the former press secretary to the superintendent of the Boston Public Schools in the mid-1990s, I was witness to this unraveling when a White parent whose daughter was not admitted to Boston Latin School sued the district for reverse discrimination and won (*McLaughlin v. Boston School Committee*, 1997). The case would mark an unfortunate milestone in the dismantling of desegregation in Boston and many other cities in the US.

Perhaps most relevant to my study, Massachusetts typically ranks first or second in the nation for the quality of its schools. And yet when the data are disaggregated, Massachusetts's test-score gaps are among the worst in the nation (Bradbury, 2021). Clearly, the commonwealth must take the time not only to examine the data closely but also investigate root causes so that concrete action can be taken.

Positionality

I am a White, cisgender, heterosexual female who has lived in the Boston metropolitan area for more than 35 years. Until very recently, although I recognized that I was perceived as White by the general population, I did not strongly identify that way. Rather, I identified as a Jewish woman who was born in Minneapolis, a city that was the hotbed of anti-Semitism in the United States for several decades in the middle of the 20th century. The fact of anti-Semitism loomed large throughout my childhood, whether it was the swastikas we found painted on our garage one morning, the awareness that the country club a few blocks away did not admit Jews, the unflattering names that I was called on the school bus, or the gym teacher's decision to give failing grades to the handful of Jewish students in her class who missed school because of Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. My mother reminded me regularly that I had to behave well because I was an "ambassador" for my people. Because of our decidedly outsider status, the Jewish community was close-knit, providing a strong sense of solidarity and identity. I attended Hebrew School on most weekday afternoons after public school; Saturdays and Sundays were spent at the synagogue or Hebrew School, or at Jewish youth events.

Ours was among the hundreds of families who had fled to the inner-ring suburbs from the "Old Northside" neighborhood of the city as it turned from almost entirely Jewish to predominantly African American (Berman & Schloff, 2002; Weber, 2015). I would not learn, until many years later, that this "White flight" spectacle played out in many US cities after World War II, largely due to racist federal housing policies and unsavory real estate practices such as redlining. Thus, I grew up thinking that the neighborhood that was once the very definition of a close-knit village to my grandparents, parents, and large extended family was now a "dangerous" place (code for Black) to be strenuously avoided. Through college and even

graduate school, I had woefully few encounters with Black, Brown, and Indigenous people: one of my mother's housecleaners was African American, another was Native American. In adolescence, I was introduced to the new "Black attorney" at my father's law firm, and, as editor of my high school newspaper, I had the privilege of interviewing a Black defensive tackle for the Minnesota Vikings football team, a client of my father's law firm. These two individuals were the exceptions that proved the rule that Black, Brown, and Indigenous Americans were not on an equal footing with "normal" White Americans. The phenomenon was lost on me at the time, though I do remember an unsettled feeling—the same feeling I experienced when my father talked about the "lady lawyers" in his firm.

When Jews Turned White. By this time, Jews in Minnesota, though later than their counterparts in other American cities, became "White folks" (Brodkin, 1998). My family was upper-middle class; my father was a corporate attorney, my mother, a homemaker, and both parents assumed leadership roles in the Jewish community. There was always a roof over our heads and food on the table. My sisters and I excelled in school and participated in many extracurricular activities. From the outside, in other words, our family life was a model of the American idea of success. From the inside, however, the family history of fleeing the pogroms of Eastern Europe, coupled with the hostile environment that greeted my grandparents in their new country, wreaked havoc on their psyches, leading to externalized pain that resulted in chronic trauma and dysfunction in subsequent generations. The sense of not belonging took its toll on my grandparents, parents, and later, on me and many others in my nuclear and extended family. While I would never claim to know what it is to live in Black, Brown, or Indigenous skin, I do know intimately the experience of feeling, by turns, invisible and demeaned. Some scholars have

written that White women who have encountered trauma, as well as Jews with strong cultural identities, are drawn to anti-racism work (K. Davis, 2014; Thompson, 1995).

Because I have always identified so strongly with Judaism as both my religion *and* my culture, it has taken me a long time, even in adulthood, to fully embrace a White identity. In the early 1990s, I attended several diversity trainings in which I was forced to reject my Jewish identity so that I could "admit" my Whiteness—a binary mode of thinking that did not sit well. The result was that, for many years, I did my best to avoid race conversations altogether—something I *could* do precisely because I am White. Even at the beginning of this doctoral program, I could feel my heart beating faster during our seminars on race. I credit the professors and my classmates of color for validating my "both/and" identity so that I could finally pursue an authentic path toward racial conscientization.

Professional Stance. Professionally, I have spent 35 years working at the intersection of communications, youth development, and education—first, as a broadcast journalist covering these topics, then as an advocate, public affairs specialist, communications analyst, and strategist on behalf of school districts, nonprofit organizations, and government. I often draw upon an approach to communications, strategic framing, whose goal is to *reframe* social issues to make the system more visible, thereby priming *systemic*, as opposed to individual, solutions to social problems. As I have learned through my studies, this approach is highly aligned with Critical Theory. I have also learned through this doctoral journey that communications and dialogue are at the core of leading change; the professional development network of 14 school districts in Massachusetts that I founded and direct is highly informed both by my communications background and my doctoral journey.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review in a Grounded Theory study remains a contested matter among scholars, the operative question being, does one conduct the literature review before or after engaging in the original research? Of course, familiarizing oneself with the literature inevitably influences the researcher. On the other hand, how can one know enough to ask meaningful questions if one has not at least done a preliminary scan of such literature? In addition to the fact that a doctoral study requires a literature review, I agree with Birks and Mills (2012) that conducting a literature review beforehand can serve to “enhance theoretical sensitivity, as data during analysis, and as a source of theoretical codes” (p. 22). I also agree with Strauss and Corbin who were said to have quoted the adage that “an open mind is not the same as an empty head” (Bryant, 2021, p. 401). Clearly, life experience has informed my choice of topic, as has my reading of relevant literature both before and during my doctoral experience. This stance is consistent with a postpositivist philosophy that accepts that the researcher inevitably influences the research. Thus, I embarked on this literature with an awareness that my values, ideas, experiences, and positionality shape my choices. There are no discoveries that materialize like magic fairy dust from the findings; rather, the story is *constructed* based on the evidence that is trustworthy because it comes from the lived experience of those who are in the ring, as it were.

In this chapter, I review the bodies of scholarship that, in my view, are essential to understanding White middle and high school teachers and their interactions with BIPOC students in K–12 public schools. The discussion begins with the literature on teacher identity, including racial identity development and the dispositions required for teaching across difference. Chapter II also touches on the emotional lives of White teachers, namely, the strong negative feeling states that are often present but not acknowledged or processed. These emotions constitute a

hidden curriculum that can negatively affect the learning experience. This chapter also highlights White scholar-practitioners who have themselves traveled a path to racial awareness and helped others to do the same. White Teacher Identity Studies (Applebaum, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2013; Frankenberg, 1993; Jupp et al., 2016; Marx, 2003; Sleeter, 1992, 1993), an offshoot of Critical Whiteness Studies that is grounded in the early scholarship of Black intellectuals, figures prominently in this chapter.

We then turn to some of the classic and contemporary scholarship on teacher-student relationships (TSR), as it is *in relationship* that race is enacted between White teachers and BIPOC students. While teacher-student relationships are consequential for all students, research suggests they matter even more for BIPOC students (Guest & Biasini, 2001; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Murray et al., 2008; Murray et al., 2016). Three constructs stand out as central in the study of relationships between White teachers and BIPOC students: belonging, care, and empathy. Thereafter, we will examine the deficit thinking that constrains the relationships between White teachers and BIPOC students (Milner, 2008; Shields et al., 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Valencia, 1997). The history of deficit thinking in the United States and the now-discredited pseudoscience of eugenics have shaped and continue to influence America's schools and its White teachers. Deficit thinking manifests in the classroom largely through teacher expectations that have developed over a lifetime of experiences. Studies across many decades have shown that teacher expectations have an enormous impact on student learning and development, and it is no more evident than in the K–12 classroom.

To counter deficit thinking and low expectations, BIPOC scholars have led the way in creating asset-based pedagogies and practices. We will explore some of these approaches and their immense value to White teachers. Finally, I will close this chapter with a survey of the

research that is most proximate to my study—exemplary teachers of BIPOC students—and I will end with the subject of this study: White teachers who have been acknowledged by BIPOC educators and families as exemplary.

In essence, this literature review represents my attempt to begin to understand the root causes—both in and out of the schoolhouse—of the often-strained relationships between White teachers and BIPOC students. The review serves as the backdrop for my appreciative inquiry of those White teachers who, operating in the same conditions as their same-race peers, are somehow able to touch the souls of their BIPOC students.

Teacher Identity

According to Palmer (1997/2017), good teaching comes from solid identity, not technique:

> In fact, knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life—and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject—not at the deeply levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth . . . good teaching requires self-knowing; it is a secret hidden in plain sight. (pp. 2–3)

Raider-Roth (2014), in her writing on “presence” in teaching, describes how challenging it can be for a teacher to be present to oneself when life in the classroom often evokes aspects of one’s own identity and history, especially those that remain unsettled. Drawing on the work of Gilligan (1982, 1993), J. Miller and Stiver (1997), and Reichert and Hawley (2014), Raider-Roth explains that teachers, like all human beings, carry relational images from past relationships and deeply embedded cultural assumptions that influence their interactions in the classroom. She tells the story of a veteran teacher who was puzzled by feelings of anger and frustration that surfaced for him with a particular student at the beginning of the school year. The teacher wanted to

understand the student better, and "was determined to explore my own emotional responses to this child in order to inform my own inner work for the good of the hundreds of children that I will help educate during the rest of my career" (p. 97). In other words, the teacher knew that his own capacity to be present would be diminished if he did not take the risk of becoming aware of his own inner life. What he uncovered in the process not only helped his student; it enabled him to revisit and resolve some of his own early struggles as a learner. This idea is echoed by Schwartz (2019), who reminds us that to engage with students authentically and effectively, "we must also strive to know ourselves well" (p. 8).

Palmer (1997) suggests that three important paths must be taken to fully tap "the inner landscape of the teaching self" (p. 4): intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. By intellectual, he means the form and content of concepts about how people know and learn, "of the nature of our students and our subjects" (1997, p. 4). By emotional, he means the way teachers and students feel as they teach and learn—"feelings that can either enlarge or diminish the exchange between us" (1997, p. 4.) By spiritual, he means:

> the diverse ways we answer the heart's longing to be connected with the largeness of life—a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called teaching. . . . The inward quest for communion becomes a quest for outward relationship: at home in our own souls, we become more at home with each other. (1997, p. 5)

Teachers and Inner Cultural Work

G. Howard (2016) tells us that it is the inner work of personal transformation that has been the missing piece in the preparation of White teachers. "Too often we place White teachers in multicultural settings and expect them to behave in ways that are inconsistent with their own life experiences, socialization patterns, worldviews, and levels of racial identity development" (G. Howard, 2016, p. 9). Sealey-Ruiz (2021) posits that White teachers must begin probing "the archaeology of self" by which she means, the "deep excavation and exploration of beliefs,

biases, and ideas that shape how we engage in the work" (p. 6). Many scholars have studied racial identity and racial identity development theory; a solid subset of these studies is focused specifically on White teachers and their struggles to interrogate how race influences their practice (Bloom et al., 2013; Brandon, 2003; Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Dray, 2005; Giroux, 1997; Helms, 1993; G. Howard, 1999/2006/2016, 2019; Jupp, 2017; Lynch, 2018; Marx, 2003, 2008; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntyre, 1997b; Sleeter, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 2005; Tatum, 1992, 1994, 1997; Tatum & Knapland, 1996; Utt & Tochluk, 2016). Moreover, several White scholars and educators have written vulnerable and compelling accounts of their own racial struggles and awakenings (Cochran-Smith, 2000; G. Howard, 1999/2006/2016; Jupp, 2013; Paley, 2000, 2019; Sleeter, 2008, 2011, 2015).

For example, Sleeter (2011) probes beneath the surface of her own family history, applying insights from Critical Race Theory, critical whiteness studies, and post-positivist realist identity theory to the story of her great-great-grandmother who immigrated to the US from Switzerland in the mid-1800s. Although family lore had depicted her ancestor as an accomplished and sophisticated woman whose individual toil and grit made her an American success story, Sleeter's (2011) investigation unearthed a more problematic tale, "uncovering its silences related to her claiming of a white Southern identity in the context of racism and competition for economic resources" (p. 422). The lesson is not that her ancestor was a racist, but rather that the racial classification system and its accompanying laws afforded her the opportunity to identify as White at a time when it clearly gave her social and economic advantages. A seasoned teacher-educator, Sleeter (2011) urges White aspiring and practicing teachers to embark on similar explorations of family history that complicate the "up-by-their-bootstraps" dominant narrative (p. 422). In addition, Sleeter's fictional book, *White*

Bread: Weaving Cultural Past into the Present (2015), is a semi-autobiographical account of her experience as a White teacher in a multicultural community who struggles to learn about race and culture under the patient tutelage of a Mexican American colleague. During this time, the protagonist also happens upon a century-old letter written by a relative, which marks the beginning of a reckoning of her family's past with her present, and her claiming of an ethnic identity that felt honest and organic.

G. Howard (1999/2006/2016) tells an almost confessional story of his personal transformation from a White suburban boy growing up in the 1950s who first encountered a Black person as a high school senior, to his racial awakening when he moved from Seattle to New Haven to attend Yale University—in his words a "baptism by fire" (p. 19). "I came to Yale with the Bible in one hand and a copy of conservative Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater's platform in the other" (p. 19). Over the next few years, Howard would volunteer with the YMCA, where he worked with Black and Brown inner-city youth and subsequently moved into the Hill, an urban neighborhood in New Haven that was a hotbed of 1960s turmoil. "This native missionary period," he said, "was merely the tentative beginning of a long journey toward cultural competence and racial consciousness" (p. 21). Challenged by his friends of color and Black Power leaders at the time, he came to realize that his true life's work was back at home, working within the White community, despite serious misgivings and some attempts to flee his calling. Howard's wanderings included travel to the British Isles and to Stonehenge, which became a touchpoint of his exploration of his Celtic roots. The pilgrimage helped him find "a deep connection with personal culture that is indigenous to my own heritage" (p. 29). The experience cemented an affirmative White identity of which he could be proud while continuing his anti-racism work in earnest.

The need for deep identity exploration is especially important for White teachers who work with BIPOC students because there is less common ground for them to stand on together and hence more assumptions related to identity that may be inaccurate. Quoting Helms (1990/1993), Matias (2016) asserts that “those who plan to engage in the racial identity development of others must first go through that jungle themselves” (p. 14). Helms (1990/1993) describes racial identity development as

> a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group . . . racial identity development theory concerns the psychological implications of racial-group membership, that is belief systems that evolve in reaction to perceived differential racial-group membership. (p. 3)

Helms’s stages of White identity development mirror Cross’s (1995) model of Black identity development, which includes five stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. In the case of White identity, Helms (2007) describes six stages divided into two categories: The first phase is Abandonment of a Racist Identity, which includes contact, disintegration, and reintegration; the second phase is the Establishment of a Nonracist White Identity, which includes pseudo-independence, immersion-emersion, and autonomy. The goal is for one to “accept his or her own Whiteness, the cultural implications of being White, and define a view of Self as a racial being that does not depend on the perceived superiority of one racial group over another” (p. 49). While this model has gained momentum since the 1990s, researchers remind us that the field’s understanding of White identity development is still emergent (G. Howard, 2016).

Consistent with but distinct from Cross, Helms, and others, G. Howard (1999, 2006, 2016) mapped the process of multicultural growth to mark significant developmental milestones of White teachers who commit to the journey. He identified three core “orientations” of White people: fundamentalist, integrationist, and transformationist. Each orientation is described by

nine indicators, which are, in turn, clustered into three modalities of growth that include thinking, feeling, and acting (p. 104).

- Fundamentalist Whites are “literal and linear thinkers regarding issues of race and Whiteness. They are fixed and rigid in their cognitive functioning and immutably committed, either consciously or unconsciously, to the assumption of White supremacy” (p. 106).
- Integrationist Whites, in contrast, recognize the existence of different perspectives, though their acceptance of diverse claims to truth can be shallow, understanding the history of White dominance but not its continuing impact in contemporary society.
- Transformationist Whites “challenge the legitimacy of White dominance” and “welcome the process of self-interrogation” (p. 113). They recognize their own complicity as oppressors in a rigged system and become humbler and more reflective.

White Teacher Identity Studies

White Teacher Identity Studies (WTIS) emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in response to “the demographic imperative,” a confluence of three phenomena: the widening gap between increases in public school enrollment of students of color; the continuing overrepresentation of White teachers in US schools, and the resegregation of the nation’s public schools since the 1980s (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). WTIS directly confronts and disrupts deficit thinking and directly addresses the cultural mismatch between minoritized students and their White teachers (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016; Jupp et al., 2019).

WTIS grew out of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), an offshoot of Critical Theory, which exposes how White privilege and White Supremacy are deeply embedded in our society—invisible, yet pernicious and easily reproduced. Levine-Rasky (2000) explains that CWS was

initially directed at White people of European decent, questioning how some groups such as Italians, Irish, and Jews became White in America over the course of two generations, problematizing the "melting pot" notion that held sway for decades and left many Whites of European descent in a state of personal and collective amnesia about their own ethnic history and heritage.

The First Wave. Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the first wave of White Teacher Identity Studies emphasized White teachers' race-evasive identities (Howard, 2006; Marx, 2004, 2008; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntyre, 1997b, 2002; Sleeter, 1992, 1993). It focused on individuals and character traits in the tradition of American individualism and the idea of meritocracy. Sleeter (1992, 1993, 1995, 2001), captures the conceptual thrust of first-wave studies:

> Faced with the paradox of liking and helping students of color while explaining away the subordination of people of color and adhering to social structures that benefit themselves and their own children, the White teachers I studied responded in patterned ways. Many simply refused to "see" color. Others searched for "positive" associations with race by drawing on their European ethnic experience.... Discussing race or multiculturalism meant discussing "them," not the social structure. (1993, p. 168)

One of the best-known scholars of the first wave is Peggy McIntosh who, in 1989, published "White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies." In this seminal article, for which she was widely vilified at the time, she wrote:

> Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon with a life of its own, I realized that since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege that was similarly denied and protected, but alive and real in its effects. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage. (McIntosh, 1988, p. 1)

Today, McIntosh's "invisible knapsack of white privilege" (McIntosh, 1988), a list of 50 ways in which White people are advantaged in everyday life—for example, "I can go shopping

alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed"—remains a staple of professional development seminars on race and diversity for educators, even as more contemporary scholars caution that the White privilege framework "demands confession and . . . confession is a dead end for antiracist action" (Lensmire et al., 2013, p. 410). They advocate the use of more complex conceptual frameworks that address the structural origins of privilege and the downsides of privilege for White people (Frankenberg, 1993; Giroux, 1997; Leonardo, 2002, 2004, 2013; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Logue, 2005; Picower, 2009).

Sleeter (1992) launched the first wave of WTIS by applying CWS content to transcripts of interviews she conducted with White teachers who had enrolled in her two-year multicultural professional development course in the late 1980s. In reflecting on this experience and her own work as an educator, Sleeter created a lexicon that became a shared language for the field, coining such terms as *White teachers' race resistance* (1992), *race-evasion* (1993), and *silence/solidarity* (1994). She would later (2001) refer to, "the overwhelming presence of whiteness," a phrase that still has currency. Sleeter's eye was trained on colleges of education and pre-service programs, the vast majority of which positioned (and continue to position) race as elective content that is not central to the core curriculum. Others such as McIntyre (1997a, 1997b, 2002), Marx (2004b), and Marx and Pennington (2003) would follow.

The Second Wave. Blum (2008), in articulating the essence of second wave studies, suggests that White people ask themselves not how to divest themselves of privilege but rather to probe a deeper question. "Suppose we shift from the question, 'How can I divest myself of White privilege in my own life?' to a quite different question, 'What can I do to make my society more racially just?' That question can lead down very different paths, and lead to quite different antiracist projects that have a different kind of meaning to students who engage in them" (p.

318). The second wave of WTIS brought social-psychoanalytic concepts into whiteness pedagogies, emphasizing reflective experiences that allow "affective, cognitive, and pedagogical interventions for learning and teaching about race, whiteness, and White identity" (Jupp, 2020, p. 7). Second-wave studies is also a commitment to paying closer attention to the social contexts in which White teachers learn and work: "Too often, first-wave studies seemed almost to assume that white preservice and professional teachers were making up their identities in a vacuum" (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016, p. 987).

In the second-wave tradition, Jupp (2013) wrote a series of essays based on "committed" White teachers' life histories, aimed at "capacitating an overwhelmingly White teaching force for teaching diverse students attending de facto segregated inner-city schools" (p. 1). He describes life histories as a way of getting at the tacit position of power that a teacher holds. He describes teaching as private intellectual work, as public, and as practical, allowing "us to valorize teachers' professional processes of *becoming* as a means of understanding professional identities along with teaching and learning" (2013, p. 3). Jupp's work teases out issues of *race-visible* professional identity formation, teaching across borders of race, class, culture, and language, and the development of a "white double-consciousness" (p. 7) that recognizes structural oppression but also requires bridging across difference. He emphasizes that such work cannot be simply "adopted" but rather that it requires learning in the moment. Reading the essays is akin to talking with an astute friend who is humbly sharing their life story. Other second-wave scholars (Applebaum, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2013; Asher, 2007; Hyland, 2009; Jupp & Slattery, 2010; Jupp & Lensmire, 2016; Lowenstein, 2009; McCarthy, 2003; Tanner, 2020; A. Thompson, 2003; Ullucci & Battey, 2011) explore various aspects of race consciousness and the development of a positive racial identity. The work continues to this day.

Teacher Dispositions

Dispositions are an important aspect of identity and, I argue, serve as a spark that provides fuel for the long haul, particularly for White teachers of BIPOC students. According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), dispositions are defined as "the values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behavior toward students, families, colleagues, and communities and affect student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator's own professional growth. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice" (NCATE, 2006, p. 53). According to Katz and Raths (1985), dispositions are not single acts but instead reflect patterns of behavior or tendencies (Villegas, 2007) that are shaped in part by the social, cultural, and political context in which the teacher is embedded (Diez, 2007). In the early 20th century, Dewey (1933) referred to dispositions as "habits of thinking". He identified open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility as central dispositions for successful teaching.

Haberman (1995) identifies seven dispositions of "star" urban teachers:

(a) Persistence. Effective teachers believe that their students can learn and that it is their responsibility to find ways to engage each one (p. 3).

(b) Protecting learners and learning. Star teachers find a way to harness their own passions for students learning—a hobby, a sport, or something that they find meaningful, the theory being that we teach best what we most care about. They also eliminate unwanted disruptions to classroom life and will diplomatically take on the bureaucracy if necessary to protect student learning time (p. 4).

(c) Application of generalization. This disposition requires teachers to be reflective and responsive. They understand their own principles and practices well enough to move

from the specific to the general and can apply what they've learned to other situations. They know the difference between information and knowledge (p. 5).

(d) Positive approach to "at-risk" students. Haberman tells us that this is perhaps the most critical disposition determining teacher effectiveness in urban environments. These teachers understand the litany of reasons that inhibit students' learning—racism, unemployment, housing instability, and other factors—but also see the problems inside the school, such as uninspired curricula and teaching and bureaucratic hurdles. These teachers, however, do not let these factors dampen their sense of responsibility and belief in their students (p. 6).

(e) Professional vs. personal orientation to students. "Star" teachers recognize that while they may not love every student, they must teach them. They use terms such as *caring*, *respect*, and *concern*, and may enjoy the love and affection of students if it happens naturally. These teachers do not take student misbehavior personally (p. 6).

(f) Guard against burnout. "Star" teachers understand the often-unrealistic demands of the job but know how to take care of themselves with the long horizon in mind. They seek networks of support as sources of emotional sustenance (p. 6).

(g) Embrace fallibility. The most effective teachers graciously accept their own mistakes and can, therefore, be generous with the mistakes of their students. They understand the complexity of the world and their own humanity (p. 7).

Warren (2018) points to the dearth of models in teacher education that "help connect teacher candidates' knowledge of students and communities to development of efficacious physical habits, tendencies, and trends in observable behavior or teacher *dispositions"* (p. 1). The author draws on elements of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy that include active commitment to

social justice and anti-racist teaching (Amos, 2011; Annamma, 2015; Talbert-Johnson, 2006; Villegas, 2007), to engage teacher candidates in the process of perspective-taking, inviting them "to obtain (and reason with) new knowledge of students and the socio-cultural context where she or he will teach" (p. 1). Perspective-taking, in Warren's view, is a disposition that can operationalize teacher empathy, a topic to which we will return shortly.

Kirylo (2021), in his book on how teachers make connections with diverse student populations, identifies six dispositions of significance:

(a) Love, which he describes as foundational, "Not as some kind of sentimentality intention without substance but, rather, as an authentic illumination of it in concrete practice," or a form of agape love (p. 26).

(b) Faith as "a manifestation of how one communicates, what is communicated, as well as in behaviors and action. It is exemplified by adopting an "article of faith" that believes in the betterment of the other, in this case, the student (p. 27).

(c) Humility, the quality of staying close to the ground, of learning from students and listening to them intently, of admitting one's own foibles.

(d) Compassion, a disposition that is linked to the qualities of empathy and care that requires awareness of others' strengths and vulnerabilities.

(e) Persistence, a disposition that signals that "despite the odds, circumstances, situations, and multiple other factors, because every child is unique and specially created, the teacher remains resolute in believing in the possibilities of each child (p. 30).

(f) Hope, a disposition that provides a sense of purpose and meaning in life and offers a sense of possibility.

Duncan-Andrade (2009) also writes compellingly about hope as a key disposition for teachers working with BIPOC students, quoting lyrics from Tupac Shakur (1999) that describe young people who are resilient in the face of toxic environments as the "roses that grow from concrete" (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, p. 186). He distinguishes between, on the one hand, "hokey and mythical hope" that are inauthentic and offer false promises and, on the other hand, "critical, material, Socratic, and audacious hope" that are grounded in the real world and demand action (p. 185).

In summary, dispositions—or patterns of behavior that teachers have developed over many years of life experience—are a critical component of their professional identity. Some of the dispositions described are internal and comport with deeply held morals or values; others are more oriented toward a behavioral or relational stance toward their students. A few dispositions bubbled up across studies, namely, the ability to empathize or take another's perspective, persistence through challenges, and a grounded sense of hopefulness about students' capabilities and futures.

Emotions and Difference

Dispositions are often connected to emotions, and teaching is an inherently emotional enterprise. As H. Schwartz (2019) reminds us: "The question is not whether teaching is an emotional experience, but whether we acknowledge or deny the emotion inherent in teaching" (p. 8). Part of a teacher's job is to continuously monitor what is happening in the classroom and how students are responding emotionally. Inevitably, a teacher will misunderstand what they see and act based on that misunderstanding. For example, my own daughter sometimes showed up for class displaying a "tough girl" façade that disguised intense anxiety and a learning disability of which she was ashamed. To prevent teachers from making assumptions about her motivation

(she desperately wanted to do well), I took to writing a letter to her teachers at the beginning of each school year. Sometimes, it worked wonders; often, more advocacy was required. Nias (1996) helped me understand what was at stake for my daughter's teachers:

> When teachers feel they are effective, assisting the learning of all pupils, keeping pace with their needs, handling the complex demands of teaching with insight and fluid flexibility, they experience joy, excitement, exhilaration and deep satisfaction. . . . By the same token, teachers feel afraid, frustrated, guilty, anxious and angry when they know that they are not teaching well or when they encounter pupils whom they cannot help. (p. 297)

This dynamic goes right to the essence of White teachers who do not understand the BIPOC students in their classrooms and hence miss the mark time and again. When this occurs, teachers are likely to externalize the feelings or suppress them in the name of "niceness" (Bissonnette, 2016). In either case, the feelings are transmitted to students. The emotions may be received and absorbed by students, but they are not named—a predicament that is ripe for psychological gaslighting (Calef & Weinshel, 1981).

The Landscape of Emotions in Teaching

Research reveals a common repertoire of beliefs and feelings that often surface among White teachers and their pre-service counterparts when confronted with race. It is this "the emotionality of Whiteness" (Matias & Zembylas, 2014, p. 10) that lurks just below the surface in classrooms across America, but that gets pushed down time and again in the interest of so-called organizational efficiency. Leonardo (2016) states that "in fact, white emotionality is perhaps the most egregious violation of Enlightenment principles because it represents the gateway practice leading to denial, failure to weigh social science evidence, and, ultimately, violence" (p. 11). Denial, shame, and disgust are three emotions that White teachers often experience.

Denial. Denial is perhaps the most predominant emotional stance, manifesting most frequently as color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Jupp et al., 2019; Picower, 2009; Schofield,

1986) and/or color-muteness (Pollock, 2004). Ullucci and Battey (2011) argue that while color blindness has often been sold as a positive, it only contributes to "a collective ignorance and relieves individuals from fighting against the impact of racism" (p. 1196). Matias (2013) puts a finer point on it: "How can white teachers teach students of color if they claim not to see color in the first place? Herein lies the problem of a liberal white teaching force that has yet to understand its Whiteness" (p. 13). Sleeter (1992), in her two-year study of 26 White teachers in a staff development program oriented toward multiculturalism, found that the teachers adopted a color-blind approach and viewed students of color as if they were White ethnic immigrants who would eventually assimilate into mainstream American society. Most of what Sleeter (1992) calls "resisting racial awareness" happens at the unconscious level and is emotionally taxing.

> Trying not to see what is obvious (color) and to suppress the negative and stereotypical imagery with which one is bombarded requires considerable psychological energy. Education about race conflicts with many white teachers' strategies of denial, compounded by the psychological energy they must expend to continue being 'blind' to color. (Sleeter 2005, p. 248)

McIntyre (1997a), in her study of 13 White undergraduate female student teachers, described how participants expressed a belief in racism as individual and attitudinal and resisted conceptualizing it as a system of power and advantage. She also noted that participants constructed difference based on a racial "other" and privileged their own feelings of discomfort when talking about racism. Bell (2002) in her investigation of preparing White teachers for multicultural classrooms, uses Feagin's (2001) phrase, "sincere fictions," to describe the unconscious attitudes of many White Americans who profess color blindness.

> These views are 'sincere' in that Whites who espouse them truly believe themselves to be color blind people who do not discriminate against others. They are "fictions" in that they ignore the enduring realities of racism in the United States in favor of an optimistic tale of continuous progress and social reform that bolsters images of white decency and goodness. (Bell, 2002, p. 237)

Denial can also manifest as anger, rage, fear, and the "shedding of false tears or no tears at all" (Matias, 2015, p. 13). DiAngelo (2018) created an umbrella term for such strong emotions: *White Fragility*, "a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (p. 54). These behaviors, she says, "function to reinstate white racial equilibrium" (p. 54). Educators, according to Matias (2016) "create their own versions of tears in the guise of benevolence, saviority, and heroism—a historical rhetoric so often employed in the domination of marginalized people" (p. 13).

Shame. Shame is one of the most powerful human emotions, but one that has received less attention in discussions of White responses to race. Thandeka (1999) writes about how White children are socialized in such a way as to confine them psychically:

> The Euro-American child . . . is a racial victim of its own white community of parents, caretakers, and peers, who attack it because it does not yet have a White racial identity. The only way to be accepted, and not rejected, in the White world, is to create a White identity. (p. 13)

Thandeka considers this phenomenon a form of abuse because it constrains a child's choices about how to view and act in the world. Importantly, Thandeka distinguishes between White guilt, which is a conscious recognition of having done something wrong, and White shame, which is unconscious and leaves no room for redemption, just a sinking feeling that one is deeply flawed. The result is that white people detach from themselves from conversations about race to avoid the possibility of being labeled racists (1999, p. 77), rather than channeling their psychic energy to addressing the longstanding problem of White supremacy. Crowley (2019) extends Thandeka's (1999) ideas about White shame to show how "White teachers' early experiences with race can inhibit White racial identity development and work against racial justice" (p. 180). Crowley reports instances in which teachers' interest in race was discouraged by people in the White community, or in which inquiries they made about race were met with

rebukes or silence. Therefore, it should not be surprising that many White teachers who have experienced rejection for their curiosity about race unwittingly carry shame into the classroom. Students of color, like their White teachers, may not understand consciously what is happening when a teacher treats them differently, but they do know it unconsciously and feel it deeply.

Disgust. Like shame, disgust is a complex emotion that involves having an aversion to someone or something. Matias and Zembylas (2014), in describing a juror's response in the wake of the not guilty verdict of the murder trial of Trayvon Martin, write, "Instead of displaying disgust, an emotion that is socially unacceptable and tantamount to racism, she displays pity for them, a more socially acceptable emotion that still objectifies and sentimentalizes the black Other while deflecting racist culpability" (p. 2). This a response with which the authors, both teacher educators, are familiar in their work in training teachers in the ideals and practices of social justice and equity. They point out that White female teachers often take pains to mask disgust. "Particularly, we explore how whiteness ideology among white teacher candidates in an urban teacher education program perverts their emotions of disgust to false claims of love, empathy, and caring" (p. 2), the very emotions that, in their authentic form, are considered the gold standard of cultural responsiveness. Other scholars have written about this phenomenon (Ahmed, 2004; Boler, 1999; Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Trainor, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999), positing that disgust works at the levels of both the individual and society and is both a physical and psychological state focused on rejecting "The Other" and reinforcing an "us- versus-them" dynamic (Ahmed, 2004). Clearly, the emotions that teachers feel have an enormous impact on their relationships with students, especially when teaching across difference.

The Teacher-Student Relationship (TSR)

> The direction to the right pew in education—like the real estate mantra of location, location, location—is relationships, relationships, relationships.
>
> —Comer, 2004, p. 2

Having explored the identities, dispositions, backgrounds, and emotions of teachers as individuals, we now pivot to the relationships between teachers and students, recognizing that learning is an inherently social process. From the moment we are born, our interactions with others shape our understanding of the world (Vygotsky, 1978). While scholars have known this for a long time, advances in neuroscience now validate that it is our relationships with others, especially in the earliest years of life, that shape the architecture of the maturing brain, wiring it for good or ill (Osher et al., 2020; Shonkoff, 2011). Simply put, responsive relationships are central to positive development *and* learning.

It should come as no surprise, then, that relationships between teachers and their students are of tremendous consequence. The *relational zone* is a term that has been employed to communicate the centrality of interpersonal caring to children's participation and learning in the zone of proximal development (Goldstein, 1999). H. Davis (2006) writes that "we find strong evidence to suggest teacher-child relationships influence social and cognitive outcomes as early as preschool and continue to influence students' social and intellectual development throughout childhood and adolescence" (p. 208). Hattie's (2009) acclaimed meta-analysis of 800 effective educational practices echoes the notion that the interaction between teacher and student is a highly significant part of the educational experience. Others go further to say that the teacher-student relationship is *the most* critical factor affecting the success of individual students (Chetty et al., 2011; Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2013; Jacob & McGovern, 2015; Marzano, 2007; Marzano et al., 2001; Marzano & Toth, 2013).

An Interdisciplinary Research Landscape

In the last four decades, scholars across the social science disciplines—psychology, sociology, social psychology, anthropology, education, and public health—have studied teacher-student relationships (TSR) through several theoretical lenses and an array of research methodologies. I will explore this research broadly to establish the grounding from which I will address the specific scholarship on the relationship between White teachers and BIPOC students. Most of the general literature resides in the quantitative, post-positivist tradition, wherein scholars take a granular approach to studying the effects of a range of direct and indirect variables to pinpoint what matters most in effective teacher-student relationships. While I was appreciative of the conclusions of these studies, I found many of them to be somewhat clinical and removed from daily classroom life in all its human complexity. Later, as I began delving into the literature on the specific relational dimensions between White teachers and BIPOC students, I realized that the majority of TSR studies rarely disaggregate data by race, though the analyses often parse grade level and gender. It appears to be the case, therefore, that the participants were predominantly European American and middle-class, with the assumption that what is true for them is true for everyone. This phenomenon casts doubt on the veracity and universality of the findings.

The smaller collection of qualitative studies on teacher-student relationships are in the form of case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and experimental narrative methods (Anderman et al., 2011; Bernstein-Yamashiro, 2004; Chhuon & Wallace, 2012; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; Gilligan, 2015; Kennedy, 2011; McHugh et al., 2013; Moje, 1996; Nicholas & Raider-Roth, 2016). Many of these studies were conducted at the middle and high school levels,

taking advantage of students' metacognitive and reflective capacities. Some of these studies centered BIPOC students and their relationships with White teachers.

Relationships Matter

Across both the quantitative and qualitative literature, strong evidence suggests that teacher-student relationships influence social and cognitive outcomes as early as preschool and continue to influence students' social and intellectual development throughout childhood and adolescence (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Bryk et al., 2010; H. Davis, 2006; Hattie, 2009; Reyes et al., 2012; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2015). The research also tells us that a high-quality relationship with at least one adult promotes school success (H. Davis, 2006; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Nichols, 2008; A. Ryan & Patrick, 2001).

Loosely speaking, the scholarly literature falls into four overarching themes: (a) the links between teacher-student relationships and academic achievement (Midgley et al., 1989; Muller et al.,1999; Hughes et al., 2008); (b) motivational theory as it connects to teacher-student relationships (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Gelbach et al., 2011; Klem & Connell, 2004; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Skinner & Belmont, 1993); (c) attachment, or applying what researchers have investigated about the parent-child relationship to teachers. (Ainsworth, 1978; Baker, 1999; Birch & Ladd, 1998; Bowlby, 1969; Kennedy, 2011; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997; Murray & Greenberg, 2001; Pianta, 1994; Pianta & Nimetz, 1991; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004); and (d) the interrelated constructs of belonging, care, and empathy (Anderman, 2003; Chhuon & Wallace, 2012; Goodenow, 1993; Hayes et al., 1994; Muller, 2001; Roeser et al., 1998; Ozer et al., 2008). In the next section, I will briefly describe the four themes mentioned above. Thereafter, I will look at what the research says specifically about TSR and students from marginalized and minoritized communities, including studies on the constructs of belonging, care, and empathy.

TSR's Relevance to Academic Achievement

Studies that explore the connection between the student-teacher relationship and academic achievement, particularly in literacy and math, are plentiful. They ask questions concerning how teachers and students each view their mutual relationship, and how this relationship affect students' subsequent academic performance (Midgely et al., 1989; Muller et al., 1999). Perhaps not surprisingly, findings suggest that students who perceive that their teachers are more supportive have better achievement outcomes on standardized math tests (Midgley et al., 1989) and English grades (Goodenow, 1993). In longitudinal research conducted by Wentzel (1998), perceived teacher support, compared with support from parents and peers, made the strongest contribution to student interest and engagement. In early adolescence, children's feelings about teacher support predict achievement expectancies and values, effort, engagement, and performance (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow, 1993; Murdock, 1999). Research has also shown that teacher's high expectations for their students correspond with better end-of-year grades (Wentzel, 2002), and negative aspects of teacher-student relationships correspond to worse student outcomes across achievement and motivational domains (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). In a longitudinal study of primarily African American middle school students, Roeser et al. (1996) demonstrated that the quality of relationships with teachers was predictive of emotional functioning as well as academic motivation and achievement.

TSR, Motivation, and Engagement

Within the body of scholarship on the factors that motivate children to learn, some studies focus on the teacher as a critical influencer (Anderman et al., 2011; H. Davis, 2006; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Gehlbach et al., 2011; Klem & Connell, 2004). In one study, middle school students' reports of teacher caring predict changes in motivational outcomes over two

years, even after controlling for previous academic performance and perceived control (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Wentzel, 1997). In examining the effects of teacher behavior, Skinner and Belmont (1993) found that teacher involvement was central to children's experiences in the classroom and helped predict children's motivation during the school year. Anderman et al. (2011) studied how effective high school teachers create classroom environments that students perceive as building and enhancing their motivation and engagement. In a recent study, students whose relationships with teachers improved over time reported greater academic motivation (Sethi & Scales, 2020). Sadly, the motivation research also suggests that children's intrinsic motivation for learning in school deteriorates from the time they enter kindergarten until they complete high school, with marked declines during the middle and high school transitions. According to Klem and Connell (2004), by high school, as many as 40–60% of students become chronically disengaged from school—urban, suburban, rural—not counting those who already dropped out (p. 262). The erosion of motivation can be traced, at least in part, to how school is structured; the developmental focus slowly fades as the teacher-student relationship becomes more transactional. This motivational decline is especially severe for boys and students from low socioeconomic, minority, and immigrant backgrounds (Roeser et al., 1996; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012).

Learner-Centered Approaches. Related to motivation, there has been a growing movement in US education reform (with corresponding movements in other countries) to make the classroom more student-centered (www.studentsatthecenterhub.org) and personalized (Pane et al., 2015) so that young people are in the driver's seat of their educational experience, engaged in tasks centered in rigor, relevance, and relationships. Of course, this is not entirely new; in 1997, the American Psychological Association (APA) issued its "Learner-Centered

Psychological Principles: A Framework for School Reform"; such is the cyclical (and often repetitive) nature of education reform. In the current context, what distinguishes student-centered learning is its promotion of student agency and empowerment; on the leading edge are ideas about the value of authentic student-adult partnerships in the learning process (Beattie, 2012; Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2003). To date, this research has focused primarily on students in Whiter and more homogeneous school environments, but efforts are underway to become more inclusive. In some ways, this strand of research harkens back to the call by earlier scholars such as Freire (1970, 1985), Giroux & Simon, 1988), Giroux and McLaren (1992), Lensmire (1998), and Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) to engage teachers and students in critical dialogues in which diverse "student voices would sound and be heard" (Lensmire, 1998, p. 261).

TSR and Attachment

Many articles on teacher-student relationships focus on the psychological and emotional attachment between teachers and students and treat learning as an inherently developmental process. Scholars in this field have transplanted constructs and methodologies from the attachment literature in psychology and child development into the school realm (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Birch & Ladd, 1998; Bowlby, 1969; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Pianta & Nimetz, 1991; Riley, 2013), testing for the parallels between the parent-child and teacher-student dyads. Most of these articles appear in psychology or school psychology journals, which may help explain the lack of attention to relational issues in the classroom, in addition to the fact that teachers, until very recently, have not typically been held accountable for matters beyond curriculum, instruction, and assessment. It is notable that there is woefully little research on attachment and BIPOC students, the standouts being Baker (1999), Crosnoe et al. (2004), Murray and Zvoch (2011), and Murray et al. (2016). As Kagan (2011) notes:

> A serious limitation of attachment theory is its failure to recognize the profound influences of social class, gender, ethnicity, and culture on personality development. These factors, independent of a mother's sensitivity, can be as significant as the quality of the early attachment. (p. 28)

Middle and High School Attachment. Attachment research on middle and high school students focuses on many of the same issues that are explored concerning the early years, such as relational patterns, relational quality, school transition issues, teacher influence, and the perceptions of teachers and students toward one another (Ang, 2005; Davidson et al., 2010; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997; Wentzel, 1997, 1998). As students gain greater capacity to express abstract thoughts and feelings in the upper grades, the research methods extend beyond teacher reporting and engage the students directly. For example, articles emphasize such questions concerning how perceptions of teachers' *and* students' investment in the relationship affect the productivity of the relationship (Muller, 2001; Muller et al., 1999). Other questions have to do with how student and teacher interactions promote or impede growth for both students and teachers (Baker, 1999; Bernstein-Yamashiro, 2004; Crosnoe et al., 2004; Kennedy, 2011; McHugh et al., 2013; Riley, 2010) and are highly relevant to this study.

The Intersection of TSR and Race

Several studies suggest that African American students generally have poorer quality relationships with teachers than do White students (Murray et al., 2016; Saft & Pianta, 2001). In Suarez-Orosco and Suarez-Orosco's (2009) large-scale study of newly arrived immigrants, ages 9 to 14, in 20 urban public middle and high schools, only 6% of the participants could name a teacher as someone they would go to with a problem; just 3% could identify a teacher who was proud of them. Other studies suggest that White teachers are more likely to view their relationships with all students more negatively than do teachers of color, regardless of student race (Mashburn et al., 2006; Murray et al., 2016). Moreover, emerging findings suggest that the

beneficial effects of teacher-student relationships may be more strongly associated with positive outcomes among students of color who face a greater variety of risk factors than their White counterparts. In other words, socially supportive relationships can serve an important protective function for children of color (Guest & Biasini, 2001; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Murray et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2008). Three interconnected and relational constructs in the TSR literature appear more frequently in the research on White teachers and BIPOC students: belonging, care, and empathy. I will highlight these constructs and their implications for my study.

Belonging and Students of Color

In his classic “motivational hierarchy,” psychologist Abraham Maslow (1968) put “love and belongingness needs” right after such basic needs as food and basic physical safety. Baumeister and Leary (1995) tell us that “real, potential or imagined changes in one’s belongingness status will produce emotional responses, with positive affect linked to increases in belongingness and negative affect linked to decreases in it” (p. 505). Relatively recent findings in neuroscience have validated these claims, demonstrating that, to our brains, the pain of social rejection is akin to the pain from a physical injury or illness; both register in the part of the brain known as the Dorsal Anterior Cingulate Cortex (Banks & Hirschman, 2016; Eisenberger et al., 2003). In other words, a sense of belonging is literally felt in the body. It stands to reason, then, that a student’s perception of belonging would be especially relevant to those whose very bodies make them a target in American society (Coates, 2015).

The literature about belonging and minoritized students is more plentiful in higher education than in the K–12 domain, but some studies are illuminating. For example, a few researchers have shown how a decrease in a sense of belonging among minoritized students has a negative impact on school transitions, susceptibility to school dropout, and low academic

achievement (Anderman, 2003; Booker & Lim, 2018; Honora, 2003; Kiefer et al., 2015). Other studies focus solely on the connection between students' feelings of belongingness and academic achievement (Byrd & Chavous, 2011; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). Work by Finn (1989) and Wehlage (1989; Wehlage et al., 1990) state quite explicitly that belonging could be the single most crucial factor in the motivation and engagement of certain categories of at-risk students. In a study on school belonging (also referred to as relatedness), Boston and Warren (2017) examined the relationship between the individual components of racial identity and sense of belonging on the academic achievement of 105 urban African American high school students. The authors employ the lens of racial identity theory (Sellers et al., 1998) to determine the significance and meaning that individuals attach to their group membership. This study suggests that students whose race is central to their self-concept feel more connected to their school because social support from fellow group members serves as a buffer to negative racial stigma. As a result, students may still feel a sense of belonging despite their perceptions of discrimination.

Some studies of belongingness beliefs (Battistich et al., 1997; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Nichols, 2006, 2008) reveal that minoritized students tend to benefit more from a sense of belonging than White students. That is, "the relation between beliefs of belonging and motivational indicators (whether students expect to be successful) was stronger for ethnic minority students than for white students" (Nichols, 2006, pp. 257–258). Goodenow and Grady (1993) looked at belonging in an urban working-class city with a large Hispanic and African American population. Using a scale called the PSSM (Psychological Sense of School Membership) to assess the sense of belonging, the researchers found that school belongingness scores in these schools were noticeably lower than those in the suburban white schools. Nichols

(2006) cautions that one cannot create a school environment that maximizes a sense of belonging until one has examined "the link between teachers' perceptions of their students' level of belongingness and students' own perceptions of belongingness—especially in schools where teachers and students are culturally dissimilar (p. 259). Nichols found that such perceptions, in fact, often do not align.

Care and Students of Color

That teachers care about their students is taken as core to the job description, but the vernacular definition of caring belies its true complexity. The construct of care originated in philosophy and ethics (Gilligan, 1982; Kittay & Myers, 1987; Mayeroff, 1971; Ruddick, 1998; Tronto, 1994) and has taken root in K–12 education, most notably with the contributions of Noddings (1984/2013, 1988, 1992, 2003, 2005), who writes about the imperative of an *ethic of care* in education. Her philosophy is summarized well here:

> Caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's. When we care, we consider the others' point of view, [her] objective needs, and what [she] expects of us. Our attention, our mental engrossment is on the cared-for, not on ourselves. Our reasons for acting, then, have to do both with the other's wants and desires and with the objective elements of [her] problematic situation . . . if our minds are on ourselves, however—if we have never really left our own a priori frame of reference—our reasons for acting point back at us and not outward to the cared for. (Noddings, 1984, p. 24)

Some theorists and practitioners have made the issue of care central to thinking about how teachers enact care (or fail to do so) in their relationships with students of color (Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Parsons, 2005; Pennington et al., 2012). Parsons (2005) looked at caring as a potential bridge for White teachers with their BIPOC students, and Gay (2010) identifies caring as one of the four dynamic elements of her Culturally Responsive Teaching Model. Culturally responsive *caring* is enacted when "teachers' attitudes and expectations (academic, personal, social, and ethical dimensions), as well as their pedagogical skills determine the tone, structure,

and quality of instruction. Caring teachers expect (highly), relate (genuinely), and facilitate (relentlessly)" (Gay, 2010, p. 47).

Caring in Middle and High School

Noguera (2003) and others have noted that having a strong, caring, and accountable relationship is at the core of successfully educating Black and Latino males, who are often considered either "dangerous or at-risk and needing to be saved" (Nelson, 2016, p. 1). *Subtractive Schooling*, Valenzuela's (1999) classic study of Mexican and Mexican American high school students focuses on how caring shaped the students' educational experience. She introduces "cariño," a concept advanced by education scholars studying Latinx and other immigrant youth that involves disrupting hegemonic and racist policies and reimagining practices that are more humanizing (Valenzuela, 1999). She describes the aspiration:

> An authentically caring pedagogy would . . . build cultural bridges wherever there are divisions and it would privilege biculturalism . . . [teachers] repositioning as students, rather than as teachers, of culture will invest them with the dispositions and knowledge that they need to have to maximize their effectiveness as both teachers and purveyors of cultural knowledge. (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 266)

Alder's (2002) qualitative study examined how caring relationships are created and maintained between middle school students and their teachers. Teachers are seen as caring when they know their students well, provide personalized leadership, teach to understanding and are academically helpful, and hold high expectations for behavior and achievement. Students in this study also said that teachers who had control of the classroom exercised caring, not allowing disruptive students to dominate.

In her research on middle school Latino students, Mercado (1993) illustrates how an ethic of caring had as much to do with the academic accomplishments of her students as her team's promotion of literacy and academic learning. Similarly, in their multimethod study about

adolescents' feelings of respect for and caring by teachers, Ozer et al. (2008) found that students respected teachers who possessed "engaging instructional styles and a commitment to student learning; most viewed even small efforts by teachers to get to know them as evidence of caring" (p. 438). For some students, it was significant that their teachers knew their names (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012) or wondered why they were absent. In two studies that investigated Latinx students' conceptions of care (Garrett et al., 2007; Garza, 2009), students said that teachers holding high expectations and helping them academically was the supreme demonstration of caring.

Caring is difficult to reconcile with American hyper-individualism, which tends to think of "virtues as personal possessions, hard-won through a grueling process of character-building" (Noddings, 2005). While Noddings and philosophers such as John Dewey (1930) have emphasized that virtues are developed only in relationship, it remains a hard sell in an environment of high-stakes testing and accountability. Rector-Aranda (2018) points out that "teachers face a dilemma of care when they must teach to the test and/or choose whether to focus most of their efforts on students who are likely to do better on these measures at the expense of helping those who are falling behind" (p. 3). Nieto (2008) commented on how good intentions can go awry in systems that are riddled with inequality: "at some moments when we think we are caring for students of color we actually are harming them because we are failing to counter a social structure that treats them unequally" (p. 1). Valenzuela (1999) is careful to distinguish between *aesthetic care*, which is mostly sentimental and manifests as lip service, and *authentic care*, a genuine consideration of and appreciation for the full capacities of the student being cared for. Toshalis (2012) challenges what he calls the "rhetoric of care." In describing his study of five preservice teachers in an urban high school in Boston, he notes "how seductive and

convincing the rhetoric of care can be, how easily teacher educators and researchers can be duped into accepting it as evidence of good teaching" (p. 9). Specifically, he observed that the teachers he was following kept referring to their students as street-smart and capable, which at first blush sounded like praise. The subtext, however, was more complex—the suggestion being that these students were an exception to the dysfunctional rule—a deficit orientation to be sure. The praise was thus more patronizing than it was an authentic expression of care (pp. 210–211). Similarly, Van Galen (1993) says the literature is littered with ‘‘examples of teachers who may have presumed that they were working in the best interests of their students but who misread situationally and culturally grounded behaviors of students of color, poor children, and female students’’ (p. 8). The construct of care requires care.

Empathy and Students of Color

According to a number of researchers, empathy is a critical tool for developing positive relationships between White teachers and BIPOC students (Arghode et al., 2013; Carter, 2009; B. Cooper, 2010; Dolby, 2012; Feshbach & Feshbach, 2011; Garza, 2009; Goroshit & Hen, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006; McAllister & Irvine, 2002; Milner, 2010; Warren, 2013, 2014b; Warren & Herd, 2022; Warren & Hotchkins, 2015). Several scholars (Carter, 2009; G. Howard, 2007; T. C. Howard, 2010, 2013, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Marx & Pray, 2011; McAlinden, 2012; Tettegah, 2007; Tettegah & Anderson, 2007) have argued that effective teachers of BIPOC students utilize empathy in their classrooms, even if these teachers do not name empathy per se as a factor in their teaching. In an article about teacher candidates, Warren (2018) bemoans the fact that "the construct of empathy receives far too little attention in teacher education for its advantages to improving how teachers flexibly respond to and communicate with youth across racial and cultural difference" (p.169) and wonders why the gap in the literature on empathy

persists "despite increased admonition that teachers working with youth in multicultural schooling contexts develop empathy" (p. 170).

Warren and Lessner (2014) note the challenge of pinpointing concrete strategies for enacting empathy in the classroom. They introduce an approach called "Family Business (FB)," a daily classroom routine that helps teachers build rapport with students in a group setting and offers a "platform for teachers to access the most intimate, discreet aspects of students' real-life experiences—the facets of their personal lives that institutional and instructional norms tend to mute" (p. 122).

> During FB, the classroom is transformed into one large living room where students offer personal insights, critiques, and observations most adults in the school are hard pressed to find elsewhere. FB is structured to afford students the space in school to be completely transparent without fear of judgment or backlash. Students get to tell their own stories, through their own eyes, using the words and forms of expression they feel are most appropriate to adequately communicate their ideas and experiences. (Warren & Lessner, 2014, p. 123)

FB is intended as a form of community building and perspective-taking that can ultimately improve academic achievement because it improves the quality of students' experiences and increases motivation for learning. The teacher's primary role is to establish and maintain a sense of belonging for all students, with focused attention on setting mutually developed norms. Topics brought to FB can vary widely: loss of loved ones; what students ate for dinner; movies they saw; problems with family members; discipline issues; grades; new clothes. FB is designed as a judgment-free zone in which listening and asking questions are the coin of the realm.

Delgado advanced the concept of "false empathy" (California Law Review, 1996) to describe "an individual's tendency to think, believe, and act as if he or she possesses more empathy than what can be personally confirmed or validated by: (a) the beneficiaries of the empathetic response, or (b) positive outcomes resulting from the individual's application of empathy in social relationships" (p. 267). Delgado (1996) elaborates:

> False empathy is worse than none at all, worse than indifference. It makes you overconfident, so that you can easily harm the intended beneficiary. You are apt to be paternalistic, thinking you know what the other really wants or needs. You can easily substitute your own goal for his. You visualize what you would want if you were he, when your experiences and needs are radically different. (p. 31)

In their study on how false empathy manifested in the classrooms of eight White teachers in two different urban school settings, Warren and Hotchkins (2015) saw that teachers' "conceptions and application of empathy to their interactions with stakeholders of color can lead to the unconscious cultivation of false empathy" (p. 268). For White teachers to be successful, they must "be given space in teacher education to develop the skill of empathizing with others who may be very different from them; learning how to engage in perspective taking in cultural communities that are not their own" (p. 274).

To summarize, the constructs of belonging, care, and empathy share a human-centered, relational, and moral orientation that helps us understand classroom dynamics that may not be readily visible. The research strongly suggests that all students can benefit from feeling a sense of belonging and of being known and cared for, and that students who have been marginalized and demeaned by the larger culture can benefit even more. A popular administrator in the Boston Public Schools, paraphrasing Delpit (1995), told an audience that her job was to help her faculty learn to "love someone else's child" (L. McIntyre, 2015). This notion is echoed in the literature by scholars of color such as Matias and Liou (2015), Matias and Allen (2013, 2016), Duncan-Andrade (2009), Freire (1993), hooks (1994), Love (2019), and Valenzuela (1999), who insist that teachers must feel genuine love for their students. The operable question then is, if the scholarship is clear that positive teacher-student relationships are central to the success of BIPOC students, why do so many White teachers struggle to *truly* connect with students who do not share their racial identity?

Deficit Thinking: The Roots of Racism

> They are in effect still trapped in a history which they do not understand and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men. . . . Many of them indeed know better, but as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case the danger in the minds and hearts of most white Americans is the loss of their identity.
>
> –James Baldwin, 1962

To better understand the gap between what we know is important for building strong teacher-student relationships and the reality of the relationships between White teachers and BIPOC students, we must consider the broader socio and historical context that informs their interactions. Across the centuries, a conversation has persisted among scholars, scientists, and experts in a variety of fields on whether Black and Brown people were born genetically inferior or whether their lower status was due to cultural deficits and deprivation (Valencia, 1997). This worldview has been named "deficit thinking," an endogenous theory that blames the individual as opposed to looking at the systems and structures that are highly inhibiting (Valencia, 1997).

As deficit thinking took hold in the larger culture, it also bled into the nation's classrooms. For much of the 19th century, when public education began in the US, racial minorities were largely excluded: in the south, "compulsory ignorance" laws were passed and, in the north, Blacks were allowed to be educated only in segregated schools and classrooms, as codified by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 (Valencia, 1997, p. 37). By the beginning of the 20th century, most Black children were attending segregated schools, and by 1920, this right was extended to Mexicans, Asians, and Native Americans. The seeds of White superiority and Black, Brown, and Indigenous inferiority were sown, justified by White economic interests and ideological beliefs about racial purity. What solidified and catalyzed the spread of these cultural notions about intelligence was the arrival of the first intelligence test on US shores in 1916, when

Stanford University Professor Lewis Terman adapted what had been developed in Europe to create the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) Test that is still widely used today. Terman reported that 80% of the immigrants he tested were "feeble-minded," concluding:

> Their dullness seems to be racial, or at least in the family stock from which they come. The fact one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans, and Negroes [sic] suggests quite forcibly that the whole question of racial differences in mental differences will have to be taken up anew. . . . Children of this group should be segregated in special classes. . . . They cannot master abstractions, but they can often be made efficient workers. (Terman, 1922, as cited in Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016, p. 597)

Pathologizing Practices

This phase of American history is characterized by what Valencia (1997) calls "the genetic pathology model" period (p. 40), when differences measured by tests were attributed largely to heredity. Terman was joined by many other influential and "progressive" scholars of the time, including Charles Davenport, Stanley Hall, and Edward Thorndike, all of whom subscribed to the American eugenics movement and were generously supported by the federal government and philanthropic foundations. As a result, several generations of school psychologists and administrators were trained to see students through this deficit lens (Valencia, 1997, p. 41). The impact of deficit thinking is what Shields et al. (2005) call "pathologizing practices," which they define as follows:

> Pathologizing is a process where perceived structural-functional, cultural, or epistemological deviation from an assumed normal state is ascribed to another group as a product of power relationships, whereby the less powerful group is deemed to be abnormal in some way. Pathologizing is a mode of colonization used to govern, regulate, manage, marginalize, or minoritize primarily through hegemonic discourses. (p. 119)

The history of deficit thinking and pathologizing practices echoes in the halls of today's schools and classrooms. At the school level, deficit ideology is expressed in myriad ways. Minoritized students are routinely tracked into low-level classes (Oakes, 1985), overidentified for special education referral and placement (Hughley & Larwin, 2021), or misdiagnosed

altogether (Beljian, 2021; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). Moreover, "African American boys in special education (excluding gifted and talented programs) are more than twice their representation in the overall public-school population" (Jackson et al., 2014, p. 396). Similarly, they are under-identified for gifted and talented programs relative to White students (Hopkins & Garrett, 2010; Milner & Ford, 2005; Nicholson-Crotty, 2016; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). In addition, poor BIPOC students are more likely to have an unqualified or underqualified teacher in critical 21st-century subject areas such as mathematics and science (Oakes et al., 1990). A 2014 study issued by the Center for American Progress (Partee, 2014) reinforced the fact that low-income BIPOC students not only receive less experienced mathematics teachers but also are more likely to have ineffective mathematics teachers. Thus, it is unsurprising that, for example, Black and Latino males have the lowest high school graduation rate of all reported ethnic groups and genders (Curran & Kitchin, 2018).

Perhaps most egregiously, BIPOC students are disproportionately disciplined and frequently given much harsher punishments than their White peers, a phenomenon that has come to be known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Kim et al., 2010). Black male students are more likely than any other population to be suspended or expelled from school (Gregory et al., 2010; Milner, 2013; Noguera, 2008). Specifically, they are twice as likely as their White peers to be suspended and three times as likely to be expelled (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2006, as cited in Pollack, 2009). Sáenz and Ponjuan (2011) report that 49.5% of Black and 29.6% of Latino male students in grades 6 to 12 were suspended from school. Black girls are six times more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts (Crenshaw et al., 2015). In addition, nationally, Black girls are "four times more likely to be arrested, three times more likely to receive corporal punishment, three times more likely to be referred to law enforcement,

and twice as likely to be physically restrained than white girls" (The African American Policy Forum, n.d.). They are mostly cited for small infractions such as defiance and inappropriate dress (Annamma et al., 2019; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). On this point, Kendi (2019) describes a clash with his White third-grade teacher when he sat, uncharacteristically, in silent resistance after witnessing the teacher's blatant disrespect of a Black female classmate.

> Looking back, I wonder, if I had been one of her White kids, would she have asked me: "What's wrong?" Would she have wondered if I was hurting? I wonder. I wonder if her racist ideas chalked up my resistance to my Blackness and therefore categorized it as a misbehavior, not distress. With racist teachers, misbehaving kids of color do not receive inquiry and empathy and legitimacy. We receive orders and punishments and "no excuses," as if we are adults. (pp. 47–48)

Of course, many White teachers defend their actions as following the school's rules. Gay (2010) explains:

> While most teachers are not blatant racists, many probably are cultural hegemonists. They expect all students to behave according to the school's cultural standards of normality. When students of color fail to comply, the teachers find them unlovable, problematic, and difficult to honor or embrace without equivocation . . . teachers want to correct and compensate for their cultural deprivations. (p. 46)

Teacher Expectations

What teachers expect from students is consequential for a host of reasons. First, expectations affect judgment, which in turn affects how students are graded and treated in the classroom and how they come to see themselves as learners (Peterson et al., 2016, p. 124). When teachers have lower expectations for specific groups of students, they may treat those students differently. Research by Good and Brophy (1978, 1990) found strong evidence of such differential treatment, identifying 17 ways that teachers responded differently to students for whom they had low (compared to high) expectations. Similarly, Turner et al. (2015) found that teachers often set high-level learning tasks when they have high expectations but low-level tasks when they have low expectations. Morrow and Torres (1995) found evidence that the ethnic and

socioeconomic backgrounds of students have a significant bearing on how students are perceived and treated by the teachers and other adults who work with them in school. Similarly, Minor (2014) looked at racial differences in teacher perception of student ability, asking to what extent kindergarten teachers rate Black and White students' academic ability and social and behavioral skills differently and to what extent test scores, teacher perceptions in the fall of students' academic ability, and social and behavioral skills explain racial differences in teacher evaluations of students' academic ability in the spring of kindergarten (p. 1). Sadly, the study found that teachers perceived Black students to have lower academic ability in both the fall and the spring of kindergarten compared to White students. The same was true for social and behavioral skills. Black students behaving well seems to have a larger influence on teacher perceptions of academic ability than it does for White students. It is easy—and very sobering—to imagine how such distorted relational dynamics established so early on in a student's schooling could lead to an inexorable march from the classroom to a prison cell.

Self-Fulfilling Prophesy

Scholarship on the power of expectations illuminates what can happen when a teacher does not respect or value a student and/or presumes inferiority. Merton (1968), a sociologist, first coined the term "self-fulfilling prophesy" to describe "a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true" (p. 477). Merton was primarily studying racial discrimination, employing a parable about a run on the US banks to draw a parallel to race; he pointed out that, just as "depositors fail to realize that their own panicked withdrawals cause the bank to collapse, whites fail to realize that their own racial discrimination makes African Americans seem intellectually inferior" (Hedström et al., 2009, p. 294). Bringing similar ideas to education, Rist (1970) studied the relationship between the

socioeconomic status of students and how their teachers evaluated them, concluding that expectations of a child's path through school was determined *as early as the second week of kindergarten*, based on a teacher's placement of them in the "fast" or "slow" learners' groups. Not surprisingly, White middle-class teachers placed White middle-class students in the fast group and poor students of color in the lower two groups.

Likewise, in psychology, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) introduced the "Pygmalion Effect" to describe their theory that teachers' higher expectations of students lead to higher performance, or conversely, that teachers' lower expectations lead to poorer performance and that "powerful self-fulfilling prophecies may selectively occur among students from stigmatized social groups" (Jussim & Harber, 2005, p. 131). Though aspects of Rosenthal and Jacobson's initial theory and its replicability have been disputed by subsequent researchers (Jussim & Harber, 2005), the basic idea has stood the test of time.

In a MetLife Survey (MetLife & Harris Interactive, 2010) of more than 1,000 K–12 teachers, 86% of teachers said that there is a strong relationship between having "high expectations for all students" and their achievement, but only 36% of teachers said that "all of their students" can achieve academic success. In addition, only 13% of teachers said they believed that "all of their students are motivated to succeed academically" (p. 9). Similarly, a longitudinal study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that "students whose high school teachers had high expectations of them graduated from college at three times the rate of those whose teachers had low expectations" (Boser et al., 2014, p. 2), with teacher expectations being even more predictive than student motivation or effort. Specifically, teachers deemed Black and Hispanic students 47 and 42% less likely to graduate than White students, respectively (Boser et al., 2014). Most recently, Gershenson and Papageorge (2018), in three

related analytic approaches that isolated a range of variables to probe correlation and causation, found that college completion rates are systematically higher for students whose teachers had higher expectations for them and that White teachers have much lower expectations for Black students than they do for White students in similar situations:

> White teachers were 9 percentage points less likely to expect a black student to earn a college degree than their black colleagues when both teachers were evaluating the same student—on average, 33 percent of black teachers expected the student to finish college, compared to 24 percent of white teachers. We also find that these biases were slightly more pronounced for black male students than for black female students. (para. 18)

Sadly, when assumptions about a particular group's supposed inferiority are so ubiquitous, "the less powerful groups come to accept that the differences in levels of power and economic wealth within a society are natural and just, and so will consent to the rule of their 'betters'" (Shields et al., 2005, p. 7). School failure is thus blamed on and internalized by minoritized students, who develop a distorted understanding of themselves. Steele (1997) coined the term "stereotype threat" to describe this phenomenon:

> It is the social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype. . . . It is a situational threat—a threat in the air—that, in general form, can affect the members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists. . . . Where bad stereotypes about these groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype. And for those who identify with the domain to which the stereotype is relevant, this predicament can be self-threatening. (p. 614)

This very phenomenon was studied by Steele and Aronson (1995), who conducted research on the impact of societal stereotypes on college women's achievement and subsequently, on the achievement of other groups. When participants were reminded of common stereotypes about their group (for example, that women do not perform well on math exams), their performance plummeted because they felt self-conscious and overly cautious. Steele and Aronson (1995) propose that this "stereotype threat" is most salient for those students who care

most about performing well. The scholars subsequently tested many other groups of participants, including BIPOC college students, with consistent results.

A few studies have been undertaken to test whether stereotype threat is applicable to K–12 students. Gross (1993) studied math performance for students in a racially integrated suburb for two years. In the fourth grade, 92% of Blacks and 86% of Whites who were above grade level on the number of math competencies that they had mastered scored in the eighth and nineth stanines (i.e., ninths) of the state standardized exam (p. 279). By sixth grade, 82% of White students who were above grade level in completion of competencies were still in the eighth and nineth h stanines, but only 68% of Black students reached that level on the standardized exam. Gross found there was a clear discrepancy between those scores and students' in-school performance, pointing to the unreliability of using ability-group placements based only on test scores. In focus groups with middle and high school students, the research team found that, despite their wishes to do well, Black students experienced lower expectations from teachers. "This was particularly true for the honors-level Black students who reported that each year they had to prove they were capable of doing honors work" (Gross, 1993, p. 282). Ferguson (2003) offers that Steele's (1998) theory could explain why Black sixth graders who were above grade level on classroom competencies got lower test scores than White peers with the same competence levels.

Likewise, Kellow and Jones (2005) investigated whether African American high school freshmen experienced stereotype threat when given a test seen as a predictor of success on a high-stakes exam, concluding that the achievement gap may be explained, in part, by the stereotype threat felt by African American students during high-stakes exams because their anxiety prevented them from demonstrating their true abilities. Similarly, Anderson and Martin

(2018), in their study of gifted Black girls, highlight the ways that their perfectionism can be psychologically distressing in the K–12 setting—and specifically, how perfectionism and stereotype threat conspire to hamper the achievement, emotional well-being, and motivation of these students.

Implicit Racial Bias

Many studies have explored the effects of teachers' *explicit* expectations on student achievement (Jussim et al., 2009; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Okonofua et al., 2016; Rubie-Davies et al., 2006), but only recently has *implicit* bias in the K–12 classroom become a serious area of study. The term "implicit bias" was coined in 1995 by Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald, psychologists who argue that social behavior is significantly influenced by unconscious associations and judgments (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Greenwald and Krieger (2006) tell us that there are two forms of "implicit cognition" relevant to race: implicit attitudes—that is, the tendency to like or dislike members of a racial group; and implicit stereotypes, or the association of a group with a particular trait (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Implicit attitudes and stereotypes can be automatically activated in one's mind (Devine, 1989), leading to implicit bias or prejudicial behaviors or judgments (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Thus, people can exhibit implicit bias even when they do not consciously endorse the underlying attitude or stereotype (Devine, 1989; Dovidio et al., 2002). The research on implicit bias has progressed significantly with the advent of the readily accessible Implicit Association Test (IAT) (implicit.harvard.edu).

Van den Bergh et al. (2010) assessed teachers' general implicit prejudiced attitudes toward different ethnic groups, using the IAT, finding that teachers' implicit ethnic attitudes correlated with student achievement. Another study (Peterson et al., 2016) showed that students

in classrooms of teachers with high expectations did perform better in reading at the end of the year and that these effects were found across all ethnic groups. In contrast, “students’ mathematics achievement scores were largely unrelated to teachers’ explicit expectations; teachers’ implicit prejudiced attitudes predicted student performance. Specifically, students benefited most academically when their teachers’ implicit biases favored the ethnic group to which the student belonged” (p. 123).

In 2016, four scholars issued a manifesto of sorts, urging education scholars to apply implicit bias research to the study of K–12 schools and teachers (Warikoo et al., 2016): “Studying implicit racial associations in schools is likely to provide a productive new perspective for understanding why and when teachers and other school personnel engage in behaviors that reproduce racial inequality, often in spite of best intentions and commitments to racial equity” (Abstract). They cited several reasons for their sense of urgency. First, implicit associations toward low-achieving groups can potentially lead to educational inequality “not only because they are automatic and difficult to control, but also because they are pervasive” (p. 2). Second, most previous research on teacher expectations has focused on teacher reports, which may not capture the full picture and may also explain why even the most genuine efforts by teachers to reduce disparities may fall short. Third, “implicit racial associations are likely to affect student outcomes because they consistently correlate with problematic feelings and behaviors that emerge during interracial interactions” (p. 3). In the case of White teachers, their lack of proximity to and comfort with cross-race relationships is likely revealed in the classroom, jeopardizing the teacher-student relationships that are so critical to student success. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly in my estimation, because of teachers’ working conditions—having to make quick decisions in highly stressful environments—the impact of implicit bias can be more

damaging than it would be in lower-stress environments where the space between stimulus and response is more expansive. One can easily imagine how this phenomenon is magnified in low-resource communities with poorly funded schools that disproportionately serve minoritized students. The cognitive and emotional load can be heavy, potentially jeopardizing the interactions between teacher and student. To wit, researcher Loewenberg-Ball (2018) set out to investigate the number of judgments a teacher is asked to make on any given school day. In an elementary math class that she teaches, Loewenberg-Ball counts 20 moments within the time span of a minute and a half when she had to make a snap decision about how to respond to a student. The human dynamics were complicated, and though Loewenberg-Ball managed them with aplomb, she points to how easily implicit bias can creep into the classrooms of even the most race-conscious teachers.

Warikoo et al. (2016) call for more research on, for example, the connection between teacher implicit bias and student achievement, sense of belonging, student self-efficacy, and disciplinary and special education referrals. They urged scholars to also study "the relative importance of educators' implicit racial associations compared to other drivers of racial inequality in education such as poverty, teacher training, and school funding, as well as how these drivers interact with educators' implicit racial associations" (p. 6). Finally, they encourage scholars to invent and test methods to interrupt implicit bias, pointing to several low-cost interventions from social psychology that have engendered surprisingly large effects (Devine et al., 2012; Yeager & Walton, 2011).

A study by Okonofua et al. (2016) did just that, demonstrating that when teachers were more empathetic with minoritized students, especially regarding discipline, suspension rates were cut in half among adolescents. In a similar study, researchers tested the connection between

teacher-student relationships and learning outcomes based on the insight that "when people perceive themselves as similar to others, greater liking and closer relationships typically result" (Gelbach et al., 2016, p. 1). In a randomized field experiment, the authors examined the affiliations between 315 ninth-grade students and their 25 teachers. Students in the treatment condition received feedback on five similarities that they shared with their teachers; each teacher received parallel feedback regarding about half of his/her ninth-grade students. Five weeks after the intervention, those in the treatment conditions perceived greater similarity with their counterparts. Moreover, when teachers received feedback about their similarities with specific students, they perceived better relationships with those students, and those students earned higher course grades. Exploratory analyses suggest that these effects are particularly salient in relationships between teachers and their "underserved" students. Stunningly, this brief—and cost-free—intervention appears to have closed the achievement gap at the school by over 60%. In other words, while implicit bias is stubborn, it is also malleable under the right set of circumstances and with thoughtful prompts.

White teachers must understand that their own expectations of students of color can have an enormous impact on their academic success. While explicit bias may rear its ugly head on occasion, it is *implicit* bias that is likely to cause incalculable harm, especially to students who desire to do well. In the words of Matias (2013), "White teachers must 'check' themselves before they wreck themselves" and their students of color (p. 69).

Asset-Based Pedagogies

Starting in the early 1970s and 1980s, scholars such as J. Banks (1993), Sleeter and Grant (1987), Gay (1988), Cortes (1991), and others critiqued the American education system for its deficit orientation and for using "a cultural, historical, and inclusion lens that did not recognize

the importance of non-White groups in school curriculum" (Howard & Navarro, 2016, p. 4). This was a transformative period, coming on the heels of the civil rights and anti-war movements, because it anticipated the demographic changes in US schools and recognized that teaching and learning would need to be responsive to a far more diverse population (J. Banks, 2004.) In the early 1980s, a new language of *multiculturalism* took hold, with terms such as *culturally appropriate* (Au & Jordan, 1981), *culturally congruent* (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), and *culturally compatible* (C. Jordan, 1985), describing approaches to instruction that scholars employed to affirm the cultural characteristics of non-White students. For example, K. Au (1980) studied how teachers in Hawaii drew on language practices common in Native speech called "talk story" to help students make the distinction between their home language and that of the wider world with which they would be called upon to interact. The result of this early work was to empower students, leading to significant increases in reading achievement. By imagining a different way to think about educating students of color (Banks & Banks, 2015; Shields et al., 2005; Sleeter, 1991, 1992, 1994, 2014, 2018; Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995), multicultural education provided an important landmark in research, theory, and practice because it promoted the idea that "students of color possess a rich, complex, and robust set of cultural practices, experiences, and knowledge that are essential for learning and understanding, a concept that challenged racial pathologies often used to explain disparate school outcomes between White students and students of color" (Howard & Navarro, 2016, pp. 4–5). This reframing, also known as the "cultural difference paradigm," and the accompanying vocabulary gained traction and served as a critical building block for the waves of research that followed.

Over time, many education scholars have contributed to this literature (W. Au, 2009; J. Banks, 1993; Banks & Banks, 2015; Delpit, 1995; Freire, 1993; Gay, 1997, 2010, 2016; hooks,

1994; Irvine, 1990, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Murrell, 2002; Nieto, 1999, 2010; Nieto & Bode, 2007; Paris & Alim, 2017; Sleeter, 1994, 2014, 2018; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Even though the specific pedagogies and practices have distinctive features, they are highly aligned in affirming students' identities, advocating for student achievement to occur while keeping students' cultural integrity intact, and honoring "the idea that students of color possess a rich, complex, and robust set of cultural practices, experiences, and knowledge that are essential for learning and understanding" (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017, p. 4). Embedded in these pedagogies and instructional practices is teachers' attunement to the relational dimensions of classroom life. I will describe three of the most widely known frameworks below.

Figure 2.1

The Fundamentals of Culturally Relevant Education

The fundamentals of culturally relevant education. Reprinted from Kotluk, N. & Kocakaya, S. (2018). Culturally relevant/responsive education: What do teachers think in Turkey? *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies, Istanbul, 5*(2), 100. Copyright 2018 by the *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*. Reprinted with permission.

Cultural Relevance and Competence

Ladson-Billings (1992) describes Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) as “a pedagogy of opposition”. It is also, she says, “specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment” (p. 160):

> Culturally relevant teaching fosters the kind of social interactions in the classroom that support the individual in the group context. Students feel a part of the collective effort designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence. As members of an extended family, the students assist, support, and encourage one another. The entire group rises and falls together. (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 76)

CRP has three components: academic achievement/student learning, cultural competence, and socio-political critical consciousness. All three of these components must be present for culturally relevant teaching. The achievement component is focused on students’ academic growth, which is, after all, the crux of the school experience. Ladson-Billings (2021) points out that her own definition of academic growth is not connected to scores on high-stakes tests but rather determined by whether a teacher has moved students to greater levels of knowledge and skill from the beginning of the school year to the end. In her view, academic achievement and content coverage are not synonymous. The second component—cultural competence—is what Ladson-Billings (2021) says is the most misunderstood of the three components in that many teachers believe that the process is simply about representing diverse cultures in the classroom. According to Ladson-Billings (2021), it is a far more complex proposition:

> Cultural competence means that students are secure in their knowledge and understanding of their own culture—language, traditions, histories, culture, and so forth, AND are developing fluency and facility in at least one other culture. In the case of minoritized students that other culture is typically the mainstream culture. It should be noted that White students are not exempt from developing cultural competence. All students will be thrust into a diverse, multicultural world where they will need to understand the culture of those different from themselves. (p. 71)

The third component of culturally relevant pedagogy is socio-critical or critical consciousness. This is perhaps the deepest, most demanding, and, as Ladson-Billings would say,

most ignored of the three components in that it requires teachers to help students understand the larger context of and the rationale for learning about the world.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching begins with the premise that all students if provided the right supports in the classroom, can achieve at high levels. For White teachers of BIPOC students, this requires significant changes in classroom culture, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teacher mindset. According to Gay (2016), culturally responsive teaching is not an add-on or a sporadic event; instead, it is a "deliberate, explicit, systematic, and sustained" way of doing business in the classroom (p. 291), "part of all subjects and skills taught at all grade level" (p. 291). Culturally responsive teaching insists that learning is a developmental and collaborative process that addresses the psychological, social, emotional, political, and cultural domains of each student and is highly attuned to their contexts and lived experiences. Teachers guided by culturally responsive teaching have high expectations of students and support students in meeting the demands in an authentically caring manner. Instead of being judged by a single assessment system, students are taught to understand themselves as learners and to assess their own progress; likewise, the teacher synchronizes assessments to students' preferred ways of demonstrating what they know, based on their communication and participation styles. Teachers in classrooms informed by culturally responsive teaching make a commitment to developing in students "an intolerance for all kinds of oppression" (Gay, 2016, p. 291). Hammond (2015) describes it as follows:

> An educator's ability to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing. All the while, the educator understands the importance of being in a relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning. (p. 15)

Cultural Sustaining Pedagogy and Practice

Building on the work of Ladson-Billings (1995), Gay and Howard (2000), and others (A. Ball, 1995; Heath, 1983; Moll et al., 1992) who reside in the field of asset pedagogies, Paris (2012) and Paris and Alim (2014) issue a "loving critique" (p. 85) of earlier approaches with a new term, *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CSP). Paris (2012) defines it as follows:

> Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. In the face of current policies and practices that have the explicit goal of creating a monocultural and monolingual society, research and practice need equally explicit resistances that embrace cultural pluralism and cultural equality. (p. 93)

In seeking an approach that is attuned to how learners' identities and cultures evolve, Paris (2012) posits that culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies have not gone far enough in their "orientation to the languages and literacies and other cultural practices of students and communities to ensure the valuing and maintenance of our increasingly multiethnic and multilingual society" (p. 94). In other words, he wonders if the pedagogy and practice under this umbrella are truly leading to the preservation of African American, Latinx, Indigenous American, Asian American, and Pacific Islander American cultures, as opposed to contributing to the assimilation project that is the natural default of schools. Similarly, he wonders whether the critical stance and attention to power inequities remain on the field's radar. Paris (2012) views culturally sustaining pedagogy as a both/and pedagogy, believing that as students become steeped in culture and tradition, they must also have access to the practices of the dominant society to make their way in the world. In some ways, culturally sustaining pedagogy is a commentary on language, as Paris (2012) questions whether *relevance* is an outdated term, much as *tolerance* was removed from the multicultural lexicon many years ago. Culturally sustaining pedagogy can thus be seen as a natural iteration and a way to reinvigorate the field for a new generation. The language is also in synch with the renewed commitment, in some circles, to

environmental matters —away from the habits of a disposable society and toward an emphasis on what lasts and how we best steward precious resources.

The translation of culturally sustaining pedagogy from theory into classroom practice has not yet been researched fully, albeit with a few exceptions. Zoch (2015) examines how four urban elementary teachers in a predominantly Latinx and low-resource community designed literacy instruction to both maintain students' language and cultural practices while also preparing them for high-stakes testing. It is noteworthy that the teachers in the study disagreed with the district's decision to focus on test preparation; all of them found creative ways to circumvent the traditional workbooks. They typically selected culturally relevant texts to introduce concepts such as "schema," "evidence," and "prediction" and reminded students to pick up context cues. They also engaged in dialogue with students, encouraging them to make connections between the text and their own lives—a strategy that was frowned upon by the administration. One teacher created a literature unit on "Everyday Heroes" to highlight role models from non-dominant groups. About that teacher, she said, "She wants her students to understand that what they are doing is something they have already been doing, but now they are seeing how it looks on the test" (Zoch, 2015, p. 611). Another study (McCarty & Lee, 2014), referenced by Zoch, focuses on how teachers used the lens of culturally sustaining pedagogy in Native American communities. Some of the strategies that were deployed included integrating Native perspectives and culture in the curriculum, teaching Native languages, and building a sense of belonging and community. Other strategies in this vein include incorporating hip-hop into the curriculum (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2000; Emdin, 2016; Irizarry, 2009; Love, 2015) and family storytelling (Strekalova-Hughes & Wang, 2019). Paris and Alim best summarize culturally sustaining pedagogy as a strategy to help young people thrive, "but it is

also centrally about love, a love that can help us see our young people as whole versus broken when they enter schools, and a love that can work to keep them whole as they grow and expand who they are and can be through education" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 14).

Exemplary Teachers of BIPOC Students

Studies of exemplary teachers of minoritized children might be viewed as counternarratives that draw inspiration from what has been written about educators of color in both segregated and desegregated schools. Irvine (2003) encouraged White educators to look through their "third eye," to see their students of color through "the cultural eyes" of their Black and Brown colleagues. As previously mentioned, prior to the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education*, many students of color had ready access to teachers of color. Sadly, the new law resulted in the widespread dismissal of approximately 38,000 black teachers and administrators across the south (Horsford, 2010; Tillman, 2004), representing 35 to 50% of the teaching force in the southern states that had mandated segregation (New America Foundation, December 14, 2020). The unintended consequence of *Brown v. Board of Education* was to eliminate a large swath of the teacher workforce, thereby depriving students of color of the very role models who could enable their success.

Exploring this phenomenon, Foster (1993, 1997), Irvine (1990, 2002, 2003), Irvine and Irvine (1983), Siddle Walker (1996, 2001) and others have written about the many positive attributes of segregated schools, most notably the way in which teachers intentionally built relationships with their students based on shared history, shared values, and shared community. They describe the attributes of a "warm demander" (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Collins, 1990; Delpit, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Kleinfeld, 1975; Vasquez, 1988; Ware, 2002, 2006) a reference to effective, culturally responsive teachers who "provide a tough-minded, no-nonsense, structured

and disciplined classroom environment for kids whom society had psychologically and physically abandoned" (Irvine & Fraser, 1998, p. 56). Kleinfeld (1975) introduced the concept of "warm demander" to describe the type of teacher who was effective in teaching Athabaskan Indian and Eskimo ninth graders in Alaskan schools "with a combination of warmth and high expectations" (Kleinfeld, 1975). Over time, the phrase "warm demander" has shifted toward describing effective African American teachers of African American students in underfunded urban schools.

White and BIPOC Outlier Teachers

Scholars began studying White and BIPOC outliers beginning in the early 1990s, when Ladson-Billings (1995) documented the experiences of eight teachers in a small, predominantly African American, low-income elementary school district in California. The teachers were identified through a community nomination process (Foster, 1991) in which parents from local churches suggested teachers they thought were exemplary. Their criteria: that the teacher behaved respectfully toward their children, and that their children demonstrated enthusiasm for learning. This process was triangulated by asking principals and teachers the same question, though their criteria were quite different: excellent classroom management skills, students' standardized test scores, and classroom observations. The nine teachers whose names appeared on both lists were included in the study. All nine teachers were women; five were African American and three were White.

Ladson-Billings (2021) emphasizes that the teachers she studied taught in the same conditions as their peers:

> The same out-of-school socioeconomic factors of students who performed poorly in other teachers' classrooms were present among the culturally relevant teachers. They had students from single parent households. They had students who were eligible for free and reduced lunches. They had students whose parents had not completed high school. Yet,

> students in their classrooms posted academic gains far beyond those of students in other classes in the same school. (p. 70)

Ladson-Billings conducted ethnographic interviews with each teacher, and then observed and videotaped in their respective classrooms. Thereafter, she convened the teachers for ten, two-to-three-hour meetings "to examine both their own and one another's pedagogy. In these meetings, meaning was constructed through reciprocal dialogue" (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 472), an extensive process that led to the concept of "culturally relevant pedagogy" discussed previously.

Concurrent with Ladson-Billing's work was Haberman's (1995) whose study of "star teachers" working in urban settings we have already examined from the vantage point of dispositions. He believes that the careful selection of teachers is more important than training because the exemplary teachers are guided by a clear ideology and set of principles. "Moreover, it is a human, respectful, caring, and nonviolent form of 'gentle teaching'" (Haberman, 1995, p. 1). By constructing a structured interview instrument and analyzing the results, he and his team identified 14 functions of exemplary teachers

> that are neither discrete behaviors nor personality attributes. Instead, these functions are 'mid-range' in the sense that they represent chunks of teaching behavior that encompass a number of interrelated actions and simultaneously represent beliefs or commitments that predispose these teachers to act. (Haberman, 1995, p. 2)

Some of these are what might be expected: organizational ability—curriculum planning and resource gathering skills; physical and emotional stamina—the ability to persist in situations characterized by violence, death, and other crises; employing coaching rather than directive teaching; emphasizing effort over ability. Other functions are less conventional: the ability to care for oneself to inoculate against burnout; a high tolerance for making mistakes—their own and others'; an orientation toward the systemic causes of low achievement such as "irrelevant school curricula, poor teaching, and bureaucratic school systems" (Haberman, 1995, p. 2).

Though somewhat outside of the academy, the Gallup Organization conducted research on talented urban teachers (Gordon, 1999), creating what the team called the Urban Teacher Perceiver Interview,

> a systematic, focused, and organized approach to the staff selection and development process . . . based on a study of the best urban teachers as identified through principal rankings and student rankings; second, a research-based structured interview format focuses interviewers on appropriate questions and what to listen for; and third, interview teams are trained in the process of administering and interpreting the interview results. (p. 304)

They found that teachers who received lower ratings focused on disciplinary issues, while the outstanding teachers placed an emphasis on knowing their students and offering opportunities for learning and growth. Like Haberman, these researchers found a series of recurring patterns of thought, feeling, and action, such as commitment, dedication, caring, empathy, positivity, initiator, and stimulator. It should be noted that both Haberman (1995) and Gordon (1999) used the word *urban* as a proxy for race.

Making Race Explicit

As the century turned, another small wave of studies of exemplary teachers emerged that addressed race more explicitly. P. Cooper (2003) conducted a qualitative case study of three White elementary school teachers who were nominated by members of the Black community and two Black administrators, noticing that there was significant overlap between the beliefs and practice of these teachers with what the literature says about effective Black teachers. Her study identifies five major themes and 25 subthemes, three of which she highlights. The author looks to Ladson-Billings's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy as an influence, as well as Irvine's (1990) concept of *cultural synchronization*, which considers the relationship between two people from different cultural backgrounds in terms of the "unstated rules and subtleties" of their common or distinct cultures (Irvine, 1990, p. xix). According to Irvine (1990), "lack of cultural

synchronization because of misunderstanding, missed communications, and low or no teacher interaction results in negative teacher expectations" (Abstract).

The three subthemes that Cooper's research revealed were (a) the teachers' intensive focus on mastery of reading and writing; (b) the teachers' authoritative discipline style, not unlike teachers of color who think of themselves as "warm demanders"; and (c) the teachers' view of themselves as a second mother, caring for the students and concerned about their health and well-being. A fourth subtheme, racial consciousness, showed unevenness across her participant pool, with some prepared to talk about racial justice and others not engaging on the topic of race at all. Cooper believes that it is mandatory that teacher education programs offer courses, for example, on the history of Black education in America, though she allowed that the teachers in her study who did not exhibit racial consciousness were still able to cross the cultural divide.

Gangstas, Wangstas, and Ridas. Duncan-Andrade (2007) conducted research in classrooms of four "highly effective" elementary and secondary teachers in South Los Angeles who distinguished themselves in critical inquiry groups over a three-year period. Drawing on social justice pedagogy, "a set of teaching practices that aim to create equitable social and academic outcomes for students in urban schools" (p. 618), the researcher discerned five principles of pedagogy through classroom visits, videotapes, and group discussion. He also looked at lesson plans and student work samples. Duncan-Andrade (2007) identifies three teacher archetypes in urban districts: Gangstas, Wankstas, and Ridas. Gangstas are those who are always unsatisfied, resentful of students, parents, and the larger community, and support ineffective shortcuts such as zero tolerance discipline and tracking. Wankstas (a hip-hop reference), he says, represent most teachers, those who begin with good intentions but may not

deliver on their promises and who engage in self-protection. They rely on their relationships with students to get through the day but may become disillusioned and emotionally detached when students show disrespect. Ridas are best described by the author himself:

> "Rida" is a popular cultural term that refers to people who can be counted on during times of extreme duress. The term is often referenced in hip-hop with the expression, "ride or die," meaning that Ridas are people who would sooner die than let their people down. . . . Ridas are consistently successful with a broad range of students. They risk deep emotional involvement with the great majority of their students and they are sometimes hurt because of those investments. The depth of their relationships with students allows them to challenge students and get notable effort and achievement. Ridas are often uncommitted to the larger school structure because they perceive it as morally bankrupt and hesitate to take on any challenge that would mean time away from their direct service to students. (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. 623)

It is this model of "Ridas" that Duncan-Andrade studied and through which he identified five pillars that characterized their successes, though the pillars manifested in unique ways. Briefly, these pillars focus on teachers (a) understanding the communities in which they work, (b) viewing teaching as a calling, (c) being consistently well-prepared, (d) possessing a mix of confidence and humility, (e) demonstrating trustworthiness, and (f) never ceasing to build relationships with students.

Counternarratives. Milner (2008) describes three "counternarratives" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) of teachers in an urban middle school. In an earlier article (Milner, 2007), he made the argument that effective teachers in urban environments

> envision life beyond their present situations; come to know themselves culturally, linguistically, gendered, racially, economically, and socially in relation to others; speak possibility and not destruction both inside and outside of the classroom regarding their students; care and demonstrate that care; and change their negative, deficit, counterproductive thinking in order to change their actions in the classrooms with students. (Milner, 2007, p. 1574)

In this study, he wanted to understand how these three teachers, who were selected for the study by the school principal and who employed very different approaches, had each become successful in the urban classroom. Two of the teachers profiled were Black, one was White.

Milner (2007) argues that these three teachers are countering two categories of deficit: notions about urban education as ineffective and the idea that some teachers' alternative classroom practices are deficient (p. 1592). Mr. Hall, the one White teacher in the study, was able to build strong relationships with his students by knowing their interests outside of school and showing up at ball games. He also used his own story about growing up in poverty to share a vulnerability that he and his students had in common. Importantly, he understood power dynamics and sought to share power with his students. Across the three teachers, certain patterns of behavior became evident, such as emphasizing the value and importance of learning; immersing themselves in students' worlds; doing more with fewer resources; rejecting deficit notions; understanding the difference between equality and equity; rejecting color-blind and culture-blind ideologies; and developing critical consciousness (p. 1595).

Funds of Knowledge. Irizarry and Raible (2011) studied 10 exemplary teachers of Latino students, as identified by Latino students, parents, and community members (p. 186) through the community nomination method (Foster, 1991). Teachers recommended by more than one nominator became eligible for the study. The goal of the study was to examine the teachers' biographies and other factors that might affect their work in and beyond the classroom. Specifically, they were looking at how teachers come to understand students' "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992) or the cultural treasures present in "student's barrios or neighborhoods . . . that have the potential to positively inform teachers' work yet often remain untapped by schools" (Irizarry & Raible, 2011, p. 187). The authors refer to such "culturally responsive and critical pedagogical approaches that Latino students can become empowered to successfully navigate school and dismantle barriers: "*barrio-based* because they intentionally draw on the funds of knowledge that become available when teachers immerse themselves in the

social and cultural networks of their Latino students and their students' families" (pp. 191–192). Interview data was analyzed using grounded theory and creating a thematic analysis. Archival research, demographic data, and achievement scores supported the analysis. Half of the teachers grew up in the community, and half came from outside the city. The most consistent thread across all the interviews was "a pattern of sustained involvement with Latino communities both in the United States and abroad" (p. 194). In addition, there were three findings of note. First, the participants attributed their success to "immersion experiences"—that is, putting the community at the center of their practice and learning from them. A second, related finding was that the teachers said they brought el barrio into their classrooms to make learning more culturally responsive. The third finding was related to language; several teachers who spoke only English when they arrived said their efforts to learn their students' language was significant. In addition, the teachers understood themselves as partners with the community in the ongoing struggle for social justice. The authors' notion of *barrio-based epistemologies and ontologies* exists in sharp contrast to the frequent depiction of urban barrios "as pathological, crime-ridden spaces that are devoid of educative resources" (p. 200).

Relational Processes. It was not until 2012 that scholars looked specifically at the *relational processes* specific to increasing the academic achievement and psychological well-being of culturally diverse students (Cholewa et al., 2012). The researchers employed grounded theory to examine the practices of one highly successful African American teacher, with two questions guiding their research: How does the teacher develop and structure her relationships with her fifth-grade African American students and how does the teacher utilize her social relationships in the teaching and learning process? The teacher was videotaped during the first week of the school year, and a team coded and analyzed the video data with a software

program that compiles a short video montage of all the instances of a particular code. Four dimensions were identified in the study: emotional connectedness, creating teacher-student connections, creating teacher-class connections, and being transparent and joining. Although this study did not include interviews, the methodology, the relational orientation, and the study's findings are probably the closest to my study of any I encountered in the K-12 literature on teaching BIPOC students. The principal researcher (Cholewa et al., 2014) subsequently published another study that examined the impact of culturally responsive practices on the psychological well-being of BIPOC students, utilizing an RCT lens.

Farinde-Wu et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative study of seven award-winning teachers of students in urban schools who had been named "teacher of the year" at the school or district level. Of the seven teachers chosen, one was White. Researchers focused on "the intentional use of culturally responsive teaching strategies to enhance students' learning and stimulate students' personal growth" (pp. 280–281). Four themes emerged at the conclusion of the data analysis process, suggesting that effective, award-winning teachers (a) implement RACCE (i.e., they respect, act immediately, communicate, celebrate, and encourage students); (b) co-create a familial-style classroom culture of success; (c) establish student-first learning; and (d) utilize critical multicultural content delivery (p. 287). Additionally, these teachers exhibited respect toward their students, viewed themselves as caring facilitators of student growth and development, celebrated students' successes large and small publicly and privately, created a family-like or community environment, and set high expectations.

Exemplary White Teachers

A smaller batch of studies focuses exclusively on White teachers and BIPOC students. Johnson (2002) used a life history approach to study "six White teachers of racially diverse

classrooms who had been nominated as being 'aware of race and racism' by a diverse panel of experts" (p. 153). Employing semi-structured interviews, classroom visits, analysis of classroom artifacts, and teacher drawings of their racial identities, Johnson conducted a narrative analysis and found that teachers' success was attributed to (a) an "outsider" identity due to class background or sexual orientation, "that enabled them to disidentify with the White mainstream" (p. 153); (b) having proximity to a diverse group of people who provided "insider" perspectives (p. 153); and (c) holding "religious/philosophical beliefs that emphasized equality and social justice concerns" (p. 153).

Employing the methodology of portraiture, Harding (2005, 2006) explored the process of racialization for four White teachers identified as "successful" with Black middle school students, asking "how White teachers experience their Whiteness in predominantly Black classrooms; how they racialize their Black students; and how their pedagogy is racialized as a result" (Harding, 2006, p. 52). The findings were less concrete than those in other studies in that they provided no concrete solutions per se, but the conceptual nuance is noteworthy:

> The findings of this study suggest that race mattered for "successful" White teachers of Black students based on a temporally fixed notion of Whiteness as racist. Being in predominantly Black classrooms heightened the visibility of these teachers' Whiteness, leaving them with the challenge of disproving the unspoken perception that being White means being racist. The legacy of Whiteness as a racist ideology shaped the pedagogical actions of these teachers by forcing them to manage their Whiteness, which operated largely as an oppressive force that compromised and distorted their intentions. (p. iv)

Harding explores three models for what she calls "managing Whiteness: The recovering Colorblind model, Exceptional, and Disassociated." Calling their classrooms sites of "race wrestling," (Pollock, 2004), she reported that teachers succeeded by developing consistent classroom structures, forging caring relationships, and holding high expectations. Like others in this genre, Harding advocates for intellectually rigorous professional development that includes White teachers' reflections on Whiteness.

Boucher (2016) conducted a qualitative study to examine his own attitudes and behaviors as a White suburban male, part of a larger study of five White high school teachers that sought to understand how successful White teachers create relationships with African American students. Echoing the findings of previously mentioned studies, Boucher learned that successful White teachers engaged in reflection, whether it was through book study or staff development or mentoring students. In addition, these teachers worked to create relationships of solidarity with students based on the theory that "teachers form alliances with students, but the best teachers who are truly shelters from the storm are more than allies, they act in solidarity with their students. These teachers are more than caring, more than culturally relevant; they create relationships of solidarity by meeting their students in a co-relational refuge" (p. 85).

Looking across these studies of exemplary teachers of BIPOC students, I notice a few themes. Most of them are qualitative, suggesting that relational dynamics are best understood through thick description and analysis, not a set of variables that can be tested. Life histories, portraiture, case studies, thematic analysis, and grounded theory are the primary methodologies employed, and the sample sizes are very small. Additionally, most of the research on exemplary teaching of BIPOC students has been conducted by scholars of color. This is not surprising, given that the period during which these studies were conducted was prior to the Obama presidency and the Black Lives Matter movement. The few White scholars writing in the 1980s and 1990s were clearly ahead of their time. And while many of the studies touch on relationships, only one (Cholewa et al., 2012) probes relational processes. In other words, most of the studies focus on the *what*, not the *how* of relating across difference. As Cholewa et al. (2012) noted,

> There is a dearth of information about the distinctive ways that such teachers develop their relationships with their African American students. In the past, most researchers assumed that effective relational methods were applicable to all students regardless of income level or cultural background. (p. 47)

Summary

In this chapter, we have taken an intellectual journey that began with an exploration of teacher identity writ large and, specifically, White teacher identity—recognizing that the development of a strong professional identity is critical for all teachers, but that White teachers of BIPOC students must also be committed to knowing themselves as racial beings before they are ready to teach across difference. We then turned to a summary of the vast literature on teacher-student relationships, including the much smaller body of research on the relationships between White teachers and BIPOC students. The constructs of belonging, care, and empathy stood out as central to forging relationships across difference. We then investigated the barriers to forging such relationships, beginning with centuries-old notions that falsely claim White superiority and how a deficit mindset manifests in US classrooms in the form of both explicit and implicit bias—leading to low expectations of BIPOC students, overrepresentation in special education, harsher disciplinary practices, and other indignities. Next, we encountered the research of BIPOC scholars, who conducted the first studies of exemplary teachers of BIPOC students and articulated a set of pedagogies that amplify the cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) BIPOC students bring with them into the classroom. As we have learned, BIPOC and White scholars continue to study successful teachers of BIPOC students, but the *relational* dimensions of teaching across difference remain under-theorized and under-studied.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

> When we encounter another individual truly as a person, not as an object for use, we become fully human.
>
> —Martin Buber

> For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.
>
> —Audre Lorde

This study utilized Constructivist Grounded Theory as a methodology and Critical Theory (CRT) as a framework or sensitizing lens. In this chapter, I describe the fundamentals of grounded theory and argue that it is a good fit for this researcher, the research domain (K–12 education), and, most importantly, the question that drives this study: "How do White teachers understand their experiences and relationships with BIPOC students?" The perspective of the teacher is my central concern: classroom teachers are the most proximate to students and, therefore, have the capacity to be the single most powerful agents of change in the system. I also demonstrate the complementarity of Constructivist Grounded Theory and Critical Race Theory. Finally, I address the methodological, logistical, technical, and ethical considerations that informed the design of my study.

An Inductive Method

Grounded theory, first developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their landmark work *Awareness of Dying,* countered the methodological assumptions of positivist and quantitative schools of thought that prevailed at the time, in which the researcher was viewed as a passive and unbiased observer in search of objective knowledge about the world; in contrast, qualitative research was considered anecdotal and unsystematic—useful only as an informal testing ground for quantitative instruments. Charmaz (2014) explains: "[grounded theory] provided a powerful argument that legitimized qualitative research as a credible—and rigorous—methodological

approach in its own right" (p. 7). This is a critically important point: that sociology, a discipline focused on understanding the social world, was excluding the study of much of the richness of that world by virtue of its narrow methodological outlook and its grand theories that lacked evidence or the veracity of lived experience (Charmaz, 2014). Central to grounded theory is the inductive nature of the enterprise: a researcher does not *predetermine* the plan of data collection because the ongoing analysis of data will continue to inform the inquiry and reveal the need for more data. Emergence is a core principle of grounded theory. Unlike the hypothesis-driven pursuit that characterizes academic research in the positivist tradition, grounded theory refrains from forcing the data to conform to preexisting notions or hoped-for conclusions. The commitment is to remain close to the world being studied while developing integrated theoretical concepts grounded in data that show process, relationship, and social world connectedness (Charmaz, 2005, p. 508; Clarke, 2005, p. 292, 2015).

Philosophical Positioning

I have always been drawn to narrative methods and qualitative approaches that illuminate the workings of the social world. As a former journalist and documentary filmmaker and as a communications professional who has documented many educational programs and practices over the years, I am attuned to the power of narrative, as Bruner (1992) so eloquently captures:

> We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative. . . . For narratives do not exist, as it were, in some real world, waiting there patiently and eternally to be veridically mirrored in a text. The act of constructing a narrative, moreover, is considerably more than "selecting" events either from real life, from memory, or from fantasy and then placing them in an appropriate order. The events themselves need to be constituted in the light of the overall narrative. (p. 8)

I was first exposed to grounded theory while on staff at a communications research firm that employs methods from the cognitive and social sciences to study *how* Americans think about social issues. My interest in the methodology was only heightened in the doctoral program as we

became immersed in the history, epistemology, and mechanics of grounded theory. The guiding question of grounded theory, “what ‘all’ is involved here?” (Schatzman, 1991), captivated me as an honest and humble way to embark on an inquiry. This is an important first step in becoming a grounded theorist: understanding how we position ourselves philosophically (Birks & Mills, 2012). Our personal philosophy is important because “it defines what we consider to be real and how we can legitimately acquire knowledge about the world” (Birks & Mills, 2012, pp. 1–2). As I investigated the three major strands of grounded theory—Classic, Straussian, and Constructivist, I found a home in the Constructivist tradition, which Charmaz (2005) situated between positivism and postmodernism. Charmaz’s explicit mission was to recover from the classical tradition the pragmatist and symbolic interactionist emphasis on meaning, language, interpretation, and interaction (Charmaz, 2014). I learned the term *symbolic interactionism* from a professor early in the doctoral program, who explained that my views as expressed to him were aligned with this perspective. Since then, I have been able to recognize coherence across my intellectual interests. For example, I recognized that John Dewey and Jane Addams, whose work I have studied, came out of the pragmatic tradition, but I had not fully connected pragmatism to symbolic interactionism. In addition, symbolic interactionism appealed to me as a creative response to the age-old structure-vs.-agency debate. Symbolic interactionism seems to hold the tension well between the two—affirming agency without disavowing the central importance of structure and context.

New Perspectives on Rigor

Rigor is a buzzword in education that often connotes an objectivist worldview favoring content acquisition and memorization. Along similar lines, rigor as defined by positivist-leaning researchers renders grounded theory inferior because it does not measure quantitative effects.

Lincoln and Guba (2000) posit that qualitative research must be judged on alternative criteria that are consistent with grounded theory's interpretive, as opposed to objectivist, worldview. They describe four specific criteria as central to achieving rigor: confirmability, dependability/auditability, authenticity, and transferability. In contrast to objectivity, in which findings are said to be free from researcher bias (a claim that can surely be contested), confirmability suggests that the conclusions made depend on the subjects and conditions of the study rather than the researcher. Similarly, in contrast to positivism's concept of reliability as the ability to replicate findings independent of context, dependability/auditability in grounded theory demonstrates consistency, stability, and trustworthiness over time and between researchers. Moreover, while a positivist research approach values internal validity or statistical significance, an interpretive worldview focuses on internal consistency (i.e., that the research findings are credible and consistent, both to the research participants and the readers). Finally, while the positivist worldview seeks external validity and generalizability, the interpretive approach centers on transferability—that is, whether and how broadly the conclusions can be transferred to other contexts and how useful they are in the real world. In other words, as stated persuasively by Gasson (2004):

> Overall, qualitative, inductive approaches are no more subjective than quantitative, deductive approaches. Subjectivity is merely introduced at a later, more visible stage of the research life cycle than with hypothesis-testing research approaches. The formalized ways by which we manage subjectivity are only problematic as they are based on positivist assessments of rigor. We need to substitute reflexive self-awareness for objectivity. (p. 90)

Power Sharing

One element of Constructivist Grounded Theory—the sharing of power between researcher and research participant—addressed a concern that I had always had as a journalist: that of wielding too much power. Working for organizations that were held in high public

esteem, I could call anyone and ask anything to pursue my story. It never seemed fair that I had so much control over the final product, the only negotiation being between myself and an editor. I like to think that my interviews were always personable and respectful, but the interaction was not authentically intimate, because it demanded that I take only what *I* needed to file a story. Shared power requires an entirely different stance; ideally, it is an I-Thou encounter (Buber, 1937) that is initiated by the researcher. The process is slower and more deliberate, involves active listening, and perhaps most importantly, it requires consent from the participant that the researcher has captured the encounter accurately and that the participant has an opportunity to correct and complete the story. Constructivist Grounded Theory implies the sharing of power, or a "power-with" stance (Fletcher, 2004; J. Miller & Stiver, 1997) in an interview setting, whereby there is an ongoing negotiation between researcher and participant. In other words, the interview is a relational, not an instrumental, encounter. Charmaz (2008) describes it this way: "Entering the phenomenon shrinks the distance between the viewer and the viewed. Subsequently, we might better understand our research participants' multiple realities and standpoints" (p. 133). This stance was especially important in my study because the power dynamics in K–12 education are more complex than meets the eye. In a conventional K–12 classroom, the teacher is viewed as the one holding the power, and students are empowered only to the extent that the teacher allows it. In the wrong hands, teaching and learning can feel like enslavement to students who do not feel they belong in the classroom. This can be especially harmful to BIPOC students, many of whom carry the historical legacy of slavery—the ultimate "othering" experience.

Teacher-student power dynamics, however, must also be considered within the larger K–12 context. First, most K–12 teachers are women; typically, they hold much less authority within the White-male-normed system than the (mostly) male administrators to whom they

report. Moreover, school and district administrators must follow federal and state mandates that have been created largely by White male authority figures, who typically incentivize “teaching to the test.” Most teachers know better than to let high-stakes testing dominate their daily lives, but the pressures of performance and evaluation often force them to conform and comply. In the process, their relationships with students can be jeopardized. As I hope I have made evident in Chapters I and II, students of color (as well as other marginalized students) are the most vulnerable to teachers’ preoccupation with mandates. Finally, while US teachers are sometimes valorized in the public discourse, the teaching profession is considered low in status relative to other professions, even as the public desperately depends on the teaching force to keep the economy humming. This was made only too evident during the pandemic; for a moment in time, when parents first attempted to assume the role of teacher in their homes, educators were widely celebrated. As the pandemic wore on, however, the public grew tired of teacher demands for safe working conditions, and a collective amnesia about the value of the teacher workforce seemed to set in. Thus, if teachers justifiably feel disempowered by the system, it stands to reason that that they could easily transmit and project these feelings onto their students, especially those most likely to be and feel marginalized: students of color. Such complex human dynamics call for deep sensitivity on the part of the researcher. Curiosity must prevail over judgment.

Abduction

It is precisely because teachers live in a thick swamp of mental and cultural models of which they may be unaware, that an additional tool of Grounded Theory—abduction—may be helpful. Abduction has been described as a kind of “hypothesis formation [that] occurs when researchers, during data analysis, shape or insightfully generate beliefs about the meaning or significance of their data on non-deductive and non-inductive grounds” (Boutilier & Becher,

1995). Abduction occurs at all stages of analysis, but particularly during the constant comparative analysis of categories that leads to theoretical integration (Charmaz, 2006; Reichert et al., 2007; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

> When using abductive reasoning, the researcher 'has decided . . . no longer to adhere to the conventional view of things. . . . Abduction is therefore a cerebral process, an intellectual act, a mental leap that brings together things which one had never associated with another: a cognitive logic of discovery.'" (Reichert et al., 2007, p. 220)

In this study, abduction has been a useful tool for looking inside the education system, wherein highly bureaucratic patterns are extremely difficult to dislodge, making it more challenging—perhaps even threatening—for insiders to see as clearly as an outsider who can sit "on the balcony" (Heifitz & Linsky, 2002/2017) with the luxury of taking nothing for granted. Coupled with the rigor of Grounded Theory, abduction further opens a window into the complex social phenomena inherent in school and classroom environments and sheds light specifically on how White middle and high school teachers navigate across difference in a system that, to this day, remains beholden to sameness.

Clarke and the Postmodern Turn

The power dynamics—visible and invisible—that are so central to the workings of K–12 education and that render the field inherently political (Freire, 1985; Giroux & McLaren, 1992) calls upon researchers to carefully interrogate claims of "truth." Postmodernism, a philosophical turn that began in the late 19th century and now spans the social sciences, the humanities, and many other professional and aesthetic domains, provides an important backdrop for my study (Clarke, 2003), in that the larger context in which K–12 education resides has an outsized influence on what happens in the classroom and must be accounted for in the research process. Briefly stated, postmodernist scholarship "seeks to address 'almost unthinkably complex, interrelated and interactive global' situations (Usher, 1997 in Clarke, 2003, p. 555) while

simultaneously acknowledging the "ungraspable of this world" (Usher, 1997 in Clarke, 2003, p. 555). Postmodernism stands in contrast to modernism, which emphasizes "universality, generalization, simplification, permanence, stability, wholeness, rationality, regularity, homogeneity, and sufficiency" (Clarke, 2003, p. 555). The nature of research changes quite dramatically in a postmodern frame.

Specifically, the postmodern turn in Constructivist Grounded Theory was initiated by Clarke (2003). It aligns with Grounded Theory's roots in symbolic interactionism and pragmatism, which have "always had the capacity to be distinctly perspectival in ways fully compatible with what are now understood as situated knowledges" (Clarke, 2003, p. 555). In looking closely at the nature of inquiry, Clarke set out to update "modes of regenerating and updating a very popular and epistemologically sound approach" (p. 553) and, in so doing, to widen the lens of Grounded Theory to account for the increasing complexity of the social world. She sought to offer "methodological innovations [that] allow researchers to draw together studies of discourse and agency, action and structure, image, text and context, history and the present moment—to analyze complex situations of inquiry" (p. 554). Codifying her approach as "situational analysis," she encourages a balance between the postmodernist modes that foreground individual voice (through autoethnography, narrative analysis, and various forms of feminist inquiry) and those that engage what she calls "the full situation of inquiry"—that is, the larger domains of the social arena and the social processes therein. Though I did not conduct a formal situation analysis, I wholeheartedly embrace Clarke's position that expanding one's perspective beyond the individual to the larger systems that influence beliefs and behaviors is important. In keeping with that mission, I used Critical Theory as a sensitizing concept to analyze the data in my study of White middle and high school teachers in public schools.

Interplay of Critical Theory and Grounded Theory

Critical Theory originated in the Frankfurt School of the 1920s, in which philosophers and social theorists in the Western European tradition sought to explain and transform circumstances in which human beings in modern society are dominated. (Bohman, 2021). Habermas is best known among the early generation of philosophers and social theorists who meant by it a very specific ideology; in later years, Giddens, Bourdieu, and Foucault have all been associated with critical theory. In contemporary times, critical theory (without capital letters), like its predecessor, is said to be concerned with "the problem of emancipation from those past practices and beliefs that enslave human beings" (Bohman, 1999, p. 237). As such, it is an umbrella for a broad range of theories from the Marxist and feminist traditions through to postmodern and poststructuralist critiques of society (Gibson, 2007). According to Denzin (2019), critical theory, like Pragmatism and Postmodernism, recognizes the interplay of individuals and social and historical forces as realities "constructed in and through people's linguistic, cultural, social, and behavioral interactions" that both shape and are shaped by social, political, economic, and cultural forces (Fischman & McLaren, 2005, p. 425). Understanding is not sufficient for critical theorists. Rather, there is an imperative to "transform it with the goal of radically democratizing educational sites and societies" (Fischman & McLaren, 2005, p. 425).

Kushner and Morrow (2003) propose a research path that "focuses on the interplay between grounded, feminist, and critical theories, as a strategy they claim provides a more comprehensive account of the relations between agency, structure, and critique" (p. 31). They suggest a "theoretical triangulation that encourages internal dialogue within a given research design" (p. 31). Grounded theory, therefore, is primarily a methodological strategy, while feminist theory and critical theory are theoretical perspectives or paradigms. For this discussion,

I will focus on Critical Race Theory, however, it should be noted that there is much in common with feminist theory, or as Kushner and Morrow (2003) remind us, "the benefits of the interplay between the three derive simultaneously from a triangulation that is mutually corrective and synergistic" (p. 32).

Believing that grounded theory does not offer "any specific guidelines with respect to research priorities, theoretical presuppositions, or normative standpoints" (Gibson, 2011, p. 37), Kushner and Morrow (2003) also claim that, on its own, symbolic interactionism is not sufficiently developed with respect to critical theory, nor is it adequately "sensitized to issues relating to alienation, power, and domination" (p. 37). A critically interested grounded theory, on the other hand, one that engages with critical theory as a paradigm, "is intended to result in the generation of knowledge that contributes to meaningful understandings and explanations of human interaction in the social world, these in turn potentially contributing to emancipatory transformation" (p. 37). They emphasize that theoretical, not methodological, triangulation is the goal, with grounded theory a companion in data gathering analysis, coupled with an ongoing back-and-forth movement between it and among the theoretical questions. Kushner and Morrow (2003) elaborate:

> Critical theory understood in the ecumenical form we have proposed—provides a more systematic framework for considering and asking questions about the relations among multiple sources of domination, competing theories of society in the context of globalization, and a general theory of critique and participatory action that draws upon the work of Paulo Freire. (p. 38)

Grounded theory that accommodates critical theory carries with it "the added sensitivity that it is through the technologies of the method itself that important political relations can be hidden in the research process" (Gibson, 2011, p. 7) Critical theory, then, is about making explicit the implicit, especially regarding invisible but very present power structures. At the same time, its mission is to move beyond comprehension to transformation (M. Thompson, 2017).

> The key insight of a critical theory of society is therefore not meant to impose some set of *a priori* values and ideals onto the social world, but to unravel the contradictions that already exist within it; to make evident an emancipatory insight into the very fabric of what we take as given, as basic to our social world. (M. Thompson, 2017, p. 3).

Another benefit of critical theory to grounded theory is that it extends beyond the central question of "what all is happening" (Glaser, 1978). A critical stance interrogates the origins of phenomena—and examines the implications of the situation for various individual actors and for the larger field (Charmaz, 2016). However, we are reminded that "any extant concept must earn its way into the analysis. Thus, we cannot import a set of concepts such as hegemony and domination and paste them on the realities of the field" (Holloway & Schwartz, 2018, p. 504). Still, there has been some evolution in the postmodern turn that allows the researcher to enter with, say, a critical or feminist lens that foregrounds issues of power and underrepresentation, even while continuing to "seek theory from the phenomenon itself" (p. 504). In summary, grounded theory and critical theory, taken together, can enrich a research project—each theory providing a check on the other.

Charmaz (2016) articulates four criteria essential for bridging grounded theory with any form of social justice inquiry: credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. Such criteria relate primarily to understanding the local context and needs—and the necessity to be sensitive to and in service of those needs. In other words, the research should have a positive impact on the community being studied (Denzin, 2019, p. 18). Although I interviewed white teachers representing the majority in public schools, I did so with the marginalized population in mind. My explicit purpose is to substantially improve conditions for BIPOC students, which requires white teachers to step outside their comfort zones and into a space of deep inquiry.

Critical theorists are sometimes known to maintain a distance between themselves and their subjects by "integrating existing theory into large theoretical edifices that attempted to

establish the superiority of the theorist because of the degree of comprehensiveness of the theory" (Gibson, 2007, p. 6). Grounded theory can serve as a useful corrective by closing the distance between scholar and subject by promoting sensitivity and fit. "This is grounded theory's pragmatism. This pragmatism provides great potential for accommodating critical theory" (Gibson, 2007, p. 6) In addition, the concept of theoretical sensitivity in grounded theory reflects an awareness that a multiplicity of theoretical accounts may have legitimacy for the research at hand. It opens a space that might otherwise be constricted by employing a solely critical lens.

A burgeoning branch of Critical Theory that is especially relevant to my study is Critical Race Theory (CRT), which recognizes that racism is ordinary, not an aberration, and that it is a social construction conferring advantages upon those in the society whose voices are dominant (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; J. Williams, 1991; R. Williams,1997). CRT originated in the late 1970s as lawyers, activists, and legal scholars worked to devise "a new strategy for dealing with the emergence of a post-civil rights racial structure in the United States" (Malagon et al., 2009, p. 255). They argued that such a structure had at its core "a colorblind ideology that hid and protected white privilege while masking racism within the rhetoric of "meritocracy" and "fairness" (p. 255). The goal of CRT was to undermine colorblind ideology by deconstructing its racist premise.

Grounded theory is consistent with Critical Race Theory in that it understands "that all inquiry is political and moral. It confronts the tension between the Western critical theory paradigm and indigenous knowledge . . . uses methods critically, for explicit social justice purposes" (Denzin, 2019, p. 454). Malagon et al. (2009) describe their frustration with "traditional, qualitative research methods to accurately understand and document the complex experiences of Students of Color, their families, and their communities" (p. 253). They argue for

the reconstruction of a more critical approach within qualitative research that foregrounds "the pursuit of social justice as a guiding methodological principle" (p. 254). Their goal is to "deliberately attempt to employ grounded theory in the research process to directly challenge previous scholarship that has distorted and erased the experiences of students of color, their families, and their communities" (p. 254). Scholars point to the process of "cultural intuition" as a way of engaging the researchers' multiple sources of knowledge that becomes part of the theory-building that occurs in a critical race-grounded theory approach. By being more attuned to these sources of knowledge or forms of "cultural intuition," a researcher is more reflexive throughout the research process and is better able to "ground" her work in the life experiences of people of color (p. 255). This is aligned with constructivist grounded theory in that the researcher is (a) focused on lived experience, not abstraction, (b) always conscious of her positionality, and (c) not concerned with population representativeness and external validity. Cultural intuition is a form of abduction.

Holloway and Schwartz (2018) emphasize that grounded theory "as a study of social processes" is "well-suited for scholar-practitioners who seek to understand the everyday exclusion that occurs in organizations" (p. 497). This organizational perspective is important to my study. Even though organizational theorists recognize school districts and individual schools as complex adaptive systems (Fidan & Balci, 2017), they are often not treated as such by the communities in which they are embedded. A grounded theory study that is guided by critical theory and critical race theory, therefore,

> has the potential to uncover the elusive qualities of the workplace, take the researcher beyond hegemonic understandings of organizations, hold as central the participants and their stories, portray complex interactions, include an intersectional stance, and make visible the role of silence; all elements that situate grounded theory as a viable and powerful method for EDI research. (Holloway & Schwartz, 2018, p. 497)

Similarly, grounded theory is focused on interactions, whether it is “self to self, self to other, and self to system” (Schwartz & Holloway, 2018, p. 504). This idea is consistent with my personal philosophy about the centrality of relationships in the learning process.

Relational-Cultural Theory

Along these lines, another sensitizing concept informing this study is Relational-Cultural Theory, which views increased relational competence over the life span as the goal of development:

> The path of human development is through movement to increasingly differentiated and growth-fostering connection; chronic disconnections result from the unresponsiveness of important people in our lives. When we are hurt, misunderstood, or violated in some way, when we attempt to represent our experience to the injuring person and we are not responded to, we learn to suppress our experience and disconnect from both our own feelings and the other person. If, on the other hand, we are able to express our feelings and the other person responds with care, showing that we have had an effect, then we feel that we are effective in relationship with others; that we matter, that we can participate in creating growth-fostering and healthy relationships. (J. Jordan et al., 2004, p. 2)

Initially named Self-in-Relation Theory, the founding scholars soon began to investigate the effects of disconnection at a societal level—how power differentials, stratification, privilege, and marginalization can disempower individuals and groups of people. The work during this time studied the experiences of women whose voices had been historically marginalized from the mainstream writing about women’s development. This marked a critical step in the evolution of the model, one that emphasized the significance of cultural context to human development. Marking this step was a renaming of the theory itself: Self-in-Relation Theory became Relational-Cultural Theory, representing the scholars’ growing awareness that relationships both represent and reproduce the cultures in which they are embedded and that there is much evidence

in the history of psychological theory of "complicity with cultural arrangements and power practices that divide people into groups of dominants and subordinates" (J. Jordan et al., 2004, p. 3). This newest work challenged the notion that "resilience and other characteristics attributed to individuals are really internal, individual traits" (p. 7). The scholars asked pointedly: What are the implications for organizing social institutions differently around a core belief in connection rather than separation? And how can we use what we learn in psychological practice and theory to facilitate social change?" (J. Jordan et al., 2004, p. 3). Given the social contexts in which the teacher-student relationship is embedded, Relational-Cultural Theory helps provide definition to the complexity of connecting across difference.

Design of the Study

In the following section, I outline the design of my Critical and Constructivist grounded theory study of the relationships between White middle and high school teachers and BIPOC students. Below I surface my assumptions; describe my strategy for sampling and recruiting participants; discuss how I approached the interview process; describe the process of coding and subsequent analysis, and how I navigated ethical issues.

Surfacing Assumptions

The purpose of surfacing assumptions is to avoid imposing preconceptions on the developing theory; it includes acknowledging where one stands relative to the proposed study and being fully transparent (Birks & Mills, 2012). For example, as stated in Chapter I, the following assumptions, supported by the research, undergird my study:

- Race is a social construct
- The race of a teacher matters to students of color

- Relationships are central to what happens in the school and classroom, and race work is relationship work
- Most teachers enter the field with noble intentions and want to treat all children well and help them fulfill their potential
- Most White teachers have not interrogated their own beliefs and attitudes about race, nor have they reckoned with their implicit racial bias
- Most White teachers unconsciously hold lower expectations of their students of color than they do of their White students
- Many students of color may not consciously understand what is happening when a teacher treats them differently, though they do know it unconsciously and feel it deeply
- The neoliberal high-stakes accountability frame that pervades the field often flies in the face of relational values.

Purposeful Sampling and Participants

In keeping with grounded theory, I began with a purposeful sampling strategy to identify White middle and high school teachers in Massachusetts who met the criteria for my study, namely teachers who had been in the classroom for at least five years and were recognized as exemplary by BIPOC principals, peers, and parents. Middle and high school teachers were the focus of this study because the number of students they serve is much higher than in the lower grades, making it much more difficult to develop relationships. Further, teachers in the upper grades often have a more distant stance, viewing themselves less as caregivers and more as subject matter experts preparing students for college and their careers. Additionally, while elementary school children of color are often viewed as cute and non-threatening, sadly, the

same is not true of preteens and adolescents, who are often assumed (unfairly) to have nefarious intentions (Goff et al., 2014). The goal was to search for teachers who met the high bar of building relationships in a system that seems designed for disconnection.

Recruitment of Teachers

In the selection process, I followed the guidance of Black scholars who have conducted similar studies. Instead of securing a list of state and local teachers of the year, as did Farinde-Wu et al. (2017) in their qualitative analysis of standout White teachers, I wanted to avoid the possibility of such a list skewing toward White-normed notions of excellence. In addition, Ladson-Billings (1994) cautioned against only using so-called objective measures, such as standardized test scores, to identify teacher excellence. Instead, she first approached the parents of color ("educational consumers"), who shared their perspectives about good teaching:

> In essence, I asked them to identify the teachers who met the educational standards that they felt were important. . . . Using the dual goal for both academic and cultural excellence, the parents generated a list of more than twenty teachers they felt passed the test. (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 27.

Ladson-Billings (1994) also asked principals of schools in a single district to suggest teachers they felt demonstrated excellence with African American students. The principals adhered to more conventional criteria such as test scores, classroom management, student discipline, and student attendance and satisfaction—generating a list of more than twenty potential candidates. Ladson-Billings's final sample included teachers who appeared on both the parents' and principals' lists. This approach, known as the community-nomination method (Foster, 1991), entails "relying upon community members and community-sanctioned vehicles (for example, community newspapers and organizations) in order to judge people, places, and things within their own settings" (p. 147). Teachers identified by more than one nominator were invited to participate in the study.

The recruitment strategy for this study was adapted for the context and circumstances. To help develop a purposeful sample, I first turned to two statewide organizations: Black Educators of Massachusetts (BEAM) and Latinos for Education, two national organizations with statewide chapters. Both organizations are deeply rooted in the communities they represent. I asked each via email (and, in one instance, a follow-up Zoom call) to help identify superintendents and principals of color who could nominate exemplary White teachers. I had hoped that the organizations would post a notice on their respective listservs and/or that members might make informal recommendations. In the end, that outreach did not bear fruit. Simultaneously, I turned to my professional contacts—first, to several high-profile educational leaders and organizations in Massachusetts who generously recommended BIPOC educators whom they thought might be willing to nominate White teachers. I began sending emails and making phone calls. Of the dozens of emails sent and phone calls made over nine months, the vast majority were not returned. This was understandable, as COVID variants put educators on a roller coaster ride of uncertainty and constant recalibration. I found it challenging to even ask potential BIPOC nominators to prioritize my request at a time when schools, educators, and families were overwhelmed, under-resourced, and just plain exhausted.

It is also true that I encountered some resistance unrelated to the pandemic. Several BIPOC educators in leadership positions politely declined my request, occasionally leaving me puzzled. Out of respect for their time, I did not inquire further. One district leader said he did not approve of my methodology, and my repeated attempts to understand his reservations were rebuffed. A couple of others asked why I was emphasizing White teachers and not focusing on diversifying the teacher workforce. In these instances, my response had a few elements: (a) that diversification of the workforce is, without a doubt, Job #1 in public schools; (b) that according

to some estimates, it will take decades to create a truly diverse workforce; and (c) that as long as White teachers were in the system, it was critical to find ways for them to improve and, at the very least, not cause harm. I emphasized that the goal was to uncover lessons for recruitment, retention, pre- and in-service training, and policy. Finally, some BIPOC parents wondered why I was not asking their children directly to nominate their favorite White teachers, to which I responded that IRB requirements are very strict about interviewing children under 18 and explained that it was not easy to approve such an approach for a doctoral dissertation. As the months passed, I realized that I had to expand my reach and turned to The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO), a long-standing program in Massachusetts that sends students from the city of Boston to 33 suburban districts in the Greater Boston Metropolitan area. METCO grew out of court-ordered busing in the 1970s and continues to be a signature feature of the state's educational landscape. The director generously agreed to put a notice in the organization's newsletter. I also contacted several METCO-participating suburban school districts directly with positive results. Word spread, and many BIPOC parents and educators responded to my request. Eventually, over the course of a school year, I found enough nominators and interviewed enough teachers to reach saturation. Once I identified the exemplary teachers, I emailed each one to ascertain their interest in participating in the study and, if they agreed, solicited their informed consent, including the provision that they could withdraw from the study at any time. In the informed consent form, I also asked participants to authorize using their voices (audio only) in my oral defense to lend texture to the findings.

Interviewing

As mentioned earlier, the relationship between researcher and participant is central to constructivist interviewing. The interview is, as described earlier, a mutual encounter, "the site of exploration, emergent understandings, legitimation of identity, and validation of experience" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 91). It often takes just one thoroughly considered question to get the ball rolling. For example, in Schwartz and Holloway's (2012) study of the relationship between professors and adult master's students, each interview began with the question: "How have you come to know alum X?" or "How have you come to know professor Y?" The researcher "then asked follow up questions to explore the participant's reflection and meaning-making" (p. 120). The specific language of participants was then used to craft additional questions that were intended to probe the comments at a deeper level. For example, "Please tell me more about what it was like to collaborate with her in that setting" (p. 120). According to Charmaz (2014), it is essential to choose questions carefully and ask them slowly to facilitate a reflective environment. In this study, I asked what I considered a warm-up question to help the participant feel comfortable in the interview setting: "How did you come to the teaching profession and to your current school?" The question turned out to be highly generative and central to the study's findings. Thereafter, I asked one more question: "You identify as a White teacher who works predominantly with students of color. What is that experience like for you?" Occasionally, I probed with questions that paraphrased their own words. For example, "When you said X, what did you mean by that?" or, "Can you say more about that?" Occasionally, I asked, "What do you think it takes to do it well?" or, "Can you recall moments that made you feel successful or challenged you?" or, "Is there anything else you'd like to share?" Interviews tended to run about an hour in duration, though the range was between 55 and 90 minutes. All but one of the

interviews, conducted by telephone to accommodate the teacher's long commute home from school, took place over Zoom. COVID prevented us from meeting in person.

Transcribing and Managing the Data

Each interview was transcribed verbatim by a professional confidential transcription service to capture every nuance, pause, and expression of emotion. After that, I completed member-checking, sending each participant a copy of the transcribed interview and inviting feedback, corrections, and additional commentary. After the participants approved the transcribed interviews, the transcripts were thoroughly anonymized and imported into Dedoose, a web-based coding software program that is often utilized in qualitative research.

Participant Characteristics

Three (16%) of the participants are middle school teachers, and 16 (84%) teach high school, though some of them previously taught middle school. I was interested in interviewing only those teachers who had been in the classroom for at least five years; in this study, the participants' years of experience range from 5 to 25 years. Generationally, two teachers (11%) belonged to the Baby Boom generation (born 1946–1964), 8 (42%) to Generation X (born 1965–1980), and 9 (47%) to the Millennial Generation (born 1981–1996). Thirteen (68%) of the participants identify as female, and six (32%) as male. The percentage of male teachers is higher than might be expected in what is typically a female-dominated profession. However, the percentages are often greater at the high school level than in the lower grades—some say because of the orientation to subject matter expertise. Eight (42%) of the participants grew up in poor or working-class families; 10 (53%) grew up in middle- or upper-middle-class families in the suburbs. One (5%) grew up in a rural community. Sixteen (84%) of the participants work in urban districts and teach in large comprehensive middle and high schools; six (32%) work in

schools that are small and/or that have an alternative model. Nine participants (47%) teach history; five (26%) teach English Language Arts; two (11%) teach science; one (5%) teaches math, one (5%) teaches a foreign language, and one (5%) teaches health education. In some ways, the preponderance of history teachers is not surprising. In my experience, they are often socially adept. Moreover, their subject matter lends itself to deeper conversations than one might encounter in a math class, for example—and history can be a politically charged topic.

Five (26%) of the participants in this study work in suburban districts that participate in the METCO program. I decided to interview White METCO teachers because I suspected that there might be differences and similarities between the White teachers in the suburbs who were nominated and those who were nominated in the urban centers. That turned out to be the case. On the one hand, the educational and pedagogical issues of the White teachers in the city and those in the suburbs were very similar. Keeping students engaged intellectually and making the time for relationship-building were key. On the other hand, the suburban teachers were managing fraught political dynamics: White students who resented studying non-Eurocentric topics and parents who felt threatened by it. The suburban teachers also had to navigate peer-to-peer relationships between White and BIPOC students. I will say more about their experiences in Chapter VI. Figure 3.1 summarizes the demographics of the participants in this study.

Figure 3.1

Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Gender	Generation	Grade Level	City/Suburb	School Size	Reared in	Subject	Years of Exp
Participant 1	*Female*	*Generation X*	*High School*	*City*	*Large*	*City*	*History/Civic*	21
Participant 2	Male	Baby Boomer	High School	City	Large	City	Science	25
Participant 3	Female	Generation X	Middle School	City	Large	Suburb	History/Civic	7
Participant 4	Female	Millenial	High School	City	Small	Rural	Science	10
Participant 5	Female	Baby Boomer	Middle School	City	Large	Suburb	History/Civic	22
Participant 6	Female	Millenial	High School	City	Large	City	ELA	5
Partiicpant 7	Female	Generation X	High School	City	Large	Suburb	Spanish	12
Participant 8	Female	Generation X	High School	Suburb	Large	City	ELA	5
Participant 9	Female	Millenial	High School	City	Medium	Suburb	US Gov't	5
Participant 10	Female	Generation X	High School	City	Large	City	Math	11
Participant 11	Male	Generation X	High School	Suburb	Large	City	History	17
Participant 12	Female	Generation X	High School	Suburb	Medium	Suburb	English	12
Participant 13	Male	Millenial	High School	Suburb	Medium	Suburb	History	15
Participant 14	Female	Millenial	High School	City	Small	Suburb	English/Hum	15
Participant 15	Female	Generation X	Middle School	Suburb	Medium	Suburb	English/Civ	8
Participant 16	Male	Millenial	High School	City	Small	Suburb	History	9
Participant 17	Male	Millenial	High School	City	Small	Suburb	History	13
Participant 18	Female	Millenial	High School	City	Small	City	Health	15
Participant 19	Male	Millenial	High School	City	Small	Town	History	7

Baby Boomers: Born 1946-1964. Generation X: Born 1965-1980. Millennials: Born 1981-1996. Generation Z: Born 1997-2012.

Coding

True to the constructivist tradition, this study employed both open and selective coding (Charmaz, 2000). In open coding, data are collected and analyzed line by line, and each incident is coded with a keyword or short phrase. Thereafter, coded segments are fragmented from the transcript, compared to each other, and grouped conceptually. The researcher gives a name to each segment and forms as many conceptual categories as possible. Through constant comparison and analysis, the interrelationships become apparent, and a principal core category emerges. In selective coding, the core category becomes the focus of the inquiry, along with other categories that may relate to it. At this point, the researcher explores theoretical sampling, the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses the data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them as part of developing his theory as it emerges (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical sampling may lead to

refining the interview questions (Jones & Alony, 2011). As the categories become saturated, "the core category becomes increasingly dense and its theoretical relationships with other relevant categories will become apparent. Subsequently, the researcher integrates (or reduces) the categories into higher-level substantive concepts to reach a higher level of conceptualization" (Kenny & Fourie, 2015, p. 1271). I was fortunate to work with three classmates who constituted my coding team to assist in this phase of the study, including one person of color to ensure the presence of a critical inside perspective. The coding team jointly coded the first three interviews. The next set of interviews was coded independently. Consulting with the team was critical and provided valuable feedback that validated, challenged, and expanded my thinking.

Memo Writing

Memo writing is the process of capturing written records of a researcher's thoughts, feelings, insights, and ideas while conducting a grounded theory study. Clarke (2005) describes memo writing as "intellectual capital in the bank" (p. 85). Begun in the earliest planning stages and continued until completion, memo writing is often considered one of the most significant factors in ensuring rigor and quality. The purpose of memo writing is to capture an ongoing dialogue with oneself about feelings and assumptions related to the research—concerns related to the study design; reflections on raw data such as quotations from participants or observations from field notes; and decisions related to coding and related analysis (Birks & Mills, 2012). Memos may also document "gaps in the data" and help develop conceptual "conjectures" (Charmaz, 2008, p. 166). Thus, writing and sorting memos captures the unfolding process of interpreting the phenomena and constructing a theory. In this study, triangulation with Critical Theory and Constructivist Grounded Theory, as mentioned above, began in the memoing process. My custom was to spend a half hour after each interview to capture my thoughts. I also

wrote memos during the coding process to note emerging themes. I developed a system of labeling and filing memos to facilitate easy access to them later—using short descriptive titles that reflected the content of each memo. Memos were dated so that I could track my lines of inquiry over time (Birks & Mills, 2012).

Toward Theory Building

The final steps in a Constructivist Grounded Theory study entail a progressively higher-level analysis of the data as the research process moves closer to the building of theory. This level of analysis includes axial coding, dimensions, and the explanatory matrix. *Axial coding* is the search for the relationships among larger concepts within the frame of analysis (Holloway & Schwartz, 2018). Through this process, dimensions—or the connections across the larger concepts that reflect action or interaction—begin to develop (Holloway & Schwartz, 2018). Finally, as the dimensions begin to cohere into a story—that is, "the specific processes that ensue, and the consequences or impact that these actions and processes have on the context of the whole" (Schatzman 1991, as cited in Holloway & Schwartz, 2018, p. 519)—*explanatory or theoretical matrices* emerge. Holloway and Schwartz (2018) caution that this is a particularly vulnerable moment in the research process, as the researcher may default to a personal perspective instead of staying focused on how the participants make meaning of their experience. As a former journalist, accustomed to developing "my" story, I appreciated being held accountable by my coding team, the dissertation chair, and the committee. The last steps in the process prior to publication and presentation are to generate theoretical propositions, diagram emergent theory, and create a visual representation of the model to express the theory to be shared with the community of scholars and practitioners. (Holloway & Schwartz, 2018, p. 507). These deliverables appear in Chapter V.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality and time commitment during a highly uncertain historical moment for educators were the most salient ethical considerations. Concerning confidentiality, I took precautions to protect the participants' privacy. I also included in the consent form the possibility of utilizing short audio excerpts of their recorded voices if I received their approval and express consent for each piece of sound. These participants were selected by educators and parents who consider them exemplars. Thus, they seemed very ready to share their stories; only one teacher in the study expressed worry about exposure. The greater risk, perhaps, was the identifiability of students or families who figure in the stories shared by teachers. I took great care in removing identifying information to protect the identities of teachers, students, and their families. In a few instances, I did not use material that I thought might give away a teacher's identity. Interviews were stored in a secure location, accessible only to me, my chair, and members of my coding team.

My larger ethical concern was related to the pandemic and the enormous demands on teachers' time and psyches. Teachers are always first responders of sorts; during the height of the pandemic—when this study was conducted—many felt overburdened by ever-changing COVID mandates and the ongoing contingencies related to student hunger, long absences, family emergencies, technology, and other issues. Would they volunteer for yet another commitment? My worries turned out to be unfounded: once nominators identified the teachers, it was rather straightforward to call them—and in almost all cases, my request for an interview was greeted as a source of validation and, as they told me, provided them a rare opportunity for reflection amidst the chaos.

Massachusetts has fewer teachers of color than in many other parts of the US. While the primary goal is to diversify the teacher workforce so that there is a far more balanced racial/cultural match, projections are that it will take several decades to reach parity. Therefore, it is urgent to identify White teachers who can truly reach and teach students of color and can elevate these models of excellence so that a growing number of White teachers might be more successful with their students of color. As mentioned, Constructivist Grounded Theory, through unstructured interviews, taps into hidden dimensions—the values, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs undergirding human behavior and relationships. The methodology enables one to read between the lines of the stories told. If much of what happens in our nation's urban classrooms resides under the surface, we must make visible the unseen dimensions that are the most critical to helping students of color thrive. Moreover, the field discourse (and, alas, the public discourse) is often dominated by policymakers who are furthest from the daily realities of the classroom. Constructivist Grounded Theory builds from evidence on the ground; the inductive nature of this methodology gives it added credibility because it represents lived experience—in this case, the lived experience of White teachers of BIPOC students.

CHAPTER IV: THE FINDINGS

This study aimed to explore how White middle and high school teachers in Massachusetts, who were nominated as exemplary by BIPOC educators and parents, understand their experiences and relationships with BIPOC students. In this chapter, the voices of participants will take center stage, vividly demonstrating through storytelling and reflection the multifaceted landscape in which they are situated and the wide range of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and experiences that animate their everyday lives as teachers. To capture the full complexity of teachers' experiences, I employed dimensional analysis, a variant of grounded theory developed by Schatzman and Strauss (1973) that "has its own epistemology and unique set of operations" (Kools et al., 1996, p. 314).

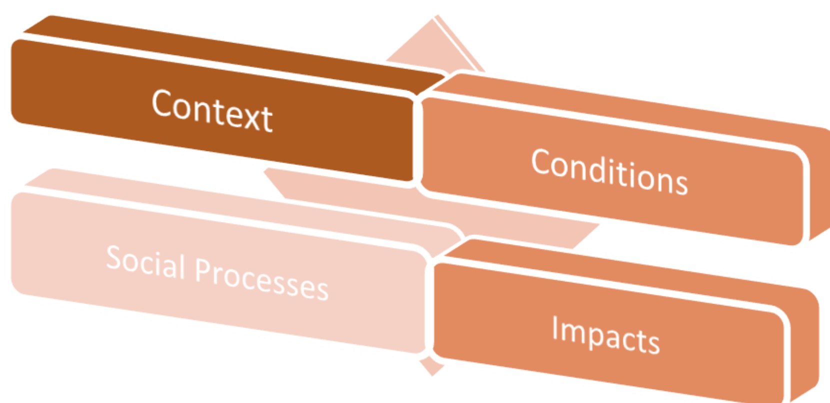
Dimensional Analysis

Grounded theory answers the conceptual question, "What is the *basic social process* that underlies the phenomenon of interest?" (Kools et al., 1996, p. 316, emphasis in original). Dimensional analysis goes further, asking the question, "What *all* is involved here?" (Schatzman, 1986, 1991, emphasis in original). "It encourages the researcher to expand the realm of conceptual possibilities" (Kools et al., 1996, p. 316). Schatzman was troubled by what he viewed as grounded theory's excessive focus on technical coding procedures; his response was to elevate grounded theory's roots in symbolic interactionism, in which "human beings *act* toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2, emphasis in original). Thus, dimensions are frameworks for action (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998), with the methodology designed to identify the significant actions within that phenomenon, what influences them, and what results from them. Dimensional analysis aims to capture the full depth and breadth of a complex social phenomenon, beginning with the data of

lived experience (Benson & Holloway, 2005; Bowers & Schatzman, 2009; Kools et al., 1996). The structure for capturing this complexity is to analyze the data as they relate to four essential properties: contexts (historical and contemporary backdrop), conditions (influencing factors), social processes (loci of action), and impacts (Charmaz, 1990). These properties are not linear but rather emergent and dynamic around a set of phenomena (Birks & Mills, 2015).

Figure 4.1

The Four Properties of Dimensional Analysis



In this study, six dimensions were identified, with one rising to the level of core dimension, the overarching beacon around which all elements, processes, and consequences intersect (Creech, 2021). The core dimension may also be viewed as the primary goal of the actor. I will first describe the core dimension, Being-and-Becoming Across Difference—its philosophical and psychological origins and its properties as expressed by the study participants. Table 4.1 is the Explanatory Matrix for this core dimension; it provides a roadmap for the entire study in that the primary dimensions are contained therein, expressed as social processes for the core dimension. Later in this chapter, I will describe the five primary dimensions that constitute the core dimension: Relating, Reflecting, Embodying Humility, Affirming Culture, and Holding

Hope. Each of these primary dimensions contains subdimensions. The core dimension will be represented in an explanatory matrix that addresses the four essential properties mentioned above: contexts, conditions, processes, and impacts. Because of the interconnected nature of the context and conditions across the core dimension and five primary dimensions, they will be summarized in the narrative below. The other two properties—social processes and impacts—will be represented by a matrix for each dimension, immediately followed by an expository narrative. What follows is an introduction to the core dimension.

Core Dimension: Being-and-Becoming Across Difference

Being-and-Becoming Across Difference is the core dimension of this study (see Table 4.1). In classic philosophy, "being" is a thing's material or immaterial existence that encompasses both objective and subjective features (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The metaphysical concept originated in Western philosophy in pre-Socratic times and continued into the modern era, most notably through the work of the 20th-century German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Expressed by such commonly used words as "is," "are," and "am," the concept connotes something static, self-contained, and eternal. "Becoming," on the other hand, connotes fluidity—the possibility of change in a "being" that exists. The concept of "becoming" originated in ancient Greece with the philosopher Heraclitus, who believed in impermanence. He famously stated that "everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed. You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others, go flowing on" (Bohman, 2021). "Being" and "becoming" are two foundational concepts in ontology (a branch of metaphysics) that are typically regarded as antithetical to one another. Both, however, are rooted in a Western individualistic perspective.

Mainstream psychology echoes this individualist tradition in which “the rational agent, or autonomous self, is considered the fundamental atom of social life” (Gergen, 2009, book jacket). In the last four decades, however, psychologists, feminist scholars, and counseling professionals have critiqued this individualistic orientation and posited a more relational approach, “one in which relational process stands prior to the very concept of the individual” (Gergen, 2009, xv). By this definition, the human mind is a manifestation of relationships. A relational orientation highlights interdependence, intersubjectivity, and an ongoing process of meaning-making that are context-dependent (Blumer, 1969; Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Uhl Bien, 2006). Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) offer a historical and philosophical account of the emergence of a relational orientation—drawing on Buber’s (1970) philosophy that true interaction or real meaning emerges in what he calls the “space between” (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000, p. 551). According to Buber (1923/1937), there are two types of relationships, the I-It and the I-Thou. In an I-It relationship, an “ego” views another human as a separate object to be used in an instrumental or transactional manner. In an I-Thou relationship, there is a sacred encounter between two subjects in their wholeness; it is non-instrumental and inherently reciprocal. An energy exists between them that is nourishing to both. It is this mode of relationship that might be characterized as being-and-becoming—not two separate concepts, but rather a single, recursive social process. This idea is echoed in the work of H. Schwartz (2019), a relational-cultural theorist who coined the term *connected teaching* to describe a relational stance whereby a teacher “is attentive and responsive with students; this intent and ability to connect is inherent in all aspects of teaching . . . [it] is not simply a strategy we enact when we are advising, rather it is the foundation of the entire teaching endeavor” (H. Schwartz, 2019, p. 15).

The teachers in this study, while living in the real world in which concrete tasks must be accomplished, nonetheless demonstrate that the most pressing and satisfying aspects of teaching are in the act of “being-and-becoming.” They are “inwardly integrated” (Palmer, 1997, p. 15) and keenly aware of themselves in the moment while simultaneously connecting outward, creating an interstitial space for their students to enter. There was remarkable similarity in how participants described this experience, centering on authentic connection:

> Our kids deserve to have teachers that see them fully as people. (P14)

> First and foremost, it has to be genuine and authentic. You can’t just do a show of caring . . . one of the ways you show them that you care is by valuing their opinion, authentically and genuinely. (P10)

> You have to engage them as people. And that means really getting where they’re coming from. . . . The child matters, those kids matter more than whatever curriculum you are teaching. (P2)

> It has to be about those connections. It has to be about somebody that comes directly to them as people, as individuals. (P11)

> They have to know that you see them as a human, that you respect them, that you care about them. And a lot of that is just relationship-building. I always try to build the relationship, find a connection with the students. (P18)

I now describe the four properties of Being-and-Becoming: context, conditions, processes, and impacts. Table 4.1 is the Explanatory Matrix for this core dimension; it provides a roadmap for the entire study in that the primary dimensions are contained therein, expressed as social processes for the core dimension. The Explanatory Matrix is immediately followed by the contexts and conditions that apply across the core and five primary dimensions.

Table 4.1

Explanatory Matrix: Being and Becoming Across Difference

CONTEXTS	CONDITIONS	SOCIAL PROCESSES	IMPACTS
Classroom	Overcame significant life challenge	Reflecting	Teachers feel efficacious and appreciated
School	Proximate to others with diverse backgrounds	Relating	Relational space is created
Community	Circuitous path to teaching	Affirming Culture	Students feel motivated and a sense of belonging
Education System	Early influences on the decision to become a teacher	Embodying Humility	Students persist in the face of challenges and experience success
American Society		Holding Hope	

Context

In grounded theory, context bounds the inquiry and describes the environment in which the phenomenon exists (Kools et al., 1996). In this study, context is critical because public education exists within the public sphere. One might say that it is one of the few remaining democratic spaces in 21st-century American culture.

There are five key contexts in which the core and five primary dimensions occur—the classroom, the school, the community, the education system, and American society (see Table 4.1). In each of the primary dimensions, while some contexts are more dominant than others, all the contexts may be in play at any given time. Context is central to the postmodern strand of grounded theory known as situational analysis. Developed by Clarke (2005) to widen the lens of study beyond the pragmatic social processes, situational analysis elevates the macro, meso, political, social, and cultural forces that frame the action. In a field as multilayered and contested

as K–12 public education, it is necessary to understand the larger context within which teachers work and how they navigate the inevitable tensions therein.

The Classroom. In this model, the classroom is the microsystem—the context most readily associated with the classroom teacher. It is where most of the action and interaction occur during a school day and is thus highly consequential for teaching and learning. The classroom might be viewed as a "holding environment" for students (Heifetz, 2013; Winnicott, 1960) that helps facilitate their cognitive, intellectual, and emotional development. Many of the study participants spoke of their classrooms as animated spaces with a particular vibe.

> Generally, my class is very calm. I'm very calm, but I think kids are very calm relative to in some other spaces in the realm. I feel I try to strike the balance of, I want my class to be really rigorous and I want the kids to get smart or smarter. But I also want kids to have a calm space that feels safe. I don't want kids being unkind to each other. I don't want things to feel chaotic or loud. (P17)

> It's a little zooey. I tolerate more from eighth graders than some people do because they're young and I want them expressive. . . . But I expect a high level of . . . I mean, we're talking about complicated things. We're learning about complex issues. So . . . I want them to be having fun and be excited about what they're learning. (P5)

> So my classroom feels a little bit, I don't want to say crazy at times, but it becomes energetic at times. (P16)

> My classes are noisy. Definitely, if you're walking in and we're working on an activity, the volume's high, it's constructive chaos. (P2)

> Classroom's a sacred space. What we do here is important. It carries incredible weight and incredible seriousness. (P11)

Study participants described their efforts to establish a comfortable, home-like environment, purchasing artwork for the walls, posting affirmations and quotations, and creating discrete stations in the classroom for reading and relaxing. Several of the teachers in the study noted that their classroom had become a popular hangout for students during lunch, between classes, and after school.

The School. The school in which the classroom is embedded is also a microsystem; it is a complex adaptive system with many "interacting elements characterized by dynamic and non-linear (non-proportional) interactions where small changes in one element can have large results and vice versa" (Osborn & Hunt, 2007, p. 320). The teacher has less autonomy in this realm while remaining influenced directly by it. Relevant to this microsystem are the physical and material aspects of the school—the building itself, its infrastructure, and the curricular resources available for teaching and learning. Urban schools are often plagued with physical problems, as evidenced by the situation in this teacher's school:

> Some teachers are moving from room to room . . . our guidance counselor switches offices . . . like there isn't space. There's rats in our buildings, there's cockroaches. . . . My door is falling apart and it's not being fixed, like just things that shouldn't be allowed. (P7)

Equally important are the school's climate and culture. School climate, a term borrowed from industrial and social psychology, refers to teachers' perceptions of their work environment and "is influenced by the formal organization, informal organization, personalities of participants, and the leadership of the school," while school culture "refers to belief systems, values, and cognitive structure" (Hoy, 1990, p. 151). Teachers' decisions to remain in a school or move to another often hinge on the climate and culture of a school and the values, dispositions, and behaviors of its leaders.

> This is a place that cares about their employees as individuals. . . . We have people who I know are in meetings all the time, are trying to communicate for what we do and advocate for what we do. (P4)

> I think it's been a wonderful place to learn to teach, and to refine my craft, because you have a community that is really supportive of the work we do. (P11)

> I cycled through a number of different [leaders]. Some were awesome and some were horrific. (P1)

The Community. The community represents the mesosystem in this model—that is, the multiple stakeholders who continuously influence and are influenced by what happens in schools and classrooms: parents and other family caregivers, community leaders, social service agencies, nonprofit organizations, the business community, houses of worship, and residents who do not have children in school. The demands of these stakeholders can often be at odds with one another. Stakeholders with the most significant direct impact on the everyday lives of teachers are parents and other family caregivers. All the study participants recognized the inherent value of building a solid bridge between school and family, even if they did not always feel efficacious.

> I think my biggest goal is to start the year by saying like, "The lines of communication are always open," and to hope that parents take advantage of it. . . . I think that's the one place in my teaching that I always struggle with is family engagement because it's very difficult at the high school level. (P10)

> Calling a family in [an urban neighborhood] there's an immediate divide there that I need really intensive training to navigate, and to know "who do I need to use as support to help me navigate that?" (P11)

> I would love it if we would actually listen to parents more. I think parents have higher expectations for their kids than we give them credit for. (P2)

The Education System. The American education system encompasses everything that goes into educating public school students at the federal, state, and local levels: laws, policies, regulations, funding formulas, and more. The purpose of public education has been contested throughout American history, but the last 50 years have seen an increasing emphasis on closing so-called achievement gaps and preparing students to compete in a global economy—a neoliberal perspective wherein "education is viewed as a private commodity rather than a public good," placing "economic needs over human needs and teaching content over developing children" (Sleeter, 2019, pp. 232–233). This perspective lands in the classroom primarily in the

form of rigid accountability measures and high stakes standardized testing. The participants in my study understood their role as agents of the system who must follow the law. As one participant said, "we have to teach them how to navigate [the test], because it's just a reality of life, unfortunately" (P14). That said, most of the teachers eschewed standardized testing as a mechanism that unfairly disadvantages their BIPOC students and "breeds teaching that focuses on breadth" (P4).

> We've seen all the studies, right? [T]he only thing they correlate with is socio-economic class. . . . I appreciate the need for data. I don't think the data is unimportant and I do think data can tell us a lot . . . but ranking districts is just gross. (P1)

> You know, we tell ourselves that the kids matter to us, but do they matter to us as much as the [standardized test] scores do? When it comes down between the kid's needs and the [test] scores, which one was I going to put first? The [test] scores, right? (P2)

> [W]e had kids who've been in the country 18 months coming. I mean, literally I can still think of [a student who] came across the border in the back of a truck and took a Greyhound to [the city] coming from El Salvador. Do you know what I mean? Almost smothered to death. And I just think like we're going to hold him to the same standard and our school is going to be judged on [the student] who's coming here with limited English and horrific trauma. (P10)

At the same time, participants were adamant about the value of authentic assessment. As one teacher noted, "There are a lot of kids who don't take learning seriously until there's an assessment in front of them" (P2). Some teachers refuse to "teach to the test" but are highly creative in how they prepare students, rejecting drill-and-kill tactics and embracing poetry, video, and other media instead to help students meet state standards. They also aspired to implement more equitable and less punitive grading strategies.

> That's what's been most transformative for the students. . . . Creating new kinds of programs with different kinds of assessments, to allow students to show understanding and connect with the curriculum in ways that weren't available before. (P11)

> [M]y main purpose in an assessment is to figure out how they are progressing on their levels, right? Are you developing novice low? Are you emerging? Are you proficient? Are you advanced? Where are you at? And then I try and get some feedback with that. (P7)

> I think the thing I'm most drawn to is wouldn't it be great if we could do performance assessments or portfolios or something like that that was just . . . longer term. So it's less like . . . these two hours are the most important. Then just be like give kids more of an opportunity to show a fuller picture of what they can do. (P14)

Several participants registered extreme discomfort with giving students a grade for behavior, as this high school teacher explained.

> I think if I ended up at a school that was giving participation grades and marking students' points off . . . that would feel terrible, I would hate that . . . I just don't think it's a reflection of what they're learning. I think it further penalizes students that are already disadvantaged. And if your grade is supposed to be a reflection of what you learned in the course, I don't think bringing a pencil is a reflection of what you can do in anatomy or whatever course you're taking. . . . I think it's especially detrimental to students of color because often they are the ones losing participation points and behavior points . . . it's a personal preference what is good behavior or what's the right way to act in someone's space, in my opinion. (P14)

The Local Districts. Study participants commented that the districts in which their schools were embedded were all subject to state and federal mandates that trickled down into the classroom. Some participants applauded the new emphasis on racial equity in districts, but often did not trust the bureaucracy to get it right.

> The system talks a good game, it supports this work in theory but when it comes down to it the system cares about three things: graduation grades, attendance, and [standardized test] scores, and, oh I'm sorry, SAT scores and college admissions. Those are the five things they care about. . . . And forget about kids mattering. They matter, you matter when you meet those things and [don't matter] when you don't meet them. (P2)

> I hate people who work in central office. I don't hate them as individuals, I just hate the whole. . . . It's become so bloated and over. I mean, it's insane. . . . And there's so much turnaround and so many people who would not know what to do with a kid when they couldn't manage them I just feel like and they put in all of these mandates and rules. (P1)

> [I]t's too top down. We need more boots on the ground. We need to stop filling the district offices with accountability people. (P3)

A similar lack of trust was experienced at the state level.

> I don't think the state ultimately supports an anti-racist classroom because if they did they would allow students to make choices about curriculum and assessments. (P2)

Outlier Context of Suburban METCO Districts. The classroom, school, community, and larger educational contexts of the four participants who teach in the suburban METCO-affiliated districts are, in some respects, markedly different from that of the study participants who work in urban districts in which BIPOC students constitute a majority. These differences can be attributed primarily to the presence of White students and parents who may resist efforts to revise the curriculum or initiate conversations about race or families from other parts of the world who feel that there is too much focus on the Black experience. Such concerns can have a chilling effect on school and district leaders trying to keep the peace. As one teacher mentioned, "This might sound a little harsh, but I think there's an implicit hesitancy to dig too deeply into the structures of our school for fear of what we might find" (P11).

American Society. Finally, the macrosystem is American society. Schools often reflect the values of the larger society and become a space for contesting competing values. Study participants all pointed to the enormous impact of larger societal forces on their teaching, particularly the chronic conditions that many of students and their families endure—unemployment, food insecurity, immigration issues, mental health struggles, community violence, and homelessness.

> Like you know when a kid's living in poverty. I mean, like last year I had a student, it was plain as day she was in a shelter. (P1)

> [O]ne kid I knew was murdered. And . . . I taught three students in this family and their mother was murdered going to the grocery store. (P2)

> I had a student, a seventh grader, who her father had been taken. The father was undocumented. This was probably like seven or eight years ago. (P15)

> I have some students who work full-time, go to school full-time, are paying their transit here. (P12)

> We have a lot of students with depression, and anxiety is our biggest thing. So students that are dealing with those kinds of things, it's tough to see students go through that. (P10)

Global Pandemic. An important contextual factor in this study is that it was conducted during the third school year of the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 17, 2020, Governor Charlie Baker ordered all public and private schools in the commonwealth to suspend standard, in-person instruction and other educational operations. The shutdown extended through the end of the school year. At the start of the following school year, 2020–2021, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education issued guidance intended to safely bring as many students as possible back to school. However, new virus variants, complicated safety protocols, and differential impacts on communities across the state presented ongoing challenges. Some public schools remained virtual, and others took a hybrid approach to educate their students. Interviews for this study began in August of 2021 and continued throughout the 2021–2022 school year when schools had reopened, albeit with mask mandates still in place for much of that time. Perhaps most surprising was that while every participant in the study made some reference to the pandemic, no one was fixated on it, perhaps because they were back in school and thinking retrospectively. That said, participants reported being deeply affected by the pandemic and its fallout in the first school year of the pandemic. They mentioned missing their students dearly and that they did "the best they could" (P1) under the circumstances.

> Their cameras are off. I can't even see their faces. I literally don't know what they look like. Maybe I don't know what their voice sounds like. They just log on, and we start. And so, I was like, "Oh my gosh. How am I going to do this?" (P14)

On the academic side, teachers felt that missed classroom time had taken a severe toll on students. One participant hesitated to use the word "behind," instead reporting that her students

were “not there yet” (P3). Others mourned the loss of in-person group work they felt was so central to building community. Some reported experiencing massive Zoom fatigue. Holding students’ attention was also a monumental challenge. As P14 quipped, “Last year, we were working so hard to just entice them to be there and to like, ‘Okay, don’t just turn your Zoom on and walk away. Stay here. We’re going to try. We’re going to put on a show. We’re going to entertain.’” Another participant found it effective to meet regularly with students one-on-one in Zoom breakout rooms.

Many of the study participants felt they fell short even when everyone was back in school.

> [I]f I’m the kind of teacher I want to be, you’re going to see humor. You’re going to see some lightness and some joy. I think those days are harder this year. This year’s hard. And so, I’m not always the teacher I want to be” (P14).

Participants also expressed worry about their students’ developmental needs and mental health challenges. “It’s so important to them to be with each other. It’s such a crucial time,” said P5. Several noted that many students were suffering and that fights broke out more often than usual in the hallways. “So I’m still trying to figure it out. But it’s a struggle, particularly this year because students are still so deregulated and have lost the stamina” (P7).

Amidst the dark clouds of the pandemic, however, were some unexpected silver linings. “Last year was a crazy year, but we did a lot of really great work,” said one teacher. Another noted an unexpected fringe benefit of online learning.

> I remember this one time I was talking to one of my students . . . his mom walked by and gave him a hug and a kiss on his head. Just thought it was so sweet. . . . We don’t see them interacting with their families. (P7)

One participant found a new way to teach foreign language, and others created and tested new curricula. Another teacher said that the pandemic made anti-racism work more accessible

because she could convene people across the district in online community conversations. One teacher said that technology had created a more equitable classroom environment.

> I saw the last 18 months as a great opportunity to try to implement things that were as inclusive as possible; the laptop is a great equalizer. It is a great source of equity in the classroom. Having every single kid have a laptop and they all bring them. (P2)

All in all, the participants in this study struggled through the pandemic like everyone else, but many seized opportunities to adapt, experiment, and grow.

The Racial Awakening of 2020. Most relevant to this study, almost every participant described how the Black Lives Matter movement and the senseless murder of George Floyd and other Black and Brown Americans catalyzed a racial reckoning in their schools.

> I think it changed everything for students, and teachers, and districts. For students, in that you can now say, "We're going to talk about race. We're going to talk about racism. We're going to talk about Whiteness, and White privilege, and the history of White Supremacy." You don't immediately just feel everyone in the room cringing. Ten, 15 years ago, "We're going to talk about race today," silence. It's like, "Maybe you're going to talk about race today, but that's not a conversation we're going to have." (P11)

> I think our conversations about race and equity at [our school] have gotten a lot deeper over the last couple of years. (P4)

One teacher said that the burgeoning number of racial incidents across the county strengthened his resolve and sense of responsibility to his students.

> I think I'm more self-aware. I feel like these, the COVID years, have really kind of twisted me a little bit. . . . I think that since Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown and all the sort of unrest and inequality kind of being brought to the forefront nationally, and through Trump's presidency and everything else, I just feel I have just kind of doubled down on that this is wicked important. (P17)

Several participants explicitly mentioned the national discourse around Critical Race Theory, with one quipping, "It's just funny that there's all these debates about critical race theory, because I don't feel like that's even . . . I would never even say critical race theory in a high school classroom. They're high schoolers" (P9). Not unexpectedly, the suburban teachers in

METCO-affiliated districts were more concerned than their urban peers that the politically fraught race discourse would have an impact on their classrooms.

> I remember sharing . . . with my colleagues, "We got to be careful with our messaging because . . . Here's a kid who for all intents and purpose is going to be an amazing ally, but if he feels like no one's ever going to see me as anything other than . . . the White, liberal privileged male . . . That's going to discourage him and he's going to go, "So then why should I try? What's the point?" (P15)

Conditions: The Teachers

In grounded theory, conditions facilitate or block the social processes of the phenomenon of interest (Kools et al., 1996). In this study, they are the fertile ground in which the teachers' mindsets, motivations, and actions are rooted. Conditions are not linear; they tend to be cyclical and enmeshed, not easily parsed. Therefore, I am treating the conditions for all the primary dimensions and their properties as an integrated whole rather than discussing them as they relate to each specific primary dimension. Four conditions surfaced as most relevant to the core dimension and primary dimensions: having overcome a significant life challenge, proximity to and experience with others who have diverse backgrounds, a circuitous path to the teaching profession, and early influences on the decision to become a teacher (see Table 4.1).

Has Overcome Significant Life Challenge(s). In virtually every interview, there was a moment in which participants shared a personal challenge that had deeply influenced their worldview and helped develop their empathic capacities—whether it was a childhood experience, a personal crisis in early adulthood, or a story of multigenerational hardship or trauma.

> I grew up in a big, really tough family. Like my own immediate family, my parents were extraordinary, but . . . my dad has 13 brothers and sisters and we all grew up in the same neighborhood . . . and I've known a number of cousins who've been gang involved, drug involved, that have overdoses, things like that . . . I have a messy family. (P1)

> So I was drinking. And I finally, right before I turned 21, I got sober and have been ever since. (P5)

> And then my brother, my older brother, who I adored and looked up to and just like every little sister does think he's just like the greatest thing ever, he was diagnosed with a learning disability in kindergarten and had to repeat kindergarten. And I think my family's reaction to it, as well as just his experiences in school, his self-esteem just tanked. The longer he was in school, the worse he felt about himself. He made it through school and graduated. But he's always struggled to keep a job. (P7)

> I grew up in a time where people were awful [to people who identified as gay]. My own family was really bad. I didn't talk to various members of my family for some time because of things that were said. (P8)

> My father didn't have any grandparents. He had one great uncle. His uncle was shot in the town square. I mean, it was dark, dark. They didn't know their birthdays because all the records [in the home country] were burned. (P12)

A surprising number of participants have poor or working-class roots. One participant grew up in a working-class town in New England during deindustrialization. "A lot of big military contractors were packing up and moving. A lot of families had a really hard time in the transition. I don't think [it] was a community that put a lot of stock in public education." Another participant recounted how her paternal grandparents were poor factory workers in a small New England town who saved up just enough money to send one child in the family to college—her father. "[He] used to have to hitchhike to Virginia to get to school because he didn't have bus fare" (P12). Another participant grew up with a father who was a teamster and truck driver, and another's grandfather was a firefighter from a large Irish family of police officers. Still others expressed a sense of pride in their socioeconomic origins.

> [M]y dad's brilliant. He's probably one of the smartest people I know, but he could not do more than high school. There was just no way, he joined the Army. And my mum is very smart too, but it just wasn't in the cards. Like they didn't have the money and it was just a different time. . . . Like there was no extras, but I also saw what hard work can bring . . . I'm quoting my dad, but you got to work for your pretties. You do, you got to work for it. And you got to put your all in and that's what you get in return. (P1)

> [Both parents] had union jobs. Neither one went to college, but they made sure that they had the money that they needed. And we were solid, middle class, solid, solid. And my dad would always tell us, you guys should go to college . . . the economy is changing. It's something that you need to do. (P7)

Proximate to Others with Diverse Backgrounds. A theme that emerged repeatedly was participants' exposure to those whose backgrounds were significantly different from their own. Sometimes the exposure was within their own nuclear or extended families, and other times, it was through experiences with friends, classmates, or their communities of origin.

> [M]y immediate family is all White. But we had a lot of a lot of differences in the family that weren't racial. So we have, I was raised Catholic. My dad's family is Christian, but one of his sisters became Jewish when she married her husband, and so we always kind of just negotiated around that. . . . [M]y mom was raised on a farm in Wisconsin, and my dad was raised in a small desert community outside of Los Angeles. . . . [M]y mom grew up in like a fairly middle class, hardworking family and my dad grew up in a really poor family. . . . So there was always a negotiation of who you are and there was always common space that was created. (P7)

> [M]y best friend that got me excited about the Spanish language, I've known her since we were 11. She came to the country illegally, and her father was still illegal when I knew her, her parents didn't have a lot of money, didn't have a lot of education. And I remember experiences with her in the classroom where I remember one, where she had been out for a week, because her siblings were sick, she was the oldest of five. And she was the one that had to stay home to take care of them for obvious economic reasons, her parents couldn't take that time off. And when she finally came back to school after having that responsibility, our math teacher called her up to the front and really loudly, I was in the back and I could hear it clear as day, told her, "You need to come to school if you care about your future. And this is irresponsible of you." And she didn't say anything to him, did not tell him why she wasn't in school, but came back and was just miserable. (P7)

> Actually, when I was younger, I was in Haiti because my aunt worked in the Foreign Service. . . . I am very pale. . . . There was this place in Port-au-Prince, the Iron Market. Walking through, people touching me because they had never seen anybody so White. My father's Armenian, so he's darkish. I don't know. For some reason, I was super White compared to my other family members. . . . I remember that really kind of dawned on me. I was 11. I was like, wait a second. I'm the odd man out here. It made me feel really uncomfortable. I've kind of gone back to that sometimes. (P12)

A significant number of participants lived and worked abroad or visited family outside of the US: one taught English in China for a year, another went to Spain, yet another to New

Zealand. One participant, a long-time critic of US policy, studied in Ecuador as an undergraduate, where she said she tried, unsuccessfully, to “get rid of my Americanness” (P7). Another participant regularly visited family in England who had been Salvation Army missionaries in British Guyana. Yet another participant grew up in a small midwestern town that was adjacent to a Native American reservation. Because there was no school on the reservation, the school in town served the children there.

> We had Native American studies classes, we had history classes that weren’t quite so Eurocentric, they still were, but it was something that we were more aware of as kids. . . . I can’t really say it’s a diverse school. It was pretty much white or Native. But it was primarily non-White. . . . Some of the classes were great . . . we had beading classes, we built Birch bark canoes . . . and we had powwows at school. And my family was really great . . . we were out on the reservation. They tried really hard not to make it feel these were two separate communities . . . they both have like learned, in some capacity, how to speak Ojibwemowin, which is the tribal language. So I’ve really been able to watch them authentically immerse themselves in Native culture in a way that doesn’t feel like appropriation, just listen and learn. (P4)

Circuitous Route to Teaching. Although two or three of the participants studied education as undergraduates, most came to the profession after an extended period of exploration. Many were apologetic about their latecomer status, expressing variations on the theme of “I have an unusual path” (P8), or “I had a super long road of confusion” (P8), or “I didn’t land on my feet until I was in my twenties, really” (P5). The list of former jobs and, in some cases, established professions is wide-ranging: actor, dramaturge, Hollywood writer/developer, project manager for a small contractor, addiction counselor, early intervention specialist, unskilled social worker, waiter, SAT tutor, nanny, summer school counselor, AmeriCorps volunteer, retail salesperson, market researcher, and management consultant, among others. Participants said these experiences helped equip them for teaching, “I think all of that experience has given me an ability to talk to kids. I had some counseling experience. I am kind, and I can sometimes figure out what’s going on with the kid. I can talk to them” (P5).

The participant who began as an actor described how she supplemented her meager income in Los Angeles by tutoring. When she and her husband decided to move back to Massachusetts, there were new choices to make.

> I did not set out to be an educator. My mother was a teacher, and I took one class my freshman year of college in education. I think it was so much theory that it was like, "This is definitely not for me." . . . My goal was to really go into theater. I really loved theater. . . . To sort of supplement that, I would tutor. I started first with a company that was preparing students for private school entrance exams and then kind of branched out on my own and was doing pretty well. We were out living in California at the time, and we moved back to Massachusetts. The two of us were like, "Well, if we're not doing theater, what else can we do?" I think, my gosh, teaching is as close to performance as you can get, so I said, "Well, geez, I've always really loved working with kids. I know I originally didn't want to do teaching, but maybe I could do that."

The participant who was formerly a Hollywood writer/developer described a defining moment that led her to teaching.

> My career was moving up, and to be honest, I know this sounds very Miss America . . . I just felt empty. I just felt like my life . . . I needed, I wanted to give back, and I felt like I was losing my soul a little bit. I felt like I was in a world that was very materialistic. I remember someone saying, "You need to wear designer jeans and have a Louis Vuitton handbag." And I just remember seeing people who had all the money and success in the world who were miserable, and I was in my late twenties. I felt like I was coming to a crossroads where if I continued on this path or was it time to make a change? (P18)

Additionally, a significant number of study participants came in through the metaphoric back door of the schoolhouse—as a substitute teacher, a temporary replacement for another teacher's maternity leave, a parent whose spark for teaching was lit by her engagement with her son's school, or through fortuitous connections and circumstances or, as one participant put it, "right place, right time" (P3). A few teachers sampled the profession by tutoring or running after-school or summer camp programs. Several participants earned master's degrees and one entered an in-district residency program that led to certification. Two of the participants currently teach at the same school they attended as a student.

Early Influences on the Decision to Become a Teacher. As participants shared their stories, it became evident that their choice of profession often stemmed from early memories, both positive and negative. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, and others were often influential.

> I like to think that I came to teaching on my own, but I should preface it by saying both my parents are teachers. I have grandparents who are teachers. I have aunts who are teachers. So I think I was greatly influenced by the fact that I have so many family members in the school system. And school was always a really positive place for me, I think partially because I had family there, I felt really at home, I could go to my dad's room. I could check in with my mom. I went to a K–12 school, so we were all in the same building the whole time. My dad was a high school science teacher and he was amazing. And so I think that was really inspiring for me, just seeing how he took what was sometimes kind of boring in other classes and made it come to life and was really respected by students and had great relationships with them. (P4)

> I remember my aunt and uncle—one was the librarian at my high school and the other one was a history teacher. And I just remember how in love they were with their profession, and how alive they were with everything. We'd go on vacation and it was like having a personal tour guide with us. And so, I think I was always attracted to that. And I'm just always curious and I love learning and thinking and interacting with people. (P7)

> I was not a good student in high school, which I think is a big part of my teaching philosophy. I did not thrive in the school system. But my second half of my junior year, my school had a block schedule. I had a teacher who really changed my outlook on education. I decided to consider pursuing teaching if I could get into college, which at that point, my GPA wasn't great. But luckily I got into [state university] in the teaching program there. (P19)

One participant attributes her career choice to her father, who coached her in basketball for many years and whose coaching style has influenced her teaching style.

> [M]y dad got us into sports early. We were what you would call tomboys. We didn't really play with dolls. We played with sports objects. My sister's three years older, so whatever she did, I did, and she picked up basketball, and she was really good. Then I got into it obviously. . . . I think I started when I was in first grade at the YMCA. So my dad was always a coach too. Half the stuff I learned was from him as a coach. (P6)

Several participants considered teaching early on and then rejected it as a career choice until many years later. A few others knew they wanted to teach from an early age but were not sure what grade or subject.

> My mom was a professor. So she was always a student and a teacher when I was growing up. And so, there were signs and symptoms that I would become a teacher, but I just didn't pick up on them. I loved Take Your Daughter to Work Day, where she would bring me into her college classroom. I would sit in the little desk and write in the blue composition books and just feel so grown up. Or she had this freshman grammar ESL review book for college or whatever, and I would just do the exercises in it for fun. So, yeah, I look back and I'm like, "Oh yeah, right. I was a teacher." (P14)

> I was someone that always knew I wanted to be a teacher. I loved school as a kid. I played school with my stuffed animals. . . . So in my brain, it was just logical like, "I want to be a teacher when I grow up." . . . I had wonderful teachers in elementary school and that really inspired me to continue in that path. . . . When I started really thinking about college and career, I was like, "You know, if I really want to be a teacher, I should start tutoring to make sure this is really what I want to do." So I started tutoring during my studies. . . . And that's when I realized I wanted to be a math teacher. . . . I absolutely fell in love with it. I loved when students had the 'aha' moment when it all clicked, and they could make sense of a problem. (P10)

Primary Dimensions: The Loci of Action

This section will discuss the social processes and impacts of the five primary dimensions. The primary dimensions/social processes are as follows: reflecting, relating, embodying humility, affirming culture, and holding hope. Within each of these primary processes are sub-processes that illuminate the nature of the primary processes.

Primary Dimension: Reflecting. At its best, the unstructured nature of a grounded theory interview can serve as an ideal reflection space—a moment in time to pause and take stock; it was my sincere hope that it would serve as such for each of the 19 middle and high school teachers in this study. What I discovered was an exceedingly high level of reflective capacity among the participants, so much so that it became a defining disposition and hence a primary dimension. Three subdimensions characterized their reflective capabilities: checking

assumptions, interrogating personal/racial identity, and critiquing the education system and American society (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Primary Dimension: Reflecting

Social Processes	Impacts
Checking Assumptions,	Ability to pause and regroup
Interrogating Personal/Racial	Strengthened personal and racial identity
Identity	Increasing understanding of students, families, and communities of Color
Critiquing the Education System and American Society	Knows what one is up against and fortifies classroom to transcend negative externalities

Sub-Process: Checking Assumptions. Many of the study participants described events that prompted deep introspection and the unearthing of assumptions carried from lived experience. One participant summed it up nicely: "[I] have so much left to learn and I mess up all the time and I make assumptions, then I have to interrupt those assumptions" (P14). Sometimes assumptions are made about students' abilities, as was the case with the following participant, who recalled a story from early in her career.

> I had a student, and he had some learning disabilities; he struggled in my class. He brought some work in that seemed . . . someone had helped him quite a bit. . . . Then he came in with his finished product and the front cover was so beautiful. I said . . . "Oh, did you do this?" because I was assuming someone had done it for him. It turns out he was an artist and he had made this beautiful front cover. His family was so angry with me when they found out that I had questioned whether he'd done it himself. . . . And so, that, I think, taught me that . . . I have a limited view of my kids—and their families know them so much better. A kid might be . . . deeply struggling with writing and have these other gifts that are really profound that I might not see if I don't make room for them. (P14)

Participants owned some of the assumptions they've made about the underlying motivations of students' behaviors, whereby teachers take an accusatory stance when none is necessary. One participant described how her body language has changed over the years to demonstrate that she gives her students the benefit of the doubt.

> I've noticed that sometimes a kid will walk out of the room. When I was a first-year teacher . . . you immediately want to run to the door and be like, "Where are you going? . . . But now what I do is I will slowly stroll to the door and glance outside, because nine times out of 10, the student is throwing away their breakfast trash in the big bin in the hallway because they don't want to stink up my trash can. Or they're grabbing a friend from the hallway, who's supposed to be in my class. . . . In those situations, I don't even need to say anything. And your body language will convey to the student, if you run to the door, they're going to know, "Oh, she thought I was doing something wrong." . . . But if you just casually walk over, give it some wait time glance out, "Okay, I see what they're doing, it's fine." . . . It's just those little micro teaching moves that convey trust to your students. (P9)

Other participants noticed themselves taking a judgmental stance if their students' lives did not conform to middle-class White norms, such as when a participant and her colleague were invited to a baby shower sponsored by the families of a couple in their respective classrooms.

> We were like, "Do we go to this, celebrating this, or do we not?" Then afterward, we went to it. The parents had rented out a restaurant. It was this celebration. Then we both felt really badly because we were like, "We totally were judging them. . . . Just because it wasn't our way of life, what we thought was. . . . I was disappointed with that, with my initial. . . . I'm so glad we went. It was like a full-on-wedding baby shower. (P12)

Several participants reflected on the underlying assumptions of school policies, as exemplified by one teacher who struggled with enforcing the school's strict dress code.

> My thing was it was in the handbook. So as a professional, I had to enforce the handbook. I didn't take a moment to actually step back and be like, "Is what I'm enforcing even worth it?" Again, I'm not going to be insubordinate. I know that it's professional. There are things you need to do, but just kind of realizing now, shifting the narrative on what matters to the kids, what matters to ensure student success. Is it going to ruin a whole kid's day? Is a kid going to not learn if he's wearing a hood in my class? I just think about that. I won't ever tell a kid to take off a hood anymore. . . . We want them to be individual in schools, yet there are still policies that are stripping them of their own culture. I wear headbands. I'm an athlete. I wear my headband and the hair on the top of my head. No one would ever tell me to take that off, so just all these things are like,

> "What? What is happening?" Just a lot of reflective metacognitions on why am I thinking these things? Why am I doing these things? (P12)

***Sub-Process: Interrogating Personal/Racial Identity*.** Each study participant has, in some way, reflected on how personal identity, especially racial identity, has influenced their beliefs and practices.

> I've grown in the past five years more than I've grown ever in realizing what I do and all the implicit and unconscious bias. (P6)

> It's internal work, personally the work that I do so that I can do the right thing and help, and actually help, not just like, say, "I'll do this." Actually help and change the situation . . . change what I have the power to change. . . . I think it just takes reflection upon the way in which you operate in a space where you think about it, and you're like, you play the rewind button, maybe I could have handled that better. I do that all the time. Maybe I could have said this better. (P8)

> I think that White folks adultify Black kids and then turn them into threatening or scary people when in fact they are kids. It's harmful to our kids because they see it, they understand what's happening. We had a teacher who said to the kids that she was afraid of them, and they were so upset by it. There's this kid who's . . . the only way I can describe him is a gentle giant. If you don't know him and you see him on the street, he looks older than he is, but he's just this giant teddy bear of a child. And this . . . teacher said that he was threatening, that he was scary. I just think that it's so important for us to read and . . . learn . . . and do that work of trying to interrogate where these ideas are coming from and interrupt them, because if we don't, we can do so much harm to our kids. (P14)

Other participants reflected on the impact of professional development experiences in or outside of school and how those experiences helped them grow in unexpected ways.

> [A]lot of it happened through . . . personal work, reading and signing up for things that were maybe a little outside of my comfort zone, PD talks. And . . . I definitely . . . credit friends of mine. I have a lot of friends who aren't White, who I've been able to luckily have really open conversations with about just race in general, but also specifically, things that I might be doing that are not great. And so I think I've learned a lot through my personal life and then been able to apply that to school. (P4)

Some participants drew on experiences from childhood as having at least partially shaped their identity and how they think about race today. For example, a couple of participants grew up

in the city in which they teach and recalled racial incidents that solidified their commitment to equity. Others encountered racism in their families of origin.

> My dad was like very Irish Catholic upbringing. And, I remember even at my wedding, over 20 years ago, he was like, “Are these Colored kids with you?” I was like, “What? Yes, dad, they’re my friends.” . . . He’s much more schooled now. But . . . my nana, she was still saying that until she passed. . . . She was born in 1929. Immigration then with Irish and Italian early on wasn’t great. So, they were fighting everybody for jobs. And so, that was just ingrained in them from the beginning. (P3)

> My mom’s story was always, well, the reason we left Virginia was because the schools were bad. That’s why we moved to New York. . . . So my uncomplicated, unnuanced understanding of race and my childhood for a really long time was there were racist people around, but we were better than them. . . . We were good White people and there were bad White people. . . . Then I got older and I was like, wait, ... wait, wait. So, my family mythology was we were the good White people, which allowed us to not actually have to think about the fact that sometimes my mom made racist jokes at the expense of Middle Eastern folks. . . . We didn’t have to think about race because we had just decided that we were the good White people and that bad White people and racist White people looked like Southerners with accents, who flew Confederate flags. (P14)

One participant reflected on the impact of living in the deep South during her grade school years and how her parents faced sharp criticism for their left-leaning political stands.

> And soon after they got there, they were asked to run for the school board. . . . So this is nine years after Brown versus Board of Ed. And they were in favor of desegregating the schools, but nobody asked them about what their politics were. And so, here they are running for co-presidents of the school board and people found out what their politics were. They were Unitarian, they were Northern liberals. And we started getting threats, phone calls hanging up and the John Birch Society sent a letter to the neighbors saying my parents were Communists . . . . So I knew even though I was a little kid that I was never, ever to say the bad word for Colored people, which is what people were calling people of Color at that time. And I knew that we weren’t racist, but I did not know anything about me being White. I didn’t know anything about any of that stuff. (P5)

Acknowledging her own unfinished business, she considered how race evasive she had been during her early years of teaching.

> So when I started [teaching at this school], I remember teaching through the chapters of the history narrative and we’d get to slavery and I’d say, “Racism still exists in this country. And I’m counting on you all to grow.” I would say a little bit more than that, but I didn’t really delve into it. I was always afraid to do it. I was afraid that I might make

> those kids feel uncomfortable. . . . I was afraid I didn't know what I was talking about. And I certainly didn't. (P5)

The participant's professional trajectory changed when, in 2016, a racial crisis erupted in the school. She reflected on how she found herself dissatisfied with the episodic and short-lived professional development that the school offered in response.

> And I was like, "We're just barely getting started. You can't be serious that, we're not going to do this again next year? We're not going to talk more about it? We're not going to continue to meet? We're not going to have affinity groups? Nothing's going to happen?" (P5)

From that moment onward, the teacher became an ardent racial justice advocate in the school, going so far to partner with the school librarian to create a unit on race and racism for students in the school and later presenting their work at a national conference.

For many participants, as mentioned earlier, the Black Lives Matter movement and the murder of George Floyd and its aftermath served as wake-up calls. Several teachers reflected on the degree to which "White saviorism" (Kipling, 1899) may have drawn them to teaching BIPOC students.

> I think when I started out, I had the White teacher savior complex thing happening. I think I was working with kids from [another city in the Northeast] who were mostly kids of Color. I think I assumed that they were coming from rough circumstances. I don't even know. . . . I think when I got to [a non-profit organization], it was a lot of young, idealistic, White future teachers . . . where it was like I'm going to do this for a couple of years and then I'm going to go off and do what I really do. I think that those types of programs, they breed this White savior mindset about kids of color. And so, I think I definitely had that going in. (P14)

They also recognized how White Fragility (DiAngelo, 2018) and White Privilege (McIntosh, 1988) have played out in their lives—reflecting on what it means to grow up in a White supremacist society.

> I wish I hadn't been afraid . . . I wish that White people were taught to reflect on their position relative to race and think about ways that, not thinking about it makes us complicit in this whole system. And I wish I had learned more about the structures and

> the way that that plays out in people’s lives. And I just, I never thought about it. I remember watching Robin DiAngelo for the first time . . . talking about, “no one ever said to me you’re going to live your whole life among other White people, mostly and no one’s ever going to say to you that that’s a loss.” And I thought, that’s me too. (P5)

> [Y]ou have to be willing to self-analyze and go to really scary places and admit to the racism that lives and breathes inside of you. And the white supremacy that lives and breathes inside of you and be okay with like, that’s there and that needs to change. And have some patience with yourself but also urgency. (P7)

Sub-Process: Critiquing the Education System and American Society. Most of the participants in this study did not define themselves as politically radical. They did, however, reflect critically on the American education system and society writ large. One participant mentioned to a colleague how uncomfortable she was about wearing the American flag on school heritage days. Another participant expressed frustration at the general state of the world concerning race.

> That the fact that this country is so segregated still is poisonous. I feel I get angrier about people talking about [the city where I teach]. It’s like, I owe this city my entire career so far and it’s been a great career . . . I think that since Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown and all the sort of unrest and inequality kind of being brought to the forefront nationally, and through Trump’s presidency and everything else, I just feel I have just kind of doubled down on that this is wicked important. (P17)

More than one participant felt incensed that government and even national philanthropy are neglecting their responsibilities, setting priorities that wittingly or unwittingly benefit the wealthy and, in the process, maintain the status quo.

> Yeah, government focusing so much on money, putting money in things that shouldn’t be our priority as a society that aren’t things that we value, but because that’s where our money ends up, that’s what we value, right? So if we can give all these tax breaks and things to the companies coming in, why am I tripping over my colleagues as they are moving into my room, I’m moving out of my room. Some teachers are moving from room to room, our social worker doesn’t have an office. (P7)

Impact of Reflecting. The primary dimension of reflecting calls to mind to the ancient Greek aphorism, “Know Thyself.” Having the fortitude to examine oneself—warts and all—is a

necessary, though not sufficient, condition for teachers of students whose cultures and histories are dissimilar from their own. The art of simultaneously being present *to* oneself and *with* one's students in the classroom often requires years of practice and reserves of courage.

> In fact, knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life—and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject—not at the deeply levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth . . . good teaching requires self-knowing; it is a secret hidden in plain sight. (Palmer, 1987, pp. 2–3)

The reflective capabilities of the participants in this study yielded tremendous dividends for them—as professionals and as human beings. When race-related issues arose internally or externally, the study participants had the wherewithal to pause in the moment or make the time later to step back and take stock. The act of pausing to think, sense, and feel was often the difference between letting the unconscious (including unconscious bias) seep into the classroom or catching themselves and making a different decision, one that could preserve and deepen their own integrity, while building more authentic connections with their students. One teacher summed it up beautifully:

> [A]s White folks, so many of us were not raised to talk about race. It was considered impolite or inappropriate. And so . . . if that's how we've been socialized . . . then when it comes up, it feels impolite and inappropriate and wrong. And so, then your body is like, "Wait. No, we're not supposed to do this." [T]hese are some of the things that I'm trying to unlearn . . . We . . . have to talk about these things. We . . . have to be uncomfortable. We . . . have to sit with the fact that maybe our face will flush or our heart will pound a little bit, and that's actually okay. We have to teach our body and our mind like you're not actually in any danger . . . and it's like actually explicitly interrupting those thoughts and being like, "Okay. So that thought that I'm having right now is not actually true." Then just sitting with it. Those unconscious and unwanted thoughts and feelings are just going to continue coming up. . . . There's that little cliche phrase, name it to tame it. . . . There isn't a quick fix. There's not a book I can read that's going to tell me, that's going to fix me . . . from having racist thoughts and ideas, because . . . if you're socialized in America as a White person, that's just in there. And so, it's just like you just constantly have to be struggling against it. (P14)

Through reflection, teachers' identities are strengthened, their instructional practices shift to better meet the needs of the students and the moment, and their respect for the deep assets of students, their families, and communities deepens. Reflection also sharpens their critique of larger systemic forces that contribute to continuing inequities, inspiring them to build classroom communities that protect against the ravages of racism and promote student wellness and robust learning opportunities. The process can be trying but ultimately rewarding. Again, Palmer (1987) offers counsel:

> When I seek my identity and integrity, what I find is not always a proud and shining thing. The discoveries I make about myself when I remember the encounters that have shaped and revealed my selfhood, are sometimes embarrassing—but they are also real. Whatever the cost of embarrassment, I will know myself better, and thus be a better teacher, when I acknowledge the forces at play within me instead of allowing them to wreak witness havoc on my work. (p. 29)

Primary Dimension: Relating. Positive teacher-student relationships have been shown to be especially important for students of Color, especially Black boys who are frequently viewed through a deficit lens—"either dangerous or at-risk and needing to be saved" (Nelson, 2016, p. 1). These conceptions often operate at an unconscious level, making it difficult for teachers to truly see students' distinct learning needs.

Thus, the primary dimension or social process of relating is focused primarily on the teacher-student relationship—in this case, White teachers and BIPOC middle and high school students. The relationships that teachers have with other key stakeholders—namely, BIPOC parents and colleagues—will be addressed later in the chapter. Four sub-processes about the teacher-student relationship emerged from the interviews with study participants: getting to know you, connecting with care, empathizing, and being the adult in the room (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Explanatory Matrix: Relating

Social Processes	Impacts
Getting to Know You	Students are motivated to learn, even if their motivation is extrinsic, i.e., they do their work *for* the teacher
Connecting with Care	Students and teachers grow through connection
Empathizing	Students feel seen, known, and cared for, which fosters learning
Being the Adult in the Room (norms)	Teachers have role clarity and a strong sense of efficacy

Sub-Process: Getting to Know You. For each of the 19 teachers in my study, the first order of business is getting to know their students. They invest considerable time and energy at the beginning of the school year in understanding who is in front of them, sometimes even before students set foot in the classroom. As Participant 1 described:

> You just have to know them. You have to know as much as you can about them. Also, I sound a little creepy, but I get my class lists and I pour over Aspen [the learning management system]. Where did you go to elementary? What neighborhood do you live in? What did your grades look like? (P1)

Greeting each student individually is considered an essential ingredient to getting the school year off to a good start.

> So like the first day in school, I make sure that every single student is greeted immediately when they come in the room. “Hi, I’m Ms. []. What’s your name?” Which sounds cheesy, but just you have to start by just acknowledging every student. (P9)

The beginning of the school year is a critical time for teachers to gather information about students and their families. They are adamant that content takes a back seat for the first couple of weeks of school. Some teachers offer prompts such as, “What is the best thing that

happened to you this summer?" or "How did you get your name?" Many of the teachers ask students to complete an "identity map," a questionnaire of sorts about their families, pets, favorite foods, language spoken at home, cultural traditions, hobbies, passions, and even who will be especially proud of them at graduation. Other participants said they ask students to give an oral presentation that is biographical in nature.

> There's always something about an obstacle. Or, what's your favorite memory from your country? Then that always leads into a story of how they got here or . . . What's your road here? (P12)

> I make them uncomfortably stand up and tell us two things about themselves, two or three things about themselves. (P3)

Several teachers begin to compile playlists of students' favorite songs that are shared at the beginning of class throughout the year. Some send surveys home for parents and guardians to complete. Most of the teachers devote time to learning students' names (and their pronunciations) and devise clever methods for remembering them. They also collaborate with their students to establish rules of engagement or community norms and agreements that will shape the kind of experience that honors every person in the classroom.

> In the beginning you got to get buy-in, you get like two months to hook them or they're not going to be with you. (P1)

Sub-Process: Connecting with Care. A teacher's ability to connect with students in a genuinely caring manner is a central and recurring theme in this study. Participants expressed the vital importance of caring about and for their students, and shared a wide variety of thoughts, feelings, and experiences that foreground how they manifest care in and beyond the classroom. Acknowledging students when they enter the classroom each day is a priority, often accompanied by rituals such as high-fives or fist and elbow bumps. The first activity of the class

is often devoted to ensuring that each student's voice is heard and honored, such as asking students to share their opinions each day through an "attendance question."

> So every day, we do an attendance question, which everybody has to answer. So at the least, they're hearing their name, I'm calling on them individually, because some kids go throughout school without anybody saying their name and calling on them. So I call their name, and they are entitled to speak up. They have to say something, because their voice is important, and it's also an opinion-based question. So starts some real heavy debates, but it's not a gotcha. It's like, "Do you like candy corn or no?" So every single kid feels comfortable speaking and starting, and it is a way actually to build community. . . . It's been a game changer. (P6)

Once students settle into the routine, teachers employ an array of strategies to continue getting to know them, recognizing that a solid relationship with each student pays dividends over the school year and beyond. A connected student, they know, is more motivated, hence more engaged, and thus ultimately more successful as a learner. Teachers seem genuinely energized by students' stories and consider it a privilege to learn about young people, many of whose lives differ drastically from their own.

> A lot of the relationship building that happens, I feel like it happens in the spaces between, the few minutes before class starts where some kids are wandering in early and you're asking them, "Oh, how's it going? How's your day?" That's how you find out, oh, they play basketball before school, or they have to drop their younger sibling off, or they dance on the weekends, or whatever. You find these little things out. (P14)

> I think they know that I care. And I know that sounds very basic and very vague, but I think that's genuinely what it is, is they know that I care about them individually. (P10)

Throughout the school year, teachers use the stories and details they have gleaned to deepen their relationships with students, "squirrel[ing] information away for later retrieval," and as touchpoints for connecting the curriculum to students' individual interests. Some teachers have conversations with students in written journals that go back and forth. P14 describes such a strategy that she and her co-teacher have employed:

> Every time we would find in their journal entry a little nugget of something, we made this little secret document where we started just dropping these facts about them. Then we would go through and we would look, and then we said, "Okay, send us a picture of you." So we put their picture on it. (P14)

A common refrain was that it was not grand gestures of caring that mattered, but rather, as P12 stated: "I just think it's little things. . . . I don't think it's anything that I do that is spectacular. I think it's just little things that make them feel comfortable." Some gestures include acknowledging girls' manicured nails, complimenting boys on their gym shoes, gently tapping a student on the shoulder when they enter the classroom or planting post-it notes with birthday wishes. Striking up conversations with students—about their weekends, their families, sports, or just what's happening in the lives—enables teachers to express care.

> I really make it a point to be in my classroom before any kids get in there so you're catching them as they're coming in, and just those casual conversations. (P11)

Teachers check in with students regularly to see how they are doing and consistently prioritize student well-being over academic achievement—"relationship first, rigor second," as one participant put it. Another teacher, remarking on her high expectations of her students, talked about staying flexible when students are struggling.

> So if a kid's not having a good day, respecting like it's not a good day, but you know what, we can make this up, but let's get you right first. And just being comfortable with that is okay. (P1)

> Or like, What can we do to scale this back to make you feel more successful? Maybe you don't do every homework assignment. Maybe let's just focus on the key things that need to get done. (P10)

In their efforts to connect through the expression of care, many study participants make it a habit to scan the classroom, looking for students who may need extra attention. Participant 2 described how this might play out.

> When a kid is not having a good day, I'm not going to bark at him. . . . I'm going to just try to get him to do work, I'm going to talk to him, I'm going to ask him, "Do you need to go to the nurse? What can we do? Is there anything I can do to help support you do this work right now?" And usually there's nothing, and they'll just start doing the work. (P2)

Attending to Their Physical Comfort. Some of how study participants demonstrate care relate to their students' physical comfort. One teacher turns down the fluorescent lights in the classroom and replaces them with lamps because students report getting headaches from the lighting in the building. Another teacher lets her students run to the cafeteria to get lunch and bring it back to the classroom, though it is technically against school policy. Several teachers have snacks on hand in the classroom, so no student feels hungry; another distributes pencils freely if students do not have them.

Mattering. The concept of "mattering" surfaced several times among participants. "The child matters more than the curriculum" said one teacher. "The first thing is that kids matter, each one of them," said another. In one teacher's classroom, a sign that reads, "You matter and you are important" greets students when they enter the classroom every day. "Mattering is the word that really hooks me," said a teacher who referenced the use of the word by Black scholar, author, and activist Bettina Love as an inspiration. Another participant said she sees a clear connection between her students' feeling valued and their success in the class. Another remarked that her caring is not dependent on a student's performance or grade.

> Look, you are an A-plus human. You might be like a D-enough student, but I separate the two—like your humanity is not tied to how you do in my class. They're two different things. (P1)

Being Authentic. Teachers being authentic with their students was often cited as an aspect of caring, as one participant said: "That's definitely what I strive for. That's how I would want to be categorized." The value of authenticity was expressed in both implicit and explicit

ways. Explicitly, they discussed the importance of "being on the level" with students and "being honest and real." One participant said she tries to "be on the level with them" (P3).

> They want to be treated like adults. So one of the ways you show them that you care is by valuing their opinion, authentically and genuinely, you know what I mean? (P10)

> I don't mince words, I will talk to students and I'll let them know like, "No, you make me feel kind of mad right now. We've done a lot of work on this and here you are acting like a total jerk in so-and-so's class, what are you doing that for?" . . . I expect a lot from kids because I know they're capable of a lot. (P1)

Teachers savored moments when they got to know students organically, for example, when an introverted student stayed to set up a room with the teacher for the next period. Being available to students in and beyond the classroom and the academic year was another oft-mentioned expression of authenticity. Students in upper grades visit these teachers repeatedly—to say hello, get help with homework, receive advice, or share news. Some teachers find it especially gratifying to stay in touch with students through middle and/or high school, watching their charges grow up in front of their eyes. Many participants reported that students who graduated come back to visit or meet for lunch. One participant mentioned that she still sees students from her first year of teaching almost a decade ago. A couple of teachers have even brought former students back to the school for panel discussions about their careers and life as an adult. In other words, the relationships are real and sometimes enduring.

Loving. While the word "love" is not often uttered in mainstream educational discourse, study participants used it liberally to describe how they feel about teaching as a profession, their subject matter, and their students. Many expressed that they love their students like extended family and feel genuine affection toward them. Others consider love part of the job description.

> If I need to love that kid a little bit more in my classroom, because maybe they've lost somebody or things are just not going great in their household, then that becomes part of my job, too. (P3)

> I think one of the things about being a teacher is if you don't really love the kids, you're miserable and they're miserable with you there. (P2)

Several female study participants understand the loving maternal role they play in some students' lives.

> He's one of the most special people in the entire world. He comes and sees me every morning. He keeps telling me, he's like, "Oh, Miss, you're going to come out for Senior Day. I'm going to invite you to my game." I'm basically his second mom. (P6)

> I think it's just, I'm also a mom. Because I'm older, a lot of them have . . . Their parents are in their native countries. They come to me about various things, whatever it is, but they definitely see me as a maternal figure in their lives. (P12)

Many of the teachers spoke of choosing to teach middle and high school because they are energized by students who are at such a critical developmental stage in life—"like it's such a natural process that they're going through. And I'm so tolerant of it that just like it doesn't bother me" (P1). Another said: "I tolerate more from eighth graders than some people do because they're young and I want them expressive" (P5). "It takes a special kind of crazy to teach middle school students" (P3), joked one teacher who said she loves working with students in that phase of life. "Every time I tell people that I like working with middle-schoolers, they act like I've just said I enjoyed juggling chainsaws," another commented (P14).

Acknowledging that it is not always easy to care for students who may be disruptive, one participant shared that a BIPOC colleague offered a strategy he has found transformative:

> getting to know each student well enough so that you can find something about them to love . . . And with me, it's something I like to do. I'm good at it, because I feel like love is the thing that, that binds human beings together and makes the human experience, the joyous thing that it can be a lot of the time. (P2)

Sub-Process: Empathizing. One of the teachers put it succinctly and bluntly. "I think if somebody doesn't have the empathy, they shouldn't be a teacher" (P12). The value of empathy was often stated explicitly by study participants. They felt it was a necessary disposition for

teaching and commented on other White teachers who did not seem to be empathetic. As one teacher noted, “I would say that teachers don’t have empathy for the [immigrant students] who work full-time so they miss a lot of days. They look at them like they’re bringing the district down” (P12). Another said it “broke her heart” to learn how badly students were treated by some of her colleagues (P10). Another said that her own empathy for her BIPOC students grew when she became a parent.

> I think especially after having children, how would you want your child to be treated? Just plain. It’s such a simple thing, right? I think that having children also made me a better teacher, because I always think about that . . . and I keep that in the back of my mind: how would you want your child to be treated? Would you want your child to be in your classroom? (P18)

Much of what the participants shared was a less direct, more implicit demonstration of empathy. Participants focused on listening intently to their BIPOC students, seeing them in their complexity, and learning from them. They spoke of the vital importance of giving their students focused attention, making room for every voice to be heard in the classroom, and validating students’ individual and collective experiences in life and in school.

> I think just it’s really trying to form genuine relationships with them and listening to them and being available to them and at least showing them in a sea of students that you see them. (P10)

A few participants talked about the importance of “reading the subtle cues” (P1) in body language and then sitting with a student who seems to need extra attention, or gently asking a forlorn-looking student what is going on.

The struggles of their students weighed heavily and seemed to deepen their empathy and respect for students. One recalled a seventh grader whose father, an undocumented immigrant, had been taken away. Another participant talked about students whose families lived with economic insecurity or experienced homelessness.

> I think there's a lot of kids who are real smart who their circumstances are not the same as others. And they kind of hide it, but you can see through. Like you know when a kid's living in poverty. I mean, like last year I had a student, it was plain as day she was in a shelter. I could see it. And she didn't have to tell me, we never really talked much about it. (P1)

Participants also demonstrated empathy for students struggling with mental illness, especially depression and anxiety, and for students adjusting to a new country or grieving the untimely death of a parent. One participant checks her email at night because some of her students are caring for siblings earlier in the evening and may be doing their homework in the later hours.

Some teachers were acutely aware of the community violence their students endured. One participant mentioned that he taught three siblings whose mother was murdered going to the supermarket. Several participants knew students who were gang-involved and too many who were murdered. One poignantly described the heartbreak of attending the funeral of a beloved student who had been assigned to her class for several years in a row because she was the only teacher who could reach him.

> [H]e was shot in the neck and was paralyzed. And he just died and it was awful. But I was thinking to myself like we did everything we could for [him] and it's still . . . I mean, I'm almost going to cry thinking about it, but it was just one of those things where . . . you just have to sort of accept that there's a hand of fate in there that isn't yours and you're going to do the best you can. (P1)

Respecting. In light of what teachers witnessed, one could easily imagine empathy taking a wrong turn into sympathy or pity; what seemed to prevent that from happening was the respect study participants have for their students. Participants recognize their students as human beings. As one teacher said, "Our kids deserve to have teachers that see them fully as people" (P14). Said another: "You are trying to engage them as learners, and in order to do that, you have to engage them as people" (P2). Respect begins with honesty:

> Kids aren't going to work with you unless they can sense that you respect them and not that you fear them. I think students inherently understand like I respect their intelligence and I'm not going to baby them and I'm not going to talk down to them and I'm going to push them. (P1)

> But I just learned really quickly that being honest with kids begets honesty. And it also invokes respect on both ends, right? . . . And when it comes down to it, it was the most loyal class I've encountered in my life because respect given was respect received. (P8)

Sub-Process: Being the Adult in the Room. Several of the participants said their success stems partly from their capacity to be "the adult in the room"—that is, to help students feel a sense of psychological safety knowing that the teacher has a handle on the classroom environment. A calm attitude helps, as does boundary-setting early in the school year.

> Making kids feel like you're the adult in the room and you're in charge helps a lot. And that doesn't matter if they're 18 or if they're 13, I think they appreciate knowing that there's an adult there that's not going to miss a trick and you're going to see it all.

Related to safety is trust, namely the teacher's ability to establish a trusting environment for all students. "I think that's first and foremost, like kids need to feel like if they speak up, if they talk, if they share that that's going to be a safe place for them and that you're not going to allow somebody to mock them, tease them, whatever" (P1). She added that it's also crucial for students to know that you can manage the intensity of their lives: "They do want to know like they can tell you things and you're not going to be shocked" (P1).

At least a third of the participants articulated that part of being an adult is to accept negative feedback from students with grace and not take things personally. That said, some admitted that it could be challenging to stay regulated in the face of intense emotion from students. "I've had to learn because I'm a hyper-empathetic person to my own detriment," said one participant (P8). Another quipped, "I mean, certainly I'm not perfect. But I try to not take things personally. I try to be understanding" (P17).

One teacher told of an incident in which a student insulted him in class and he responded defensively and, in his mind, inappropriately. After processing the incident with a colleague of color, he role-played in our interview how he would handle the same incident now.

> Dude, chill. That's pretty intense. What's up? There's a lot of rage in that. I don't understand. Why would you come at me like that? What's going on? And why would you say something like that in the first place? Let's unpack all of the assumptions built into that. (P2)

For some, years of experience in the classroom have thickened their skin. As one participant said: "Definitely, I did that when I was a first-year teacher, everything was about me. If a student stuttered at something, it was because of me, but now I'm like, 'It's truly not because of me.' We only see these kids for one hour a day. So nine times out of 10, it has nothing to do with me" (P9).

One female participant talked about the maturity required for managing students' stereotypes about White people:

> Knowing that most of my students have primarily experienced White female teachers . . . I think their first response for many of them is it's not one of interest. It's like I've seen a thousand of you. I know what you're bringing to the table. I kind of already know what to expect from you. I think earlier on in my career, knowing all that was debilitating. I don't really remember what I made of it in terms of how I tried to overcome it, but I know that I lost sleep over it and that I agonized. I was so in my head about it, that I think it impacted how I was teaching. (P4)

Over time, the participant said that she came to trust her abilities as a professional. "So I just try to swallow that for as long as I need to when I'm building relationships with new students and just know that, over time, my work will speak for itself."

Several participants suggested that being "the adult in the room" requires teachers to forgive students for negative interactions in the classroom. One teacher reported, "If you have an off day and you've been like a total turd in my class, I really can be forgiving. The next day we really can start fresh, and it works out" (P1).

Another participant relayed the story of a student who frequently externalized his rage in school; on many occasions, he was too dysregulated to learn. "But I didn't ever hold that against him. . . . Every day it was a new day" (P19). Eventually, together with another colleague in the school, the teacher helped the student develop his artistic talent and settle more comfortably into the classroom environment. One participant described how she keeps the focus on learning, even when it is tempting to react negatively:

> I get annoyed sometimes, but if someone does say something [inappropriate], I have to say, "That's inappropriate. . . . Why did you think that that was okay to say?" But I haven't really gotten mad . . . our job is to teach. So yes, someone could have said something that was a little bit wrong, but what's the point of snapping when it's a learning opportunity for them? That's the biggest part of how I've changed. Teach them, not shame them. (P6)

Impacts of Relating

The importance of the teacher-student relationship cannot be overestimated. Without a strong relationship in which BIPOC students feel seen, known, and cared for by White teachers, learning will be an uphill battle at best. When the relationship is strong, students are motivated to learn, even if their motivation is extrinsic; that is, they do their work *for* the teacher initially and attach to the subject matter through the door of personal connection. This idea is reinforced by Noddings (1984), who reminds us that "the child, as one cared-for, will often respond with interest to challenges proffered by the one-caring, if the one-caring is loved and trusted by the child" (p. 64).

A strong relationship propels students to work through academic and life challenges knowing they will not be shamed or belittled by their teacher. Additional evidence of a strong teacher-student relationship includes students keeping in touch with the teacher when they have entered another grade or school, or when they leave K–12 for post-secondary experiences. It also shows up when students express outright gratitude, as this study participant shared:

> Every year at the end of the year, I have my students write me a letter, like a reflective letter. I'm like, "Just write to me about anything you want to tell me about this year. You could tell me you hate me. You could tell me that I got to fix some stuff. You could tell me you love me." . . . Most of them turn into thank you letters. I have those forever. . . . Kids I didn't even think really were that close were just like, "Miss, you changed my life." (P6)

Another sign of solid teacher-student connections is the absence of discipline problems. It was surprising how few behavioral problems manifested in the study participants' classrooms given the mainstream media's emphasis on discipline, and the punitive behavioral codes of many school districts. Representing her peers in this study, one teacher said, "I have literally, knock on wood, no problems in my classroom because I'm able to connect with kids" (P6). Another said, "teachers are afraid of behaviors, and the behaviors never scare me because I know there's a path out of that bad behavior and it's a pretty quick path if you've laid the groundwork" (P1).

Some might question the wisdom of fostering the relationship between teacher and student, worrying that boundaries will be crossed, and inappropriate behavior will ensue. A truly authentic relationship is one in which the boundaries are clear: the teacher is the adult whose job it is to create favorable conditions for learning, part of which entails supporting students' natural curiosity and their quest for both connection and autonomy. At its best, the teacher-student relationship creates a virtuous cycle of sorts: teachers are energized by their relationships with students, which makes teachers feel more efficacious, which makes students feel more effective, which makes teachers feel even more efficacious. Authentic connection fosters growth for both teachers and students.

Primary Dimension: Embodying Humility. Derived from the Latin word "humilitas," which means grounded or "from the earth" (Oxford Latin Dictionary, 2022), humility is typically defined as "freedom from pride or arrogance" (Merriam-Webster, 2022). An even more nuanced and explicitly relational definition of humility is offered by Narvaez (2019): "Relational humility

is not simply an intellectual thing, but *embodied*, all the way down to neurobiological systems. Humility is a developmental process, shaped and expressed within social systems from the beginning of life" (chapter 5, p. 1, emphasis added). The word *embodied* is highlighted here, as the stories shared by study participants felt rooted in their physical, emotional, and even spiritual presence. I identified four sub-processes of embodying humility: facing the mirror, modeling vulnerability, learning continuously, and attending to power dynamics (see Table 4.4).

Table 3.4

Subdimension: Embodying Humility

Social Processes	Impacts
Facing the Mirror	Can square with one's own foibles and blind spots
Modeling Vulnerability	Is okay with not having all the answers
Learning Continuously	Becomes more learned because of receptivity to other cultures
Attending to Power Dynamics	Assumes responsibility for inadvertent errors in judgment and earns trust of students and families

Sub-Process: Facing the Mirror. One of the primary ways in which study participants demonstrated humility was through their willingness to look at their own behavior, admit their mistakes, apologize if necessary, and seek advice from colleagues.

> [I]think it means . . . just being aware all the time . . . of the impacts that something I say or do might have and how it may impact students differently because I'm White. . . . And just, yeah, I think there's a humility that's needed in order to do that well. . . . And don't be afraid to be wrong, to acknowledge that you did something wrong and to follow up with a student. I think that was something I learned early on there. I had a . . . first couple of years, sleepless nights thinking, I wonder, I'm not sure that these were racially specific incidents, but I [would] think about something I may have said to a student and processing how that came off wrong. And it wasn't until I circled back around and just had a human-to-human conversation that I was able to move past that and hopefully repair the relationship with the student. (P4)

> I also have very trusted White mentors that I can go to . . . [with] one mentor . . . there's been some things that weren't clicking for me, and I'll talk about it with her. And she'll say things like, . . . "Sometimes, if you say 'what?' to . . . Black kids, they'll be like, "How rude?" . . . And so my mentor teacher had to be like, "For some Black people that

> comes across as disrespectful." And so finding a trusted White person, that has more experience than you do . . . to just bounce things off of and run things by . . . I guess, just not thinking you have all the answers. I don't have all the answers. So being able to empower yourself to go find the information that you need. (P9)

Some participants described errors of commission—taking an action that was perceived as hurtful or speaking words that were experienced as sufficiently wounding to require an apology in the moment or later. Others reported errors of omission—not speaking up on behalf of a student or not taking concrete action, or not acting soon enough, that might have minimized harm done by others. Some of the errors were race-related, others were more general in nature, such as when one participant felt deep regret about a student who needed attention but fell through the cracks.

> I should have reached out but I kind of felt what I was struggling with in that moment was "I have so many students that aren't doing well, and I know I can't reach out to every family. So who do I start with?" And then I just didn't do anything. And that wasn't okay. And so I failed multiple students that year, meaning I wasn't the teacher that I needed to be for them. (P7)

Though study participants generally exercised healthy self-compassion about their mistakes, they took the incidents to heart, especially interactions with students that revealed to them their own unconscious bias.

> I had a student who was a young Black man, and he's big, over six feet tall, and he left the room without my permission, which I wasn't happy about. So then when he was coming back, I tried to meet him in the doorway, because I wanted to talk to him about, "You can't leave class without permission." And I was holding the door, and he pushed past my arm. It was nothing crazy or dramatic, but I made it dramatic, "Don't push me. Don't put your hands on me." And I basically lost my shit, and I've talked to my student teacher about this like, "Obviously, you never want that to happen." But you're a human and sometimes your emotions, your reptilian brain just takes over. And it's just a fight or flight response. But I also think that part of that response was this ingrained, "I'm a White woman, you're a Black man and you're threatening me." Even though I was not threatened, I was not hurt. Nothing dramatic happened, and that situation really haunted me. . . . He was really upset, he didn't want to be in my class anymore. . . . And it took a lot of work to resolve that situation, me obviously apologizing to him and to the class saying I overreacted. (P9)

> I think over the years, I've just humbled myself and done a lot of learning about the fact that my kids and their families and their communities are coming from incredible richness. It's not that I'm going to come in and bestow upon them these values and this knowledge, but it's like, no, I need to understand where they're going to coming from. I need to value where they're coming from. I need to see the places where they're going to be, teaching me things. And so, I think it's just been a continuous process of learning, unlearning, relearning, reflecting, and just constantly trying to . . . . Yeah, I think humble myself is the best way to describe it and just, I don't know, try to break myself of these racist mindsets that I have because I grew up White in America. (P14)

Another teacher described an incident while teaching one of her all-time favorite books, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Her custom had always been to forewarn students that the "N" word appeared in the book.

> I'd go through the history. . . . I said, "When I was growing up, you're White, you don't use the word. . . . It's a terrible term, and you didn't use it." I said, "Now, the writer uses it because she's trying to convey an authentic experience. During that time period, they would've used the word. So when I say the word, I'm not saying it, I'm reading it. It's important to be authentic to the language." (P14)

For several years, she heard no objections to her reasoning. Then, a new BIPOC student moved into the community and was assigned to her classroom. He approached her after class one day.

> "I'm not going to read this book." I was like, "No, no, I've been teaching a long time. . . . This is a whole class novel." This wasn't an option. I go, "Well, we're reading this in class. All the lessons are going to be on this book." He's like, "Yeah, but I'm not going to read this book." (P14)

The teacher was surprised by the student's persistence and felt her own authority questioned. She told the new student that he did not have a choice:

> He said, "Well, I'm not going to read this book. This book has the N-word in it. I don't say the N-word." I was like, "Oh, okay, I get it." I said, "Well, you've got to understand." You know . . . I went through the whole thing. "Oh because he wasn't there for it. He missed the speech. If he had heard the speech, this wouldn't even be an issue. I'll give him the speech, he'll be fine." I went through it with him and he said, "That's fine except that people have called me that before." I was like, "Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry." He's like, "Yeah. The first day I came to this school, someone called me that." I was like, . . . "I'm really sorry. . . . I'll tell everybody . . . we're not going to read it aloud. How would you feel about that?" He was like, "Well, yeah, yeah, I'd read it then." (P14)

The next day, the teacher explained to the class that she would no longer be reading the "N" word aloud and offered an apology for the hurt she had inflicted in the name of authenticity.

> It had never occurred to me that there were kids of color sitting in my room hearing . . . their White teacher saying this word. . . . That's what he was trying to say, "I know you're not saying it because you're a racist, but you are still saying the word. It's hard for me because I'm 14 years old and the only context I hear it is in an offensive, racist way. I don't have the capacity, nor should I have to develop the capacity to separate the two." (P14)

Sub-Process: Modeling Vulnerability. In the social sciences, vulnerability is often used to describe precarious situations or the predicaments of dependent individuals or groups who need protection—the elderly, young children, refugees, people who are disabled, homeless, or living in squalid conditions (Vironkannas et al., 2018). In other words, vulnerability signals weakness in a society that prizes individualism and autonomy. Such a definition "creates the illusion of an invulnerable and separate self and uses individualistic standards to measure a person's worth. Since these unrealistic expectations cannot be humanly attained, these controlling images become the source of shame and disconnection" (J. Jordan, 2008, p. 209). Drawing on Relational-Cultural Theory, this study recasts vulnerability as a strength and a core capacity for building healthy relationships.

Participants model vulnerability in a variety of ways: by giving themselves permission to laugh at themselves, by freely admitting a grammar faux pas or a factual error—or by generally revealing themselves as human and fallible. They recognize the positive contagion of vulnerability, and its power to expand the relational space.

> The image of the perfect teacher is not my jam. I want my kids to be able to connect with me so that we can have rich conversations that will lead to rich writing and that they'll enjoy reading. (P12)

> I want to show them that I mess up . . . I'm human. [T]hey see me mess up. They call me on my stuff, and I say, "I'm so sorry. You're right. You're right." (P6)

> I'm also willing to act like an idiot. And I think that gives them permission to be here. . . . I'll tell them that my emotional development was arrested at age 13 and that's why I think parts jokes are funny or I think they're funny. (P5)

Sometimes, participants modeled vulnerability through self-disclosure: "I'm sharing parts of myself with students so that they can build that trust with me to share parts of themselves with me" (P9). Many share stories about their families, pets, or places they have visited. Some go deeper into their life stories, revealing they are gender non-conforming, or normalizing illness by sharing that they suffer from a chronic condition such as OCD or ADHD. One participant talked about modeling vulnerability by revealing her struggles to become a teacher.

> I didn't take the typical route. I love that I have that little piece of community college that I can share with the kids. . . . There's no stigma. I am very happy where I got, so I like that my path is a little bit different. I think the kids can also kind of relate to that too. I didn't just do the norm. I struggled. I didn't know what I wanted to do until I was 22. Then I went back to school. That's, I think, a good thing to model for them just in general. I didn't know what the heck was going on, but I figured it out. (P6)

Another disclosed to her students that she got tagged with a derogatory nickname in middle school.

> I started the year by showing them that the year I was in eighth grade was the year that *Green Acres* came out on TV and the pig's name was Arnold Zippel. And I was like, so what do you think they started calling me? I was like, and if I had been a different kid, maybe I would've figured out how to turn that to my advantage, but I was not that kid. I was nerdy and awkward and uncomfortable. (P5)

Sub-Process: Learning Continuously. A critical aspect of embodying humility is recognizing that even the most intelligent person has much to learn and that we often do not know what we do not know. Most of the study participants had keen intellectual interests that they pursued prodigiously and an insatiable curiosity that extended both to academic content and to their students' stories and everyday lives. Given the enormous demands on teachers' time, it is striking that almost all the study participants are voracious readers. Some of them read for fun,

but more often they read to advance their learning, especially about pedagogy, anti-racism, cultural proficiency, and American history.

> When Michael Brown was killed, I realized . . . we haven't made any progress at all. I was horrified. And so I just started digging in deep reading, Ibram Kendi's work and a bunch of other people who do fantastic work. Carol Anderson, anything by Eddie Glaude Jr. Yeah, all sorts of folks. And I was reading W. E. B. Du Bois. (P2)

> I'm a huge nerd for teaching. In my spare time I read, like right now I'm reading a special education book. . . . So I read Zaretta Hammond's book, I read Bettina Love's book, Gholdy Muhammad's book, *Black Appetite, White Food*. I can't even remember all the books I read. *So You Want to Talk About Race*, *White Privilege* by Robin DiAngelo, which has different criticisms, but I found it to be a helpful starter book. (P9)

Participants also talked about the importance of White teachers deepening their learning *before* they step into a classroom as well as throughout the duration of their career—through professional development or school-based affinity groups.

> I really strongly believe that teachers who are coming out of ed schools should be spending a lot of time having to learn about this before they wind up in the classroom. I mean, it's not something that we should learn on the fly. It takes too long and it's too important. And it's difficult for White teachers to do. (P1)

> And I think for me, a lot of it happened through kind of personal work, reading and signing up for things that were maybe a little outside of my comfort zone. (P4)

Learning from students and their life experiences was also mentioned on many occasions.

> [T]here was a learning curve, understanding my students' cultural backgrounds and the ways in which my cultural background might cause tension. . . . [M]y first year of teaching . . . when I was a long-term sub, I was just really strict. And I don't think there's anything wrong with being strict. I feel like I'm equally as strict now. But it's just like my approach to classroom management is different. So . . . I guess part of me being a White teacher of Black students has been really taking the time to deliberately educate myself about my privilege and my worldview and how that's different from people who are not White. (P9)

Sub-Process: Attending to Power Dynamics. In the US, it is impossible to talk about race in education without attending to power dynamics. As White teachers reared in a White-normed society and working in a White-normed school setting with primarily BIPOC

students, most study participants are keenly aware of power dynamics, whether related to the teacher-student hierarchy or to race relations more generally. One participant candidly shared that he came into the profession with "power-over" habits that, he admitted, crossed into toxic masculinity.

> I was rude because I thought the expectation was, I was expected to run that classroom. And there were a lot of assumptions built into [a] White male running a classroom, that are patriarchal and racist. . . . So, I had to analyze the power dynamics in my classroom. And what's wonderful is . . . I had this one class that I used to get into it with all the time and they would call me out for being racist. And so, I got defensive and that led to more friction, but eventually I just listened to them.

Listening to his students and seeking advice from a colleague of color allowed him to find a new way of being with his students, one in which he shared power with his students. The change was palpable:

> As soon as I realized all that and started giving up that shit, I am really having a great time in the classroom. . . . As a teacher you have to have humility. But I think White men have to be the most humble people in a classroom full of kids of color. (P2)

Another participant said she assumed that, as a new classroom teacher, her students would recognize her as the authority figure. When she experienced otherwise, she was puzzled until turning to a book by Delpit (1995) in which she learned that having positional authority does not guarantee respect.

> It's something that you have to earn. . . . And so because of that . . . I always assume the best, I don't automatically jump to the conclusion a student's doing something wrong. I give wait time for students to meet an expectation. . . . Because that conveys to them, even if it's not conscious, it's subconscious, that, "I trust that you're going to meet this expectation and I don't need to micromanage . . . your compliance to it." (P9)

Among the participants, there was also solid evidence of "power-with" mindsets, whereby teachers sought to create more democratic spaces in which students' voices were heard and validated.

> [O]ne of the things I really value in my classroom is feedback, and I ask the kids constantly like, "Is this working for you?" (P10)

> I never really believed in teachers being the experts and kids just being a bucket that you fill up with knowledge. (P9)

> [A]t the end of the day, you need to be respectful. And at the end of the day, you need to realize that education is power. Education is everything. And so, that's what I mean by influential power, just making sure that in my role, I'm conveying the most important things about life. (P3)

> There's no hierarchy in here. We're all here. We're all important. . . . I tell them no one is more important than anybody else. No one will ever speak over anybody else . . . . we're all in the same level playing field. I've just been in school longer, so I know more. I'm just trying to teach them what I know. But other than that, we are learning together to navigate this world. (P6)

Impacts of Embodying Humility

Opening oneself up to self-scrutiny is not easy for anyone, let alone a teacher who is also subject to evaluation by a supervisor and judgment from parents. Nevertheless, the participants in this study did, indeed, embody humility in that it seemed almost baked into their ways of being in the world. By recognizing that they do not have all the answers, they live in a perpetual (and sometimes blissful) state of inquiry and receptivity, which leads them to new knowledge and understanding. By making themselves vulnerable, students learn that it is safe for them to share their thoughts and feelings freely. By assuming responsibility for inadvertent errors in judgment, they earn the trust of students and their families. By questioning whether they should even be teaching BIPOC students in the city when they might be better suited to teaching anti-racism to White students in the suburbs, they leave open the possibility that perhaps their job should, one day, be filled by a teacher of *c*olor. By considering themselves on an equal footing with others (as opposed to feeling superior to them), they earn the deep respect of their students, families, and colleagues. Such demonstrations of humility are not a form of false modesty but rather the stance of someone who values and models lifelong learning.

Primary Dimension: Affirming Culture. Sadly, for classrooms in which BIPOC students are the majority, and mixed-race classrooms, American schooling has provided woefully few opportunities for students to see themselves in the curriculum. By contrast, each of the 19 participants in my study described numerous ways in which they strive to affirm the racial and ethnic backgrounds of their students. As one participant stated directly: “I think it’s really important for students to have an opportunity to see themselves in the curriculum, and for Black students to see themselves in the curriculum and not constantly . . . stories of slavery” (P11).

The following four sub-processes surfaced as the most salient: choosing culturally relevant materials; creating engaging and personalized pedagogy; advocating on behalf of BIPOC students; and building community (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

Primary Dimension: Affirming Culture

Social Processes	Impacts
Choosing Culturally Relevant Materials	Culture informs everything a teacher does in the classroom
Creating Engaging and Personalized Pedagogy	Classroom is a dynamic, personalized environment, where everyone has a voice and some choice
Advocating on Behalf of BIPOC Students	Students feel that their culture is honored and respected—and that the teacher has their back
Building Community	Classroom is thought of as a community
	Other marginalized groups are comfortable owning their identities fully, e.g., Latinos, LGBTQ+
	Parents and community feel understood and respected
	Teachers feel comfortable in the communities of their students

Sub-Process: Choosing Culturally Relevant Materials. Many practices mentioned by participants align with the literature on asset-based approaches to teaching and learning (as described in Chapter II). Notably, participants only occasionally employed the specific terminology of cultural competence, cultural relevance, cultural responsiveness, cultural sustainability, multi-culturalism, or other strength-based frameworks. However, their decisions about curriculum, instructional methods, and pedagogy demonstrate that they honor their students' social and cultural identities and take great care in facilitating meaningful conversations in the classroom (Foster, 1997; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Most of the study participants devote significant time to selecting material that will engage their students. One begins the year reading Trevor Noah's book, *Born a Crime*, about growing up as a mixed-race child under South African apartheid, and another with *This Book is Anti-Racist* by Tiffany Jewell. One study participant assigns Kanye West's essay on the myth of the American dream, asking the class to compare it to *A Raisin in the Sun*, a play about a Black family aspiring to move beyond segregation and disenfranchisement in 1950s Chicago. Many of the study participants aim to bridge historical events with contemporary phenomena.

> We've been mostly talking about the history of slavery, and we've looked at some of the 1619 podcasts. We've just finished talking about voting rights and voter suppression, so how that legacy of Jim Crow really carries forward into the future, the gutting of the voting rights act in 2013, this huge voter suppression surge that's been going on. (P5)

One study participant who said she typically begins the year with a unit on social contract theory interrogated that unit before the new school year.

> This was . . . the first pandemic summer. And I was like, "Well, I can't overhaul my entire curriculum. That's too much to do. But let me just start with my first unit." And so I sat down, and I went through my first unit. And I was like, "Okay, where are some areas in this unit where White supremacy is showing up? Where are there opportunities to obviously dismantle that White supremacy but also to incorporate Black and Brown authors and activities that are suggested by Black and Brown scholars in this area of education?" (P9)

With newly sharpened sensibilities, she discovered that Western philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, who wrote about social contract theory, exclude people of color. Instead of deleting the unit, she looked for evidence of modern-day philosophers who might be more inclusive. She discovered Charles Mills, whose counter to social contract theory is racial contract theory, and she incorporated Mills' ideas into the unit. "And that not only made the unit more anti-racist but more rigorous" (P9).

According to Paris (2021):

> For White educators . . . seeking to be and become culturally sustaining educators, this means divesting from whiteness and the ways whiteness castes White normed practices and bodies as superior—which means educators invested in whiteness must be willing to give something up. (p. 368)

In keeping with this idea, some participants recognized that they could no longer tweak the existing White-normed curriculum. Instead, some took it upon themselves to reframe the historical narrative in its entirety to be more accurate, nuanced, and empowering. As might be expected, English, history, and social studies teachers in the study felt the greatest urgency to overhaul the curriculum. For example, one participant revamped her entire African American Literature class to feature Afrofuturism, a radical mode of storytelling that focuses on joy and glory, in which female protagonists of color use their strength for good, and young Black people are portrayed in positions of power.

> It . . . levels out this understanding that the only images we actually see are images of athletes, musicians, or the strife of the civil rights movement or slavery. So we . . . juxtaposed the two. (P8)

Another teacher created an extended unit that was organized as a single narrative thread: the rise and fall of White Supremacy.

> Rewriting the way we present our history to be . . . sensitive to the potentially traumatizing impacts of certain narratives. Not to exclude those narratives, but to re-contextualize them so that students can connect. . . . So, you start with the Haitian

> revolution. You end with Nelson Mandela's election as President in 1994. So you're going from 1792 to 1994 over four months. We . . . say right out front, this is about race and racism, but it's also about people of color, and many times Black people, reclaiming their dignity through resistance, both violent and non-violent. . . . It also dismantles that idea that we only talk about Black people when they're in chains or when they're destined for sainthood. (P11)

Even science and math teachers were attuned to rethinking their lesson plans to incorporate new voices and perspectives. For example, one science teacher begins the year by asking students to write a biography of a famous scientist, offering a sobering warning about what they might encounter in mainstream research.

> If you Google, like if we go on Wikipedia and you just type in famous physicists, you're going to have a bunch of old dead white guys. Okay. But . . . I think you guys know that. . . the people doing this work are not all White guys. Right? Yeah. And so we do projects, and they find people who aren't. (P2)

Sub-Process: Creating Engaging and Personalized Pedagogy. In addition to carefully selecting and revising curricula, study participants utilized creative methods for drawing students into the material. Many use games, some of them virtual, to reinforce concepts. Almost all the study participants employ hands-on or project-based learning of one kind or another and often assign group projects in which the students learn together and teach each other.

> I had given them this project where they needed to take a piece of artwork, any artwork that they want, it could be something that we studied or not, and then remake it in any way that they want it … And so they did … they recreated the Mona Lisa … And then they had to write about it, of course. That's when the Spanish language piece comes in. (P7)

> I had them pick an issue that they felt … was important. And I wanted them to look at and think about "How does the left-wing media portray it, how does right-wing media portray it?" And talking about media bias. Students … picked … racial justice, the drug crisis, health care, abortion rights, COVID, I mean, just all sorts of different things … it was like a challenging assignment, but they, I think, appreciated it. (P1)

Study participants search to make learning relevant to their students by providing them with options, encouraging them to explore their own interests, and providing multiple opportunities to express what they have learned.

> I think we try to mix together projects that are explicitly tied to the curriculum with projects that are more about storytelling and narrative. I don't think students have enough opportunity to really reflect on their own lives. I think there's a lot more focus on that in the last few years because of the way that Black Lives Matter has reshaped public education. . . . To say to a student, "Your experience has value and has meaning, so tell your story. Then we'll figure out how we can use the academic skills that are important to reinforce that narrative and reinforce that story." (P11)

Another study participant, wanting to expose students to modes of storytelling that capture the systemic nature of racism, asks students to create counternarratives based on the book, *The House on Mango Street*.

> [T]here's a vignette in it, where the main character is talking about how other people see her neighborhood. It's called "Those Who Don't." And it's like those who don't know any better think that we all have guns or something. But then she talks about the counternarrative, which is like, "This is how I see my neighborhood." So kids were able to pick . . . their own specific identity, their neighborhood, their school, and write a counter-narrative for it. (P9)

At least two of the participants are steeped in hip-hop music and culture. One, calling herself a "small hip-hop historian," created a mini course on the history of hip-hop for teachers in the district. When she told her students about the course, they were thrilled.

> I just feel like it became a point of connection with me and the kids, right? We talked about music, we talked about all these things. We talked about what I was teaching teachers, right. We talked about everything. Then I would get their input, like, what do you think about this? To be fair, most of them didn't know the history either, so I was giving them history, too. But from that I was like, oh, kids love learning about this. They love learning about the stuff that they're interested in. (P8)

Another teacher who has "always had a deep passion for hip-hop music" (P19) asks students to write raps, graffiti pieces, or slam poetry based on the historical documents they are analyzing in class. Study participants routinely use films and videos as conversation prompts and some assign

students to create their own media. As one participant noted: “[T]hey were filming videos today in groups about voter suppression, gerrymandering, the electoral college” (P5). Others want to help students deepen their thinking by using specific methods to become immersed in difficult academic texts.

> And you start to give kids that language and then it’s kind of like success begets success. Like you give them the language like we use these frames to talk. In a Socratic seminar, we talk academically, we use our good language. I [have] never shied away from difficult texts. . . . And I think kids appreciate knowing that they’re doing higher level work. (P1)

Engaging students through simulations and performances is another pedagogical strategy employed by several study participants. One holds a mock trial about South Africa during apartheid. She has also established a long-term relationship with a professional theater company whereby she and an artistic director prepare high school students to perform a social justice-themed play on a world-class stage every year. Some study participants draw on students’ unique life experiences during class to give the curriculum more immediacy.

> We were talking about Hurricane Maria, this was last week. The way that the government handled Hurricane Maria comparative to Hurricane Harvey in Texas. I had a student say, “Oh, I was there.” I was like, “If you’re comfortable, can you talk about that?” She’s like, “Yeah.” She told me about her grandmother’s house and all these things that she saw. I’m like, “Is that why you came here?” She’s like, “Yeah, we came a month after.” (P19)

One participant seized a teaching moment the day after the insurrection at the US Capitol Building on January 6, 2022. “[I] completely scrapped my lesson plans for that day” (P9). She selected a protocol from a book she was reading, an adaptation of a Freirean culture circle. “I had never done one before, so I was a little bit nervous” (P9). She wondered if it would translate to a virtual environment and whether the students would feel emotionally prepared for such a conversation. “I don’t want to force them to talk about it if it’s going to be traumatizing, but I also don’t want to ignore it.” Using photos and videos from the news media, the teacher guided the class through the six steps of the protocol, from concrete description to analysis to

meaning-making. They spent the entire 75 minutes of class immersed in a structured conversation, reporting afterward that they appreciated hearing their peers' perspectives.

On the lighter side, many teachers use humor to diffuse conflict, invent silly songs to break through apathy or melancholy, or even joke about their Whiteness.

> [F]or some kids I'm like maybe the first White person that they've ever connected with . . . you just acknowledge it . . . clearly, I'm the only White girl in the room, but that's okay. We can have jokes about it. And you know what I mean? I've had a million jokes with kids about that. And I think kids appreciate a little bit of the humor. (P1)

One participant, an ESL teacher bent on building students' grasp of English, organizes a "word funeral" every year.

> We are putting words to rest . . . words that are no longer allowed in our formal writing . . . because we want to make sure we're coming off as professional and academic scholars. So . . . they write a eulogy for the word. They make a gravestone, and they have to dress formally for the funeral. . . . We kill overused words, like nice, good, bad, happy, sad. . . . But they talk about the word like it's a person. So if they were doing "sorta," it'd be like, "Welcome . . . Today, we're gathered here to celebrate the life of Sorta. . . . He is survived by his remaining family, Somewhat, Moderately, and Slightly. He will be dearly missed. . . . Rest in peace." (P6)

Sub-Process: Advocating on Behalf of BIPOC Students. Study participants also affirm the identities and cultures of their BIPOC students by "seeing" and calling out fraught situations and sometimes directly advocating on their behalf.

> I think just as I've gotten older, I realize that sometimes . . . although I do follow the rules, I think that sometimes the rules need to be broken. I think if a kid is in the United States, then they should be given citizenship. (P12)

> But I really do think, there's not two sides to many of these issues. There's what's right and there's what's not, not just. It's wrong. So I've gotten a lot more willing to just put it out there. (P5)

In some cases, students seek out the study participants for emotional support, as when a student approached a teacher in the months after George Floyd's murder:

> He wanted to vent about being a Black boy and how scared he was, and how it was wrong. . . . I just listened because there was nothing I could say. But then he was like, "Thank you for allowing me the space." (P6)

In other instances, participants confront the conscious or unconscious bias of other adults in their respective schools. For example, one suburban teacher described an incident in which some of her BIPOC students played hip-hop music loudly on Bluetooth speakers, and the White students in the class responded "in retaliation" by blaring country music. The problem, she said, was that the BIPOC students were more harshly reprimanded than their White classmates for the incident (P8). Another participant was infuriated by the second-class status accorded her ESL students, complaining that it was "like pulling teeth" in the school to secure a room for them to take the high stakes standardized test, as administrators did not want to "inconvenience" other teachers in the school (P12). Another suburban teacher recalled that, in his first year of teaching, he began to see that many of his BIPOC students did not belong in his remedial class.

> My first day, I walk into my D block class. . . . It was 75% Black. . . . Immediately, I'm thinking, I know I've read about this, but come on. This is insane. The kids immediately are joking about it, by the first week like . . . "Isn't it crazy that they put all the Black kids in the same class?" They . . . they knew exactly what was going on. It became very apparent within weeks that you had all of these kids who, at one time or another in their academic career, had clearly been written off. You could never quite figure out why, but [they] didn't really have skill deficits. Maybe they had some skill deficits because they were continuously written off. (P11)

The teacher also noticed that while the students did not seem engaged in the work, they would finish their exams in the first 15 minutes of a 55-minute period and earn perfect scores.

> You realize, "you're not in here because you have a learning issue. You're in here because someone wrote you off, and you've gotten basically sent into this pipeline where, for whatever reason, the culture, certain adults have reinforced this idea that, "We're not really going to fight for you." . . . So these kids would pull Bs. They wouldn't do any homework, but they would ace their tests and their in-class essays. (P11)

Over time, he said, the school began holding itself accountable, creating programs to ensure BIPOC students have opportunities to excel. He co-developed one such program, a

combined English and American History class that allows students to demonstrate their understanding through creative expression, such as producing documentaries and podcasts, including one that was submitted to National Public Radio.

> In our first year, we had probably the most diverse cohort that I've ever taught. There were five girls in the program, all of whom were in METCO. They were, individually and collectively, forces of nature, absolutely incredible. They brought so much creativity to the work. They elevated the classroom. They clearly had come up through school together, and knew each other, and were very fond of each other. (P11)

The teacher said that promoting divergent expressions of learning broke the mold of a unitary and constricting model of academic success that often plagues wealthier communities, allowing BIPOC students "to take pride in their work and feel a sense of accomplishment and ownership" (P11).

Sub-Process: Creating Community. Effective teachers of color are known to define the classroom in collectivist terms—as a community of learners (Cholewa et al., 2012; Foster, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Each student is seen as an important member of the community, and there is an expectation that students are accountable to themselves and each other and bear responsibility for supporting one another's success. This sense of community stands in stark contrast to the competitive frame of the traditional American classroom in which students are sorted and judged primarily by their individual contributions, which often pits students against one another, thereby creating a hierarchy of who matters.

Most, if not all, of the White teachers in this study view their classrooms as communities that must be tended like lush gardens. "A community has rituals, and a community has affection for one another," said one participant. "So if you walked into my classroom, you would see my kids interacting with one another very comfortably, you would see me interacting with them very comfortably and respectfully" (P2). Another participant described the joys of helping students

work together: “You’re going to see a lot of group work and a lot of collaboration” (P10). “I just feel like if you set up a safe space in class to talk and share, then you listen and you don’t judge, then it becomes a safe space, and kids can feel that,” said another participant (P8).

Mirroring the practice known as “family business” (see Chapter II), one teacher described a specific community-building ritual she initiated several years ago.

> We start the day with celebrations. . . . It doesn’t have to be big. Literally, anything you can find to be grateful. So we do that, and they get better as the year goes on. Then it’ll be more like community, like, “Oh, I’m going to see my mom this weekend,” or, “Oh, it’s my sister’s birthday,” and we kind of get to celebrate that together. (P6)

This participant also works with her students to co-create a set of classroom agreements at the beginning of the school year.

> We make a whole list of “What does respect look like? What does it sound like? What does it feel like? What does it not sound like?” They make their own lists, and they put it on the board. Then they sign their names. I sign my name. It’s like a contract.

The teacher also instituted “Feel Good Fridays” in her class to encourage members to appreciate one another.

> So first, I ease them in. They write a compliment, an anonymous compliment about someone sitting in the room. Then I read it out loud just to start the day off with good vibes. Then toward the middle of the year, I take away the anonymity because you need to be nice to people, and I make them say it to someone’s face. (P6)

Perhaps this sense of community is what accounts, at least in part, for the fact that surprisingly few study participants struggled with discipline issues. Only two participants described difficulties managing their classrooms. Other participants mentioned that they need to redirect on occasion, and they do not hesitate to call students out on inappropriate behavior, but they seem to be skilled co-regulators, swiftly de-escalating tense moments that could go south in the wrong hands. One teacher who grew up in the city in which she teaches believes that knowing all

students well, including their neighborhoods of origin, provides important data for creating a community of learners.

> Like any school that you name, I can tell you what neighborhood it's in. I think just knowing your kids and being aware of who each of them are and possible personality, you just know it. And I think you build community by making kids feel safe. And you make kids feel safe by letting them know that you got this and you're not going to miss a trick. (P1)

A critical aspect of community building for all study participants is addressing race directly. I wondered, had I conducted my study five or ten years earlier, would I have encountered such insistence about confronting race? It is impossible to know for certain, but what is clear is that the Black Lives Matter movement, and especially the murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020, has had a profound impact on the study participants. As one participant noted: "I've become a lot more open about talking about race throughout my years" (P5). Another said that support at the school level has eased the way. "I think our conversations about race and equity . . . have gotten a lot deeper over the last couple of years" (P4). As schools step up their commitments to anti-racism and equity, teachers are empowered to talk directly about what might have been only hinted at previously.

> And all the time I was learning more, actively seeking out information and really starting to teach my students about institutionalized racism, about the criminal justice system, about housing policy, about implicit bias, lots of pieces. I mean, the first year that I did that, I had a whole crew of kids that would come to my room after school, kids of color, and hang out for two hours. . . . They had never done that before. . . . And they brought friends, kids that I didn't even teach who were hanging out with me. . . . And one of the kids said to me, "We don't talk about this anywhere. We don't even talk about this at home, except every now and then sometimes at the dinner table. Even my parents aren't talking about this." (P5)

In suburban classrooms serving METCO students, conversations about race have also been prioritized in the last few years.

> I will say, the one thing that, if there was any silver lining to it is, in those classrooms you could talk about race. You could talk about racism. You could talk about Whiteness and you could talk about Blackness without the fear that there's only one Black student in the class who then feels like, "If I say anything, I have to represent all Black people." (P11)

Oftentimes, however, conversations in suburban schools are often more fraught than in city schools. White students and their parents may become defensive when White Privilege or White Supremacy are mentioned or when teachers widen the lens on the American historical narrative. The presence of East Asian, Chinese, and Russian students in the population also complicates the conversation.

> It's really hard to say to a student who's a Russian kid whose family, whose grandparents survived World War II, or maybe had many relatives that didn't, and then had to be subject to the day-to-day humiliations of Soviet life. Then maybe went to Israel and lived at the edges of society, where they were settled in the 1990s and had a hardscrabble life, and then came here and probably had parents who worked in kitchens, scrubbing dishes and stocking shelves, just to get a place here. They say, "Wait. I have to apologize for 400 years of history? I didn't do any of this."

Under these circumstances, the participant said, "we've never really entertained the complicated questions. . . . I think there's an implicit hesitancy to dig too deeply into the structures of our school, for fear of what we might find . . . because it's really messy, and it's tough" (P11).

Impacts of Affirming Culture. The research is clear about the key features of asset-based pedagogies and practices that affirm the lived experiences of students, their families, and communities: high expectations, student voice, and agency, culturally relevant curricula, cultural competence, valuing communities' histories and languages, honoring different communication styles, and teaching critical consciousness—that is, knowing how to identify and address social inequities against minoritized groups (J. Banks, 2006; Gay, 2002/2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). The 19 participants in this study demonstrate a keen awareness of these features and take them to heart in and beyond their classrooms. Especially for the White teachers who work predominantly with BIPOC students, culture informs many, if not most, of the decisions they make. Their

classrooms are dynamic and personalized; students have a voice and some choice about what they are learning and how that learning is demonstrated. Race is discussed openly, and students consistently feel their culture is honored and respected.

Moreover, students are confident that the teacher has their back and is willing to stand up to injustice on their behalf. For most study participants, a primary goal is to build a community in which everyone feels a sense of belonging and everyone's identities are validated and appreciated. Outside of the classroom, study participants reported varying levels of comfort with the parents of their students. However, all of them recognize the significance of building those relationships and gaining a level of comfort in and with communities of color.

Primary Dimension: Holding Hope. Many of the teachers in this study seem to understand that part of their role is to *hold* the hope on behalf of their BIPOC students, acknowledging their often-tenuous daily realities while also embracing their resilience, creativity, and genius. Four sub-processes of Holding Hope were identified: honoring students' capabilities; reminding students of their resilience; helping students navigate; and painting a hopeful vision of the future (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

Primary Dimension: Holding Hope

Social Processes	Impacts
Honoring Students' Capabilities	Students feel empowered
Reminding Students of Their Resilience	Students can engage in productive struggle knowing that their teacher has their back
Helping Students Navigate	Students feel capable of achieving more than they had imagined Teachers feel a sense of pride about what their students can accomplish
Painting a Hopeful Vision of the Future	Students feel that, despite the odds, they can make it

***Sub-Process: Honoring Their Capabilities*.** The teachers in this study all held high expectations for their BIPOC students, balancing the reality of students' lives with their steadfast belief that education can put them on a positive life trajectory.

> I think you have to meet the kids where they are but be willing to push them way beyond where they think they can go. And that's done just only through hard work. Like you've got to work really hard to know your kids, know what they can do and personalize their education in a way that is super meaningful. . . . [T]he kids are raw, but it's like that rawness is . . . so powerful and authentic. They're not going to bullshit you. (P1)

> I believe that education should be enjoyable, I believe that it should be self-affirming. And I believe that our students are as capable as anybody else. And they have a lot to offer. I believe that their culture is an asset. . . . I believe every student needs to feel successful every single day in every single class. (P7)

> I never ever teach down to them. Like no matter what their skill level is, I'm teaching them like they are college bound and we're really raising the bar academically. (P1)

Several teachers expressed frustration with some of their colleagues for not holding students to high expectations. "There's no excuse for not holding kids accountable for what they're able to do and even more," one teacher commented (P3). Another complained how demoralizing it was,

early in her career, to be exposed to a group of White teachers close to retirement "that were just so burnt out, and so negative" (P7). Such teachers held low expectations of their students, a subtle but pernicious form of bigotry.

Many study participants recognized that high expectations had to be met with high levels of support, especially for the many students whose needs had not been met by the system and, therefore, whose experiences with schooling had been frustrating or dispiriting. Some teachers encourage students to re-submit assignments for a better grade; others carefully scaffold the learning for those who may not yet have mastered a set of skills or body of knowledge, for example:

> I never shied away from difficult texts. Like we would read difficult texts, but we might not read 30 pages of difficult texts. I would chunk it and I would say, "Okay, we're going to read these excerpts. And then what's the big idea?" And I think kids appreciate knowing that they're doing higher-level work. (P1)

Another strategy she employs is raising the bar gently over the course of the year, so that one success builds on the next in a virtuous cycle of learning.

> In the beginning you got to get buy-in, you get like two months to hook them or they're not going to be with you. So you got to kind of build up this idea that like this is something you can do and you're capable of. And if that sometimes means that you're grading a little bit on the curve to like hook them in, I'm for it, I don't think it's a bad idea. (P1)

Some teachers make clear to students early on that they will not be assigning busy work.

> I'm not going to waste your time. . . . I'm like, "you did not get out of bed at 5:30 this morning and come all the way over here for me to waste your time. So of course, I'm going to make you work. Like how ridiculous that you would think I would give you stupid work. Like we have real work to do." So I think telegraphing that . . . I know you're capable of things, but we got to do things in order to show you're capable of things. (P1)
>
> I'm super straightforward with kids. I'm always, "I'm not ever going to give you an assignment that doesn't count. I'm not ever going to give you an assignment that doesn't mean anything. I'm never giving you busy work." (P3)

***Sub-Process: Reminding Students of Their Resilience*.** The participants in this study were unanimous in appreciating the resiliency of their students—through illness, substandard housing, food insecurity, community violence, family tragedy, and the daily indignities of living as a young person of color in a society and an education system that often views them either as glasses half-empty or dangerous predators.

> I try to look at everything like, wow, what a hot mess things are right now but look at where you're headed and look at the strength this is going to give you. You can pull through this . . . and let's forward think together. (P1)

This study participant said it infuriates her to hear some young teachers repeatedly tell students that they are victims and project a kind of pity she believes is "extremely detrimental to them."

> I feel like that's the worst thing that White teachers of Black and Brown students can do. . . . I teach through a lens of empowerment. I'm going to teach you to be proud of your history. . . . They don't want to hear that they're a victim. They want something to feel proud of. . . . I'm not going to sugarcoat history, but I'm also not going to let you buy into this victim mentality. It's not healthy for you. It's not healthy for our society. . . . [Y]ou've got a lot to be proud of and you have strong proud histories. (P1)

Developmental psychologists (Brooks & Goldstein, 2008; Morrison & Allen, 2007) tell us that resilience is often a by-product of strong relationships and a reliable support system. Along those lines, one teacher shared that she was heeding the advice of scholar and activist Ibram Kendi, who said in response to a question she asked at a public lecture that the primary job of a teacher of BIPOC students is to heal them.

> So when I think about my students and what I'm doing with them, my primary thought is, how do I heal them? How do I get them back to how they were when they were one, two years old and excited about everything, and seeking and following their interests? (P7)

***Sub-Process: Helping Students Navigate*.** Study participants recognized their influence in steering students to make good decisions and learn from their mistakes. They were not afraid to confront students about their behavior, nor did they shy away from explaining how it might translate to the larger world, mostly to their detriment.

> [W]ith students of color, the system is set up against them and to just be aware of that. . . . I think it's important to prepare kids that these things are going to be said to you, that's going to happen. Just know that reacting in anger is going to get you nowhere. You can be angry, you should be angry, but here's what we're going to teach you what you should do. Because, especially in an academic setting. . . . You go to college, you sort of pop off at a professor. . . . At least here there's a cushion and there are people that are here to support you, that doesn't always happen in a collegiate setting. . . . You need to foster that with students of color. . . . Don't go easy on them. That's not going to help them . . . you can be honest, and you can say, "That's not going to apply in other places, and here's why." (P8)

> I've had kids cuss me out of course. And then I've been like, "Okay, we're done now? You're so rude. I wouldn't talk to you that way." And then it's just kind of like, "Oh, I'm sorry." But you just got to kind of like accept that these things are going to happen and it's not an attack on you . . . you can't take it personally. (P1)

> I'm not taking your phones away from you. I will tell you that it's irritating me. I will tell you that when I'm talking and then you start talking, that's kind of rude. Because, if you're in a workplace, you wouldn't do that and if you do, you're going to get spoken to by a boss, because everything, I explain, has a connection to somewhere else, Right? . . . [H]igh school is only one little part of your life. We're trying to prep you to be good people outside of here and be able to function. (P8)

Several of the study participants who teach in suburban schools called attention to the "code-switching" that BIPOC students must engage in every day and the toll it takes on them.

> I'm from [the city]. Especially kids from [the city] . . . their families are loud. We're loud. It's just the way we operate. Come here, there's this assumption that you need to be quiet. There's a language that needs to change. . . . That's so much work. That is so much work for little brains. . . . I think teachers forget that. (P8)

The same suburban teacher talked about her conversations with a student who frequently used the "N-word."

> That's just part of his colloquialism. . . . I've said, "Here's the thing. It's part of your language. It's part of the way in which you connect. . . . I'm not here to tell you it's wrong. Because I'm not telling you what's wrong. It is how you communicate within your family and within your friends." I will say that it's hard in the classroom when you have also White kids who sometimes hear you say it . . . why isn't it okay for me to say it? . . . Is it fair? No. Absolutely not. I acknowledge that it's unfair. I said, "But I just want to let you know that that is sometimes the way things go." (P8)

Sub-Process: Painting a Hopeful Vision of the Future. According to Snyder (2002), hope is comprised of three elements: goals, pathways, and agency. Goals provide the targets of mental action sequences, pathways the means thereto, and agency, "the perceived capacity to use one's pathways to reach desired goals" (Snyder, 2002, p. 251). Similarly, Syme (2004) says hope is about "control of destiny" (p. 3) and is related to positive health outcomes. Several study participants considered it part of their job description to help create pictures in students' heads of a successful future and help them chart the journey toward that future, even in the face of a formidable challenge.

> I think about students whose parents have given up everything in their home countries and . . . they've come here and I would never want a kid sitting in my room to feel like, "wow, my parents are so stupid because I'll never make it here because of all the oppression." That's so wrong. . . . [T]here's hope and opportunity here too . . . you've got to hit that sweet spot of like, we have issues, but things are not insurmountable. And for you personally, you can make it and here's your 100 paths out. . . . So maybe I'm going to sugarcoat it, but what's the alternative? Make them feel so beaten down that they're not even going to try? Well, then that doesn't help them, and it doesn't help our greater society, right? So isn't it better to . . . particularly with young minds, to err on the side of positivity and hope as opposed to err on the side of things are really awful . . . and you say . . . "You know what? Somebody is going to make it, why not you?" (P1)

> [W]hat to do with our students that are hurting right now? What is it that they need? How do we keep working on their academics while helping them deal with all of this emotional stuff? Yeah, those are the big questions, right? How do we get these students to come up to grade level and keep working on their academics to believe that they can go to college, that it's a place for them. Or to even just have a choice and a plan? Like if trades is your choice? Great, go for it. But have a plan. (P7)

> I think there's a lot to feel sad about and there's a lot to feel victimized by, right? But we don't do kids any favors by just letting them feel that alone, right? Like we have to let them feel, like I said, like there's a lot to be proud of. And you use this knowledge as your weapon. (P1)

Duncan-Andrade (2009) reminds us that the classroom is a micro-system, not one that is closed to the "external toxins" (p. 190) of the outside world, but one in which teachers can exercise significant agency on students' behalf by being in solidarity with them and honoring the

collective struggle for liberation. As K. Schwartz (2018) noted in an interview with public television station KQED: “No master gardener blames the seed for not growing. They know they have to change the soil. You’ve got to license yourself to be audacious” (para. 16).

Impact of Holding Hope. Some have described hope as a muscle.

> It’s a choice. It is a vigorous choice, to see what is wrong and what needs healing . . . and also to keep our hearts and our imaginations and our energy oriented towards what we want to build, what we want to create, what we’re walking towards. (Tippett, 2018)

For young people experiencing personal and/or communal stressors such as racial bias, however, hope may be challenging to sustain independently. Many of the White teachers in this study see it as part of their job description to *hold the hope*, as it were, on their students’ behalf. It is an embrace of sorts, a way to keep them close and gently nudge them toward believing they can shape a bright future for themselves. When teachers see and encourage the development of students’ capabilities, students feel empowered. When students feel empowered, they can take chances, engaging in productive struggle without fear of failure or humiliation. When they engage fully in their learning, students feel capable of achieving more than they had ever imagined. Teachers, in turn, take pride in what their students have accomplished and send them off into the world—or the next grade level—with greater confidence.

Impact of Being and Becoming Across Difference

Earlier in this chapter, the context, conditions, and social processes of the core dimension *being and becoming across difference* were introduced. Coming full circle, we now examine the cumulative impact of all five primary dimensions that have been identified. What emerged from the data are four central demonstrations of impact (see Table 4.1).

Relational Space is Created. In the social sciences, unlike in mathematics and the natural sciences, it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that the concept of space expanded beyond “a container of pure materiality” to include the social realm (Bourdieu,

1989,1998; Löw & Weidenhaus, 2017, p. 554). Since that time, other scholars in sociology and psychology have conceptualized space as a relational arrangement (Löw & Weidenhaus, 2017, p. 554). Friedman (2011) captures the relationality of space beautifully:

> Social spaces take shape through interaction among people who enact their thinking and feeling and encounter the enacted thinking and feelings of others. These invisible and dynamic interactions link individual cognitive, emotional, behaviorial, and perhaps even spiritual processes with those of other individuals. They represent the fundamental structure out of which social space takes shape. (p. 243)

In this study, participants describe how they cultivate rich relational landscapes for their BIPOC students. What begins as a spartan physical space consisting of four walls and the requisite assortment of desks, tables, and chairs is converted into a multifaceted social world of its own. For these teachers, the differences between themselves and their students are a welcome gift.

Teachers Feel Efficacious and Appreciated. It is important to reiterate that all the participants in this study have been in the classroom for at least five years, a recognized milestone in the profession and hence one of the criteria for participation in this study. Participants have all reached a level of proficiency that contributes to their confidence in the classroom, and as mentioned earlier, they have very few discipline issues. In the literature, the participants would be said to possess self-efficacy, which Bandura (1997) defined as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the course of action to provide given attainments” (p. 3). In other words, when it comes to instruction, assessment, discipline, and other aspects of life in the classroom and school, teachers who feel confident as professionals are better able to build positive relationships with students (Hajovsky et al., 2020; Siwatu & Chesnut, 2014; Sosa & Gomez, 2012). This is especially true for those students whose backgrounds differ from the teacher (Bloom et al., 2013; Siwatu & Starker, 2010). In this respect, all the study participants have reached a level of mastery and collected a robust repertoire of tools, techniques, and practices that have served them in good stead and, by extension, their students. The appreciation

they receive from students, either directly through explicit expressions of gratitude or indirectly, by seeing students fully engaged in their learning reinforces their sense of efficacy and provides psychic fuel for the long haul. As one teacher said: "I have the greatest job in the entire world, because I actually can make a direct impact on kids every single day" (P6).

Students Feel Motivated and a Sense of Belonging. High-quality teacher-student relationships are positively associated with student engagement and motivation (Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011). The extent to which students feel motivated is the "extent to which they feel their actions are or will be self-determined" (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 9). Researchers R. Ryan and Deci (2000) describe the three-legged stool of self-determination: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. In other words, can they do what is being asked of them (competence), do they feel some control over how to do the assignment (autonomy), and is there a feeling of connection (relatedness) while they are doing it? There is ample evidence that study participants are attentive to these factors, scaffolding the learning when students may not have sufficient background knowledge, encouraging student voice and choice, and prioritizing relationships with individual students and with the community of learners in the classroom. As one teacher reflected: "It's cliche, but I do think kids feed off of that, if they see that you're excited about the stuff and excited to be there with them more than anything else, most kids are pretty good and will react accordingly, and . . . kind of feed off of that" (P13).

Teachers Feel a Sense of Belonging. Belonging matters not only for the BIPOC students, but also for the White teachers. Though several participants wondered aloud whether it might be more appropriate for them to help White teachers in suburban districts explore their racial identities, all of them seemed at home in their classrooms. Belongingness, therefore, seemed to be a shared experience between teacher and students. As one teacher celebrated:

> I have an exceptional group of students, and they have created such a welcoming . . . community. I try really hard, but it's also the kids. . . . They are just kind, and they compliment each other, and they listen. . . . They are going to change the world, because they're so accepting, and they've already built such a great community. (P6)

One can easily imagine that White teachers who do not experience that feeling of belonging because of fear, anxiety, or discomfort might not be equipped to engage in the collaborative task of building a welcoming environment for learning.

Students Persist in the Face of Challenges and Experience Success. In the last two decades, student mindset and its connection to positive learning outcomes has received great attention (Dweck, 2006). Specifically, scholars distinguish between growth and fixed mindset: someone with a growth mindset understands that intelligence, abilities, and talents are malleable and can be learned through persistence over time. On the other hand, someone with a fixed mindset views intelligence, abilities, and talents as essentially unchangeable (we all have elements of both). As described in detail in Chapter II, teacher expectations can have a significant impact on the development of student mindsets—for good or ill (Fox, 2016; Holt & Gershenson, 2005; Papageorge et al., 2018; Rubie-Davies, 2007; Rubie-Davies et al., 2006; Steele, 1997). A recent ethnographic study by McConnochie (2022) shows "how a [White] teacher dedicated to her students can succumb to the power of deficit beliefs and reproduce inequities in the classroom" and shows that neoliberal beliefs about families "shifts educational responsibility from schools to families in ways that perpetually frame Latinx families as academically deficient by "holding them to meritocratic moral discourse about how to 'make an effort' in schooling" (p. 2). A study by Sosa and Gomez (2012), on the other hand, demonstrates the positive influence teachers with high efficacy can have on Latinx students:

> Teachers with high self-efficacy are more apt to develop supportive relationships with students, teach more challenging academic work, and have higher expectations (Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1982; Lee & Smith, 1996; Payne, 1994; Tucker et al., 2005). Such support and expectations, in turn, promote student self-efficacy and the willingness to

> persist in their efforts. This suggests a need to turn our attention to teachers who not only support student achievement but also support students' continued efforts to keep trying when difficulties or obstacles arise. (p. 877)

The participants in this study are attuned to how their expectations of BIPOC students can promote or derail success. One teacher described how he is learning Spanish from his Latinx students, both to model a growth mindset and to demonstrate respect for students' cultures. All the teachers in the study recognize the additional stressors BIPOC students face; they deploy curriculum and use pedagogical strategies that enlist students' interests and promote resilience and possibility. As one teacher said: "I actually can make a direct impact on kids every single day" (P6). By holding high expectations of their students and matching those expectations with high levels of support, the participants in this study convey their belief that BIPOC students can be successful and their faith in students' capacities to shape for themselves promising futures.

Summary

The 19 middle and high school teachers in Massachusetts who thoughtfully and generously shared their stories in this study illuminate the psycho-social dimensions of teaching in schools or programs that consist predominantly of BIPOC students in the US. In keeping with the tenets of positive deviance, the teachers in this study demonstrate uncommon behaviors and strategies that enable them to be successful where their peers who face similar challenges may struggle, flounder, or cause irreparable harm. The goal of identifying these positive outliers is not to lionize or glorify them but rather to gain insights into their mindsets, dispositions, backgrounds, life experiences, and daily practices—all in the service of dramatically improving the learning experience of BIPOC students. In the next chapter, I will suggest a range of implications that flow from my findings that can inform and potentially transform policy, program, and practice. I will also articulate theoretical propositions that emerged from the analysis of the data and share a composite story that I hope will serve as a heuristic toward

preventing the hiring of White teachers who may inadvertently hurt BIPOC students and, importantly, identifying and developing White teachers who demonstrate they have “the right stuff” (Wolfe, 1979). Finally, I will employ a critical lens that considers the systemic nature of racism in education and its impact on schooling in general and on White educators who work predominantly with BIPOC students.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

> [L]earning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility…we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.
>
> —bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

In this chapter, I synthesize the findings from this study, illuminating the ways in which the core and primary dimensions, the contexts, conditions, and impacts that emerged in conversation with White middle and high school teachers in Massachusetts come together to create a conceptual narrative, or what Schatzman (1991), calls giving "theoretical and explanatory form to a story that would be otherwise regarded, at best, as a fine description" (p. 313).

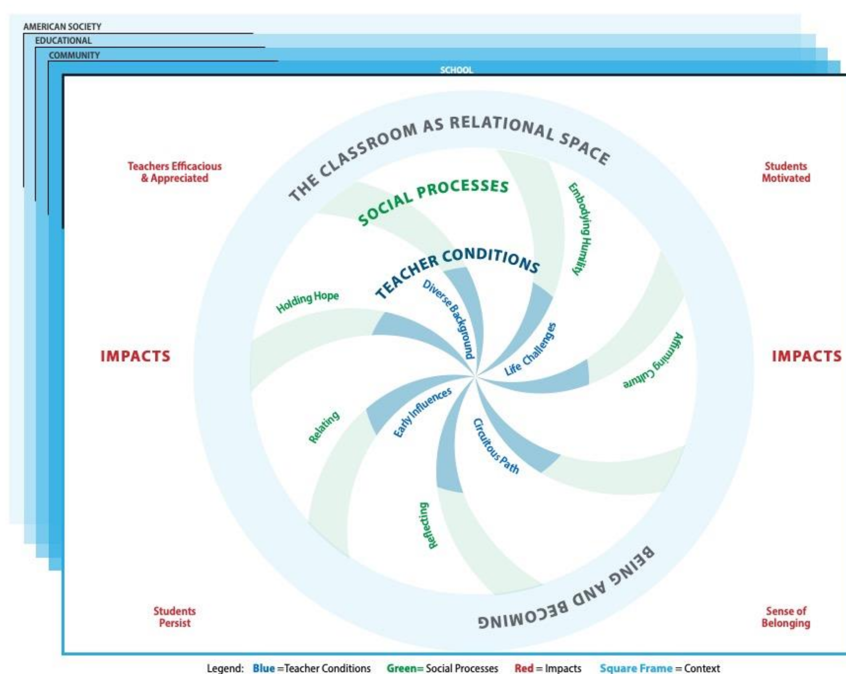
I consider my research question anew, "How do White teachers understand their experiences and relationships with students of color?" and explore how the primary dimensions connect to the core dimension of "Being-and-Becoming." A theoretical model is offered in Figure 5, accompanied by a narrative description. To dramatize the model further, I offer a short composite story of a single White teacher who stands in for the 19 participants and their experiences in the classroom.

Thereafter, I present my findings as theoretical propositions that contribute to and extend the extant research on the distinguishing qualities, dispositions, temperaments, and backgrounds of White teachers identified as exemplary by BIPOC educators and parents. In keeping with the principles of grounded theory, these findings were not the result of hypothesis testing but rather a line-by-line analysis of the unstructured interviews conducted with White teachers in Massachusetts. Next, I will discuss the scope of my study, its limitations, and suggested topics

for future exploration. And finally, I describe the programmatic and policy implications of my study, namely recommendations for making the classroom an energetic space of belonging and engagement, how we might reconsider outdated recruitment methods, and how to reimagine hiring strategies, teacher preparation, and in-service professional development for White teachers of predominantly BIPOC students.

Figure 5.1

Visual Representation of the Theoretical Model



Explanation of the Model

The model above visually represents the key findings of my study, obtained by employing a method of grounded theory known as dimensional analysis. As previously described, the purpose of dimensional analysis is to construct a story that moves beyond detailed description to a narrative with explanatory power. The process involves looking at one’s data

through four discrete lenses: Context, Conditions, Social Processes, and Impacts. I will describe each in turn below.

Context

The context at the top left corner of the model is represented by the straight lines that serve as a partial frame around the rest of the visual representation. The outermost line is American society, which seeps into US schools in myriad ways. Current features of this macrocosm include the global pandemic, the racial awakening that was sparked by Black Lives Matter, the ruthless murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020, and the predictable backlash to the increased mobilization on behalf of minoritized Americans, in which Critical Race Theory has been cynically harnessed and weaponized to stoke the fears of White Americans. Context also includes the American capitalist system and its devotion to competition and hyper-individualism.

Moving inward toward the center of the model is the US education system, including the federal Department of Education, state education agencies, and local school districts. Consequential policy and program decisions are made at this level of the education ecosystem. A salient feature of this contextual element, broadly speaking, is that schools are markets, and students are products. The theory of action that accompanies this way of thinking is that the products (students) are improved through technical accountability systems and measured via high stakes standardized testing. The producers of the products (teachers) are improved through parallel accountability measures. Also at this level is a multi-billion-dollar industry, which includes book publishers, curriculum vendors, and technology developers, that continues to flood the market in response to perceived problems in the American education system and/or perceived problems of teachers and students. Moreover, as one of the few remaining democratic spaces in

American society, school districts are increasingly the site of controversy and culture wars, whether the topic is school safety, the history of our country, or the books allowed inside the schoolhouse.

The next layer of context is the community, which consists of multiple stakeholders, including parents, community leaders, local businesses, social service agencies, public libraries, and residents who do not have children in school. Each community has a distinctive local flavor and a set of norms and rituals that distinguish it from its neighbors. In many BIPOC communities, the lack of resources such as healthy food and reliable healthcare; environmental hazards that can result in brain damage and asthma; unemployment due to larger structural forces; substandard housing due to unjust zoning laws; community violence; the ravages of a pandemic that disproportionately affected people of color; and other long-standing injustices that have piled up over time all have an impact on the students who enter the school each day.

The fourth and final layer of context is the school; it is most proximate to the classroom, hence the closest to teachers and students. In summary, the context is *where* the story takes place—the location of all action. While it does evolve, it is nonetheless the most stable element of the model.

Conditions

Conditions (in blue typeface) are the experiences that have contributed to the development of a teacher's character, dispositions, mindsets, and behaviors. Four conditions stood out in the study's findings: teachers experienced and emerged whole from significant life challenges; they were exposed to diverse people and settings; they often arrived in the classroom circuitously, having had multiple lived experiences; and they were influenced early in life by a person or situation—positive or negative—that pointed them in the direction of teaching BIPOC

students. These conditions overlap and are not mutually exclusive. For example, a teacher may have lived in another country for a while (experience with diversity) *and* struggled with an addiction or emotional challenge. These conditions enhance a teacher's capacity to engage more fully with self and others, including their BIPOC students. One might say that the White teachers in this study arrive in the classroom with a robust personal toolkit that they draw upon frequently, depending on what is happening in the classroom.

Social Processes

The social processes (in green typeface) are the actions in the story, as indicated by the gerund form. They are also the core and primary dimensions, respectively: Being-and-Becoming Across Difference; Reflecting, Relating, Embodying Humility, Affirming Culture, and Holding Hope. The visual representation of these social processes (the pinwheel-like lines) suggests that these actions are constantly in motion. They present as capabilities to which the White teacher always has access—some are internal, and others are more external. As the teachers become more seasoned professionals, they draw upon these social processes with greater fluidity and fluency. Their timing and judgment are refined as they transform the four walls of the classroom into a relational space that continues to evolve, inviting both teacher and student into the process of being and becoming. While these dynamics are present and palpable, they are nevertheless tacit and implicit—invisible to the naked eye. In other words, while they will not be written into any lesson plan, these are the social processes that distinguish the White educators in this study.

Impacts

Together, the context, conditions, and social processes create a set of impacts (seen in the diagram in red typeface) on both the teacher and the students. In this study, we learn about the impacts only from the vantage point of the teacher; thus, it is the teacher's *perception* that

students are motivated and persist. Only a companion grounded theory study of the students in the given teachers' classrooms could fully corroborate whether an impact has been made. The teacher-related impact (in the top left corner of the diagram, underneath context)—i.e., that the teacher feels efficacious and appreciated—is from the teacher's vantage point and is verifiable. The final impact (seen in the bottom right corner of the diagram in red typeface)—a sense of belonging—can apply to both teacher and student, but again, the teacher can only verify her own experience, not that of her students.

Composite Story

For readers who prefer narrative over visual representation, I have written a composite story, a fictional account of one teacher who stands in for all 19 participants in my study. Most of the material comes directly from the voices of these teachers.

> *It's the second week of school, and Ms. S. arrives in her classroom an hour before the first bell to get ready for the 28 high school students who will soon flood into her American history class. She turns on her computer and whiteboard and brings up the playlist consisting of songs that her students selected at the end of last week. She has come to appreciate hip-hop over the years and is grateful to the students for exposing her to new music and ideas every year.*
>
> *She and the students spent most of the first week of school getting to know one another: they created their identity charts and shared them with her; they also wrote letters to her about what they hoped to learn and what they needed from her to be their best selves in her class. "This group of kids is very thoughtful," she mused, as she recalled one student who told her that his mother is ill and that he might need extra time on assignments because he is caring for younger siblings and another student who shared that she wants to hear about the contributions of Black, Brown, and Indigenous Americans, not just about slavery and oppression. She smiled. Over the summer, and with the help of a professional development seminar through the organization, Facing History & Ourselves, she overhauled her curriculum to foreground the stories of resistance and liberation of Black and Brown Americans. After toiling through many late nights and parts of every weekend, she finished the course. In one respect, it was ready for prime time, but she knew that there would be kinks and that her students would guide her in remedying what didn't work. She relies on her students to give her pointed feedback because they are experts on their own experience. And they are not afraid to call her out for statements they consider sexist, racist, or ableist.*
>
> *Lost in reverie, Ms. S. is interrupted by the sudden clang of the hallway door slamming shut. "I wish they would fix that cylinder already," she murmured to herself,*

"and while they're at it, the clogged sinks and toilets in the first-floor bathroom and those mice who run rampant in the teacher's lounge. "It's a good thing I love my kids," she sighed.

Ms. S didn't start out wanting to be a teacher. In early adulthood, life dealt her some curve balls that challenged her identity and sense of self. It was painful, but it also gave her a new appreciation for others she encountered who struggled. After some career starts and stops, she landed a job as a substitute teacher in a large high school. Something about that experience clicked for her: it seemed to call upon all her talents and was gratifying intellectually, emotionally, socially, and even spiritually. She was so grateful to be in a job where she was "all in," notwithstanding the laundry that piled up at home and the bills that accumulated because of her engagement in the life of the school.

A timer went off in her classroom, her 10-minute warning before the kids would arrive. She clicked on the computer and put up the day's attendance question. Today's question was: "Who's your favorite female-identifying cartoon character from a movie?" As she called their names, they were asked to give their opinion. Through this activity, she makes sure that each student's voice is heard every day. Sometimes the conversations get heated because she asks them to provide evidence—which eases them into critical thinking. The activity also models that you can disagree with someone without disrespecting them.

With four minutes to spare, she clicked on the playlist and placed herself just outside the classroom door. As the students filed in, she was generous with high-fives, elbow and fist bumps, and even some elaborate handshakes. The kids seemed to like being greeted with enthusiasm—and she worked hard to keep the energy high throughout the day. What she aspired to do most of all was create a safe and caring community for her students. Over the years, students had shared grueling stories about violence, family tragedy, and homelessness. The harrowing tales of students who narrowly escaped from war-torn countries were always a gut punch, though she never wanted to project pity.

Ms. S. has developed a deep respect for what her students can accomplish, even when the external conditions are so rocky. That's why she has worked so hard to make her classroom an oasis of sorts. She had learned about all kinds of community-building strategies from watching videos about Black teachers like Mary McLeod Bethune and Marva Collins and reading the work of Black women scholars like Beverly Daniel Tatum, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Lisa Delpit. It wasn't always like this, of course. In her early years of teaching, she was often judgmental about her students and their families. Through her graduate school courses, an affinity group at the school, professional development offerings, independent reading, and some frank comments from colleagues of Color, she had changed, though she understood that racism was still always under the surface. It was bred in the bone. She would just keep at it; anti-racism was now a lifetime commitment, and she would not turn back. It had cost her some friendships with White colleagues, but so be it. Her mother, who never finished high school and was proud of her working-class origins, thought that some of her teacher friends were too "fancy pants" anyway.

After all the students had found their seats, Ms. S. asked the attendance question, and an animated discussion ensued. It was time to turn to the lesson, part of a six-week unit on different protest movements within the Latino community. That unit was one of

her favorites because the idea for it came from her students. "Why don't we ever talk about Latino Americans?" a few students had asked her. To which she replied, "That's a really great question." She loved nothing more than a new challenge and some dedicated time in the local library.

Ms. S. asked the students to put away their phones and began the lesson. "You've all been reading about the Chicano Movement. I want you to find a partner and talk about the strategies they used to protest." Part of building community was ensuring that kids had a chance to talk to each other every day. She got them started on turn-and-talk rituals on Day 1, and there was never any resistance from her students. For some students, it was the easiest way to make friends at school.

Ms. S knew everyone's names by now, having spent the first week making audio flashcards for each student and testing herself until she could pronounce each student's first and last name with fluency. She recalled the student last year who told her that a former teacher had proclaimed in front of the entire class that her name was ugly. It's hard to imagine what would motivate such cruelty. Ms. S. has learned that every name has an important story attached to it—and knowing someone's name is a necessary first step in encountering another human being in their wholeness.

At the end of the school day, Ms. S tidied up the classroom room and made a few quick calls to parents. She loved "catching" her students in the act of doing well and letting their parents know that their child is a valuable contributor and member of the classroom community. The new translation app even allowed her to text non-English-speaking parents. It hasn't always been smooth sailing with her students' parents; she stepped into some sticky situations when she first began her teaching career, such as when she chose a poem for a BIPOC student that contained the "N" word and his parents were understandably incredulous; even now, she felt a knot in her stomach remembering the incident.

Ms. S. got home, threw down her backpack, and prepared a simple meal for her family. They had become accustomed to frozen Trader Joe's dinners and didn't complain—most of the time. At bedtime, she said prayers for her family and friends and then for her students. She expressed her gratitude for their honesty, their brilliance, and their perseverance--and thought about what she loves about each child in her classroom. She knows that love is a powerful word and doesn't use it lightly. But it is what she feels for her students—and what she believes all students need. She also knows that it is her job to stay hopeful with and for her students, especially as the macro and micro-aggressions they experience as young people of color erode their confidence. As she has often said to new White teachers who come to her for advice, "American society kills the souls of our BIPOC students. It is our job to mend them."

Before she turned out the lights, an insight came to her in a flash. She considers it an immense privilege to enrich her students' hearts and their minds. But, she realized that the enrichment goes both ways. She feels profoundly changed by her students in one way or another virtually every single day of the school year—with each moment of contact a mutual opportunity for learning and healing. It is truly a sacred space they create together, she acknowledged to herself as she flipped off the light switch and pulled up the covers.

Theoretical Propositions

The primary goal of this study was to identify the psycho-social factors that contribute to White teachers' success with BIPOC students. As previously mentioned, these teachers were identified as exemplary by BIPOC educators and parents, a process known as "community nomination" (Foster, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1992). Community nomination rests on the premise that proximity matters, that those who are members of BIPOC communities are best equipped to gauge which White teachers have the requisite knowledge, skills, dispositions, and mindsets to authentically foster the learning and development of BIPOC students. Findings from the data in this study provide insight into how these White teachers experience success where their colleagues with equivalent resources do not—an approach known as Positive Deviance that is "based on the observation that in every community there are certain individuals or groups whose uncommon behavior and strategies enable them to find better solutions to problems than their peers" (Positive Deviance Collaborative, https://positivedeviance.org). As presented in Chapter III, an elaborate coding process led to the development of a theoretical model and a composite story about teachers who bridge the relational chasm that is so often present between White teachers and BIPOC students. In the next section, I outline a set of theoretical propositions based on the data gathered in unstructured interviews and synthesize how these propositions contribute to and expand upon the extant literature.

Theoretical Proposition I: The personal lives of exemplary White teachers—their childhood influences, ability to overcome major life challenges, their often-circuitous routes to the teaching profession, and their proximity to others with diverse backgrounds, have shaped their identities and matter significantly for their success with BIPOC students in the classroom.

In our market-oriented society, the field of education often bends over backward to avoid recognizing that teaching is a deeply personal pursuit. As Palmer (2000) reminds us, “We teach who we are” (p. 2). The small but significant body of scholarship on exemplary White teachers validates the idea that teaching—especially across difference—is intimately connected with identity and life experience.

> By identity, I mean an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic makeup, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others and to myself, the experience of love and suffering—and much, much more. In the midst of that complex field, identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human. (Palmer, 2000, p. 13)

This study reinforces for the field that a White teacher candidate’s dispositions, philosophy, and life experiences are critically important to understand *before* that teacher enters a room of predominantly BIPOC students. As Palmer (2000) reminds us: “Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). Alsop (2006) reminds us that developing a teacher identity is complex, even without the complexities of race in the mix:

> The integration of personal aspects of the self and professional expectations or demands is more complicated than simply bringing together two binary opposites (i.e., the self and the other); such a synergy involves bringing together, mixing and merging, and even welcoming a collision between personal ideologies and perceived professional expectations. . . . Often this . . . is a space of continual becoming rather than an endpoint culminating in a singular identity construction. (Preface, xiv)

It might be said that the teachers in this study wrestled with aspects of their identity before they came into the profession, making it easier for them to continue doing so as they began teaching predominantly BIPOC students. They have navigated challenges and crises, they have traveled to places or lived in communities where their sense of “normal” was challenged, and they have made mistakes they regret and made amends when it has been possible to do so.

One teacher characterizes the time before she became a teacher. "[I]t was like a pause. I had a pause in my life and started to think about me and what I wanted" (P8). She, like all the participants in the study, knows something about what it means to struggle and overcome. White teachers, to be successful, must be prepared to bring their whole selves to work. They use their varied life experiences—experiences that have stretched them personally and professionally—as levers for building relationships, developing stimulating and engaging lesson plans, and creating for students a warm, caring, and psychologically safe community.

Theoretical Proposition II: White teachers' capacity for deep and ongoing reflection, including the interrogation of one's own mindset and practices and, notably, their humility, are critical to their success with BIPOC students.

Having life experiences is only one part of the equation. The capacity to reflect on those experiences is at least, if not more, important. John Dewey's work on reflection is instructive in this regard.

> When we reflect upon an experience instead of just having it, we inevitably distinguish between our own attitude and the objects toward which we sustain the attitude. Such reflection upon experience gives rise to a distinction of what we experience (the experienced) and the experiencing—the how (Dewey, 1933, p. 173)

In other words, authentic learning results from reflecting on the everyday experiences teachers encounter in the classroom. Reflection, he says, "emancipates us from merely impulsive and merely routine activity" (Dewey, 1933, p. 17). Without reflection, Dewey maintains, teachers are not engaged in the meaning-making that enables them to fully meet the needs of their students, nor are they investing in their own growth and development as practitioners. I would argue that Dewey's directives are even more important when teaching across difference.

More contemporaneously, teacher reflection continues to be the focus of both theoretical writing and empirical research. Schön (1983, 1987), building on Dewey, coined the term

reflective practitioner and urged teachers to see themselves on an intellectual par with doctors, clergy, architects, engineers, and lawyers—high-level professionals who must be present for clients and patients in the moment while also stepping back to consider the implications of their decisions and shift accordingly if needed. Moreover, such an approach requires an ability to manage complexity and examine their work in "logical, rational, step-by-step analyses of their own teaching and the contexts in which that teaching takes place" (Korthagen, 1993, p. 317).

> Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse … viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in the mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subjects. (Palmer, 2000, p. 2)

Milner (2003) notes that reflective thinking about race and diversity remains in short supply but emphasizes that "teachers' reflective thinking could be essential in leading them into deeper understanding around areas that might otherwise be ignored, misunderstood, misrepresented, misinterpreted, or unsettled" (p. 173). He elaborates:

> Many teachers have never had significant interactions with individuals who are racially different from them. They have never taught, gone to school, or lived in neighborhoods with people of color. My point here is that many (but not all) White teachers have adopted color-blind ideologies in a variety of teaching contexts (e.g., urban, suburban, and rural), and this thinking could be disadvantageous for learning among students of Color. (Milner, 2003, p. 194; see Johnson, 2002; Lewis, 2001)

Milner calls it a matter of urgency for White teachers to reflect on their teaching as part of a long-term, continuous inquiry process.

> Race reflection can be seen as a way to uncover inconspicuous beliefs, perceptions, and experiences, specifically where race is concerned. It can be a process to understand hidden values, dispositions, biases, and beliefs that were not in the form of a teacher's thinking prior to conscious attempts to come to terms with them. (Milner, 2003, p. 175)

Without such a commitment, teachers will often adopt a deficit stance, blaming students or parents for learning disparities. In the breakneck pace of American schooling, when everyone is jumping through hoops to meet state accountability measures, it is no wonder that reflection gets

short shrift in K–12 education. Reflection requires intentionality and slowing down. Kahneman (2011) defines two systems of the mind that are always in play.

> System 1 operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control. System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operations of System 2 are often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration. (pp. 20–21)

Kahneman says that we identify most closely with System 2, the self that makes conscious choices, but that System 1 often takes over, especially when a person must make spur-of-the-moment decisions.

System 1 operates automatically and cannot be turned off, which makes biases difficult to prevent. The point is to recognize situations when bias may creep into the teacher's mind. In the last chapter, P14 spoke directly to this process:

> We, in fact, have to be uncomfortable. . . . We have to teach our body and our mind like you're not actually in any danger. You're going to be just fine. . . . It's practice and it's like actually explicitly interrupting those thoughts and being like, "Okay. So that thought that I'm having right now is not actually true." Then just sitting with it. Those unconscious and unwanted thoughts and feelings are just going to continue coming up. . . . There's that little cliche phrase, name it to tame it. So it's like you just notice that it's happening, identify that it's happening, and try and then let it drift and move on.

The participants in this study understand that long-held stereotypes are part of the mindscape of White teachers; they are deliberate about activating System 2—either in the moment or after the fact.

Humility. A White teacher's ability to reflect requires a certain level of humility. In the academic literature, humility is a virtue to be emulated. In our celebrity-saturated society, however, humility is often viewed as a sign of weakness or defeat. The participants in this study demonstrate just the opposite—that humility is a sign of strength and courage because it requires a person to square with their own foibles and inevitable blind spots. Humility allows them to embrace ambiguity and uncertainty. P4 typifies what several participants expressed. "Almost

daily . . . I wonder if I'm doing the right thing, if I'm in the right place or if I have the skill set that's needed. . . . [A]m I doing enough . . . am I going to the right talks? Am I reading the right books? Am I having the right conversations?" In the process of developing a mature racial identity, White teachers must leave room for perspective-taking and continuous learning. This is the embodiment of humility—allowing oneself to continue to evolve over time, which leads to their ability to recognize and affirm the assets that students of color bring to the classroom. The teachers in this study create this interstitial space for themselves.

Reckoning with Power Dynamics. Another aspect of reflection for the White teachers in this study was the ability to reckon with the power dynamics inherent in teaching across difference. Delpit (1988) discusses the "culture of power" that exists in America's schools and articulates five complex rules of power that "explicitly and implicitly influence the debate over meeting the educational needs of Black and poor students on all levels" (p. 280). They are: (a) issues of power are enacted in classrooms; (b) there are codes or rules for participating in the culture of power; (c) the rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power; (d) if you are not already a participant in the culture of power, explicitly being told the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier; and (e) those with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence (Delpit, 1988, p. 282). Delpit exhorts educators to be mindful of these explicit and implicit rules of power as they play out in daily classroom life.

It is important to remember, however, that power is not inherently bad. "If the goal of relationship is movement and creativity, then embracing power is a necessary function. To disavow power is not an option. The option is to choose how to relate *to* and *through* the power that one has" (M. Walker, 2002, p. 3, emphasis from original). Relational-cultural theory

distinguishes between "power-over" and "power-with." Power-over is a "cultural arrangement in which difference is stratified into dominant and subordinate, superior and inferior. In these power-over arrangements, the dominant group protects its status and perpetuates its presumed entitlements through tactics ranging from obfuscation and exclusion to violence and extermination" (M. Walker, 2002, p. 2). Power-with, on the other hand, posits that "more can be accomplished through collaborative efforts than through hierarchical arrangements, building on the notion that creativity and action develop in good connections. Power-with grows as it empowers others" (growthinconnection.org). White teachers of BIPOC students must be willing to embrace power-with as part of building their own and their students' relational capacities.

In summary, most White teachers are not given sufficient opportunity to reflect on their work; the crowded curriculum and the daily pressures preclude it. Some US schools offer common planning time during the day, but in most cases, they pale compared to countries such as Japan and Finland, where teachers are respected or even revered (OECD, 2023; Wieczorek, 2008). Reflection is an acquired habit that requires time, space, and intentionality. Teachers who are not given the space or who don't create the space are less able to do the necessary work of stretching their hearts and minds to counter the entrenched societal models that accompany them into the classroom.

Theoretical Proposition III: Creating an intentional relational space in the classroom requires honoring each student's presence and whole being—including their culture of origin—and making oneself available and vulnerable in the service of mutual learning.

When White teachers and BIPOC students encounter one another in the classroom, there is both danger and opportunity. The danger is that they will carry relational images (J. Miller & Stiver, 1997) passed down through the generations and through their own prior experiences that

impede healthy connection. P4 shared an example of how BIPOC students' assumptions can get in the way. "I think their first response for many of them is it's not one of interest. It's like I've seen a thousand of you. I know what you're bringing to the table. I kind of already know what to expect from you." White teachers, in turn, carry biases—whether conscious or unconscious—and often view their BIPOC students as deficits to be fixed rather than whole human beings who bring rich cultural resources to the classroom. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) uses the term *controlling images*, which according to Walker and Miller (2001), have "the effect of making oppression appear to be a normal, natural part of everyday life" (p. 8). Such images can foreclose the opportunity for authentic connection. "We sometimes get rutted in disconnections because the possibility of connection does bring with it vulnerability—the challenge to let go of the relational images that seem to provide a protective function" (Walker & Miller, 2001, p. 8). Thus, the relational space must be designed for opportunity, and the teacher must be the first to retire the harmful images and meet the students in their fullness. Palmer (2000) tells us that his ability to connect with his students "depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood—and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning" (p. 10). P18 perfectly exemplifies that sentiment: "I became a better teacher when I knew who I was. I felt comfortable knowing I'm nerdy and embracing that. And the kids will laugh about my lack of knowledge of emojis, and I could laugh at myself. . . . I don't try to be someone I'm not." P19 has also learned that vulnerability is an asset in his classroom.

> Most of my student body at my school is Latino . . . and I try very, very hard to speak Spanish. I'm okay at it, but oftentimes I'll mispronounce something, and they'll make fun of me. That's also part of . . . showing that vulnerability of "I'm going to try and I'm going to say things wrong or not conjugate correctly. . . . But you're also going to mess up words in English and . . . that's how learning works and kind of modeling that I think is effective. (P19)

The teacher's vulnerability opens the door to genuine connection that is not defined by a hierarchy of worthiness but rather by a shared commitment to creating a community of learners responsible for one another's success. The teacher is a part of that community of learners, not apart from it—though the teacher, as an adult in a position of responsibility, must be the first to model a flatter, more dialogical environment. Through this White teacher-BIPOC student partnership, trust can begin to be established, and old relational images can begin to fall away. As trust grows, there is the possibility of presence, which Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) describe as "a state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step (p. 266).

Affirming Personhood and Culture. As discussed at length in Chapter IV, the study participants take great care in building relationships across difference, in part, by appreciating and affirming the cultures of their students. They never stop learning about their students' backgrounds, whether through daily conversation, incessant reading, outside workshops, time with parents and colleagues of color, and/or engagement with their students' communities. It is an immersion experience, not cultural tourism. Showing respect for their students' cultures of origin deepens the connection between teacher and student and invigorates the learning space. This is what H. Schwartz (2019) calls *connected teaching*, which "consists of and creates five elements that drive learning: energy, knowledge, sense of worth, action, and desire for more connection" (p. 16). Miller and Stiver (1997) call these The Five Good Things of growth-fostering relationships:

1. Energy is the intangible but palpable experience that signals engagement and allows for risk-taking (Schwartz, 2019). In the parlance of Relational-Cultural Theory, this is also referred to as zest. Black education scholars call it "verve" (Murrell, 2002).
2. Knowledge is about learning a subject matter, and/or becoming more aware of about oneself and others (Schwartz, 2019). Emily Style (1988) writes that an equitable education provides both *windows* and *mirrors* (emphasis added) to students: windows that introduce them to worlds outside of their experience and mirrors that allow students to recognize themselves in the curriculum, thereby feeling connected to what they are learning.
3. Sense of worth is experienced by students when they feel validated by the teacher who sees what they have accomplished—and when they realize they are not alone in their struggles (Schwartz & Holloway, 2012).
4. Action is an outcome of students feeling stimulated and connected to the teacher, the subject matter, and their peers, such as when they are putting on a play or involved in an animated classroom discussion, executing a hands-on science experiment, or successfully completing a paper or a complicated project.
5. A desire for more connection is expressed when "our multifaceted selves in mutual regard with another person pushes away our doubts and reinforces that our deep struggles and big ideas … are valid" (H. Schwartz, 2019, p. 18).

The Relationality of Hope. The participants in this study are not naïve about the considerable challenges faced by their BIPOC students, but as part of their commitment to students, they carry high expectations for them. When students struggle, they may not be able to see beyond the present moment; when that happens, it is the teacher's job to lend them their hope

so that students can stay in the struggle instead of withdrawing from it. In turn, students absorb the message that they are worthy and ready for the challenges they face. West (2004) distinguishes between two virtues often viewed as synonymous: hope and optimism. Optimism, he argues, “adopts the role of the spectator who surveys the evidence in order to infer that things are going to get better” (West, 2004, p. 296). Hope, on the other hand, or “critical hope” as Duncan-Andrade (2009) defines it more pointedly, sees that the situation is indeed dire and “demands a committed and active struggle” (p. 185) “against the evidence in order to change the deadly tides of wealth inequality, group xenophobia, and personal despair” (West, 2004, pp. 296–297). In other words, critical hope is the antidote to hopelessness. It is both pragmatic, in that it demands concrete action, and spiritual, in that it calls upon deep wells of faith, both individual and collective. Concerns about separation of church and state typically keep faith out of the classroom, but faith in their students is part of the job description of White teachers who teach BIPOC students. Keeping the faith is relational.

Scope of the Work

The 19 teachers in this study tell richly textured and emotionally evocative stories—of their childhoods, their variable paths to the teaching profession, their struggles as human beings and professionals, their journeys toward racial conscientization—and especially their relationships with the BIPOC students in their charge. In keeping with grounded theory, the results of this study are transferable but not generalizable. In other words, while much of what emerged from my findings is transferable to other situations and could help researchers and practitioners discern what applies to their own circumstances, one cannot generalize about the larger population of White teachers in the US who have been identified as exemplary by the BIPOC community. That said, employing dimensional analysis seemed a perfect fit for this study

in that it required a consideration of the data from four vantage points: contexts, conditions, social processes, and impacts. Each vantage point provided an entry point into data that might otherwise have been overlooked—and taken together, they offered a framework akin to a panoramic view of the findings. At its best, teaching is personal, professional, and political, though the education system typically magnifies the professional and minimizes the personal and political aspects of teaching. Engaging in conversation about what is often unutterable seemed like a relief to the participants during the unstructured interviews. They could express themselves without censorship or worry—and the distinctiveness of what they expressed could not have been scripted by even the most talented screenwriter.

Contributions of this Study

In the academic literature, this study of exemplary White middle and high school teachers sits at the nexus of Teacher Identity, Teacher-Student Relationships, and Asset-Based Pedagogies. The sensitizing concepts I have employed are Relational Cultural Theory, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and White Teacher Identity Studies. All of these began as critiques: in the case of Relational-Cultural Theory, of the predominantly male medical establishment, and in the case of CRT, Critical Whiteness Studies, and White Teacher Identity Studies, of White people, including White teachers. These literatures evolved to include the way in which individuals and systems interact and believe that change is possible at the individual and societal levels. In other words, each body of literature experienced a narrative trajectory that began with a critique and evolved to become more hopeful about the possibilities for change. These frameworks have contributed significantly to the development of my study—and in turn, I believe this study contributes to these bodies of work, especially Relational-Cultural Theory and second-wave White Teacher Identity Studies. Recall that first-wave White Teacher Identity Studies

highlighted the race-evasive identities of White teachers (Sleeter, 1992, 1993). It "called out the insularity of White privilege and provided a much-needed discussion of racism, whiteness, and White privilege as it related to teaching, learning, and schooling in the United States" (Jupp et al., 2016, p. 1160). My study builds on second-wave White Teacher Identity Studies, which is race-visible, arguing that identities are complex and multi-dimensional and critiquing representations of White identities that "group all teacher candidates into a kind of monolithic category" (Lowenstein, 2009, p. 168). This study provides an empirical grounding that fully aligns with second wave White Teacher Identity Studies.

Most of the 30 or so peer-reviewed articles on White Teacher Identity Studies use methods such as narrative, ethnography, case studies, and hermeneutic and critical discourse analysis (Badenhorst et al., 2022). In other words, various forms of storytelling make room for complexity. Yet there is no grounded theory study of White teachers in the second-wave tradition. Moreover, second-wave White Teacher Identity Studies focuses largely on biography and identity, on the one hand, and cultural knowledge on the other, leaving teacher-student relationships largely undertheorized.

In Relational-Cultural Theory, most of the scholarship has come from clinical and counseling psychology, psychiatry, and feminist theory. Its empirical contribution to education has been conducted primarily in college settings (Abbott et al., 2019; Clinchy & Zimmerman, 1985; Comstock et al., 2008; Frey et al., 2006; Hall et al., 2014; Kundu, 2019; Ly, 2001; H. Schwartz, 2009, 2019; Schwartz & Holloway, 2012; Stiver, 1989). There are very few studies that focus on K–12 classroom teachers (Steiha & Raider-Roth, 2012; Rector-Aranda, 2018; Stieha & Raider-Roth, 2012; Tucker et al., 2011), let alone White teachers with students of color (Cholewa et al., 2012; Tatum & Knaplund, 1996). The highly politicized context of K–12

education—contested budgets, standardized testing, public outcry about what is taught in the classroom—adds texture to a body of work that considers context and culture vitally important factors in building relationships across difference.

Second, this study provides an empirical grounding for a set of theoretical and philosophical ideas in the K–12 literature writ large, particularly regarding the "how" of building teacher-student relationships. This study clarifies the mindsets, "heart sets" (Rerucha, 2021), and behaviors that are most essential for teaching across difference—what it looks like and feels like for those who are doing it well. These ways of being are not a checklist but rather an adaptive challenge both for White teachers who work with BIPOC students and for a beleaguered system that favors pacing guides and fears giving teachers permission to learn and grow. This area of inquiry remains surprisingly underdeveloped in the academy. It would be wise for researchers and practitioners to remember that, at its best, anti-racism work is relationship work.

Third, this study addresses the gap between research and practice in K–12 education. Grounded theory is centered on social processes, the "how" of the chosen phenomenon. In educational research, however, the "why" and the "what" preoccupy the field, while the research-to-practice pipeline is sluggish, partly because researchers and practitioners live in very different professional cultures and partly because implementation is messy and could call into question some of the espoused theory.

Limitations

Perhaps the most obvious limitation of my study is that only one side of the teacher-student relationship is represented. Therefore, I cannot make any claims about students' perceptions of their teachers. The primary reason for the singular focus on teachers was the constraint of time. Obtaining Internal Review Board (IRB) clearance to interview students under

18 years of age is often a lengthy process—often outside the bounds of a doctoral dissertation. Even if it had been possible to obtain clearance, the pandemic, which spanned more than two school years, precluded interviewing students at a time when they were not learning in school but rather learning online at home—or unaccounted for altogether. It would have been unfair to ask students to comment meaningfully about their teachers under such constrained circumstances. Finding *former* students (i.e., over 18 years of age) to interview during pandemic conditions might have been an alternative, but it would have been difficult to locate them without the assistance of schools and educators, who were already overtaxed and overwhelmed.

Another limitation of this study was also pandemic related. Recruiting educators and parents of color to nominate exemplary White teachers was extremely challenging—far more than I had anticipated. Without a pandemic, I would have recruited in a naturalistic way: by attending meetings and events and networking with people at conferences, in schools, and in the respective communities. Because people were either locked down or working all hours in demanding service jobs, there were no real networking opportunities. I relied on several high-profile leaders—White and BIPOC—to suggest educators and parents of color who could identify White teachers—and then sent emails and made phone calls when many people were answering neither.

Additionally, it is understandable that a White female student's doctoral study about White teachers might not rank highly on a list of priorities in the minds of parents and educators of color who, like everyone else, were just trying to get through the day in one piece. Though I am persistent by nature, I was willing to go only so far to advance my personal agenda when people's lives were literally at stake. Therefore, it took me an entire school year—and dozens of emails and phone calls—to recruit the 19 exemplary White teachers in my study. I had also

hoped to get representation from all the urban districts in Massachusetts, but that, too, was hampered by the pandemic because I had fewer personal connections in some parts of the state, and it was a struggle simply to get on anyone's radar. The result is that I have a higher proportion of teachers from the eastern part of Massachusetts in my study and fewer from the southern and western parts of the state.

Though grounded theory does not require it, I would like to have gathered student performance and attitudinal data to capture motivation, engagement, student growth, and evidence of content mastery. During the pandemic, a request of that nature would have been too onerous for struggling schools and districts.

Implications for Future Research

This grounded theory study included nineteen middle and high school teachers from Massachusetts, a state known as a liberal bastion, referred to sometimes as the "cradle of democracy." It could be valuable to conduct a similar study in another region of the US or even at the national level to determine whether geography has a meaningful impact on teacher mindsets and perceptions. Another study might focus exclusively on middle school or high school teachers or might compare elementary and high school teachers. Still another might conduct a comparative analysis of teachers by generation, for example, Baby Boomers and Millennials, to probe how their life stage and the historical context in which they came of age may influence their mindsets and practices.

As mentioned previously, I chose the teacher as the subject of my investigation. A companion set of interviews of current or former students of the teachers highlighted in this study would surely reveal a more three-dimensional portrait. Such a companion study would test the claims made by the White teachers and reveal critical convergences and divergences.

The pandemic precluded classroom observations, which I had hoped would accompany my study. Now that teachers and students are back in the classroom and largely unmasked, it might be possible to observe and record their classrooms and conduct additional interviews with teachers on-site in their respective habitats. The narrative could be further enriched by conducting interviews with the teachers' colleagues, supervisors, and perhaps even the parents of their students. Instead of following all 19 participants in this manner, I would consider focusing on three or four of the teachers in this study.

For a Boston or Massachusetts-based researcher, a thorough examination of exemplary White teachers of BIPOC students in the 33 suburban districts participating in the METCO program could elevate the thorny issues attached to desegregation. As mentioned, six of the 19 teachers in this study work in one of these communities. They reported that, as METCO students move through the K–12 system, they are often assigned to "general education" classes, as opposed to more enriched honors and advanced placement offerings, though that trend is apparently beginning to wane. The suburban teachers I interviewed had far more in common with the White teachers in predominantly BIPOC school districts than I had expected, but the differences that surfaced merit further exploration. For example, how do these White teachers navigate classrooms where tensions arise between students of different races and cultures (e.g., students born in and perhaps fled Russia, China, or India)? How do these teachers manage White students and parents who resist changes in curricula that de-center Whiteness? How do they feel about the professional development on race and equity in their schools, which they reported can seem more performative than substantive—a contest for "wokeness"? What kinds of additional support might these teachers need to engage in respectful and meaningful dialogue with BIPOC

parents? An investigation of these and related questions would, I think, shed light on the complexities and possibilities of integrated schools.

Finally, I think research on the physiology of White teachers' bodies in the presence of BIPOC students' bodies—perhaps even a comparative study of exemplary White teachers and White teachers who visibly struggle with their BIPOC students—could be groundbreaking. As Menakem (2017) writes: "We've tried to teach our brains to think better about race. But white-body supremacy doesn't live in our thinking brains. It lives and breathes in our bodies" (p. 5). The emotion of fear and how it manifests in the human body is especially relevant: the expressed absence of fear among my study participants was a noteworthy theme. "I never feel fear of a student, never," said P12. Along similar lines, P10 said: "Kids aren't going to work with you unless they can sense that you respect them and not that you fear them." Several teachers said they have been aware of bodily sensations in certain circumstances: one teacher candidly noted that her "white fragility" (DiAngelo, 2018) surfaces from time to time: "When race comes up and I'm not controlling the conversation, my body gets anxious. My heart rate might go up or my face will get flushed" (P14). Studies of White teachers' bodies in relation to BIPOC students' bodies, and perhaps even more important, body-based interventions, could make important contributions to research and practice.

Implications for the Classroom

The classroom is a dynamic space where the number of interactions is incalculable, and no day is the same as the next. When interracial relationships are in the mix, the dynamics are even more complex. Below are some of the implications of this study for the central elements of classroom life: curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The implications are relevant for all

students but particularly relevant to BIPOC students who, in a system designed for White males, must feel a sense of belonging before they can learn well.

Curriculum

All the teachers in this study appreciate the resources they have access to from a variety of sources, but they reject curriculum that comes in a box with rigid instructions about pacing and content. The word "love" was used more than once to refer to their specific content areas. "I love the next-generation science standards," said P2. "I was an American history major. . . . I love history, so I like to infuse it [into] all the things I do," P8 told me. "The eighth-grade content is my absolute favorite, because it's civics," said P3. Because these teachers love *what* they are teaching, they devote considerable time to creating their own materials, sometimes devoting time in the library to respond to students' interests. And in the process of creating lessons they, too, are learning. Their freshness to and enthusiasm for the original material is transmitted to students. "I think it means a lot to the kids," said P1, adding that her curriculum "has a brand. . . . I remember one kid was like, 'Oh, that's a [teacher's name] thing.' And I'm like, 'How do you know?' And they're like, 'Because it's your font.'"

The lessons to be drawn are multiple: exemplary teachers remain enthusiastic about their subject matter and are intellectually stimulated, which energizes their students, especially when the unit relates to their own emerging identities. Another lesson is that content might be considered part of a relational triangle—what Hawkins (1974) calls "I, Thou, and It".

> I came to realize . . . that one of the very important factors . . . is that there be some third thing which is of interest to the child *and* to the adult (emphasis in the original), in which they can join in outward projection. Only this creates a stable bond of communication, of shared concern. (Hawkins, 1974, pp. 57–58)

P4 described a similar sentiment, saying she considers her subject matter the gateway to building relationships with her students. "I love my content . . . there's always ways to develop

an activity that allows space for students to show who they are and show their creativity . . . so I try to do that throughout . . . by building in projects and letting students choose their own topics. . . . I think that's kind of how I typically get to know students is honestly through the science content, because everybody can nerd out on some aspect of science." When teaching across difference, loving one's subject matter can be a bridge to loving one's students.

Instruction/Pedagogy

As mentioned, the *how* of teaching is as important as the *what* of teaching—and it is often in the *how* that teaching can go wrong. D. Ball (2018) writes that teaching is "dense with 'discretionary spaces,' and teachers' everyday practice is filled with their own judgments, habits of action, and decisions" (p. 5). Ball says that there are approximately 1500 moments of decision-making every day in the classroom and describes a math class she taught. Analyzing a transcript of a video of her classroom, she counted 20 micro-moments within one-minute and 28-seconds when she had to make split-second judgment calls about instruction or student behavior. It is in these micro-moments, she says, when racism can unintentionally enter the classroom. Moments of unconscious bias, she says, help explain why BIPOC students may be disciplined in disproportionate ways.

> The discretionary spaces of teaching also offer pathways for dismantling the regressive "normal," however. These discretionary spaces can be an enormous resource for good because it is through them that teaching can be practiced in ways that are culturally responsive to communities, that build on their resources and ways of knowing and doing, and that responsibly serve the children and families that are so often harmed. (D. Ball 2022, p. 5)

While all the teachers in this study have regretted moments in the classroom when they failed a student by saying or doing the wrong thing or by not speaking up when the situation called for their advocacy, they are also highly intentional about pedagogy. "In the beginning, you got to get buy-in, you get like two months to hook them or they're not going to be with you,"

said P1. From the way they arrange the seating to what they put on the walls to how the lessons are designed, study participants say they are always looking for opportunities to engage students and help them develop voice and agency. Project-based and hands-on learning are popular among the study participants, as are having students work in pairs and small groups. They move from one activity to another to hold students' attention and curate an impressive array of experiences: games of all varieties, poetry and art projects, and theatre productions (think *Macbeth* with a Kardashian twist). One teacher sets up a Starbucks-like café in the classroom where students select books from the 500-volume library she has created over the years.

There is very little sit-and-git in these classrooms; teachers traverse the space, sometimes stopping to talk with a student who is struggling or has a question. To be sure, these are the techniques of the trade, but the participants in my study are not primarily technicians. It might be more accurate to call them *social artists* whose three-dimensional canvas is the classroom. As P9, whose family and friends advised her to be a doctor or lawyer, realized soon after she started teaching: "This is what I need to be doing because it takes all of my skills that I'm really good at and it's all in one, managing, organizing, creating, mentoring, coaching. It's everything that I like doing, but in one job." They know that a substantial part of their daily work is to influence students, to use their artistry to reel students into the joy of learning, even if the motivation is only extrinsic at first. As one teacher noted, "[I]can't tell you how many kids have been like, 'I do your work because I like you'" (P1).

Assessment

Every teacher in this study appreciates that assessment is integral to effective teaching and learning. Every teacher in the study *also* has serious qualms about high stakes standardized tests. However, one teacher said she has come to appreciate the perspectives of her colleagues of

color—also parents—who are pragmatic about what their children need to know to navigate a White-normed society: “The way my thinking has evolved is just in being a little more comfortable with nuance and thinking about there’s a time and a place for assessment” (P14). That said, not a single teacher in this study supports the reigning philosophy that standardized tests should be used as a barrier to high school graduation. Instead, the participants believe the test should be one of many data points about student learning. It is worth noting that many of the study participants teach subjects such as social studies, civics, and history, which are typically not attached to standardized tests. Perhaps part of what allows these teachers to excel is that they do not have the tests hanging over their heads, enabling them to focus more on what matters: their relationships with students, the development of rich curricula, and engaging pedagogy that encourages critical thinking.

Even the study participants who *are* held accountable for standardized test scores do not let it dictate what they do in the classroom. Additionally, across all my interviews, it was striking that I heard only a single mention of the achievement gap. Participants recognized the existence of test score gaps but attributed them to larger social factors. As P2 asserted, “We’ve seen all the studies, right? Like all that these tests do . . . the only thing they correlate with is socioeconomic class.” Participants were also dismayed by the anxiety levels that many of their students feel both in anticipating and taking the tests. Said one participant: “They had MCAS Tuesday and Wednesday, they came in, they were exhausted. I was like, ‘Do you need to meditate for 10 minutes? We’re going to meditate.’ And I just shut the light, and granted, I didn’t get to an activity I wanted to get to, but they needed that” (P18). Indeed, one study found that students have 15% higher cortisol levels just before taking the high-stakes test (it was 35% for male students), relative to that same timeframe during weeks without testing—roughly the equivalent

of an 80-point drop on the 1600-point SAT scale. They also found the largest cortisol effects for those living in high-poverty and high-crime neighborhoods (Heissel et al., 2018, p. 2). High-stakes tests, then, may be measuring stress more than ability. If the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again while expecting a different outcome, it would be prudent to rethink our national obsession with testing.

Implications for Recruitment and Hiring

The teacher workforce in the US consists primarily of female teachers who are White, middle class, and who have attended a traditional undergraduate or graduate education program and passed a licensing exam. Most of the participants in my study are cut from a different cloth. As mentioned, many are from working-class backgrounds and have taken a circuitous route to teaching. Many also entered the schoolhouse through the back door—as a long-term substitute teacher, filling in for a maternity leave, or just being in the right place at the right time. In other words, they came to teaching through indirect means. This suggests that conventional teacher recruitment strategies are insufficient and that a reluctance to think outside the box may not yield the kinds of candidates who have the deep reflective capacities and range of life experiences that are necessary for teaching across difference.

As the field of education takes important strides to recruit and hire more racially diverse candidates by expanding its outreach (for example, by providing BIPOC high school students with education internships or by recruiting candidates from community-based organizations such as after-school programs), human resource departments in schools could also seek alternative strategies for attracting strong White candidates from unlikely sources. Targeted social media campaigns to attract national talent from other fields are relatively inexpensive to implement. Job descriptions also need significant updating, with a reduced focus on the technical aspects of the

position and an increased focus on adaptive and relational skills. Human resource professionals might take advantage of the pandemic prompting some people to leave lucrative careers for more intrinsically meaningful work. Expanding the talent pool beyond the usual suspects, however, will require considerable creativity and risk-taking that is largely unchartered territory for a rule-bound bureaucracy like education. To be clear, I am not suggesting that the hiring standards should be relaxed, as was the case during the height of the pandemic when warm bodies were needed in the classroom and in the current climate when teacher turnover and teacher shortages are at record levels. What I am suggesting is a more nuanced lens for recognizing intellectual talent, growth mindset, and emotional maturity.

There are also hurdles to overcome in the hiring process. One is a failure of imagination. In education, unlike in other professions, the human resource office is typically short-staffed and/or not steeped in talent development. Thus, there is insufficient opportunity to probe more deeply into the dispositions and life experiences teachers bring to their work. As a result, White teachers are typically not hired for any of the qualities, dispositions, and life experiences that were revealed in this study to be central to White teachers' success with BIPOC students in the classroom.

Additionally, there is often an avoidance of topics that may be considered too personal for the workplace; hence, districts may be missing critical opportunities to see the very essence of the person applying for the job. Questions or prompts such as: "Describe a personal challenge you overcame." or "Tell us about something you had to quickly learn that you knew nothing about." or "Talk about a mistake you made and how you rectified it." or "What is the role of empathy in the learning process?" or "What kind of learner were you in school?" or asking candidates to roleplay a variety of sensitive classroom scenarios could allow for a richer and

more revealing conversation. Startlingly, a recent study found that more than one in three school districts does not include an interview with the hiring principal as part of the hiring process, and only 13% of districts require a portfolio or a sample performance lesson with students to evaluate teacher candidates' pedagogical and relational skills (Konoske-Graf et al., 2016).

Such errors and oversights also point to the need for adaptations in the licensing of teachers. For example, it would likely increase the pool of applicants to create more flexible, but not less rigorous, licensing requirements. Research shows that some of those who test poorly have impressive GPAs, relevant experience, and tremendous potential. Such candidates might opt instead to submit essays, a portfolio of work, and a demonstration of teaching.

Of course, underlying the struggles of recruiting and hiring high-quality White teachers of BIPOC students is the larger public perception that teaching is a low-status profession not worthy of economically competitive salaries. Palmer (2000) tells us that we believe this myth at society's peril:

> Teaching and learning are critical to our individual and collective survival…in our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends. (p. 3)

Implications for Pre-Service Learning

Much has been written about the preponderance of Whiteness in pre-service graduate and undergraduate education programs (Aronson, 2018; Buehler et al., 2009; Lowenstein, 2009; Matias & Allen, 2013; Milner & Laughter, 2015; Picower, 2009; Pollock et al., 2010; Pollock et al., 2016; Scott & Venegas, 2019; Sleeter, 2001, 2017). While many programs are making noble attempts to broaden the curriculum, there are still far too many in which one or two extant courses on equity or multi-culturalism serve as the sole touchpoints for White teachers who will serve in urban environments or, increasingly, in suburbs where the number of BIPOC students is

rapidly increasing. Courses in racial and ethnic studies are urgently needed in the pre-service curriculum, especially considering the disinformation that is currently spreading in schools and communities. Teachers must have the opportunity to interrogate and let go of the "cherished knowledge" (Jupp, 2017) that has clouded their awareness of history and see the connections between schooling and, for example, US housing policy. White teachers must also be exposed to the contributions and resilience of BIPOC Americans across the sweep of history. White teachers no longer have "the luxury of innocence" (Moore, Jr., 2020).

In addition, because the faculty in pre-service programs remains predominantly White, the professors may not have developed the comfort level to facilitate conversations that build teachers' figurative muscles to be, as several of my participants said, "the only White person in the room." According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2020), more than three-quarters of postsecondary faculty members in the US were white (78%). Schools of education would do well to hire more faculty of color and better prepare White faculty for the country's changing demographics.

Perhaps the greatest leverage for the field can be gained through the careful selection of who is admitted to pre-service programs in the first place. My findings echo Haberman's (1995) research from several decades ago that highlights the qualities thought to be predictive of how successful a given teacher will be in the classroom: they are often older, come from an urban community, have raised children, and have held other jobs. More recently, Christopher (2019) discerned a similar set of characteristics.

For education students with more limited life experience, community-based cross-cultural immersion programs "in which . . . students actually live in communities that are culturally different from their own while they are learning to teach" have been shown to be impactful

(Sleeter, 2001, p. 97). Living outside of their own country for an extended period has also helped aspiring teachers develop perspective-taking skills that will serve them in environments that may otherwise feel alien (Merryfield, 2000). Schools of education might also take a page from the medical and counseling professions, whereby rotations, internships, and residencies over several years' time, with close supervision, are the norm (Darling-Hammond & Darling-Hammond, 2022). This is already happening in many places. New teachers consistently say that the opportunity to teach alongside a veteran teacher is the best preparation possible, and yet the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (2016) reported that only 20% of first-year teachers had done any practice teaching before taking their first job. It seems the height of folly to put a newly minted White teacher in an under-resourced school and in a classroom by herself with two dozen BIPOC students who justifiably feel antagonistic toward the American education system. Teachers, like other professionals, should receive a robust education for a sophisticated and demanding role.

To promote the habit of reflection, pre-service programs must embed it in coursework and perhaps create a separate requirement for those wishing to teach across difference to keep a journal from the day they enter the program until they are given a classroom assignment. Pre-service students would be given regular prompts and meet with professors about their journal entries throughout the program. The resulting journal could become the focus of a transition experience with a supervisor and the basis of a multi-year learning plan for teachers to carry with them into the field. This exercise would signal to students that their learning journey has only just begun, and that continued supervision is imperative.

Implications for In-Service Professional Development

The 19 teachers in this study have taught us that the process of racial conscientization is not a short-term engagement; it requires a commitment to lifelong learning and self-examination. Research is clear that one-and-done workshops are not efficacious, even though districts "are making a massive investment in teacher improvement—far larger than people realize" (TNTP, 2015, p. 2). Job-embedded professional development that "is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning" is said to be more effective (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hirsh, 2009). Along these lines, one participant was concerned about the overemphasis on identity work to the exclusion of more pragmatic conversations with colleagues about students.

> [W]e focused mostly on teachers thinking about their own racial identity development. But . . . you really only have a few hours of professional development that isn't taken up by all the state requirements around test prep. . . . I've never really had a conversation with a colleague about how we serve [BIPOC students]. What are the problems that we notice? What are our own deficiencies? (P11)

Professional development (PD) that prepares educators for teaching across race is particularly challenging in traditional educational settings because mindset shifts leading to changes in practice require relational and adaptive work (Heifetz et al., 2009) that is deeper and takes longer than the development of specific instructional skills. The participants in this study, however, have figured out—with the support of other educators and a variety of outside resources—how to create a customized learning plan for themselves, including space for reflection that is embedded in their daily practice, and to which they can return time and again. These capacities—or access to them—are rare in the teacher workforce because it is extremely difficult to stop and reflect amidst the proverbial fire hose of everyday life in schools.

There is a burgeoning industry, however, of regional and national organizations offering PD in the anti-racism and equity space, with approaches that vary in quality and dosage. The most effective are designed as ongoing dialogues in environments that are safe and challenging, where people can speak honestly, accept each other's learning curves, and recognize that no one is the expert (Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, https://www.massupt.org/ideas-principles/). Several scholars have written about "pedagogies of discomfort" that can lead to breakthroughs (Boler, 1999; Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Zembylas & Boler, 2002). This framework helps people with privileged histories "engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others" (Boler, 1999, pp. 176–177). Through dialogue, teachers can learn to interrogate their dominant mindsets, habits, and practices and, in the process, move toward a healthier and more nuanced way of understanding race.

Alternative Professional Spaces

Another recommendation on teaching writ large (TNTP, 2015) is to extend the reach of exemplary teachers in school districts. Applying that recommendation to White teachers of BIPOC students, a state-funded "Equity Educators" pilot program could be launched, whereby exemplary White teachers meet and partner with other White teachers across Massachusetts who are motivated to change mindsets and practices. Teachers are known to learn well from their peers, and it would provide relief to educators of color who bear the burden of answering White teachers' questions. The lessons gleaned from such a pilot could be shared with other states.

Sustained progress may also necessitate a "third space" (Oldenburg, 1989), a professionally facilitated, voluntary, and judgment-free community of adult learners that is intellectually *and* relationally rigorous. One participant asked for just that: "Is there a beloved

community . . . out there that we can go to and say, 'Well, how are you doing this? Like, what does this look like?' I haven't found it yet" (P7). Such a space could help educators hold themselves accountable to their own and each other's anti-racism and equity goals without the worry of jeopardizing their professional standing or reputation. Ongoing cross-district or regionally based learning communities, in which professionals have time to plan, reflect, conduct small experiments, and work together on common challenges over time, could help cultivate individual vulnerability and foster the collective courage they need to do the difficult work.

Summary Statement

Situated at the intersection of White Teacher Identity Studies and Teacher-Student Relationships, my study might be considered part of a new generation of scholarship that post-dates the summer of 2020, when George Floyd was so senselessly murdered. Prior to that summer, the White educators I work with were ambivalent about PD related to meeting the needs of their BIPOC students. Indeed, the term "anti-racism" was not yet part of their lexicon. After that summer, they spoke of nothing but anti-racism. Sometimes, context—in this case, a once-in-a-generation racial reckoning for many White folks—can change the ground game and accelerate progress in ways previously unimaginable. All the teachers in this study said they had stepped up their game considerably in pursuit of racial equity. It is my hope that other White researchers will do the same.

Conventional wisdom has it that teachers are the ones responsible for helping their students learn and grow. In other words, learning is viewed as a one-way street. D. Ball (2022) reminds us:

> While most other languages have a single word for teaching and learning that honors the fundamental relational and connected work, English separates this concept into two different words. And compared with many Indigenous languages, rich with a "grammar of animacy," in which verbs greatly outnumber nouns, English is also noun-locked,

> implicitly turning so much of our thought to things rather than doings (Kimmerer, 2019). (D. Ball, 2022, p. 51)

The exemplary White teachers in this study recognize that genuine learning is a two-way street; they are open and receptive to BIPOC students helping *them* learn and grow. It is only through this mutuality that BIPOC students will recognize that *they* have a significant and often life-changing impact on their White teachers. This is the essence of Being-and-Becoming: a *mutual* growth-fostering experience.

Final Reflection

It is often said that research is *me-search* in disguise. There is some truth to this assertion in my case. The opening paragraphs of my dissertation describe one of many situations I encountered as the White mother of my brown-skinned daughter, a role for which I was not fully prepared and that opened my eyes in life-changing ways. As I turned both inward and outward during my doctoral journey, I have learned so much from so many: my daughter, the 19 participants in my study, my classmates of color at Antioch, educators in Massachusetts, and numerous others who have mentored me in the ongoing process of racial conscientization. It has required me to ask myself, the adoptive White mother of a daughter born 8700 miles from Boston, some tough questions. Was it White saviorism that motivated me upon realizing that a biological child was not in the cards for my husband and me? Was it righteous to prevent a baby girl on the other side of the world from being sold into prostitution or a life of economic impoverishment—or was it self-congratulatory? There are no clear answers to these nagging questions, but there is clarity about one matter: I have caused harm with harsh or insensitive words and actions simply because racism lives and breathes inside of me. More than once, in her adolescence, did my daughter call me out for racist comments. More than once did I not fully defend her against derogatory remarks from teachers, classmates, neighbors, and acquaintances.

More than once did I trip over my clumsy attempts at having "the talk" or fail to help her navigate a complex identity, part of which was inflicted upon her.

And perhaps most disturbingly, why did I insist on buying a home in one of the so-called "best" school districts in Massachusetts, only to discover over time that "best" meant a White and wealthy zip code? Given my years of experience in public education and my decidedly progressive philosophy, how did I buy into the myth of standardized test scores as the measure of quality when it came to laying down roots in a community? These are the questions that I will continue to ponder. While there is no doubt that I am a loving and caring mother who would go to the ends of the earth for my daughter, there is also no doubt that I have been complicit. I cannot erase the past, but I *can* confront it, I *can* atone for it, and I *can* commit to staying on this journey until my dying day.

It challenges the ego and the heart to reckon honestly with one's own racial identity in a society that has systematically denigrated a group of people simply because their ancestors lived longer in climates where the sun shone more brightly. It is an absurdity that has been reified across four centuries and passed down from one generation to the next. Isabella Wilkerson (2020) characterizes this racial predicament as a caste system. She states it poignantly: "Caste is insidious and therefore powerful because it is not hatred, it is not necessarily personal. It is the worn grooves of comforting routines and unthinking expectations, patterns of a social order that have been in place for so long that it looks like the natural order of things" (p. 70). It is incumbent upon White people in the US, and especially White teachers of BIPOC students, to interrogate and then change the comforting routines and unthinking expectations and to prioritize reflection, relationship building, the development of humility, cultural understanding, and hopefulness on behalf of BIPOC students. If the more than two million White teachers in the US

do their part, the nation's classrooms could become a model for a new, inclusive, and much-needed social contract.

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APPENDIX: PERMISSION FOR FIGURE 2.1

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Dear

Greetings! My name is Jane Feinberg; I live in Boston, Massachusetts. In December, I successfully defended my doctoral dissertation at the Graduate School of Leadership and Change at Antioch University. The dissertation is titled, Being-and-becoming across difference: A grounded theory study of exemplary white teachers in racially diverse classrooms.

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