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Georgia State University, carlabidwell26@yahoo.com

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, SUCCESSFUL WHITE MATHEMATICS TEACHERS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS, by CARLA REBECCA BIDWELL, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

_____
David W. Stinson, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

_____
Pier A. Junor Clarke, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Christopher C. Jett, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Brian A. Williams, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Date

_____
Dana L. Fox, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Middle-Secondary Education
and Instructional Technology

_____
R. W. Kamphaus, Ph.D.
Dean and Distinguished Research Professor
College of Education

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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Carla Rebecca Bidwell

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Carla Rebecca Bidwell
4520 Sawnee Trail
Acworth, GA 30102

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. David W. Stinson
Department of Middle-Secondary Education
and Instructional Technology
College of Education
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303-3083

VITA

Carla Rebecca Bidwell

ADDRESS: 4520 Sawnee Trail
Acworth, Georgia 30102

EDUCATION:

Ph.D.	2010	Georgia State University Major: Teaching and Learning Concentration: Mathematics Education
M.S.	2001	University of Tennessee Mathematics Education
B.S.	1999	East Tennessee State University Mathematics

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2007–present	6–12 Mathematics Coach Marietta City Schools, Marietta, Georgia
2001–2007	Mathematics Teacher Marietta City Schools, Marietta, Georgia

PRESENTATIONS AND PAPERS:

Bidwell, C. R. (2010, October). *Conquering the cultural divide.* Session facilitated at the annual meeting of the Georgia Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Eatonton, GA.

Bidwell, C. R. (2009, October). *The key to GPS success: Teacher collaboration.* Session facilitated at the annual meeting of the Georgia Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Eatonton, GA.

Bidwell, C. R. (2006, May). *Enhancing teacher preparation with cyber-learning communities.* Session facilitated at the annual meeting of the Educational Computing Organization of Ontario, Mississauga, Ontario Canada.

Bidwell, C. R. (2005, April). *E^4 in algebra I.* Session facilitated at the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Annual Conference, Anaheim, CA.

Bidwell, C. R. (2004, October). *An investigative approach to algebra I*. Session facilitated at the annual meeting of the Georgia Mathematics Conference, Eatonton, GA.

Stinson, D. W., Bidwell, C. R., & Powell, G. C. (in press). Critical pedagogy and teaching mathematics for social justice. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*.

Stinson, D. W., Bidwell, C. R., & Powell, G. C. (2010, April). *A course in critical pedagogy and teaching mathematics for social justice: Exploring the outcomes*, paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Denver, CO.

Stinson, D. W., Bidwell, C. R., Powell, G. C., & Thurman, M. M. (2008). Becoming critical mathematics pedagogues: A journey. *Proceedings of the second annual meeting of the Georgia Association of Mathematics Teachers Educators* (pp. 1–10). Eatonton, GA: Georgia Association of Mathematics Teachers Educators.

Stinson, D. W., Bidwell, C. R., Powell, G. C., & Thurman, M. M. (2008, June). *Becoming Critical mathematics pedagogues: Three teachers' beginning journey*. Paper presented at the annual International Conference of Teacher Education and Social Justice, Chicago, IL.

Stinson, D. W., Bidwell, C. R., Powell, G. C., & Thurman, M. M. (2008). Critical mathematics pedagogy: Three teachers' beginning journey [Abstract]. *Program of the 4th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry*, Urbana-Champaign, IL, 480.

Stinson, D. W., Bidwell, C. R., Jett, C. C., Powell, G. C., & Thurman, M. M. (2007). Critical mathematics pedagogy: Transforming teachers' practices. *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference: Mathematics Education in a Global Community* (619–624). Charlotte, NC: Mathematics Education into the 21st Century.

Stinson, D. W., Bidwell, C. R., Jett, C. C., Powell, G. C., & Thurman, M. M. (2007, April). *Critical mathematics pedagogy: Three teachers' beginning journey*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

ABSTRACT

SUCCESSFUL WHITE MATHEMATICS TEACHERS OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS
by
Carla Rebecca Bidwell

In the United States, a growing disparity exists between the racial composition of teachers and the students they teach. In 2006, 43.1% of K–12 public school students were reported as non-White—in 1990, 32.4% (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Teachers, however, are predominantly White, 83.3% (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a). Exacerbating this disparity, it has been noted that fewer African Americans are choosing education as a profession (see, e.g., Irvine, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This growing disparity motivates a crucial question: Can White teachers be successful with "other people's children" (Delpit, 1995)? This study explores this question by examining the life histories of four White mathematics teachers who have experienced success with other people's children, specifically, with African American children. The purpose of the study was to better understand what led each of the participants to teach African American children, and what factors may have led to her or his success as a White teacher of African American students.

A qualitative, collective case study methodology (Stake, 1995) was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using an eclectic theoretical framework (Stinson, 2009) which included critical theory, critical race theory, and Whiteness studies. Analysis of the data revealed the participants incorporated into

their own teaching many of the same characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy identified by Ladson-Billings (1994). Nevertheless, three strategies were identified as being essential to the teachers' success with African American students: (a) forming meaningful relationships with students, (b) engaging students in racial conversations, and (c) reflecting both individually and with colleagues. The findings suggest a need for "spaces" in which pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and teacher educators can discuss and openly debate issues of race, and challenge racial hierarchies found in schools and society at large. The findings also suggest developing a sharp focus on multicultural anti-racist education in teacher preparation programs as well as incorporating it into professional development plans for in-service teachers. Moreover, the findings highlight a need for school districts to provide teachers with professional development in three "How to" areas: (a) build teacher–student relationships, (b) connect to the local community, and (c) develop as reflective practitioners.

SUCCESSFUL WHITE MATHEMATICS TEACHERS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

by

Carla Rebecca Bidwell

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Teaching and Learning
in
the Department of Middle-Secondary & Instructional Technology
in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2010

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DEDICATION

To my father, Harrison Robert James III and my loving mother-in-law, Bobbie Aleine Bidwell, both of whose battles with cancer began and ended during this journey—I know if you were here now, you both would be proud.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I began the journey to a doctorate degree over five years ago as a single woman with few responsibilities. My life has changed dramatically since the journey began and I owe many thanks to family, friends, and colleagues whose support, love, and guidance along the way made my arrival to graduation possible. First, I thank my husband, Chris, for always encouraging me to keep going—even as I struggled to balance the roles of fulltime teacher, doctoral student, and new mom. I truly appreciate the many hours you played dual roles of both mom and dad while allowing me to write, and also, the many hours you spent reading every word to help me create a final document in which to be proud. And to Lucas, I look forward to days ahead when I don't have to say "Mommy has to do work." We'll spend many fun times together *flying to Neverland*!

Special thanks to "Aunt Mary" Thurman for not only being a babysitter on call but also for allowing me into your home on the countless days that you provided me a quiet place to write. I am truly grateful for your friendship. I want to thank my fellow Ph.D. colleagues: Kim (and Peter), Ginny, Chris, and Barry for the support network you have provided for the last 5 years. And also, to my parents, who have always been supportive in every endeavor, thank you.

My Dissertation Committee provided the guidance that allowed me to design a study around a topic so dear to my heart. To Dr. Pier Junor Clarke, your help in developing a concept map for my research provided the organization I needed to go forward at a critical time during this project—thank you for your thoughtful guidance. Dr. Brian Williams, thank you for keeping me grounded by challenging me to always trouble "race" and "culture." I extend many thanks, also, to Dr. Christopher Jett, for the years of support you have given me in all aspects of this project as a fellow doctoral student and now as a member of my committee.

Dr. David Stinson took me under his wing at a time when I was just learning about critical theory scholarship and needed direction in my program. David, thank you for agreeing to be my advisor and believing in the work I do, for introducing me to scholars who have transformed my life, for encouraging me and reminding me of the importance of my research, for engaging me in meaningful dialogue both in and out of class, and most importantly, for being the exemplar advisor that *all* Ph.D. students should experience. Your commitment to both the education of African American children and to your graduate students is inspiring. Thank you for everything.

And finally, to Caroline, Carrie, Patt, and Oliver—four teachers who allowed me into their lives and spent hours sharing their stories—thank you for all you do for your students. You are an inspiration to me and I hope, through this research, your stories can inspire other White teachers as well.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a personal story—an explanation of why I have chosen to explore the lived experiences of successful White teachers of African American children[1]. I then provide a brief rationale for engaging in this research project followed by the questions that guided the study. I conclude by clarifying some common terms used throughout, including a critique of the problematic nature of language used to describe "others."

A Personal Story

Growing up in a rural town taught me a lot about gardening and tobacco farming but it didn't teach me anything about African Americans or, for that matter, any other "marginalized group." I personally knew only four African Americans the first 18 years of my life and failed to develop a close relationship with any of them. In adulthood, I became increasingly more exposed to people from backgrounds "different" than my own but I had yet to have any meaningful immersive experience with people from a different "race" nor had I received any "formal" education in my initial teacher preparation to explore race and culture, including my own. During my teacher preparation, I was placed as an intern for a full school year in a Professional Development School[2] (PDS) with a

[1] Throughout this dissertation, I use the terms *children* and *students* interchangeably to avoid redundancy. When the term *students* is used, however, I am not erasing who they are as children.
[2] Professional Development Schools are "innovative institutions formed through partnerships between professional education programs and P–12 schools" (NCATE, 2010) with the goal of improving both the quality of teaching and student learning.

diverse population. At this school, university faculty attempted to "immerse" interns in other cultures by engaging us in activities such as taking a bus tour of the school district, visiting a housing project and talking to people in that community, eating "soul" food, and visiting a prison to talk in a small-group setting with inmates on death row. These experiences are unforgettable and have been invaluable to me both professionally and personally; however, despite the efforts of the university faculty, my teaching internship was far from an immersive experience. Yet, for reasons unknown to me at the time, when I became a teacher of African American students early in my career, I recognized that my life's calling was to be an educator of African American students. But this calling is not that of a "missionary" where my intention is to "save African American children from themselves and their culture" (Martin, 2007, p. 13)—I do not seek to act as the "White knight" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 123) who rescues her students and bestows goodwill upon them.

Moreover, I understand that I will never know what it is like to experience the world as an African American. I also know that, unlike African Americans, as a White woman, I have the option of ignoring race (McIntyre, 1997). And even though that option has been a possibility throughout my life, I have always had a difficult time overlooking race. In my heart, even as a child, each time I was teased about the Black[3] boy that rode my bus in elementary school or when I heard a Black man referred to as "lazy" only because of the color of his skin, I knew it was not right. As a new teacher, when my department chair lowered her voice to talk about the "loud Black girls" in her class, I

[3] In an attempt to avoid redundancy, the terms *African American* and *Black* are used interchangeably throughout this text to describe a person of African decent who culturally identifies with the United States (Stinson, 2004). Furthermore, although the term *White* typically refers to a White American of European decent, I simply use the term White to describe persons in this group.

ignored it and regretfully added that experience to a list of missed opportunities to "speak out" against what I knew was blatant racism. And though I can go on and on about the many racial experiences that have impacted my life, I still can not pinpoint exactly why I chose to teach African American children.

Admittedly, for selfish reasons, this "not knowing" is what motivated me, in part, to conduct this study. Although I'm not quite ready (yet) to place myself in the category of "successful White mathematics teachers of African American children," I do know that these are the children I was meant to teach. More importantly, I believe that we can gain valuable insight from the many White teachers who are successful with African American children in hopes to improve education for *all* children. In the end, whether or not this research helps to answer my own questions about how I came to do the work I do is irrelevant; inevitably, I will learn and grow from this experience. What this research project aims to do is to inform university faculty and K–12 administrators how better to prepare White teachers for urban schools by examining those teachers who have experienced success with Black children—which is, I believe, a necessary first step.

Rationale for the Study

The term "achievement gap" has become increasingly popular in education over the last decades as a way to describe the disparity between Black and White students in academics. Although Hilliard[4] (2003) and Gutiérrez (2008) both gave compelling arguments against an achievement gap lens when examining low student achievement,

[4] Hilliard (2003) pointed out that the United States ranks near the bottom of comparative international studies on student achievement and thus students in the United States, as a whole, are not excelling academically. Therefore, an analysis of the "achievement gap" would more appropriately be an analysis of the gap between "the current performance of African [American] students and levels of excellence" (Hilliard, 2003, p. 138) rather than a comparison of Black and White student achievement. Furthermore, Hilliard and Gutiérrez (2008) both argued that the so-called "achievement gap" of Black vs. White further serves to sustain whiteness and White student achievement as the norm—a topic discussed more thoroughly in the theoretical framework section of this study (see chapter 3).

the data alone does paint a somewhat grim picture of school achievement for non-White students, specifically, African American students (Lubienski, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2005, 2007b). In mathematics, the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment reported 40% of Black students below basic level compared to only 10% of White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Similarly, 58% of Black 8th graders were below basic level compared to 20% of their White peers. And at the 12th-grade level, 30% of White students scored below basic level compared to a staggering 70% of Black students. According to this data, not only does the achievement gap between African American and White students widen as they progress through school, but also African American students appear to be struggling the most, with Hispanic students not far behind.

This data, in part, explains why the high school dropout rate of African American students far surpasses that of White students (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2007). Thus, fewer Blacks are going to college and even fewer are choosing to pursue a career in education. Although I fully support researchers who advocate an increase in the number of African American teachers (see, e.g., Irvine, 2003; King, 1993), I also agree with Irvine (1990), who claimed, “The number of black teachers will increase only when the achievement of at-risk black students increases” (p. 39). Irvine asked, “How can we recruit K–12 students of color into teaching if they have unpleasant learning experiences in school?” She further explained: “Students of color are not less attracted to teaching than are White students. The problem is that students of color are not graduating from high schools and colleges with the skills necessary to be competent teachers” (Irvine, 2003, p. 61).

Many factors contribute to the unpleasant learning experiences in schools of too many African American children (see, e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2006); however, an exploration of these factors is not the focus of this study. What is imperative to mention here is that negative experiences in the classroom, I believe, ultimately lead to fewer teachers of color. The disparity between the percentage of teachers who are White, 83.3% (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a), and the percentage of K–12 non-White public school children, 43.1% (U.S. Department of Education, 2008), is enormous. And although, as this research shows, there are White teachers who are experiencing success with African American children, it is in the best interest of *all* students of *every* racial and ethnic background to be taught by non-White teachers as well.

Thus, the primary goal of this research was to learn from White mathematics teachers who were deemed successful with African American children in hopes to enrich education for future African American students. What childhood, adulthood, and educational experiences has she or he had that led her or him into teaching mathematics? What racial experiences has she or he had and did these experiences in any way effect her or his choice to teach African American children? How do the teachers view race within their own classrooms and what effects does their Whiteness have on their teaching? These questions are seldom asked of successful White mathematics teachers but they are questions, I believe, that are vital in order to begin to understand the racial dynamics between a successful White teacher and her non-White students. According to Irvine (2003):

> There is a compelling need for research that investigates how teachers' personal characteristics and cultural experiences affect the manner in which teaching is

> enacted. Teachers, similar to other professionals, operate from the concept of positionality, that is, they have frames of reference for viewing the world depending on how the world makes sense to them based on personal history. Although it would be unfair to imply that teachers are *solely* a product of these cultural and personal experiences, it would be equally naïve to assume that their teaching beliefs and behaviors are not influenced by their positionality. (p. 57)

By allowing the participants of this study the opportunity to "tell" their individual "stories," I hope to better understand how they make sense of the world, and more specifically, to understand the role race has played in both their personal and professional lives. Ultimately, I hope that my participants' stories can inform teacher educators on how best to prepare mathematics teacher education candidates to teach students from backgrounds different than their own, which, in turn, lessens teacher attrition, narrows the gap between the White and non–White teaching force, and most importantly, improves the education of all youth.

Guiding Questions

To investigate the lived experiences of successful White mathematics teachers of African American children, a qualitative case study methodology was employed framed within an eclectic theoretical framework (Stinson, 2009), which included critical race theory, Whiteness studies, and critical theory. In this study, I sought to better understand how each teacher came to teach African American children, the factors that may have contributed to her or his success with African American children, and each teacher's perception of the role her or his own Whiteness plays in the mathematics classroom. The following questions guided the research project:

1. How do the life histories of successful White mathematics teachers of African American children influence their decision to teach African American children?

2. How do these life histories influence their pedagogical practices as successful teachers of African American children?
3. How do successful White mathematics teachers of African American children view the role of their Whiteness in their teaching?

Clarification on Commonly Used Terms

The focus of this research project is on two distinct groups of individuals who share neither a common "race" nor "culture"—White teachers and Black students. Thus, before delving farther into this study, it is necessary to distinguish between, and trouble the ideas of race and culture. In their *Statement on "Race,"* the American Anthropological Association (AAA) explained that race was created in colonial America as a way of classifying groups of people in hierarchical categories based on skin color alone (AAA, 1998). In short, those with light skin took on a superior role over those with dark skin who were seen as subordinate and intellectually inferior:

> The "racial" worldview was invented to assign some groups to perpetual low status, while others were permitted access to privilege, power, and wealth. The tragedy in the United States has been that the policies and practices stemming from this worldview succeeded all too well in constructing unequal populations among Europeans, Native Americans, and peoples of African descent. Given what we know about the capacity of normal humans to achieve and function within any culture, we conclude that present-day inequalities between so-called "racial" groups are not consequences of their biological inheritance but products of historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances. (AAA, ¶ 12)

Although the idea of race as a social construct rather than a "biological reality" (Chubbuck, 2004) is widely accepted, there still remains a common misconception in U.S. society that Whites are "without race" and are the standard by which all others are measured (McIntyre, 1997). The assumption that race is a marker for "the other" only

serves to sustain and reify White hegemonic practices[5]. Likewise, the language used to discuss race is itself problematic.

Culture, on the other hand, refers to a set of common behaviors in a group as opposed to physical characteristics (Irvine, 2003). These behaviors are not innate but are learned and taught to new members of a group as the "correct way to perceive, act, think, and relate to others" (p. 18). Given that humans are not born with "built-in culture" (AAA, 1998, ¶ 9), culture can be unlearned as well, allowing members to transition in and out of groups. Race and culture, however, are commonly misunderstood, in part, because cultural groups are often made up of members who share racial identities. It is not unnatural for humans to desire companionship of those who "look like them"—an unfortunate result of this natural occurrence, however, is the common practice of using the terms race and culture interchangeably.

Throughout this project, I made every effort to use race and culture appropriately but perhaps the most difficult challenge involved the choice of words to describe "others." There is no "best choice" of words to fit this description—non-White, others, people (or students) of color, diverse populations—they all reinforce the idea that White is the norm. Each time I was faced with the challenge of naming people, I struggled with the words, but at times, such labels were necessary. Perhaps Tatum (1997) said it best when recognizing her own struggles to find the "right" words:

> The original creation of racial categories was in the service of oppression. Some may argue that to continue to use them is to continue that oppression. I respect that argument. Yet it is difficult to talk about what is essentially a flawed and

---

[5] Hegemony refers to "the reproduction of social and institutional practices through which dominant groups maintain not only their positions of privilege and control but also the consensual support of other members of society" (Leistyna, Sherblom, & Woodrum, 1999, p. 337). White hegemony then refers to the ways in which Whites, in particular, perpetuate their dominance over others. See summary in chapter 5 for further details.

> problematic social construct without using language that is itself problematic. We have to be able to talk about it in order to change it. So this is the language I choose. (Tatum, 1997, p. 17)

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, through a review of current literature, I demonstrate that there is a lack of research where successful White mathematics teachers of Black students are investigated for both the construction of their racial ideas and ways in which these ideas affect their students and pedagogical practices. The review is divided into five sections: (a) effective pedagogy for African American children, (b) attitudes and beliefs on teaching African American children, (c) exploring race with White teachers, (d) successful White teachers of African American children, and (e) White teachers talking about race. I conclude the chapter with a brief synthesis of the literature that clearly demonstrates the need for my project—a project that is particularly important for mathematics education.

The Present State of Affairs

Over the last 2 decades, teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers have begun to realize that students need to be taught differently than "the way we've always been taught." In mathematics, this pedagogy is commonly referred to as "drill and kill"—the teacher hovers over a warm overhead, works a couple of examples for students, and then hands each student a worksheet for them to complete individually (Hiebert, 2003). While reform in mathematics education is shifting more towards standards-based instruction that is student centered, educators often focus mainly on what is known as "best teaching practices," which are intended to benefit *all* students (see, e.g., Stone,

2007; Tileston, 2005). Although I agree, for the most part, that these "best practices" do serve to benefit all students, most lists of best teaching practices seem to have overlooked the years of research that has investigated pedagogy for Black children (see, e.g., Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Additionally, Martin (2007) contended that the best practices arguments "draw on the assumption that equal opportunity to take advantage of this good teaching is all that is necessary to level the playing field for African American learners and to raise achievement scores" (p. 18).

It is easier, though, to talk about effective pedagogy than it is to practice it. Teachers often struggle to incorporate even the shortest list of best teaching practices into their daily routines due to the large number of non-teaching demands placed upon them. Mathematics teachers, in particular, seem to have difficulties implementing culturally specific lessons given that the mathematics curriculum for years has been textbook driven (Hiebert, 2003). Furthermore, issues surrounding the teaching of mathematics become even more complex when racial dissonance exists between teacher and student (Irvine, 1990, 2003). In particular, Irvine (2003) argued that African American students need "teachers of color…[who] understand linguistic and cultural student codes and often share the hopes, dreams, and expectations of their families" (Irvine, 2003, p.54). Although there is value in what Irvine suggested, the present state of affairs in education generally and mathematics education specifically must be taken into consideration—the current corps of teachers is vastly White (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a).

Effective Pedagogy for African American Children

In her seminal work on successful teachers of African American children, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) described teaching practices that she suggested be made available

to all children. Using a qualitative ethnographic methodology, Ladson-Billings interviewed, observed, and held focus groups with eight teachers who were deemed "successful" by parents, principals, and colleagues.

Ladson-Billings (1994) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as teaching that "uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture" (p. 17). She further explained, "Culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society" (p. 128). Although Ladson-Billings (1995a) claimed that culturally relevant practices are examples of good teaching, she argued that it is much more than "just good teaching" (p. 159). This claim is also true for other cultural pedagogies, such as cultural brokering, culturally responsive teaching, culturally specific pedagogy, and so on (Leonard, 2008). Although each of these pedagogies has unique characteristics in and of themselves, each one emphasizes "the importance of students' culture in the learning process" (Leonard, 2008, p. 56). In culturally relevant classrooms, in particular, students are expected to "engage the world and others critically" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 162).

One of the most common elements of culturally relevant teaching found in the literature is the importance of establishing connections in the classroom. In a culturally relevant classroom, the teacher-student relationship is "fluid and humanely equitable" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 61). In Howard's (2002) study on students' descriptions of effective teachers, participants discussed the importance that a teacher "get to know" their students outside the classroom and show curiosity about students' interests. In other studies (see, e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ware, 2006), teachers have discussed how they

use personal connections with students as a way to motivate students to meet teachers' high expectations. Strong connections, however, should not be limited to teacher–student relationships. Research on culturally relevant teaching indicates teachers should encourage a community of learners wherein students learn collaboratively and take responsibility for each other (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Parsons, 2005). Thus, culturally relevant teaching includes creating opportunities for students to connect to each other as well as developing those teacher–student relationships.

Children have valuable knowledge and collaborative working environments allow them to share this knowledge with each other, but it also teaches children to respect and care about others. Another important element of culturally relevant pedagogy is caring, sometimes specifically referred to as culturally relevant caring (Parsons, 2005) or culturally connected caring (Howard, 2002). Howard stated that caring "can include explicitly and implicitly showing affective, emotional, and nurturing behavior toward students" (p. 436). In Parsons' study, the participant "modeled" caring in order to enhance students' capacities to care. In a culturally relevant classroom, caring extends beyond teacher–student and student–student relationships to foster a more global sense of caring in students (Ware, 2006). One of the teacher-participants in Ladson-Billings's (1994) study taught her students that education, rather than taking them away from their community, could enable them to make their community "what they wanted it to be" (p. 73). Making personal connections to students and caring for them go hand-in-hand. Students know a teacher cares when the teacher takes the time to show interest in the student (Hackenberg, 2005; Noddings, 2002).

Another indication that a teacher cares about individual students occurs when a teacher holds high expectations for the students (Howard, 2001, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ware, 2006); it is not enough for the teacher to verbalize high expectations—the teacher must take action and provide opportunities for *all* students to excel (Howard, Ladson-Billings). Ladson-Billings argued that culturally relevant teachers not only believe that every student can succeed but also they provide scaffolding for learning rather than assuming a child will fail due to lack of prerequisite skills.

A major theme in Howard's (2001) work of effective teachers of African American students is holistic instructional strategies. Teachers in his study believed that their responsibilities as teachers extended beyond academics and included building both moral and social competencies in students. Teachers instructed their students on social etiquette and encouraged their African American students not to reinforce negative stereotypes. These teachers believed that values such as perseverance, responsibility, and respect for authority needed to be explicitly taught. Likewise, they spent considerable time talking to students about the importance of taking responsibility for their own education.

In a culturally relevant classroom, students realize and learn to value their cultural identity while "developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (i.e., develop a sociopolitical consciousness, Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 469). One way to assist students in developing a sociopolitical consciousness in a mathematics class is to use real data to address issues of social justice by examining the social injustices that occur in the students' local, national, and global communities (Gutstein & Peterson, 2005). Although several scholars have written about

and conducted studies on teaching for social justice (see, e.g., Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; Gutstein & Peterson, 2005; Leonard, 2008), only a few studies, unfortunately, have investigated teaching mathematics for social justice (Gau, 2005; Gutstein, 2003, 2006, 2007).

Another pedagogy discussed in the literature as being appropriate for Black children is known as warm demander pedagogy (Irvine & Fraser, 1998). A warm demander is a teacher who "provides a tough-minded, no-nonsense, structured and disciplined classroom environment for kids whom society has psychologically and physically abandoned" (p. 56). In a study of two African American teachers identified as warm demanders, Ware (2006) described warm demanding teachers in terms of their discipline, care-giving, and pedagogy. As strong disciplinarians, the teachers were clearly the authority figure in the classroom and, though they often raised their voices, the students understood that it was out of concern for their learning. As a care giver, the veteran teacher, Ms. Willis, was perceived by herself and her students as an "other-mother." She considered less affluent African American parents as part of her community and saw her obligation as a teacher to teach these parents the standards of behavior for positive interactions in school. As a warm demander pedagogue, Ms. Carter ran a student-centered classroom and used culturally responsive pedagogy by relating students' interest to the classroom lessons. Both teachers in Ware's study shared an appreciation of African American culture with their students, a variable which Ware claims may have supported their warm demander pedagogy.

What each one of the studies on effective pedagogy for Black children fails to address are the complexities of racial differences between student and teacher. White

teachers make up an overwhelming majority of the teaching workforce, yet all but four teachers that took part in these studies were Black. In addition, only one of these teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1994) was identified as a mathematics teacher. The lack of examining White teachers generally and White mathematics teachers specifically who teach African American students in the existing literature was what motivated, in part, my desire to undertake this study. I now turn to the literature on attitudes and beliefs on teaching Black children and then examine studies where White teachers were given (or constructed) opportunities to openly discuss race with their students.

Attitudes and Beliefs on Teaching African American Children

Several studies (Bakari, 2003; Easter, Shultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1999; Garmon, 2004; Love & Kruger, 2005; Taylor & Sobel, 2001) have examined the attitudes and beliefs that pre-service and in-service teachers hold in regards to teaching Black children. Although there are some similarities in the results among the studies, in general, each study had a unique focus on the examination of these attitudes and beliefs. What the studies do have in common is that they overwhelmingly use a quantitative methodology with only one (Garmon) using a qualitative approach. Taylor and Sobel did conduct a mixed-methods study; however, their results focused heavily on the quantitative data collected from a questionnaire. Their mixed-method study investigated the beliefs and perceived skills of a new group of teacher education students on working with children from backgrounds different than their own. Data were collected through demographic profiles and a questionnaire. Results from the study showed a disconnect between pre-service teachers and students of color. Only 45% of the subjects in their study had maintained a relationship with a person from a diverse background while 36% felt they

had basic knowledge of contributions made by individuals from diverse backgrounds. Although the teachers felt that all learners were entitled to an equitable education, only 35% were confident in their abilities to meet the needs of learners from diverse backgrounds. The most positive result of Taylor and Sobel's study is that 83% of the pre-service teachers felt capable of confronting their own prejudices. This conclusion, combined with the fact that data were collected at the beginning of their teacher education program, provides hope that there is time for new teacher education students to develop into effective teachers of Black students.

The lack of qualitative data on teachers' attitudes and beliefs on teaching Black students significantly undermines the complexity of the topic. My study does not focus specifically on teachers' attitudes and beliefs about "race"; however, a precursor to understanding how a teacher views her or his own Whiteness is to first understand her or his ideas about the race of students. My study allowed teachers' the opportunity to explore the foundations of their beliefs about race in hopes to better understand how they became successful teachers of Black children.

Another study that examined the attitudes and beliefs of pre-service teachers in their initial teacher education coursework was conducted by Easter, Shultz, Neyhart, and Reck (1999). Data were collected in this quantitative study by a survey which included what the researchers called "12 statement stems." These "stems" contained some items that allowed respondents to give multiple answers and other items which enabled respondents to furnish their own descriptors. Similar to Taylor and Sobel (2003), Easter et al. investigated the participants' experiences with people from backgrounds different than their own and their perceived skills at teaching diverse students. Their study,

however, also assessed the teachers' comfort level with working with diverse students and questioned their preference of environments in which to teach. Although 51% of the participants believed that they would feel comfortable in a class with diverse students, 63% believed they could teach best in an environment similar to their own. A major contradiction in the results is that 96% of the participants believe they could teach diverse students despite the fact that only 22% of them had any experience in an urban environment and only 6% wished to teach in an urban school. The results imply, I believe, that pre-service teachers do not understand how cultural differences in a classroom influence (and can inform) their teaching.

In another quantitative study, Bakari (2003) utilized the Teaching African American Students Survey (TAASS) to measure pre-service teachers' attitudes on teaching African American students, along with two supporting instruments to measure attitudes toward teaching in general and social desirability. The TAASS was divided into two subscales: one that measured cultural sensitivity toward African American students (CSTAAS) and another which measured the teachers' willingness to teach African American students (WTAAS). The participants were three groups of pre-service teachers. Students from group 2 were enrolled in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). Students from predominantly White universities were divided into two groups: group 1 consisted of students from a university with no specific requirements for preparing students for urban classrooms while the students in group 3 were from universities requiring either field experience in urban schools or multicultural coursework. Results from the study show that teachers from group 2 were significantly more willing to teach African American children than the teachers from groups 1 and 3.

Likewise, when comparing teachers' commitment to teaching in general to their commitment to specifically teach African American children, teachers from the HBCU were more committed to specifically teaching African American students whereas teachers from the predominantly White universities expressed more interest in teaching in general.

It may come as no surprise that African American teachers are more willing to teach African American students but some suggest that African American pre-service teachers need the same multicultural training as White pre-service teachers. For instance, alarming results from Bakari's (2003) study support this idea providing significant implications for all teacher education programs. One cause of concern is that all groups in the study, including the group from HBCU, scored higher on the WTAAS subscale than on the CSTAAS subscale. Also disturbing is that students from group 1 with no required training for urban schools scored higher on the WTAAS than teachers from group 3. Bakari suggested that this type of research must be used to determine if teachers with greater willingness to teach African American students or greater culturally sensitivity have more academic success with their African American students.

One might infer that research on teachers' attitudes and beliefs is performed most often on pre-service teachers because they are more readily available to university researchers. It is concerning that more research on this topic has not been performed on teachers in the field or that the pre-service teachers who participated in existing literature have not been followed into teaching for a longitudinal study. I did, however, locate one study on the beliefs of in-service teachers. Using a survey based on Ladson-Billings' (1994) description of culturally relevant teachers, Love and Kruger (2005) surveyed 244

participants who self-identified as 48% African American and 42% Caucasian. Participants in the study agreed or strongly agreed with the majority of the culturally relevant statements such as *What I learn from my students is as important as what they learn from me* and *It is part of my responsibility to make connections between what happens in the world and who my students are*. Seventy-nine percent agreed that the cultural backgrounds of students are important to teaching and 90% felt responsible for making connections between the world and the students. Although 81% claimed to be in an urban school by choice, a few of the results are incongruent with the Ladson-Billings study. Similar to the results in Easter's et al. (1999) study, 78% of the participants in the Love and Kruger study saw their role as disseminator of knowledge. Additionally, 72% of the participants subscribed to a color-blind ideology, which disregards the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that a student brings to the classroom. Teachers in the Ladson-Billings study taught their students that an education would enable them to improve their own community rather than seeing their education as a "ticket out." However, 49% of Love's participants felt that a good education was needed to move out of the community despite the fact that 63% of the participants agreed that their purpose of teaching was to give something back to the community.

A very different study than those previously mentioned was performed by Garmon (2004). In this qualitative case study, Garmon searched for factors that might contribute to the development of greater cultural awareness in pre-service teachers. Garmon's single participant was a 22-year old, White female teacher candidate who grew up in an all-White community. The participant, Leslie, was chosen because, as her teacher, Garmon noticed a significant change in her attitudes and beliefs toward cultural

and racial diversity. While analyzing 10 hours of interviews conducted throughout Leslie's senior year, Garmon noticed six factors that may have attributed to her "transformation." Three of these factors (openness, self-awareness, and commitment to social justice) were dispositional, directly relating to her character. The other three factors (intercultural, educational, and support group experiences) were experiential and included non-academic experiences that she had throughout her college career as well as educational ones.

Despite Leslie's homogenous upbringing, she showed a great deal of willingness to accept people from different backgrounds. In class and during interviews, Leslie was eager to talk about diversity and unafraid to question her own ideas. Leslie spoke of an early awareness of injustices in schools and developed a strong sense of social justice as a result. This awareness may imply that there is a certain type of person with distinct character traits that is best suited to teach Black children, but we cannot give full credit to a teacher's character while ignoring influential experiences. In two pivotal summer experiences while in college, Leslie transformed her avoidance and fear of African Americans into a friendship with two African American boys her age. Leslie admitted that she may not have had those fears had she been exposed to African Americans as a child. Exposure alone cannot prepare a White teacher for urban schools, but Garmon (2004) suggested that though Leslie may have been predisposed to open-mindedness, she may not have gained as much from her coursework without these crucial experiences.

Having participants rate a series of statements on a Likert scale may be sufficient for an initial study on teachers' beliefs but this method of data collection can certainly not provide the depth of understanding needed for such a critical topic. Garmon's (2004) use

of a qualitative case study yielded rich results that the questionnaires and surveys of the other studies could not generate. Unfortunately, qualitative studies on attitudes and beliefs of in-service teachers are still lacking in existing literature. To assist in filling this gap, my study includes the stories of the lived experiences of successful in-service White teachers of Black students, specifically, successful White mathematics teachers of Black students.

Exploring Race with White Teachers

For many White pre-service and in-service teachers, race is a term used only in reference to "others" (Gomez, Black, & Allen, 2007; Johnson, 2002). In Gomez et al.'s study, the participant used the word "difference" to mean non-White, implying that to be White is the "norm." Johnson suggested that her participants saw race in a Black-White paradigm, one in which Blacks are racialized and Whites are not. Some researchers, however, noticed that their participants had very little exposure to people from backgrounds different than their own and knew very little about the racial and cultural identities of others (Garmon, 2004; Gomez et al., 2007; McIntyre, 1997). Likewise, some White teachers also have a lack of knowledge of their own racial and cultural identity (McIntyre).

Over the last decade, some researchers in the field of education have begun to focus their attention specifically on White teachers and how best to prepare them for urban schools. Several studies have examined the racial awareness of White pre-service or in-service teachers (Aveling, 2002; Chubbuck, 2004; Garmon, 2004; Gomez et al., 2007; Johnson, 2002; Marx & Pennington, 2003; McIntyre, 1997) but most have had a predominantly negative outlook on the condition of White teachers in urban schools.

Some researchers have, however, noticed growth in the racial awareness of teachers over time. Participants at the beginning of two different, but similar, longitudinal studies (Gomez et al.; Marx & Pennington) failed to understand Whiteness or recognize White privilege, but by the end of each study they began to see ways in which Whiteness perpetuates racism and how it affects African American children. Similarly, both participants in Chubbuck's study of effective White teachers recognized the invisible privilege of Whites based solely on the tone of their skin.

In his study, Garmon (2004) documented the "transformation" of one pre-service teacher during her teacher preparation. The participant noticed that though she began to question and examine her own biases in college, she had had the privilege throughout her life of ignoring them. It has been documented that other teachers recognized that racism was something they could chose to ignore if it was an issue of little importance to them (McIntyre, 1997). White people, in general, do not experience racism on a daily basis and thus, for most Whites, like those in McIntyre's study, the choice to ignore racism is so easy that it becomes subconscious, or *dysconscious* (King, 1991). What many European Americans (i.e., Whites) fail to realize is that African Americans do not have the option of ignoring racism; it is only a privilege owned by Whites (McIntosh, 1992; McIntyre, 1997). Unfortunately, most teachers in McIntyre's study chose to ignore it and never saw their Whiteness as contributing to racism.

Perhaps Whites often chose to ignore racism because they do not understand what it is. McIntyre's (1997) pre-service teachers spoke of racism interchangeably with prejudice and discrimination. In another study (Aveling, 2002) on pre-service teachers, participants admitted feeling that racism was a lesser problem now than "back then"

when “things were bad.” These same teachers did not consider themselves to be racist because they did not participate in overt acts of racism. Whites often understand racism to be only overt racial epithets, slurs, and hate crimes and fail to see the more silent forms of racism that are perpetuated by social institutions. Better (2008) defined institutional racism as racism that “denotes those patterns, procedures, practices, and policies that operate within social institutions so as to consistently penalize, disadvantage, and exploit individuals who are members of non-white racial/ethnic groups” (p. 11). When White teachers fail to “see” racism they indicate a lack of understanding of institutional racism.

Whites that do not recognize institutional racism are most likely unaware of certain privileges they have due to their Whiteness. Teachers in two studies (Chubbuck, 2004; Johnson, 2002) refused to recognize White privilege by equating it with economic privilege. Each of these teachers who came from poor, working-class backgrounds had difficulty seeing how they had benefitted from their Whiteness given that they did not experience any economic privilege. Teachers in Aveling’s (2002) study became defensive while discussing race and refused to see themselves as having any White privilege. Some White teachers have even felt victimized by Blacks and believed that affirmative action policies have placed Whites at a disadvantage (McIntyre, 1997).

Perhaps the most promising result found in the studies on White teachers’ racial explorations was that many teachers were willing to at least talk about race (Chubbuck, 2004; Garmon, 2004; Marx & Pennington, 2003) even though conversations were often uncomfortable and tense (McIntyre, 1997). Garmon’s participant was particularly reflective and willing to unveil and question her own biases. On the other hand, McIntyre described conversations with her teachers as a “culture of niceness”— when teachers

found comfort in their commonalties as White, middle-class women and did not wish to disrupt the "safe zone" for talking about race that they had created. This zone allowed them to evade questions, remain silent, and avoid responsibility for injustices. In other studies (Chubbuck; Gomez et al., 2007; Marx and Pennington) these conversations did allow some teachers to recognize their White privilege and to begin to understand how their Whiteness plays a significant role in their classrooms.

What appears to be common amongst the participants in all the studies is that Whites are viewed as what McIntyre (1997) called the "norm reference group" that "sets the standard" for everyone else. When a White person refers to people whose backgrounds are different than their own as "others" or as "culturally diverse" the implication is that White is the norm. When Whites see racism only as acts of overt discrimination, we fail to acknowledge institutional racism and thus have the false impression that civil rights issues in our country are problems of the past. An even larger problem exists when White teachers ignore their students' race as well as their own in classrooms (King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Ask a White teacher about her experience teaching a racially diverse group of students and she is likely to answer, "I don't see color, I only see children." This color-blind ideology presumes a "race-neutral social context" (Lewis, 2003, p.33) and sends the message that race is not recognized or valued. King (1991) went further to describe this color blindness as "dysconscious racism"—an "uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p. 135).

Teachers who subscribe to a color-blind ideology (Aveling, 2002; McIntrye, 1997) claim that they simply do not see color. Teachers in Aveling's study felt that seeing

race was itself a form of racism. While examining White pre-service teachers, McIntyre found that participants viewed teaching as neutral and free from societal and cultural pressures. In culturally and racially neutral classrooms where students' experiences are not valued, it is likely that students fail to see an education as pertaining to them and, therefore, do not value the experience. Some studies (Chubbuck, 2004; Johnson, 2002), however, revealed racially cognizant participants who recognized the dangers of color-blindness and made efforts to include students' experiences into their lessons.

Though teachers may say they do not see color, it is highly unlikely that they do not make some assumptions based on skin tone. Teachers in Marx and Pennington's (2003) study relied on *deficit thinking* to construct images of their students concerning family life, language skill, and intelligence. Giroux (1996) brought to light the media influence on cultures by claiming that films that target a specific culture often work against that culture to support stereotypes. Thus, deficit thinking of White teachers could be influenced, in part, by films that portray Blacks as under-privileged inhabitants of "the hood" (see, e.g., *Do the Right Thing*, *Boyz N the Hood*, *Friday*).

Teachers sometimes make choices that are detrimental to their students without realizing it, such as adopting a color-blind ideology or relying on deficit thinking. These same teachers often feel that their students' only chance for success is to assimilate into the mainstream (Aveling, 2002; McIntyre, 1997). Teachers in Aveling's study felt that students needed assistance in becoming proficient in negotiating the dominant culture in order to be successful. McIntyre had similar findings from her study on White teachers but chose to use the word *inclusion* rather than *assimilation*. McIntyre claimed that

assimilation implies a sense of equality whereas inclusion indicates White power over the marginalized group.

Another well-intentioned act of White teachers occurs when they attempt to "save" their students. Referred to by McIntyre (1997) as *White knights*, these teachers view teaching in inner-city schools as an act of goodwill. Studies indicate that it is fairly common for White teachers to think of themselves as the *saviors* (Titone, 1998) of their students (Aveling, 2002; Chubbuck, 2004; Marx & Pennington, 2003). In McIntyre's study, participants felt that racism was an issue too large to deal with but felt they could address it by sharing power with their students. Exactly how the teachers planned to share their power is unclear, but the single act of sharing power cannot adequately address the large issue of racism.

In past years, researchers have begun to realize the need to examine teachers' beliefs about race and how those beliefs aid in constructing images of their students, but the research is limited and continues to have a negative focus. The research repeatedly shows that White teachers often use a color-blind ideology, feel their students need to assimilate into the mainstream, and operate as White knights attempting to save their students from society's shortcomings. It is time to shift the focus away from the deficits of White teachers and move towards research that examines the successes of White teachers of Black children. Although the studies in this section did make use of qualitative research, they failed to investigate teachers' perceptions of how their racial understandings are constructed. My study allowed successful White mathematics teachers to explore the construction of their racial ideas and how these ideas impact their teaching

in hopes to improve teacher education for future White teachers—specifically in the mathematics classroom.

Successful White Teachers of African American Children

So, who *is* best suited to teach Black children? While Bakari (2003) suggested that pre-service teachers most willing to teach African Americans may be well-matched for the job, other research (Dee, 2004; Irvine, 1990, 2003) lists the benefits to students when student and teacher have the same racial background. Irvine, in particular, strived to increase the number of teachers of color not only to act as role models for African American students (Hawley, 1989; Loehr, 1988) but also because their teaching beliefs and instructional practices are (often) congruent with the needs of African American children. Additionally, Irvine (2003) stated that African American teachers act as cultural translators for Black children, have higher expectations than White teachers, and demonstrate culturally based teaching styles. Irvine (1990) also provided a caveat to this argument by noting that while Black teachers are more likely than White teachers to be in "cultural sync" (p. 61) with Black children, there are some excellent White teachers of Black children, and some Black teachers who are ineffective with Black children.

In reality, 83% of public school teachers are White (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a). My study, rather than concentrate on White teachers' negative perceptions of race or focus on Black teachers who currently make up only 7.8% of the teaching force (U.S. Department of Education), examined four White mathematics teachers who have experienced success with Black students. Unfortunately, few studies have examined these successes and none have specifically looked at White secondary teachers of mathematics.

My review of the literature uncovered very few studies (Chubbuck, 2004; Cooper, 2003; Johnson, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Parsons, 2005) whose participants were identified as either "successful" or "effective" teachers of Black students. Though similar findings appeared in some of the studies, for the most part, each study yielded different results. This conclusion is due to the fact that although each study did use similar descriptors for the participants, each study either focused on culturally relevant teaching practices, race and the teachers' Whiteness, or both. One other study (Honaker, 2003) did investigate effective White reading teachers; however, the findings section included only a brief bulleted list, and thus, it was not considered in this review. All of these studies have previously been mentioned in this review; even so, in order to provide an accurate depiction of literature on this topic, I briefly discuss each study and highlight findings not previously discussed.

I must clarify that the Ladson-Billings' (1994) study is the only one mentioned here whose participants are not all White. However, three of the eight successful teachers in her study were White, and thus, must be included in this body of research. Although some findings of this study were discussed in the effective pedagogy section of the review, other results on the teachers' characteristics are important to note. In particular, the participants saw their teaching as an art and each teacher focused on continually improving her practices. The teachers saw themselves as part of their school's local community and saw teaching as a way to give back to the community. Reciprocal teaching was valued and knowledge was considered to be continually "re-created, recycled, and shared by teachers and students alike" (p. 25). As they subscribed to Freire's (1970/2000) problem-posing education, teaching was viewed as facilitating so as

to assist students in discovering knowledge rather than treating them like “receptacles” (p. 72) where knowledge is simply deposited.

Two other researchers (Cooper, 2003; Parsons, 2005) identified culturally relevant practices in their participants. Parsons’ participant established a positive, nurturing classroom environment where students were encouraged to cooperate with and respect each other. In interviews, the participant, a White elementary school teacher, shared the importance she places on dialogue with students in order to build relationships. Nominated by the Black community as effective White teachers, Cooper’s three participants employed an authoritative discipline style, viewed themselves as a second mother to the children they taught, and displayed a personal commitment to the families of their students.

Along with other studies on effective White teachers of African American students (Chubbuck, 2004; Johnson, 2002), findings in Cooper’s (2003) study centered on race. Although teachers claimed to have a developing racial consciousness and a desire to learn from the Black community, they all felt that subscribing to a color-blind ideology was the way to be most equitable. Chubbuck’s participants were strongly opposed to a color-blind perspective but only one of the participants recognized the existence of White privilege. One teacher felt she was protecting her students by holding them to a low standard of academic achievement. Johnson’s study also yielded mixed results. Two of the six participants taught with a culturally responsive pedagogy and though some teachers stated their ideas of racial equality had developed over many years, others in the study were unable to recognize White privilege and still viewed race only within a Black-White paradigm.

White Teachers Talking About Race

One topic that is continually revisited throughout this project pertains to White teachers discussing race. In this literature review, studies were discussed which examined the racial understandings of both pre-service and in-service teachers; although, these studies yielded important findings in regards to the way White teachers think about race, there also exists scholarship by two White teachers whose efforts to document their own experiences teaching Black students must not go unnoticed in a review of literature in a study that explores the relationships between White teachers and Black students.

Vivian Paley (1979/1989) recorded her experiences teaching Kindergarten in a racially diverse school in *White Teacher*. While in her first teaching position in the South prior to desegregation, Paley fantasized about teaching in an integrated classroom. She claimed to be the "school radical" who had "fantasies about visiting colored children in their homes" (p. 1).

When desegregation became a reality, Paley (1979/1989) was intrigued by the Black students she taught and their interactions with the other students in her class. She also gained a keen interest in other teachers' reactions to the Black children. Her observations prompted discussions with the school faculty but even Paley admitted that, at the time, she was unable to openly discuss race in her classroom. Her attempt to initiate racial conversations with her colleagues resulted in a school-wide decision to "not see color." As Paley stated, "Color blindness was the essence of the creed" (p. 9).

In her book, Paley (1979/1989) chronicled the development of her own racial understanding through stories of her teaching experiences. She vividly described how she watched the children at play in her classroom while at the same time she analyzed the

decisions they made, the questions they asked, the way they formed relationships, and their willingness (or not) to accept children from "outside" the group. She reflected on her difficulty at communicating with Black parents and with disciplining Black students. The more she watched the children at play, the more comfortable she became at engaging students in "race talk" and the more she realized that open racial dialogue in the classroom was a way to understand each child and to let each of them know that they were valued in her classroom. She became more comfortable with parents and found ways to use race as a way of discouraging poor behavior from students.

As Paley (1979/1989) observed these children, she was aware that each child's perspective was unique. And although she recognized that the Black children in her class were "seeing the world through their black experience" (p. 76), she also learned not to generalize those experiences to *all* Black students. She was concerned about "missing part of the picture" (p. 77) given by her African American students due to the cultural disconnect between student and teacher. She questioned how much a child could be adversely affected by not culturally or ethnically identifying with her teacher. But Paley's thorough reflection also led her to realize that her interest and passion in teaching Black children derived from her own "outsider" status growing up as a Jew. As Paley continued to observe students from various racial backgrounds interacting in her classroom, she noticed, "My own distant painful feelings of being different were coming to the surface" (p. 23).

One could attempt to argue that Paley's (1979/1989) book is outdated—that her observations took place in a time far from the world in which we now live. But I argue that the lessons she learned and shared in the text are invaluable to all White teachers in

all educational settings—for she learned a lesson through watching Black children that is applicable to all children:

> My awkwardness with black children was not a singular phenomenon. It uncovered a serious flaw in my relationship with all children. As I watched and reacted to black children, I came to see a common need in every child. Anything a child feels is different about himself which cannot be referred to spontaneously, casually, naturally, and uncritically by the teacher can become a cause for anxiety and an obstacle to learning. (p. xv)

Two decades after Paley (1979/1989) chronicled her experiences teaching Black children, Julie Landsman (2001) too shared her stories teaching in a secondary alternative school in Minneapolis. In the book *A White Teacher Talks about Race*, Landsman described her experiences teaching literature to a group of racially and culturally diverse students who, as she explained, "have complicated lives" (p. xiii). The need for such a book is similar to that of the study at hand—the percentage of non-White students continues to increase while the vast majority of teachers are White. Landsman argued, as I will throughout this study, that there is a need for non-White teachers in *all* schools, not just schools in the inner-city. And, similar to my own study, Landsman sees a need to better understand how the racial understandings of White teachers are formed: "It is time to study our memories: to explore what it was in our childhood that formed our racial definitions, our prejudices" (p. xii).

As Landsman (2001) takes the reader through a typical day at her alternative school—painting a picture of the daily struggles of her students both inside and outside of school—she reflects upon and questions the White hegemonic practices that she sees playing a significant role in their lives. For example, Landsman is deeply troubled by the White male perspective that dominates our history textbooks. She wonders, *where are the written histories of people of color who have had a hand in the foundation of this*

country? Bothered by the tradition of "celebrating" diversity only within a certain month or particular day, Landsman wrote:

> I have often wondered what would happen if for one year, we tried having a White Studies Month. And except for that month, white people, their contributions to the world, their exploits, and their discoveries would rarely be mentioned, would not be a part of the curriculum. (p. 34)

Landsman questions why academic success is seen as a "White thing" and is troubled by the power of "middle-class White language"—both of which could be a direct result of a curriculum written entirely from the White perspective.

Landsman (2001) admitted learning a tremendous amount from her students as she observed their interactions with herself and others. She was interested in how her students negotiated race and the more she observed them, the more she realized how uniquely individual each one of them was. She was especially bothered when a non-White student was asked to speak on behalf on her race: "Whites are only asked to speak for themselves as individuals—people of color are asked to speak for every one of their race…Every time I notice this, I become conscious of the absurdity of asking that any of them 'represent' anyone but themselves" (p. 88).

Both Paley (1979/1989) and Landsman (2001) contributed unique perspectives to the literature on relationships between White teachers and their Black students an well as contributing to the conversation on White teachers talking about race. Ladson-Billings (1994) argued that the long history of poor performance of African American children is due to the "stubborn refusal in American education to recognize African American as a distinct cultural group" and the presumptions that "African American children are exactly like White children but just need a little extra help" (p. 9). Paley and Landsman appreciated their students' cultural difference and recognized that there are not only vast

differences between White and non-White students but also that we can learn from those differences to better educate all students. Most importantly, the fact that both of these women are White suggests that White teachers can learn and talk about race with their students—if they can first recognize the value in those conversations and then gain the confidence to engage in "race talk" along with them.

Summary

Studies in this review provide hope that researchers will continue to investigate effective White teachers of Black children in order to improve teacher education. While I agree with scholars who advocate an increase in Black teachers (Hawley, 1989; Irvine, 1990; Loehr, 1988), our focus must now be on improving education for our Black students by developing the culturally relevant teaching practices of our current predominantly White teaching force, particularly, White teachers of mathematics.

There *are* White mathematics teachers who effectively teach Black children. Rather than continue a line of research focused solely on White teachers' negative attitudes or their misconceptions on race, my study sought to understand how these White teachers became successful. What life experiences have they had that helped form their racial understanding? How do *they* think their Whiteness impacts their teaching? Although some researchers (see, e.g., Chubbuck, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; McIntyre, 1997) mentioned in this review gave participants an opportunity to tell their stories, none of them sought to comprehend the views of the participants themselves. In this study, I was most interested in hearing the teachers' perspective—how their life experiences impacted their racial understanding, the role those experiences play in their classroom,

and the role their own Whiteness plays in their teaching—rather than observing their teaching practices.

There is no doubt that gaps exist in the literature on successful White mathematics teachers of Black students. Perhaps most alarming is the small number of White teachers that have been included in studies of effective pedagogy for Black children. Because these studies are performed on mostly Black participants, the racial dissonance between teacher and student has essentially been ignored. Although my study could not encompass all aspects of this topic that warrant further investigation, I do believe my research has potential to make a significant impact on teacher education and, in turn, on the education of Black children.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I introduce the three theories that frame my research: critical race theory (CRT), Whiteness studies, and critical theory. After a brief history of each theory and a description of its contributions to the field of education, I give a personal account of my views as a critical theorist as well as a rationale for using an eclectic theoretical framework (Stinson, 2009) for my research. I conclude with a diagram that illustrates my understanding of how these three theories are intertwined accompanied by a description of the applications of those theories to the research project at hand.

An Evolving Worldview

The historic 2008 presidential election engaged people around the world in new and exciting dialogue never before spoken. The Democratic primary itself was a monumental event with the top two candidates—one White woman and a Black man—representing groups who had never before been their party's choice for the presidential candidate. I, too, was excited about the election and became more interested in politics than ever before. Yet, I realized that, for me, the election was much more than the experience of eagerly following two opposing campaigns competing for the highest office in our nation. Much like my experience as a teacher, an academic coach, a researcher, a wife, and a mother, the election was a reflective experience. As I watched and listened to each candidate describe her and his worldview, explain her and his ideas on policy, and tell her and his "story," I couldn't help but compare those ideas to my own

and reflect on the experiences that have shaped and continue to shape my own personal worldview.

But what does this have to do with my research on White teachers? Quite frankly, it has everything to do with it. The choice to study successful White mathematics teachers of African American children derived from my own experiences (some successful and some not) teaching African American students, and my identity as a teacher is shaped by the worldviews that I embrace. Teaching *is not* an objective act, nor should it be! My subjectivities help form who I am, and I am a teacher who cannot change into an "objective costume" to teach each day. Here, I do not suggest that I have any intent to impose my views upon students and colleagues; rather, I claim those views influence almost every aspect of my teaching from the culture of my classroom, to my pedagogy, to the ways I interact with and form relationships with others. Students cannot leave their race, culture, ethnic identities, or worldviews at home, and neither can the teacher.

I have come to realize, too, that my classroom does not look the same through different eyes. The "realities" of my classroom vary with the experiences of the students I teach. "We literally create a reality that reflects our view of the world and who we are in relation to it" (S. Emery, as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 73). My classroom is a part of the reality of each of my students, and that reality affects how and what each student learns. Reality is self-constructed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and as each of us is molded by our personal experiences and interactions with others, the ways in which we internalize each new experience depends on past ones.

Over the last few years, I have become increasingly aware of how new experiences change my identity. This transformation is not instantaneous nor is it ever complete. In essence, each new experience, regardless of how miniscule or insignificant it may seem, changes me and becomes a part of my ongoing transformation. When I think about how much I have learned and grown since I first began teaching, several experiences come to mind. The many positive experiences of collaboration with other teachers, professional learning opportunities, college coursework, and interactions with students have all helped me grow, but the negative ones have perhaps had the most effect on my growth. I have witnessed the unfair treatment of Black students, the tracking programs that have caused resegregation within a school building, and the blatant racist comments made by a fellow White teacher who assumed that because I share her skin color, I also share her views. Together, these professional experiences, along with many personal ones, have fueled my passion to contribute to a body of research aimed at improving education for African American children. This study is the beginning of my efforts.

Critical Race Theory

The beginning of CRT is traced back to two law professors in the 1970s, Derrick Bell (Harvard's first African American professor) and Alan Freeman (State University of New York-Buffalo), both of whom were troubled by the slow pace of racial reform in the United States (R. Delgado, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT developed from an earlier movement known as critical legal studies which sought to reveal ways that legal ideology had contributed to America's class structure (K. Crenshaw, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998). Although scholars of critical legal studies critique the portrayal of U.S.

society as a meritocracy, critical race theorists criticize their failure to include race in the critique (Ladson-Billings). In other words, CRT developed from the failure of critical legal studies scholars to address the experiences of people of color (Tate, 1997).

Critical race theorists believe that U.S. society is a racialized one where Whiteness is considered the norm and the standard by which all else is measured (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Ladson-Billings argued that there exists conceptual categories associated with Whiteness such as "school achievement," "middle-classness," and "intelligence"; whereas, categories like "gangs," "welfare recipients," and "basketball players" are more often connected to Blacks. Built on the idea that race is a social construct, Whiteness itself is constructed as "the absence of the 'contaminating' influence of blackness" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60). Ladson-Billings and Tate went further to label Whiteness as the "ultimate property" (p. 58) that only Whites possess.

Although it is probable that Whites recognize the advantages they (we) have over Blacks due to skin color, it is unlikely that they (we) associate any of these advantages with racism. Ladson-Billings (1998) defined racism as "culturally sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities" (p. 55). The adoption of a color-blind ideology allows Whites to ignore their privileged status; thus, racism has become a normal and natural part of our society (Ladson-Billings).

In his seminal work, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, Derrick Bell (1992) argued that not only is racism deeply embedded in our society, it is a permanent fixture. To articulate what has become a central tenet of critical race theory, Bell stated:

> Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those Herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary "peaks of progress," short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance. (p. 12)

White dominance continues in our society due to an atmosphere of racial neutrality that encourages Whites to believe that racism is a thing of the past (Bell, 1992).

Critical race theorists contend that in order to counter-act hegemonic Whiteness, we must allow voices[6] of people of color to be heard. Recognizing that people of color speak from experiences framed by racism, CRT scholars claim that the stories of people of color have a common structure (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate 1997). These stories serve to communicate the experiences and realities of oppressed people (Ladson-Billings & Tate), aim to cast doubt on the validity of racial myths held by Whites (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004), and initiate conversations that could lead to the disruption of dysconscious racism (King, 1991). In addition, the exchange of these stories between oppressed and oppressor help to construct social realities (Ladson-Billings; Tate).

So, as Ladson-Billings (1998) once asked, what *is* CRT doing in education? Scholars of CRT challenge racial inequalities by examining discourses of race and racism in our society, and schools are undoubtedly institutions that support racial inequality (Kozol, 1991). Kozol's eye-opening documentation of what he termed "savage inequalities" revealed vast differences in schooling experiences between students in White schools and those in predominantly Black/Latina/o populated schools. Ladson-

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[6] To critical race theorists, "voice" is not literally the spoken words of an individual, but rather, one's voice refers to her or his "authentic self-expression, with an understanding that people are situated in personal histories of engagement with their surroundings/communities through which voice is shaped by class, cultural, racial, and gender identities" (Leistyna, Sherblom, & Woodrum, 1999, p. 344).

Billings and Tate (1995) stated, "These inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" (p. 47). Critical race theorists aim to "unmute" these discussions while challenging school reformers who refuse to link inadequate school funding to poor student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Disproportionate funding, however, is not the only element of schooling that creates inequalities. Critical race theorists recognize the curriculum itself as a form of "intellectual property" that must be supported by "real" property such as textbooks, technology, and certified teachers (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). On the other hand, official school curriculum is viewed as "a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18) that silences and erases African American stories. In the end, CRT in education is about challenging racial inequalities in schools but the task is multi-faceted and cannot be addressed solely on a monetary basis.

Four decades after the Civil Rights era, racism continues to thrive only with a different and more concealed appearance. Blacks remain disadvantaged due to their race and schools are more segregated than ever before (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This leads me to believe, similar to Bell (1992), that there may be permanence to racism. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explained, class and gender alone cannot account for all the differences in schooling experiences and performance. Thus, a critique of race is essential in my study of White teachers of Black children.

Whiteness Studies

Although Whiteness studies made its debut several years after critical race theorists began deconstructing[7] race, it seems apparent that in order to study racial inequalities in our society one must examine both of these social theories. While CRT scholars focus on the "voice" and the stories of the oppressed, Whiteness studies scholars concentrate on the construction of the White identity (Hartman, 2004). Still yet, there exists a significant amount of congruency in the basic ideas of the two theories.

Unlike CRT, the beginnings of Whiteness studies cannot be traced back to only one or two individuals, nor do scholars in this field agree on a discrete definition of Whiteness studies. These scholars are self-proclaimed novelists, historians, educators, and film scholars, to name a few, and their ideas on racism and White dominance include as many different theories (Gillborn, 2005). The perspective I bring is one as a teacher and as an education researcher interested in White teachers' constructions of race and the role Whiteness plays in their teaching; therefore, for the purposes of this theoretical framework, I focus on Whiteness scholars in the field of education.

The assumption that "race" in our society refers to "Black" is a basic tenet of Whiteness studies (Haymes, 1995). Descriptors such as "different" or "diverse" are associated with non-Whites, leading Whites to believe that "others" have race and they (we) do not (Haymes). In fact, when asked about race, Whites often think of their ancestry before acknowledging their Whiteness (McLaren, 1995). Some Whites may even think of race as their nationality (Hartman, 2004).

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[7] A *deconstruction* of race refers to "the analytical process of taking apart (i.e., dissecting, critically inquiring, problematizing) a phenomenon in order to understand its construction" (Leistyna, Sherblom, & Woodrum, 1999, p. 335).

Whiteness scholars theorize that the inability of Whites to see their (our) own race dates back to the origins of racial categories in the 1600s when Whiteness and Blackness were first established (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Enslaved people were labeled as the subordinate group leaving Blackness as a substandard racial category. Whites only had to "unidentify" with Blacks in order to maintain their dominant status. Giroux (1997) claimed that a "new racism" came about with the rise of conservative Republicans in the 1980s as right-wing Whites "convinced themselves of their own loss of privilege" (p. 286). This new racism, Giroux explained, "served to rewrite the politics of whiteness as a 'beseiged' racial identity" (p. 287).

Another basic tenet of Whiteness studies, the idea that Whites have certain privileges based solely on their skin color, is acknowledged by many researchers in education (Howard, 2006; Leonardo, 2002; Lewis, 2003; MacMullan, 2005; McIntosh, 1992; Sleeter, 1993, 1995). McIntosh stated, "I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious" (p. 1). Unfortunately, one does not have to lay claim to Whiteness in order to benefit from it (Lewis), nor can one denounce Whiteness and expect to lose its privileges. Lewis claimed that although Whites possess various amounts of cultural capital, *all* Whites have access to the symbolic capital of their skin. Most Whites, however, do not recognize the benefits of their Whiteness (MacMullan) nor are they ever asked to examine their racial identities (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Lewis).

Perhaps this ignorance is due in part to a society that views Whiteness as the norm (Howard, 2006; Leonardo, 2002; Lewis, 2003; Roman, 1993; Sleeter, 1993). Roman

argued that even the label "people of color," which leads one to believe that Blacks have color but Whites do not, implies that White culture is the norm. This invisibility of Whiteness allows Whites yet another privilege—to not have to think about race at all (R. Terry, as cited in McIntyre, 1997). Furthermore, McIntyre stated that White people's lack of racial consciousness "has grave consequences in that it not only denies White people the experience of seeing themselves as benefitting from racism, but in doing so, frees them from taking responsibility from eradicating it" (p. 16).

Whites, however, do not only have the privilege of ignoring their own race, they can also choose to ignore the race of others. Those who claim to "not see color," in an attempt to not appear racist, adopt what is known as a color-blind ideology (Irvine, 2003; Lewis, 2003; Sleeter, 1993). Color-blindness is a "sincere fiction" (J. Feagin, as cited in Irvine, 2003, p. xv) in that Whites truly believe they are being fair and nondiscriminatory while at the same time ignoring the realities of racism. Lewis argued that when Whites claim color-blindness, they relieve themselves from blame of racial inequalities and, in turn, place blame on people of color for their own condition. In the classroom, teachers who claim color-blindness are guilty of dysconscious racism (King, 1991). In other words, while they do not consciously deprive students of color, they also do not challenge White norms and privileges (King; Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

Some scholars argue for a complete abolition of Whiteness, but if Bell (1992) is correct and racism *is* a permanent fixture in our society, then abolishment is not an attainable goal. I suggest what Chubbuck (2004) called a "disruption of whiteness" into an anti-racist White identity (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). First, one must recognize that Whiteness is a socially constructed identity (Leonardo, 2002) and

identities are "always in the process of negotiation" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 24). Thus, one can never attain a "true" anti-racist White identity as this identity should continue to develop and grow throughout one's life. Leonardo maintained that in order to begin this transformation, Whites must first analyze racial privilege and gain a historical understanding of how White hegemony came to be. Furthermore, Whites must take personal responsibility for White dominance by analyzing "our own role in perpetuating injustice" (Howard, 2006, p. 99).

This transformation toward an anti-racist White identity requires help and support as Whites on this journey will inevitably be at odds with those who may still refuse to recognize certain acts as racist (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Howard (2006) stated that these "transformationist Whites" must encourage and support their White colleagues in this same process rather than judge or discourage them. hooks (1990) extended on this idea: "It should be possible for [academic] scholars, especially those who are members of groups who dominate, exploit, and oppress others, to explore the political implications of their work without fear or guilt" (p. 124). In schools with diverse populations, it is especially important for teachers of all races to have a space in which to openly discuss race with each other. In fact, I argue that *all* Whites would benefit from an environment that allows them to explore their racially situated selves without fear or guilt.

These implications are mutually applicable to the field of education for both teacher and student alike. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1998) described a goal of a critical pedagogy of Whiteness as "the necessity of creating a positive, proud, attractive, anti-racist White identity that is empowered to travel in and out of various racial/ethnic circles with confidence and empathy" (p. 12). In addition to White students who can continue to

develop their own anti-racist identity from this education, students of color benefit from analyzing the hegemonic practices that they are forced to negotiate each day (Leonardo, 2002).

In order to implement a critical pedagogy of Whiteness, it is the White educator's responsibility to understand and be able to articulate to students the dynamics of White dominance (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). If achieved, such a pedagogy can "engage students, teachers, and other individuals in an ever-unfolding emancipatory identity that pushes the boundaries of Whiteness but always understands its inescapable connection to the White locale in the web of reality" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 24). Unfortunately, a White teacher is unlikely to feel confident in engaging in such conversations without the opportunity to first discuss her own Whiteness with others.

Critical Theory

While CRT and Whiteness studies give way to an analysis and deconstruction of race, critical theory provides the philosophical foundation for engaging in research of White teachers. Critical theory evolved from the Frankfurt school around the year 1920 and is closely associated with Marxism, "a theory designed with a practical intent, to criticize and subvert domination in all its forms" (Bottomore, 2001). Although the term "critical theory" is credited to scholars in the Frankfurt school (e.g. Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Erich Fromm), writings from these and other critical theorists are not all complementary to one another. In this theoretical framework, however, I focus on more contemporary critical theorists whose work, for the most part, has centered on education.

In order to fully understand what education looks like through a critical lens, one must begin by reading works from educational philosopher John Dewey. Take a look into a Deweyan classroom and you will see students actively engaged and guided by a facilitator who constantly gauges the progress of her students in order to inform the next classroom experience (Dewey, 1916/1944, 1938/1963). Dewey described education as a social process made up of a series of quality experiences (Dewey, 1938/1963). These experiences require the teacher to change roles from the dictator to group leader and to listen more than lecture. Dewey's democratic education is "not an affair of 'telling' and being told, but an active and constructive process" (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 38). Although Dewey would not be considered a critical theorist, many of his ideas of schooling and ethical growth are found within the scholarship of critical education theorists and he certainly shared many of their ideas on public education, particularly, ways in which students should be taught.

The echo of Dewey's democratic education rings throughout the work of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. Freire's (1970/2000) experiences with under-privileged, working-class Brazilians led to his theories of how the oppressed overcome domination by the oppressor. Because Freire saw education as the means by which the oppressed would free themselves from the oppressors, his scholarship is focused in that field. Freire's classroom would look much like the democratic classroom of John Dewey. Rather than playing the role of disengaged listener, students in Freire's class would be "critical co-investigators" (Freire, 1970/2000). As part of what Freire called a problem-posing education, students are involved in the decision-making process *with* the teacher whose role is now facilitator. Furthermore, Freire described the teacher as one who "is no

longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is [herself and] himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (p. 80). Freire did, however, trouble the use of the term *facilitator*, as he saw those who referred to themselves as facilitators rather than teachers in a "distorted reality" filled with denial of their power (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 378). Freire clarified, "while facilitators may veil their power, at any moment they can exercise power as they wish" (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 378). What Freire referred to as the "banking concept" of education is directly opposed to a problem-posing education. Characterized by a teacher who considers students to be "receptacles" waiting to be filled with knowledge, the banking classroom itself is undemocratic and the content of each lesson detached from reality (Freire, 1970/2000).

What Freire (1970/2000) described in his problem-posing education is a critical pedagogy. Such teaching practices give students the opportunity to develop a "broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 162). Any criticisms of cultural norms, or what Giroux (1996) referred to as "decentering power," requires critical thinking that only dialogue can generate (Freire). As Freire stated, "Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (p. 92).

Critical theorists in education assert that in order to engage in critical pedagogy, critical pedagogues must discard deficit notions of students (Bartolomé, 1996), have a respect for the cultural identity of each student (Freire, 1997), and help students uncover and understand their own history (Gutstein, 2003). Additionally, it is important for

critical pedagogues to recognize and accept that a neutral education does not exist (Freire, 1992). Just as I argue that my own subjectivities have a place within my research, the cultures and experiences of both students and teachers have value in the classroom.

Critical theory has played an important role in the development of the ideal mathematics classroom. Scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, William Tate, Ole Skovsmose, and Eric Gutstein, for example, have all contributed to the growing body of literature on critical mathematics pedagogy. But, why does mathematics need its own critical pedagogy and how does critical theory guide this scholarship? One reason for a mathematics critical pedagogy is that mathematics has historically been seen as a "neutral" subject that is exempt from connecting to students' experiences and cultures. Additionally, mathematics differs from other subjects in that it has "long been viewed as the paradigm of infallibly secure knowledge" (Ernest, 1998, p.1). Together, these two differences have led to mathematics classrooms with a focus on procedure where students are rarely, if ever, encouraged to challenge the "rules" of mathematics (Ladson-Billings, 1997). *Some* mathematics educators recognize this as a characteristic of traditional teaching (whole-class instruction followed by a set of practice problems) that, according to Ladson-Billings (1997) and Tate (1995), was built upon experiences of Whites.

In 1997, Ladson-Billings stated, "school mathematics is presented in ways that are divorced from the everyday experiences of most students, not just African American students" (p. 700). In recent years, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM, 2000) has argued for an equitable, engaging mathematics pedagogy that focuses on content as well as the mathematical processes. A blend of content and process standards forms a mathematics curriculum that encourages students to make

mathematical connections, represent mathematics in multiple ways, apply problem-solving techniques, reason and prove, and communicate mathematically (NCTM). Although these standards form the necessary basis of a mathematics curriculum detached from traditional teaching of the past, their purpose is not to address all the cultural elements that must be considered in one's teaching. Furthermore, the NCTM standards are absent of the "critical" element of teaching.

Critical theory supplies the groundwork for a critical mathematics pedagogy. Based on the fundamental idea of critical theory that one should challenge dominance and work towards reversing inequalities, pedagogy in the critical mathematics classroom utilizes theories and practices of critical pedagogy, "while explicitly using mathematics as an analytical tool for examining social injustices" (Stinson, Bidwell, & Powell, in press). The examination of and subsequent actions against social injustices, it has been argued, will help prepare students "to function within our democracy" (Gutstein & Peterson, 2005, p. 40).

Over the course of my career, I have been evolving as a critical mathematics pedagogue but was unaware of this title until I became exposed to critical theory during my graduate coursework. There is not one significant experience that began my transformation, but as I read and discussed critical theory for the first time, I distinctly remember the excitement I felt by identifying so closely with the literature. I was reading a text about myself, or so it seemed. While the course readings did expose me to different perspectives and new theories, in many cases, the literature affirmed the practices I already had in place in my classroom. I realized I was a critical theorist and had already begun the transformation toward a critical mathematics pedagogue.

Even though I was thinking like a critical theorist before I became exposed to critical theory scholarship, I was certainly not speaking like one. Critical theory gave me a new "voice." I can now share my understanding of critical theory and critical mathematics pedagogy with colleagues because I have a vocabulary to support these ideas. I can engage in conversations with other critical pedagogues without feeling left out or inadequate. I can use my new voice to challenge oppressive regimes. In essence, critical theory gave me confidence to say what I already knew but could not effectively convey.

Just as my subjectivities follow me into the classroom, my views as a critical theorist are not absent from my research. Critical theory is the lens through which I view the world. It makes me question everything, including my research. I believe any attempt to leave such views out of my research would directly go against a central tenet of critical pedagogy which respects the ideas and worldviews of students. Thus, it was crucial during this research for me to recognize that each of my participants was situated differently along the philosophical spectrum, making it even more important for me to listen carefully during the interviews in order to ensure each participant's story was heard.

Theoretical Rationale

In order to fully understand the rationale for using CRT, Whiteness studies, and critical theory to frame this research, one needs to see how these three theories are intertwined from my perspective. It is important to note that this perspective is part of my ongoing transformation and will continue to change as I learn and grow. As stated before, I believe any study that involves the deconstruction of race must include an examination

of both CRT and Whiteness studies given that the struggle to end White dominance is central to both theories. Additionally, most critical race and Whiteness scholars agree on some basic ideas of race: race is socially constructed, Whites possess certain privileges due only to their skin color, and a color-blind ideology prevents a necessary critique of White hegemony. These shared ideas are represented in figure 1 by two overlapping spheres with infinitely many points of intersection. Although the spheres representing CRT and Whiteness studies overlap, the two theories are certainly not subsets of each other. Scholars of both theories often converge to achieve common goals, but the direction taken to achieve such goals is not always one in the same. As represented in figure 1, both CRT and Whiteness studies are contained within the large sphere of critical theory[8] since the fundamental beliefs of both have roots in critical theory.

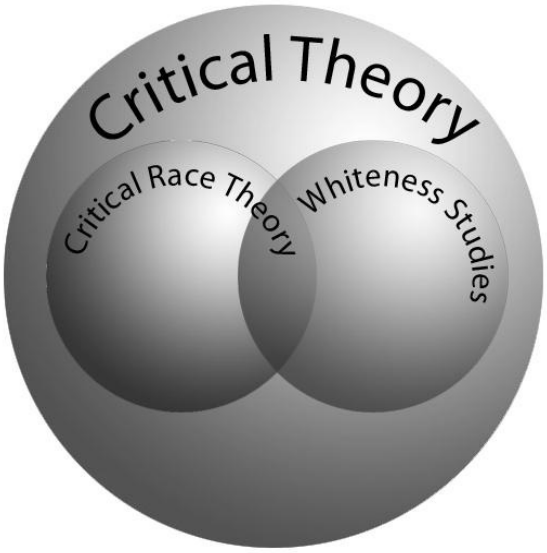

Figure 1. Three theories intertwined.

[8] As Tate (1997) pointed out, "CRT crosses epistemological boundaries" (p. 234). In other words, CRT not only draws from critical theory, but from other traditions as well "to provide a more complete analysis of 'raced' people" (p. 234).

My research investigates White teachers' constructions of race as well as their understandings of the implications of their own Whiteness in the teaching of Black children. While Whiteness studies can help us to understand how the teachers formed their racial identities, CRT, Whiteness studies, and critical theory all have the potential to inform the research in regards to the racial dynamics between student and teacher. In other words, as Stinson (2009) argued, I used theoretical concepts and methodological procedures from each theory side by side as I conducted the study.

Critical theory is the foundation of my proposed research for three reasons. First, the data collection methods I employed provided opportunities for participants to critique White hegemonic practices that support the continuation of institutional racism in schools. Second, though the purpose of the study was not to change teachers' beliefs about race, it is highly likely that participation in this research has, in some way, transformed the teachers' thinking. And third, critical theory is both my lens and my voice. It determines how I view and interpret situations, and gives me a language in order to communicate. I cannot turn it off in an attempt to objectify my role as researcher. In fact, this study is a direct result of my exposure to critical theory and would not exist without it. As I collected and analyzed data, critical theory reminded me to constantly question my methods and helped guide each decision in order to be as thorough as possible.

An investigation of successful White mathematics teachers of Black children serves to: catalyze a shift in the focus of educational research from White teachers' shortcomings to their successes, inform colleges of education on how best to prepare White teachers for urban schools, and ultimately, to improve education for Black

children. Such a study requires a theoretical framework that examines the dynamics of race between teachers and students who are "culturally mismatched" (Irvine, 2003) while challenging existing racial hierarchies. CRT, Whiteness studies, and critical theory meet the criteria. Sleeter (1993) reminds us, "Teachers bring to the profession perspectives about what race means, which they construct mainly on the basis of their life experiences and vested interests" (p. 157). Although research that has allowed White teachers opportunities to explore the construction of their own racial identities has been performed, I chose to look closer at those who have already experienced success so that we can begin learning what to do, rather than what not to do.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology of this research project. I begin by explaining the purpose of the study, the reasons for choosing a case study approach, and the procedures for selecting participants. I then describe the methods for collecting, analyzing, and reporting the data. I conclude the chapter with a description of my role as researcher and the role my subjectivity played in this process, followed by a discussion on the reliability and validity of my research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of successful White mathematics teachers of African American children to better understand not only what led each teacher to teach students from a racial group different than their own, but also the factors that may have led to their success with African American students. A case study approach allowed each participant the opportunity to "tell" her or his stories—lived experiences that could have contributed to success with African American children. Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to freely discuss their upbringing, educational experiences, and teaching experiences while, at the same time, allowing me, the researcher, to listen carefully and give thoughtful consideration to topics that needed further exploration. The focus of the study, however, is not on those individual experiences, but on how those experiences collectively led to their decision to teach

African American children and, ultimately, to their success in doing so. The following questions guided the inquiry:

1. How do the life histories of successful White mathematics teachers of African American children influence their decision to teach African American children?
2. How do these life histories influence their pedagogical practices as successful teachers of African American children?
3. How do successful White mathematics teachers of African American children view the role of their Whiteness in their teaching?

Case Study Research

Qualitative research was chosen for this study because it allows researchers the opportunity to learn an extensive amount from the participants—each of whom brings to the research unique stories of life experiences. Qualitative researchers are interested in knowing about more than experiences; rather, they seek to understand how the participant interprets and "makes sense" of those experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998). In other words, a qualitative researcher seeks to understand a phenomenon from the participant's perspective. For my study, the participants' perspectives were essential as I investigated their racial understandings and their life experiences. My goal was not to simply document these experiences and beliefs; rather, I sought to understand how each teacher interprets and makes sense of her or his own stories. It is because of this intense focus on each individual participant and her or his "sense making" as they told their stories that I have chosen case study as the research design.

Leading qualitative researchers in education agree that case studies are most effective at answering "how" and "why" questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam,

1998; Stake, 1995). Case studies are also best suited for research that investigates process. As Merriam (1998) stated: "A case study design is employed to gain in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 19). More simply, case study research has potential to expose the complexity of a situation while explaining "how things get to be the way they are" (R. Stake, as cited in Merriam, p. 30). In this study, process was particularly important as my focus remained on each participant's life history—the process of growing up—and how those experiences may have contributed to her or his success in teaching Black children.

One way in which case study differs from other qualitative designs is that the development of theories begins prior to data collection (Yin, 2003). Other approaches, such as grounded theory and ethnography, rely more solely on patterns in the data to develop new theories or add to existing ones. It is important, however, to remember that theoretical propositions are still theories, and data gathered during a case study may not necessarily follow the a priori theories adopted by the researcher. For instance, I speculated that my analysis of data would reveal characteristics of my participants that are consistent with those of teachers who practice culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994); however, because qualitative inquiry does not necessarily serve the purpose of generalizing to larger populations (Stake, 1995), there was no guarantee that participants in my study would share these characteristics. Nonetheless, Yin argued that the prior development of theories in case study research guides both the data collection and analysis processes.

In the end, case study was not only chosen for this research because of the process or the prior development of theories. A collective case study (Stake, 1995) was chosen because I wanted the focus of the study to remain on each of my participants—the cases—as unique individuals. According to Merriam (1998), "The single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case" (p. 27). During the data collection and analysis processes, it was especially important to remain focused on each individual participant. Although the final interpretation of the results did uncover some similarities amongst the cases, "our first obligation is to understand this one case" (Stake, p. 4).

Researchers often disagree on whether or not qualitative results can be generalized to a larger population (Schram, 2006). In qualitative case study research, the researcher strives for insight into the research question by studying individual cases (Stake, 1995). Stake explained succinctly the significance of a particular case:

> The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself (p. 8).

The implication is not that it is impossible for case study results to be generalized. Ultimately, the goal of this research was to uncover knowledge that could lead to a change in the way White pre-service teachers are prepared to teach in urban schools. However, the case study researcher must have a clear focus on the individual cases being studied before searching for similarities across cases.

The idea of case study research is to obtain an in-depth understanding of participants and "the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" that they

experience (Yin, 2003, p. 2). Although some argue (e.g., Marshall & Rossman, 2006) that case studies are "less intimate" than other research designs, I contend that the format of the interviews in this study led to an even more intimate research design by allowing the participants to freely chose the direction of the interview while I focused on how each of their experiences were woven together.

As previously mentioned, other research designs were considered before choosing the case study approach. Building on my desire to let participants' voices be heard, I considered narrative analysis as a research methodology. According to Reissman (1993), "narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself" (p. 1). In other words, rather than focusing on the content of the stories, or the meaning behind the experiences being shared, narrative analysis looks at the way the story is told. The focus of this research, however, was on the process of becoming a successful teacher of African American students, not on how the participants chose to tell their stories.

Likewise, I considered a phenomenological investigation. According to Hatch (2002), phenomenological researchers "seek to reveal the essence of human experience" (p. 30). Furthermore, Schram (2006) claimed that in a phenomenological study, the researcher attempts to assign a fundamental meaning to an experience applicable to anyone who shares that experience. The experience or the phenomenon in this study is the success of White mathematics teachers of African American children; however, I do not seek to give meaning to what it is like to experience this phenomenon. Instead, I want to understand how the participants' lived experiences contributed (or not) to their success. Again, the focus of this study was on each individual participant and her or his process of becoming a successful teacher, not on the experience of being one.

Finally, after concluding that case study was the best fit for my research goals, I considered calling my research approach a *critical* case study. And although the findings of this study are comparable to those in critical research (Merriam, 1998), which reflect a critique of power, privilege, and oppression, a critical researcher carries out research with "the expectation that their work will be instrumental in bringing about change" (Schram, 2006, p. 45). As I stated in my theoretical framework, I do believe that this research has in some way transformed the participants, but changing the ideology or the pedagogy of these teachers was not the intent of the research. Rather, I sought to learn from their successes in hopes to improve education for future generations of White teachers, and ultimately, for Black students.

Participant Selection

"Participants are the ultimate gatekeepers. They determine whether and to what extent the researcher will have access to the information desired" (Hatch, 2002, p. 51). That said, two essential processes existed in regards to participants for this study: careful selection of participants, and the establishment of rapport with each participant.

I knew from the onset of this research project that selection of my participants would be a crucial step. Three criteria were used for participant selection: (a) self-identify as White, (b) currently teach mathematics at the secondary level, and (c) have had "success" teaching African American children. In the metropolitan area where I conducted this study, finding a White secondary mathematics teacher was not the problem. Finding one who was successful with Black students presented a challenge.

Although this study was loosely based on Ladson-Billings' (1994) seminal study of successful teachers, there are a couple of reasons why her selection process could not

be replicated for this study. First, Ladson-Billings began by soliciting nominations of successful teachers from members of an African American church. As an African American woman, she did not have to negotiate entry into this space. As a White woman, I would certainly not have had the same access to this population. Second, participants in the Ladson-Billings study were elementary school teachers. Not only do parents tend to be more involved with their children's education at the primary level (Miller, 1986), but also their children have fewer teachers. Many involved parents of high school students may not necessarily be able to name their children's mathematics teachers when the students possibly have up to seven other teachers at the same time.

The primary method used to locate teachers fitting the criteria for this study was "word of mouth." This process was initiated with an email sent out to solicit nominations from my fellow mathematics colleagues, including higher education faculty of mathematics education, Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) mathematics specialists, as well as fellow mathematics coaches, system coordinators, mathematics curriculum directors, and PhD students. All of these professionals are deeply embedded in mathematics education and work directly with mathematics teachers. A second part of the email correspondence requested these colleagues to forward the initial email to school administrators and mathematics teachers in hopes to attain further nominations from educators who work more closely with successful teachers on a daily basis. The email correspondence specified that the nominee should currently teach classes with a majority of African American students in an urban/suburban school. A nomination form was included that asked for a brief explanation of why she or he (the nominator) considered the nominee to be successful.

One could, of course, argue that the researcher must provide potential nominators and readers with a concrete definition of what is meant by "success" in teaching African American children. This "defining" undoubtedly was one of the biggest struggles I faced as a researcher. But in the end, the decision was made to not provide a definition of success. The absence of such a definition should not be taken as "an easy way out" for the researcher; rather, the decision was an intentional attempt to avoid establishing unnecessary parameters. Although one may argue that to identify successful teachers, one must first define what is meant by success, I contend that such a definition would have limited the data in this study by possibly excluding effective teachers who may not have fit my particular description of successful. In other words, I believe that a successful teacher of African American children is defined in different ways depending on who is asked. College professors, curriculum directors, principals, and fellow mathematics teachers all work with teachers in different capacities. Each of these professionals could give a different definition of success. Moreover, the successful teacher herself (or himself) is likely to define success much differently than others. In a sense, I sought to learn how these teachers—identified as successful for many different reasons—defined success themselves and whether or not these teachers felt they have attained this self-defined success.

Unfortunately, although the email was directly sent to over 40 educators representing approximately ten school districts, no one sent back a nomination form. I did receive a few emails from people offering names of potential nominees, but no one took the time to tell me *why* they felt the teacher was successful. At that point, I decided that I needed to personally speak with some of the professionals on the email list that I felt

should have access to some potential nominees. From these conversations, I selected four candidates—Caroline, Carrie, Patt, and Oliver—all of whom agreed to participate. Furthermore, all four teachers completed the study.

The quality of data produced in this research greatly depended on my ability as the researcher to build relationships with my participants. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), when participant and researcher share a common background, the level of trust is likely to increase. In this study, there was a certain level of comfort due to the shared racial background of researcher and participants. There were many times in the interviews when I felt the teachers had trust in me simply because I, too, am White. But our shared racial background alone was not enough to build rapport with each participant. Because data were collected over a short span of time, it was especially important that participants saw me as open, honest, and trustworthy from the onset of the research. Likewise, I had to show empathy with the participants, which Merriam (1998) states "is the foundation of rapport" (p. 23). It was also important for the participants to view me as a fellow teacher more so than a graduate student working on what could be perceived as an intimidating dissertation project. I needed to be seen as genuine to each participant, but without being too revealing of my views and passion for the topic.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through a series of three, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. In the discussion that follows, the purpose of each of these interviews will be explained. Additionally, a rationale is provided for why the popular method known as participant observation was not employed.

Qualitative researchers often refer to interviews as guided conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Yin, 2003). All three interview sessions in this study were semi-structured conversations. Taking into consideration the many different levels of interviewing on the spectrum from structured to open-ended, these semi-structured interviews, though not completely open-ended, more closely represent open-ended interviews. More specifically, there were guiding questions for both the initial interview as well as the second one, but they primarily served to initiate and guide conversations rather than to restrict them (see Appendix B for a copy of the initial interview protocol).

The goal of the initial interview was to give each participant the opportunity to tell her or his story. More specifically, the interview served to: (a) get acquainted and begin developing a relationship with the participant; (b) initiate a conversation about race by discussing her or his experiences with people from different racial backgrounds starting from childhood; (c) learn about the participant's educational experiences and the factors that contributed to her or him teaching African American children; and (d) guide subsequent interviews. Prior to the interview, I emailed participants, explaining that during our initial conversation I wanted to learn about their background (family, education, etc.), racial experiences they had, reasons why they chose to teach African American students, their experiences as teachers, and their ideas on how race affects (or not) their classrooms and pedagogy. For the most part, each teacher chose to tell her or his story chronologically beginning with their childhood, continuing on with their post-secondary education, and finishing with their teaching experiences.

For the first interview, participants were also asked to bring with them any artifacts that they felt would help to tell their story of how their ideas on race were

formed and how they came to be a successful teacher of African American children. This method of data collection, known as photo-elicitation[9] (Harper, 2002), was chosen because of the potential to enrich the stories being told and ignite memories in participants that may have faded over the years. In comparing an interview with photographs to one with only words, Harper (2002) explained that the difference lies in the ways people respond to the two. "Images," according to Harper, "evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words" (p. 13). Furthermore, photo elicitation interviews do not simply produce more information, but rather, a different kind of information (Harper). Allowing participants the flexibility to bring in any artifact that would aid them in sharing these life experiences could lead to more detailed descriptions and ultimately, richer data. Likewise, the artifacts could serve as a catalyst for conversation not only by helping participants recall details of experiences that might otherwise remain suppressed during an interview, but also by creating a more comfortable interview environment.

Only one participant, however, responded to this method of data collection by bringing in artifacts. Carrie came to the first interview with several photographs from her childhood and college years. In her case, I do believe the photographs made the interview a richer and more relaxed experience. As a researcher and a visual learner, the photographs made Carrie's story seem more realistic because I could not only hear it, but I also had a visual image of the family members of whom she spoke about so often. And although the other participants chose not to share any artifacts the value it brought to Carrie's story made it worth attempting for this research.

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[9] According to Harper (2002), photo-elicitation can be used to describe any study where photographs are inserted into a research interview. In this study, participants were not only just asked to bring photographs, but also any artifact that would help to tell her or his story.

The second round of interviews took place approximately two months after the first interview. At the end of the first interview, participants were provided a copy of the book *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools* (Howard, 2006) and were asked to read selected chapters. The purpose of Howard's book is to prepare White teachers for diverse student populations. The purpose of using the text in this study was to initiate conversations on race while giving participants an opportunity to talk about it in the context of someone else's writing instead of forcing them to talk about race in the context of their own lives.

Howard's (2006) book served as the foundation for conversation in the second interview. In chapters 3–7, which participants were asked to read, Howard wrote about White dominance, White racial identity development, color-blind ideology, and, among other things, presented a model to assist educators in the transformation of their racial identities. Although the participants recognized familiarity with some of the topics discussed in the book prior to reading it, most of the topics were new ideas to them (with the exception of Oliver, who had already studied Howard's book in his graduate coursework). These teachers were reading about and discussing topics of which they were previously unaware. The idea that Whites have certain privileges based solely on their skin color or that there are stages of racial identity development were new to most of these teachers, and were ideas, that without this book, would not have been discussed in the interviews. Without reading this text, it would have been impossible to discuss such topics. Howard's book provided the participants and the researcher with a "common vocabulary" for the conversations (Stinson, 2008, p. 986). And even though reading the chapters provided motivation for the participants to discuss race in the context of

Howard's book, all of them spent much time discussing the topics presented within the chapters in relation to their own lives. Much like the first interview, I provided each participant with a list of questions presented to them as "plan B." In other words, all participants had the option of using the questions to guide the conversation but, in all four cases, the participants talked through their notes in the book first and then returned to the questions to discuss anything that was missed.

It is also important to mention here the dangers of participants reading and discussing such a text. Howard (2006) is a White man whose experiences teaching in inner-city schools led him to his work with White teachers. In his book, Howard clearly articulates his views on race and education, and does not discuss other possible viewpoints. This is not to say that Howard should have offered other viewpoints; however, it does indicate a need to clearly explain to the participants the purpose of reading the text for my project. Thus, when participants were given a copy of the book, the purpose of reading Howard's book was reiterated. As I explained to each participant, the text offered one viewpoint as a foundation for discussion. It offered an opportunity to take the conversation in a different direction. It provided a place to begin discussing the often difficult topic of race. But again, my research is not a critical case study and the intent of my research was not to transform the participants—only to learn from them.

The third and final interview came approximately three months after the second interview. During this time, each participant was sent a copy of the transcripts of her or his first two interviews. They were asked to read through them and note any mistakes or text that they felt inaccurately represented their thoughts and feelings. While the participants member checked the transcriptions, I also reread the transcripts looking

closely for things that seemed unclear to me. In the third round of interviews (all of which were conducted via telephone), participants shared with me their thoughts about the transcripts and I too asked some final follow-up questions regarding those conversations. (This type of member checking has been effectively used in other studies, see, e.g., Wilson, Cooney, & Stinson, 2005.)

Although observation or participant observation is commonly used in qualitative research, neither supports the purpose of this particular study. Yin (2003) stated that direct observations are not always necessary in case studies. The purpose of participant observation is to learn the "explicit and tacit aspects of their [participants'] life routines and their culture" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). The intent of this research, however, was not to learn about the participants' culture or their daily routines; rather, the goal was to learn about each participant's life experiences that led to her or his current racial understandings and success in teaching African American students from her or his perspective—not from my interpretation of her or his observed actions. Additionally, I hoped to better understand the participants' perceptions of the role their own Whiteness plays in their teaching. The intent is not to compare responses in interview conversations with actual teaching practices to check for consistency, but to hear the teachers' stories and how they interpret the role that life experiences have played in forming who they are.

For this research project, semi-structured interviews were the primary method of collecting data, but the incorporation of photographs into the interview process along with Howard's (2006) text allowed richer data beyond what more structured, traditional interviews would have yielded. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) warned that interviews that are too structured limit the participant from telling her or his story. Furthermore, the

flexibility of qualitative interviewing permits participants to shape the content of the interview (Bogdan & Biklen). I argue too that the flexibility of these interviews allowed me to do more listening than speaking. At times when the conversation drifted away from race, I was able to ask thoughtful questions to redirect the conversation in order to keep race in the foreground—an important component of critical race theory. I believe the flexibility afforded participants during the semi-structured interviews provided them ample opportunity to share the details of their life stories and their own interpretations of how life experiences led to their success with African American children.

Data Management and Analysis

In order to assure security of data and the confidentiality of my participants, several measures were taken. At the end of the first interview, participants were asked to select their own pseudonyms[10] for the study. Once participants chose a pseudonym, all names in the electronic documents (e.g., digital recorder and Microsoft Word files) were changed. All electronic documents were saved on a secure, desktop computer in my home and a paper copy of all documents (e.g., IRB consent forms and interview transcripts) were locked in a filing cabinet at the same location. The enormous amount of data generated from the interviews made it necessary to have a system of organizing the data. For this study, each individual participant's data were housed electronically in a file folder labeled with her or his pseudonym. The original transcribed interviews along with analysis files were saved within these file folders.

In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis happen simultaneously (Merriam, 1998). As I listened to each of my participant's during the interviews, I

[10] In addition to pseudonyms for the participants and each individual mentioned in their stories, other insignificant liberties in participant descriptions were taken to protect anonymity of participants.

recognized commonalities with the literature I had read. I quickly planned appropriate questions to ask. I thought about which stories were going to be important parts of my data and which ones needed to be redirected back to my research questions. All of these data generating and data mining procedures took place during the interviews and were part of my initial analysis of data.

But this, of course, was only the beginning of my analysis. An important step in analyzing interview data is to recognize what has been learned from an interview and what questions have still been left unanswered (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Each interview served to guide subsequent interviews; therefore, transcribing the first round of interviews prior to the second round was crucial. Because of the time-intensive nature of interview transcription, approximately two months elapsed between each round of interviews to allow me time to transcribe the interviews and to determine what information I still needed to attain.

Rather than hire a professional transcriber to transcribe interview data, I chose to complete the transcription myself: "Transcribing the interviews yourself forces you to pay attention to what interviewees said and helps you prepare for the next interview" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 204). Transcribing my own data was invaluable. Being forced to listen carefully to each interview again to accurately transcribe the conversation assisted me in understanding more deeply what the participants meant by the words they chose in telling their stories. Each time I reread a transcription, I could *hear* my conversation with the participant. I knew when they paused and when they quickly answered a question. I could hear their inflection. Had I merely listened to the conversations in real-time and relied on the transcriptions from someone else, I feel I

would have only been reading words rather than hearing exactly what was said *and* meant.

Along with transcribing the interview data, I kept a detailed research journal (Merriam, 1998) throughout the data collection process to help capture the meaning of the participants' stories. Although I did occasionally use the journal to record thoughts about the research in between interviews, the journal was particularly helpful in recording my initial reactions to each interview immediately afterwards. More specifically, as I drove away from each interview, I used the digital recorder to capture any thoughts I had and to remind myself of questions that might be needed in the next interview. My comments were included at the end of each interview transcript and became part of the data itself. In the end, the journal assisted in making sense of the data by adding clarity to some aspects of the interviews which could have been lost in between the interview and the time the transcription was completed, sometimes even reminding me of questions to ask that I may not have remembered by the next interview session.

To manage and organize the content of my data, a coding system was employed (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), "Coding involves systematically labeling concepts, themes, events, and topical markers so that you can readily retrieve and examine all of the data units that refer to the same subject across all your interviews" (p. 207). Bogden and Biklen (1998) add that these codes allow the researcher to physically separate data relating to a certain topic from the rest of the data. As you will read in the following chapter, each participant's story was recounted in a somewhat chronological way—beginning with their childhood and following through to their experiences teaching African American students. Consequently, as I prepared to

write each of their stories, I had to code the data by categories (e.g., K–12 schooling experiences, college experiences, teaching experiences), then sort the data from each of the three interviews by these categories. Because my participants told such rich, descriptive stories in our conversations, the difficult part of analysis was deciding whether each story was relevant to my research. Coding and categorizing the data assisted in answering this question.

Because this research is a collective case study, data analysis occurred on two levels. The first and, perhaps, most important step was to analyze each case individually. According to Merriam (1998), this phase is known as the within-case analysis. After interviews were completed, I examined data from each participant, one at a time, to prepare to write her or his story. After each of the four stories were written, a cross-case analysis (Hays, 2004; Merriam; Yin, 2003) allowed me to compare the experiences of the four participants to look for commonalities and differences amongst them. A summary at the end of chapter 5 outlines those commonalties and differences that I found relevant to this project. Again, I stress that case study was chosen for the research project, in part, to place the focus of the investigation upon each individual teacher. The goal was not to make generalizations about *all* successful White teachers of African American students; it was to examine the experiences of those who have found success in teaching in hopes to better inform future White teachers in urban schools.

Interpreting and Reporting Findings

My duty as researcher was to represent the voices of my participants while being as unbiased as possible. I was forced to remember throughout this process that I make the final decisions on what is reported and with that came an obligation to continually reflect.

Stake (2005) claimed, “More will be pursued than was volunteered, and less will be reported than was learned” (p. 456). So, how did I decide what to include and what to leave out? This is a question I struggled with throughout the writing process, but a question with which I became more comfortable the further along I got in analysis and writing. As Stake (1995) explained, “All researchers have great privilege and obligation: the privilege to pay attention to what they consider worthy of attention and the obligation to make conclusions drawn from those choices meaningful to colleagues and clients” (p. 49). As previously stated, with each experience that was shared I had to question its relevance to the research. And I will have to continue this process as I select other outlets through which to disseminate the findings of this study.

After completion of requirements for my doctorate program, I plan to submit articles from my dissertation to peer-reviewed journals. Hatch (2002) encourages a “just do it” approach, meaning: get something written, submit it for publication, and then learn from it if it gets rejected. Merriam (1998) stated, “The research is of little consequence if no one knows about it” (p. 220). My passion for this topic and my ongoing commitment to improving education for African American children requires me to continue this work by sharing it with other educators. Furthermore, I personally must feel that my dedication and the many sacrifices made by my family are for more than a title, a research document, and a pay raise.

Role of Researcher

Unlike quantitative researchers that often borrow well-tested instruments from other studies, a qualitative researcher is her own primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). Every aspect of the study, then, is filtered through the lens

of the researcher and is therefore affected by the researcher's worldview, values, and perspective (Merriam; Schram, 2006). This perspective, most often explicitly stated in the theoretical framework, affects *all* aspects of a study (Merriam) from the design, to the quick decisions made during data collection, to the data analysis and final report of the findings: "No matter how much you try you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe and what you value" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 34).

Although some qualitative researchers view subjectivity as a problem to be "dealt with," critical theorists, in particular, consider it to be a crucial component of research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). As critical theorists recognize the impact that their (our) ideologies have on research, so do they (we) acknowledge how these perspectives are influenced by knowledge generated with participants in the data collection process (Bogdan & Biklen). In other words, as a researcher, I am in a constant state of transformation, reconstructing my reality with each new experience, which, in turn, affects all facets of my research. As Peshkin (1988) eloquently stated, "Subjectivity can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected" (p. 18).

There are many facets to the subjectivity I bring into this research. My beliefs about education and teaching mathematics have not only been formed by my educational and professional experiences but also by many personal experiences as well. Some of those personal experiences were of growing up in a small Virginian town with only two African American peers representing my graduating class. My step-father continually

teased me about Jaylen Brown, the only Black boy on my school bus, referring to him as my "boyfriend," although I knew if I ever dated a Black man, I would be disowned. Despite a racist upbringing, I later worked and attended college in a town with a large gay and lesbian population where I continued to become more aware and appreciative of people's differences. Now, teaching in a predominantly African American suburban high school, I see how those experiences have affected the teacher I am today. I also recognize how those experiences affect every aspect of my research.

I could not begin to discuss race with my participants or ask them to explore the role of their Whiteness in their classrooms without first looking at the role my Whiteness plays in this research project. Many times in my life, I have engaged in conversation with other White people who have assumed I share their views. I have come to believe that there is a common assumption among Whites that because we share the same skin color, we also share the same beliefs. Although this assumption is certainly not taken by everyone, I had to be aware of the possibility of this assumption during the data collection process. I had to reveal enough of myself to be personable and empathetic with the four White teachers in this study, but not reveal so much that I began to influence their views.

I recognize that my own life experiences play a significant role in this research, but part of being a good qualitative researcher is to understand *how* those experiences affect the development and the outcomes of the study. That being said, I am obligated to account for and control, to a certain degree, my own subjectivity. The research journal is a tool that helped me do just that. This journal served as a record of the "affective experience" of implementing my study (Hatch, 2002, p. 88). By taking time to reflect at

the end of each interview, I was able to include my initial thoughts and reactions as part of the data. This journal provided a way to monitor my subjectivity and to keep track of any biases in which I may have otherwise been unaware (Peshkin, 1988).

My role of reflective researcher was particularly important throughout the data collection process. I could not forget that it was the participants' voices in which I am interested. In order to collect quality data, I had to hear what they were telling—requiring me to be an effective listener. As a critical theorist, I realize power plays a significant role in relationships and conversations between people. As the topic of this study is one in which I am passionate, I could not allow that passion to bleed into conversations or to in any way influence or repress the responses of my participants.

Research is not an objective process. Though the researcher's subjectivity is an important element in every aspect of the project, it must be managed in order to maintain the integrity of the research. The transparency of my subjectivity, my commitment to continual reflection, and a record of my thoughts in a research journal all contributed to the preservation of integrity of this study (Peshkin, 1988).

Trustworthiness

How reliable and valid a research study is determines how much it can be "trusted." Both validity and reliability are defined differently in qualitative research than they are in studies that adopt a more traditional, quantitative approach. In looking at reliability, quantitative researchers typically ask if two different researchers would get the same results from a study; whereas, qualitative researchers are more concerned with "the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the data" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 36). Quantitative researchers measure the reliability of their results on the feasibility that a

replication study would yield similar results, but as Merriam (1998) pointed out, reliability, in this sense, is impossible in a qualitative study. Any researcher who chooses to recognize the value of her own subjectivity and the role that her subjective being plays in the entire research process understands that no qualitative study could be replicated with the same results. Furthermore, it is unlikely that any two qualitative studies would have the same design given that the researcher's subjectivity comes into play the very moment planning of a study begins.

In this case study, several measures were taken to strengthen the validity of the research, including triangulation of data, member checking, and transparency of researcher biases (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation simply refers to using multiple sources to collect data (Merriam). One reason for selecting photo elicitation and semi-structured interviews for this study, coupled with my digital journal, was the potential for each method to generate different data. Although only one participant chose to share photographs during the first interview, this method of data collection was valuable to the research as it resulted in rich, detailed stories from the participant based on the photographs she shared. On the other hand, the use of a research journal to record my thoughts throughout the data collection process was especially important for triangulation because it provided an opportunity to consider my ideas, my thoughts, my reflections, and my memories as data as well (St. Pierre, 1997).

In addition to triangulation, I involved participants in the analysis and interpretation of data by giving each of them the opportunity to "corroborate or question any of the information or assumptions that have been drawn" (Hays, 2004, p. 233). This method, known as member checking, helps the researcher to verify that her interpretation

of the data represents the perspective of the participant. In this study, participants were sent (via email and first-class mail) copies of the transcripts from their first two interviews prior to the third interview. This gave each participant the opportunity to read over the transcriptions and provide feedback. After each participant responded, the third and final interview was scheduled to discuss any comments or add clarification from the participant. Additionally, after each participant's story was written, she or he was sent the story to review. This gave each participant one last chance to make sure her or his story was accurately told.

Last, by revealing my philosophical beliefs in my theoretical framework, I also identified potential biases that could have affected the research. And although my current understandings of CRT, Whiteness studies, and critical theory helped guide all stages of the research, simply making my subjectivity transparent did not allow me to insert my personal views into the research whenever I chose. I had to remain conscious of the taken-for-granted views that were not necessarily shared by my participants.

Conclusion

This chapter includes a detailed description of the methodological decisions that allowed this research project to become a reality. Although as a researcher I struggled to "find" the methodological approach best suited for a study of successful White teachers of African American students, in the end, it seems that case study was the only real choice. This approach allowed me to learn an extensive amount from these four teachers over the course of 16 hours of interviews. When I was ready to write the individual stories, the case study methodology forced me to focus on one teacher at a time, giving

my full attention to each individual in order to convey her or his voice in the most unbiased way possible.

The case study approach also allowed me the flexibility of choosing data collection methods that were most appropriate for the research questions I posed. I wanted to learn about the teachers' experiences which have helped shape them into successful teachers of African American students. I wanted to hear about their racial experiences and the role those experiences played in their teaching practices. But I lacked interest in seeing their classrooms for myself as I do not feel that any observations would have led to a better understanding of their "becoming" successful teachers. The loose structure of the interviews empowered the participants to tell their stories as they chose while giving me the opportunity to listen closely and question when I needed to hear more. The flexibility of these interviews also allowed me to stay true to the tenets of CRT by keeping race at the forefront of the conversation. In the end, semi-structured interviews coupled with the reading from Howard's (2006) text evoked thought-provoking, detailed narratives of the lives of four successful teachers whom I believe we can learn from to make a difference in the lives of African American children.

CHAPTER 5

TEACHER STORIES

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of successful White mathematics teachers of Black students with hopes to better understand not only how each participant became a secondary teacher of mathematics, but also and more importantly, the factors that led them to teach Black students. This chapter contains the stories of each of the four White educators who participated in this study followed by a summary in which I cross-analyze all data, noting commonalities that I believe resonated in each of the participant's story.

Each teacher's story is told separately in order to preserve as much of their individual "voices" as possible. It is my sincere belief that had the data been analyzed collectively from the onset, the common themes would have excluded important aspects of these individuals that are imperative to their success and would have limited the reader's understanding of the perspective of each teacher captured by the stories. Although these teachers share many common beliefs on teaching, it is their individual differences along with their commonalities that help paint a more complete picture of what it might mean to be a successful White teacher of Black students.

The stories that follow give a snapshot of the lives of four successful White teachers who shared stories of their childhood, their educational experiences, as well as stories about the students they have taught. The summary that follows highlights the

commonalities and differences between the four individuals so the mathematics education community and teacher educators in general might begin to learn from their successes.

Table 1

Summary of Study Participants

		Demographics of Schools			
Name	Years of K–12 teaching experience	Black	White	Hispanic	Other
Caroline[11]	5	41%	5%	48%	6%
Carrie	8	48%	25%	20%	7%
Patt	23	99%	0%	1%	0%
Oliver	4	98%	0%	2%	0%

Caroline's Story

Family Background

Caroline is a 28-year-old high school mathematics teacher in a large, northeastern metropolitan area of the United States. Caroline did not originally plan to teach but now after 5 years of teaching in Title I schools, she has no immediate plans of leaving the profession.

Caroline is an only child of her liberal, college-educated parents. Her dad was in the military and Caroline spent her childhood in several different schools until her father

[11] The racial breakdown shown here represents the students at the school where Caroline currently teaches. The demographics of students in schools where Caroline previously taught are more predominantly Black and are discussed in her story.

retired when she was in eighth grade. Caroline claimed that her parents made a conscious effort to raise her to be open-minded despite being raised themselves by parents who were not as accepting of people from different races. Both of Caroline's parents were raised in the South and, except for her parents, she described the rest of her family as "your stereotypical Southern family" (Interview 1). Because Caroline moved frequently as a child she did not see her grandparents very often but when her father retired her family moved closer to her grandparents in the South. She shared a story that helped illustrate her grandfather's views on race:

> It's not like they just talk about it [race] all the time. It's like my grandpa read an article one time about a teacher that was fired because he told his students that African American students were dumber than White students and he was like "I don't understand why he got fired, that's true." And I was just like, "Ah, grandpa." (Interview 1)

The drastic difference in Caroline's parents and the rest of her family in regards to racial understanding interested me; I asked her why she felt her parents had such a different perspective on race. Although Caroline admitted that she too would like to know the answer to that question, she speculated that her parents' education and their move away from the South were big parts of their different perspective. Caroline stated, "I don't really know what changed them, but I think a lot of people that are that age—like the baby boomers—that their parents are probably still fairly racist to a point just because of the way they grew up and that they're not" (Interview 1). According to Caroline, her mother was particularly affected by the events that took place during the Civil Rights Movement and was "especially head strong about it" (Interview 1).

Even though Caroline's parents raised her to be open-minded and accepting of people from other backgrounds, they did not raise her to "see" color. Caroline recalled:

> Like my parents would tell me…when I was really little, they would say "When you're describing somebody you don't need to say their color when you're describing someone you know." And…whenever they're talking about somebody, if they don't say a color, they're White. (Interview 1)

Caroline's views on the color-blind ideology became even more clear as she later shared her experiences teaching in a racially, and culturally, diverse school. Those experiences are discussed later in her story.

K–12 Schooling Experiences

Caroline's K–12 education was entirely in public schools. She attended several elementary and middle schools while her dad was still in the military, some on military bases, but once he retired she attended only one high school. Caroline's high school was in a predominantly White suburb of a large, metropolitan city in the South. Throughout childhood, Caroline had friends of other races but she does not remember any racial issues: "I don't remember it [race] ever being something that I thought about until after high school" (Interview 1). Caroline pointed out, however, that her entire school, including all of her non-White friends, was, socioeconomically, middle class.

Unlike Caroline, who has embraced the idea of a student-centered classroom where students investigate and discuss mathematics, her own high school experience was one of listening to the teacher positioned at the overhead projector:

> I was taught, like, the "overhead" way. I had the 50-minute classes, thank goodness, because if I was taught that way on a 90-minute block I think I would have died. You come in, get out your notes, you write for 50 minutes, and then you leave. And then…every other week, you have a test. That's how my classes went. There was no interaction, no groupwork; I don't remember anything like that. (Interview 1)

Caroline's description of her schooling experience is what Freire (1970/2000) described as the "banking" concept of education in which students are treated like "receptacles" to

be "filled with the contents of his [the teacher's] narration" (p. 71). This narration, according to Freire, leads students to "memorize mechanically" and expects them to be patient, passive recipients of their education (p. 72). Although Caroline never explicitly mentioned Freire and his philosophy on education during our interviews, it was clear that she shares some of his ideas on teaching and strives to implement Freire's problem-posing pedagogy in her own classroom.

College and Pre-Teaching Experiences

Caroline attended a large university in the same metropolitan area where she attended high school. She described the school as very diverse, but clarified that much of the diversity came from international students who had come there only to study. To Caroline, her 4 years in college was a good experience and she especially liked meeting friends from all different backgrounds.

After a change in majors, Caroline settled in on industrial engineering. Although she admitted being unhappy with that major as well, she felt she was too far along in her studies to switch again. And so, Caroline graduated with a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering. She never intended to teach. In fact, the only experience she had with children prior to teaching was as a tutor through a program at her university in conjunction with a local school system. She really enjoyed tutoring students one-on-one, but was, as she stated, "positive" that she did not want to teach. Nonetheless, while attending a job fair, Caroline met a woman recruiting recent graduates to teach in low-income schools and she became interested.

Caroline, at that time, was still undecided on a career. She kept in touch with the recruiter she had met and while interviewing for industrial engineering jobs, she

simultaneously applied for teaching jobs, despite her lack of certification. Caroline even considered applying to the Teach for America program but decided that if she went into teaching, she wanted to go through a university program for certification instead.

Caroline ended up accepting a job as a seventh-grade mathematics teacher on a provisional license and soon enrolled in a program at a local university for certification. Unlike the other three teachers in this study, Caroline gave a great deal of credit to her certification program for teaching her how to work in urban schools. In her classes, Caroline was assigned reading from authors like Gloria Ladson-Billings, which generated discussions on race. In fact, Caroline pointed out that almost all of the class discussions were race-based. These discussions, along with an advisor who guided her and encouraged her to continue teaching in an urban school, made her experience a valuable one.

Teaching Experiences

Caroline spoke very little about her K–12 and college schooling experiences, but did not hold back as she passionately shared her teaching experiences. Although Caroline is the youngest of the four participants, she is the only one who has experience teaching at more than one secondary school. As she discussed each of the four schools in which she has taught, Caroline talked in depth about racial discussions within her class, the tactics she uses to motivate students, her re-writing of curriculum to fit students' needs, and her personal ideas on the root causes of the "achievement gap."

Notably, the four schools in which Caroline has taught are all Title I schools that serve mostly Black students, or in the case of Caroline's current school, Black and Hispanic students. As mentioned previously, Caroline began teaching seventh grade on a

provisional license. She estimated the demographics of the school as being approximately 80% Black and 20% White, although she recalled teaching very few White students. She described her first year teaching as overwhelming—not necessarily because she was teaching students of a different race, but because she had no teacher training prior to the experience. Once Caroline got over what she calls the "initial shock" of having never taught before, she began learning more about her students.

Caroline, however, wanted to teach high school and after teaching middle school for only 2 years, she transferred to a large high school in a neighboring county. The school was close to 99% Black and according to Caroline was such a "bad school" that she felt sorry for the students (Interview 1). She had no computer, no classroom, and no support. Although Caroline did mention a few younger Black teachers who she identified with and kept in touch with after leaving the school, she explained that many of the teachers were older, ready to retire, and did nothing to make lessons interesting for the students. Caroline feels that for these older teachers, "It's easier to just blame the kids rather than change the way you do things" (Interview 1).

After only one year of teaching in this large high school, Caroline accepted a job as a ninth-grade mathematics teacher in a small school that focused on teaching for social justice. Though the racial makeup of the students was about the same as the previous school, almost entirely Black, Caroline's experience at this school was completely different. The faculty of only 20 was much younger than the faculty at her previous school. As Caroline explained, "We're all new to the profession. We're not stuck in these old ways" (Interview 1). Caroline spoke very highly of the small school community—not only for herself but also for the students. Caroline asserted, "I think that my small school

is amazing for these students—that they have the support—that they basically have a family at school…rather than having this 3000 student high school where they don't know anyone" (Interview 1).

Caroline admitted that she has learned and continues to learn a lot about African American culture, especially in the small school where her students lived in very homogenous communities. Caroline said she often had to address stereotypes about Whites held by her students:

> I've had to learn a lot about African American culture, and a lot of their culture revolves around respect. And so, since respect is such a big part of their culture … that's one of my most important things is just to show them respect, you know. Have respect for them, have respect for their ability levels, have high expectations for them and that they'll respect me too. (Interview 1)

Caroline lamented that she would have happily remained at her small school; however, after teaching there only one year, a job offer for her husband in another city led them to relocate.

Caroline has just completed her first year at her new high school in a large metropolitan school district in the Northeast. The biggest difference between her new school and the schools in which Caroline has previously taught is the student population, which in this school is approximately 50% Black and 50% Hispanic. Caroline talked extensively about the difference in the population and recognized that she had much to learn about the multiple cultures in her classroom. In our first interview, which took place prior to her moving to the Northeast, Caroline was very excited about teaching at her new school and was especially impressed that the school's faculty seemed to be confronting racial issues head on.

Caroline is pleased to be part of a faculty that openly discusses not only race but also how teachers can facilitate racial discussions with students. During the second interview, which took place after she had taught a few months in her new school, Caroline talked firsthand about her experience with a racially mixed population of students:

> It's been really interesting for me as a teacher in trying to—to have that discussion with students. There's been a lot of issues at our school like racial comments and joking, you know. Even students that are friends will joke about their races back and forth to each other, and we've actually talked about that as a school. Kind of been talking a lot about that lately, about how we can best engage students in the discussions in order to make them more aware of each others races and more sensitive to each other as opposed to just making fun or laughing about each others' cultures even though they think it's just joking; but, you know what it could actually be seen as and stuff. So, we've actually been having a lot of conversations about race in our school lately, which is good for me. (Interview 2)

Caroline added that while the faculty discusses ways to facilitate these conversations with students, the focus is on ways to assist students in asking the right questions while keeping respect at the forefront of the conversation.

To Caroline, however, there is a distinct difference between the racial conversations at her new school and similar conversations that took place at her small school in the South. When I first met Caroline, she was talking about race with students in the small school, but the conversations were initiated because she was White and all the students were Black. Caroline felt it was necessary to talk about her Whiteness with students, but admitted it was difficult because of the insular lives they lived. She explained, "It's hard to have racial discussions, because they don't have any with each other. They're all the same race. They don't have any experiences with people of other races" (Interview 1). Nonetheless, Caroline knew that these conversations were important. And as the teacher responsible for the curriculum during advisement each day,

Caroline sought out literature that helped other teachers initiate racial conversations with their students.

Now that Caroline teaches a mixture of Hispanic and Black students, the racial conversations are centered more on the students' races and their differences with each other rather than on her Whiteness. Caroline feels that it is easier to have racial discussions when there is diversity amongst the students. She is able to be the facilitator of the conversation as opposed to the spokesperson for the "other race"—always feeling obligated to share the White perspective. Caroline also feels that students in diverse schools have an advantage over students in single-raced schools because, without the diversity, students simply are not given the opportunity to interact with and appreciate people from other backgrounds.

Caroline admitted that she cannot fully understand what it is like to be one of her students, but it is clear from our conversations that she is dedicated to providing a space for them to discuss racial and cultural issues. Although Caroline has always had racial discussions with her students in each school in which she has taught, it is promising that she is now part of a faculty that values these conversations not only amongst students but teachers as well. Howard (2006) advocated these positive, open settings within schools where "we can work to create an empathetic environment in which their [students and teachers of color] stories and experiences can be acknowledged and shared" (p. 79).

Caroline also spoke in length about student motivation, not only in terms of what she does in the classroom to increase motivation but also the outside factors she feels strongly correlate to a student's willingness and eagerness to learn. Despite having never taught in a predominantly White school, I asked Caroline to tell me what she feels are the

main differences between the schools she has taught in and White schools like the ones she attended as a child:

> I think one of the biggest differences is the motivation which I think comes from the parental involvement. I think that's probably one of the biggest differences that I see. And it makes me want to help them more, but because I think about if I—I was not a big fan of school and I tried to think about if my parents hadn't been pushing me, if I would have been motivated at all, if I would have learned much at all. So I think about these kids that don't have anybody pushing them at home. Like, there's no external force telling them to do this—it has to be all internally motivated and things like that. Especially, like, just from elementary school it's just a parent helping you with homework or something like that to get the individual attention. (Interview 1)

Caroline recognized that low achievement could be due, in part, to poor schools similar to those Kozol (1991) spoke of with dilapidated buildings and few resources, but she feels that was not necessarily the case in her small school. Regardless, she feels it is each school system's responsibility to help support students even when the parental support is not there. Caroline exclaimed, "I don't think they're going to be able to change parents so, as a school system, we have to change the way we do things because we're not going to be able to change what happens at home" (Interview 2).

Caroline also feels that the quality of teachers is directly linked to student motivation and achievement:

> And I don't think it has anything to do with them [students]. Like you didn't have a parent at home helping you—you had a class of 30 crazy first graders and a teacher that couldn't control them. All it takes is one year. Because if you get behind in second grade, then you're behind in third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth grade, and then you get further behind, especially with math and there's no way they catch up. If you miss one grade in elementary school, there's almost no way to catch up. So all it takes is one bad teacher. (Interview 1)

Caroline works hard to build relationships with her students so that she, as a teacher, does not become a roadblock for her students' learning. Caroline feels that her students have many barriers that keep them from being successful but, as she stated, "If a student has an

issue with the teacher, then nothing's going to be learned" (Interview 1). It is important for her to gain her students' respect. If she is successful at creating that bond with students, then they will learn for her as well as for themselves. And as Caroline pointed out, this motivation to learn for the right reasons could leave her students at an advantage over some students in White schools who learn only for the grade:

> I feel like sometimes, in those more affluent schools, that the motivation may be just to get a good grade. It may not be to actually learn something. And I feel like when I can get my kids motivated, it's for a better reason. It's for the reason "Hey, I'm actually interested in this. I may want to learn this." So, there is a difference in that way, where it's not just motivation to get a good grade and get good SATs and go to a good college. (Interview 1)

Most of Caroline's students have parents that are minimally involved in their child's education. She realizes the responsibility to motivate them to want to succeed in mathematics is her own, but she also recognizes that teaching the way she was taught is not the pedagogy that will motivate her students. Caroline strives to actively engage her students in mathematics by asking them to work together:

> You don't have to be very smart to figure out that sitting there and teaching isn't going to work, especially when you're a new teacher. I mean, you have to find engaging ways of doing things or you're just not going to ever get control. So I think that was something that I had already learned. (Interview 1)

Even though Caroline was taught in a traditional, teacher-centered classroom when she was a student, she did acknowledge that her teacher education program taught her to be a facilitator of student learning rather than the stereotypical mathematics teacher married to the overhead projector. At affluent schools, Caroline explained, the teacher-led pedagogy may still result in good grades for students because they are motivated by the grades (although she questions how much they really learn), but for unmotivated students, it simply does not work.

In addition to her student-centered classroom, Caroline uses many strategies to motivate her students—mostly centered on a positive reward system. For students that are doing well in her class, Caroline calls at least three parents a week. She makes an effort to give students positive feedback and each week designates a different "student of the week." Caroline also motivates students through music, which she pointed out, plays a big role in their culture. She will ask students to bring in their favorite song or some instrumental music to listen to while they work together in groups. She often allows a deserving student to select music to play in class. Caroline also tries to weave motivation into the curriculum by doing activities that will encourage students to work. The positive rewards she gives students along with the racial conversations that she facilitates with students works not only to motivate them to succeed but also helps Caroline build relationships with students that make them want to work for her. Again, Caroline asserted, "You have to get to a point where they want to do good because they respect you and they want to do good for you" (Interview 1).

Before Caroline moved to the school where she currently teaches, she taught for 4 years in a Southern state undergoing education reform. The mathematics curriculum, in particular, drastically changed to a more integrated, standards-based curriculum. And although Caroline was fully in support of the change to standards-based instruction, she expressed concern over the higher expectations placed on her students and the obstacles they could possibly face in order to meet those expectations. In the small school, the last school she taught at in that state, Caroline shared that 75% of her students did not pass the previous year's state test in mathematics and that, furthermore, many of her students were at a fourth-grade reading level. This below-grade reading level was particularly

problematic considering that the new curriculum was task based and required a tremendous amount of reading. In regards to the tasks, Caroline claimed, “If I gave them that, they would look at it and shut down” (Interview 1). In order to make the tasks more accessible to her students, Caroline rewrote many of them. She often rewrote tasks because her students simply could not relate to the context. Other times, she rewrote the tasks to scaffold in the mathematics and assist them with their critical thinking skills, which she feels they severely lacked. Overall, Caroline was frustrated with the high level of mathematics her students were expected to master. She questioned the need for students to perform at such a higher level than she had been required to during high school when she, herself, was accepted into a rigorous, 4-year university as an engineering major. As Caroline emphasized, “I was fine with the high school math education that I had” (Interview 1).

Caroline remains committed to teaching in low-income schools despite the challenges she faces. She credits the recruiter at the job fair for first getting her interested in teaching in low-income schools but, now that she has taught for 5 years, she can not imagine teaching any other population. Caroline claimed that she did not just want to teach in a struggling school but, more specifically, in a school “where I could have a lot of say in terms of improving it” (Interview 1). Furthermore, Caroline revealed, “You know, I was like, if I’m going to do it, I’m going to do it where I’m needed. Not just—it’s not going to just be like a job. It’s going to be a job where I feel like I can make a difference” (Interview 1).

Reflections on Howard's Book

Much like the other participants in this study, Caroline chose to discuss some specific topics from Howard's (2006) book, *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*: *White Teachers, Multiracial Schools*, but more often, the book served as a basis for conversation centered on her own life experiences. Caroline openly discussed the stages of White racial identity development [12]and though she could not remember being in the contact[13] stage, she distinctly recalled a time in her life when she entered the disintegration [14]stage:

> The disintegration stage, for me, happened more when I was—once I started teaching that I began to try to think about some of the things that I had been told about race and the time I started to realize the injustices that existed within the school system. And a lot of that was based on race because race kind of parallels poverty in our country and, you know, the tendency to be poor and to be of a certain color was kind of a problem in the schools because it meant that not only were the schools almost segregated in terms of race, but also they were unequal in what resources they have for students. (Interview 2)

At this point in her life, Caroline developed what Howard called "a growing awareness of racial inequality" (2006, p. 94). She recognized inequalities within schools. She began to make connections between economic differences in our society and the disparity of resources in our schools. Caroline also listened carefully to what others were saying about race and became more aware of the vast differences in racial understandings.

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[12] Although Howard (2006) recognized various researchers (e.g. Carter, Gaertner, Ganter, Hardiman, Helms) who have explored White racial identity, some as early as the 1970s, Howard chose the six stages of White racial identity development described by Helms (1994, 1996) and Helms and Piper (1994).

[13] The initial stage of White racial identity development, the contact stage, begins when White people first encounter non-White people. At this stage, we are unaware of White privilege and may even unconsciously exhibit racist behavior (Howard, 2006).

[14] The disintegration stage is characterized by feelings of guilt or shame for one's whiteness. Likewise, White people in this stage may experience excitement over their growing knowledge of racial differences (Howard, 2006).

But similar to the other three participants in this study (discussed in turn), Caroline admitted that she does not always respond to racial comments that she feels are inappropriate. And, as she continues to work towards the autonomy[15] stage, Caroline acknowledged that she is now most likely in the immersion/emersion[16] stage of White racial identity development. Caroline is hopeful that experiences in her new school with so many diverse cultures will enable her to continue her transformation:

> I would hope that I'm in the immersion/emersion stage in terms of …trying to engage in those discussions. So, that's where I hope I would be. I think that this year is encouraging me to work on that and to try to take that to where it actually is in terms of actions and not just words and things like that. So, hopefully teaching this year and the population I'm teaching, with that, I'll be free to move to the next stage. (Interview 2)

Caroline revealed that when she read about the stages of White racial identity development, she thought of the racial discussions she has with her students and felt reassured in her decision to talk frankly about race rather than to "shy away" from it (Interview 2).

During the first interview, Caroline was both excited and nervous about moving to a school with both Black and Hispanic students. She knew that the cultural differences that she had not experienced before would present a new set of challenges for her as a teacher. When we discussed the stages of White racial identity development during the second interview, Caroline shared her new perspective on teaching in a culturally diverse environment. She pointed out that although her new school is almost half Black and half

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[15] According to Howard (2006), one is considered to be in the autonomy stage (the final stage of White racial identity development) when she or he is actively engaged in activities to fight oppression. The autonomy stage should not be viewed as an end point in one's transformation, but rather "a state of being continually open to new information and growth" (p. 97).

[16] The immersion/emersion stage, according to Howard (2006), "is marked by a movement away from paternalistic efforts to help other groups and toward an internalized desire to change oneself and one's fellow Whites in a positive way" (p. 96).

Hispanic, the Hispanic students come from many different countries and bring their own cultures with them. Despite sharing a common language, these students have differences that can often generate inappropriate jokes and comments—dividing them even further. Because these students often have prejudices about Hispanics from other countries, Caroline explained, it is important not to classify all Hispanic students together without looking at them individually. She also stated, "I think that, as teachers, we need to be more knowledgeable about other cultures or at least willing to learn more about other cultures" (Interview 2).

Caroline's philosophy that it is important to recognize students' differences and to openly discuss those differences has itself evolved over her short teaching career. Caroline admitted that she was once "color-blind" and failed to appreciate students' differences. As she recalled:

> I definitely feel like I started teaching in [a colorblind] way—that I wasn't going to see color and all the students were kind of the same. I feel like I definitely began my teaching career in that colorblind phase, but I feel like I learned really quickly through the classes I was taking and also just teaching, that—how important it was to actually understand the cultures and that looking at them wasn't necessarily classifying them a certain way, not necessarily being racist—just appreciating and understanding of their cultures and understanding the fact that not all students are the same even within the same race. I think it's just important not to think about them as all being the same and also not to classify them in a certain way, but just to try to appreciate their cultures which I think is something that I'm still working on as a teacher. (Interview 2)

Irvine (2003) noticed in her extensive work with teachers that many of them are "not only color-blind but also 'color-deaf' and 'color-mute', when it comes to issues of race—that is, unable or willing to see, hear, or speak about instances of individual or institutional racism in their personal and professional lives" (p. 78). Although Caroline is just at the beginning of her career as an educator, she has already proven to be neither colorblind,

colordeaf, nor colormute. Caroline not only recognizes her students' differences but she also openly listens and converses about race with both her students and colleagues. Moreover, Caroline extends beyond Irvine's work on race by recognizing the importance of truly understanding students' cultures. In her new school, Caroline explained:

> I'm just trying to understand what they're coming from and the type of cultures that they're coming from I think is important as a teacher. [Carla: So it's not just about being colorblind, it's also that you're not "cultureblind."] Yeah, I think that's actually really important to understand the cultures that go along with each of the races and that a race can have multiple cultures within it. (Interview 2)

Caroline's discussions with students on their differences, however, are not limited to racial and cultural differences. In both our first and second interviews, Caroline brought attention to the importance of drawing correlations between racism and other forms of inequality. Caroline recalled a conversation she had with students during her first teaching job at the middle school:

> I remember when Coretta Scott King died and I was teaching in Duncan County and we watched the funeral on TV. And some of the people at her funeral were talking about how she was not only a pioneer for racial equality but also for sexual equality and all these other types of equalities especially—I think what hit my students was homosexuality and some of them made the comments "Well, why would she focus on that?" and made some very negative comments towards those type of people and so we had a discussion about how saying things like that is just as bad as people commenting about your race or anything like that and that Coretta Scott King really strived to get rid of all forms of inequality, which really struck me as something that is very important to kind of parallel with students that inequality in those types of prejudices are all around us. It's not just necessarily in one form. So that was something that was interesting to me. (Interview 2)

In this situation, Caroline seized a perfect opportunity to discuss non-racial inequalities with Black students based on the work of Coretta Scott King—someone whom the students likely looked up to and with whom they could identify.

Sleeter (1993) stated, "It is important to educate White people as well as people of color about racism" (p. 158). But Caroline pointed out that it is important for all students

to engage in conversations not only about race but about other issues of social justice that are not racially based. In Freire's (1970/2000) fight to help the oppressed liberate themselves by educating them about their own oppression, Freire stated:

> The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor—when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love. (p. 49)

In other words, it is not enough to simply teach the oppressed—whether it be Blacks, Latinos, lesbians and gay men, women, and so on—about their own oppression, but the oppressors as well must be educated about the injustices that are happening in our society and the history leading up to it. Caroline's courage to discuss homosexuality as an injustice with her students and her admittance that she would feel obligated to have these discussions with *all* students, regardless of race, is exactly what Freire called for in the liberation of the oppressed.

During the second interview, Caroline did briefly talk on the topics of White privilege and White dominance—two topics that Howard (2006) discussed extensively. When asked if she felt Whites were afforded certain privileges based on their race, she replied: "I definitely think they are. I don't necessarily feel like all Whites are given certain privileges, but I think definitely middle or upper-class Whites definitely are in terms of how they are perceived and maybe even preferential treatment in school" (Interview 2). Caroline pointed out movies such as *Dangerous Minds*, *The Ron Clark Story*, and *Freedom Writers* that somewhat sensationalize the idea of a White teacher, or as Caroline called it, the *White Savior*, who comes in to "fix" the failing schools.

Caroline feels strongly that there are big discrepancies in equality in our schools—much of which, she states, are based on economic status:

> I feel that segregation still exists in a lot of our schools. They're still polarized in terms of race—that's still a big problem and therefore White kids earn privileges because they tend to be in those areas where they go to better schools and they have more resources and things like that, which kind of just perpetuates that cycle. (Interview 2)

Throughout our conversations, Caroline continued to stress that divisive lines in our country are based on socioeconomic differences. It just so happens that in many communities, the socioeconomic line and the racial line are one in the same.

Carrie's Story

Family Background

Carrie is a 30-year-old mathematics teacher who has taught for 8 years at Belmont High School—a racially diverse school in a metropolitan area of the Southeastern United States. She is the only one of four participants in this study who has not moved outside of the state in which she was born. In fact, Carrie lives and works only miles from where she grew up.

Carrie shared much about her childhood and the family that surrounded her growing up. Neither her mother nor her father is college educated. Her dad worked in warehouses and her mother worked in payroll. She grew up in a very small, single-level home that she shared with her parents and older brother. Many of Carrie's aunts, uncles, and cousins lived near by and she spent considerable time with them when she was young. Carrie described family members on both her mother's and father's side as being somewhat racist. She can remember her maternal grandparents using derogatory language and telling racial jokes. Carrie shared that her dad's family collects little Black dolls

called Nigglets and, as Carrie described it, "You go into my aunt's house and it is covered" (Interview 1). Carrie shared a story about the first time this same aunt visited her new home. "When they came to my new house they were like 'You know you live close to the Black church. You'd better be careful'" (Interview 1). Carrie even pointed out that one of her mother's uncles was the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in a neighboring county for years.

What Carrie talked most about in regards to her family was that, despite the racist language she was exposed to from grandparents, aunts, and uncles, she never heard that language from her own parents. In fact, Carrie gives an enormous amount of credit to her mother and father for not using the same language she heard from other family members:

> It's just strange that all the family around them is so—so, country, southern, racist, and mom and dad never let that influence—they never did. I really owe my open-mindedness to them allowing us to be that way. They never taught us hatred against somebody else—they never did. And, I guess, as we got older they would joke a little more, say some things but we were old enough to say "That's not funny." It wasn't where it influenced us. We were old enough where it didn't influence us anymore. (Interview 1)

Carrie recognizes that her mother and father were influenced by the racism they were exposed to themselves growing up, but she knows they made a conscious effort not to use racist language in front of her and her brother. Carrie best summed up her gratitude to her parents when she said, "I owe everything to who I am to my parents." (Interview 1)

K–12 Schooling Experiences

Carrie grew up in a suburban county that, at the time of her childhood, was not very diverse. In elementary school, there were so few Black students that she knew them all by name. A story that Carrie shared about one of those students, in particular, became a story told over and over again in her family:

> At a PTA meeting, we had to dress up and we did 50's dancing. You had to audition to be a dancer or a singer, and I auditioned to be a dancer and I won and they paired you up by height. Now, in fifth grade, I was 5'7". I mean, I was a huge fifth grader and so the only person they could pair me up with was this 16 year old sixth grader, Tyrone. Now, never did I tell Mom and Dad that I'm dancing with a Black guy—I'm dancing with Tyrone. They just see me that night coming out in a Poodle Skirt with this almost 6 foot tall Black guy—like, they always talk about how that—how funny that was. (Interview 1)

Carrie explained that even though this story has become one retold time and time again in her family, it is not a story that was told until years after the dance. Carrie stated that she noticed nothing out of the ordinary about dancing with Tyrone and her parents, at that time, never pointed it out.

Carried shared another story about an event in elementary school related to race:

> I remember the first time I saw an interracial couple on Maury Povich or one of those shows. I think that was third grade and I remember seeing that on TV and I remember it was a spend-the-night party and there were three of us and I remember going "Oh" and one of them going "What? There's nothing wrong with that." And from then on, I thought there was nothing wrong with that. Like, that was enough to just change my opinion. I guess just hearing someone else say it was okay. (Interview 1)

Carrie admitted that she automatically assumed interracial relationships were wrong because of the derogatory comments about Blacks she had heard from her family. She simply needed to hear someone else approve of it in order for her to challenge her own assumptions.

Carrie noted during our conversations that all of her schooling experiences have been fairly homogenous. In high school, Carrie's graduating class of approximately 400 students included only 17 Black students. As Carrie mentioned, "They were probably not the most popular kids, but you knew them all" (Interview 1). And though she could not recall any racial events that took place in high school, she did note that anytime a Black

boy dated a White girl, it caused controversy. According to Carrie, “Everybody in the school knew it, but it still happened” (Interview 1).

College and Pre-Teaching Experiences

The 4 years in which Carrie worked on her undergraduate degree in mathematics education was full of experiences that she feels contributed to her success in teaching. Carrie’s college career led her through three different colleges and universities, but during her time at each of these institutions she carried away a different tool that she has used in her teaching career. Carrie moved directly out of high school and into a 2-year liberal arts school. There she had a professor of mathematics who, Carrie claimed, inspired her to be a mathematics teacher:

> He is the biggest motivator I’ve ever had in my life. His version of teaching is what I’ve tried to take on. It’s not necessarily the material, it’s the thinking about it and the critical thinking—the thought process. And he got me involved in math lab and gave me the math lab technician award that year. I mean, I just love the man. (Interview 1)

This professor had such a profound effect on Carrie that she still visits him on occasion. Carrie always knew she wanted to teach, but it is this professor that made her want to teach mathematics.

Another experience that Carrie feels has helped her in teaching also occurred during her 2 years at the liberal arts college. Carrie participated in a mission trip to Mexico that she described as “The best week of my life ever, by far—still today” (Interview 1). Carrie went on to say:

> I’ve always been good with kids and I think more my job instead of building a house I hung out with the kids, that was my job. And it was just so neat to be able to reach kids from a totally different background and not even be able to communicate, but just to be able to reach kids from that background and it was just different. (Interview 1)

Carrie drew attention to the amount of fun she had with the children despite the language barrier and described the overall mission trip as “a real humbling experience” (Interview 1).

After completing her studies at the liberal arts college, Carrie transferred to a larger 4-year institution. Despite describing her time at this university as “the worst couple of years of my life” (Interview 1), Carrie did acknowledge two experiences that helped in her teaching career. In addition to briefly discussing her experience as a Young Life leader (a non-denominational Christian ministry), which she claimed taught her how to interact more with teenagers, she talked extensively about her job as a clinician at a private learning center. Carrie worked at the center over the course of three summers. Her job was to assist students with learning disabilities in their reading and comprehension skills. Carrie gives credit to the learning center for helping her learn to question—a skill that is particularly important with the curriculum Carrie currently teaches. Likewise, Carrie attributes her experience at the learning center, working individually with children, in helping her build relationships with her own students.

Although each of these experiences contributed in some way to Carrie’s success in teaching, she admitted that other than the mission trip to Mexico, her college experiences provided little exposure to cultures different from her own. When Carrie transferred out of the large institution and into a smaller regional university where she completed her degree, she was required to take a multicultural course, but even that did not provide any multicultural experience. When asked how much she learned about teaching Black students from her undergraduate coursework, Carrie replied, “I would say

it all came from student teaching. I can't think of any experiences in my undergrad that helped at all" (Interview 1).

Carrie spoke at length about her student teaching experience and it is clear from our conversations that Carrie first learned about teaching Black students from that experience, not from her college coursework. Carrie was placed by her university to student teach at Belmont High School, the school where she is currently employed. Belmont is 60% Black and, with a growing Hispanic population, the White population has decreased in the last few years. Several times throughout the interviews, Carrie admitted that prior to her student teaching, she did not feel Belmont was the right school for her. Because of Carrie's mostly-White upbringing, she did not feel comfortable with the idea of teaching in a school with Belmont's population and she doubted her ability to be successful there. Carrie explained, "When I first went into student teaching, I didn't think I wanted to be in a school with a predominantly African American population. I thought it would be too much of a challenge for me with my background" (Interview 1).

In fact, until Carrie was placed in Belmont for student teaching, she had never even considered teaching in any environment other than the White schools in which she grew up:

> Now, I always knew I was going to be a good teacher, but I did not think I would be a good teacher for African American students until the end of my student teaching experience. Then I was like "maybe I could do this," but I always thought that was not—I think at that point, I was in it more for the math part. And I knew I didn't know how to relate to African American students, so why would I be successful at it? (Interview 1)

Carrie believes that if she had not been placed at Belmont for student teaching, she would have taken a job in a predominantly White school and would still be there today. Without the exposure of a diverse environment, she never would have considered trying it. Carrie

also feels certain that she would not enjoy teaching as much in a predominantly White school, in part, because she feels like she makes more of a difference at Belmont. “I think during my student teaching experience, I realized that I do make a difference and I don’t think I’d make a difference there, I really don’t” (Interview 1). Although Carrie would still enjoy teaching mathematics in an all-White school, for her, the students at Belmont make it a more rewarding experience. The students in an all-White environment, according to Carrie, “have parents at home that can help them or parents that will hire them tutors that can help them. Where at Belmont, it’s me that’s helping them and I think that’s more rewarding for me” (Interview 1).

Carrie gives credit to two veteran teachers at Belmont for making her student teaching and beginning years of teaching successful and for encouraging her to stay and teach there—her cooperating teacher during student teaching and her mentor during Carrie’s first 2 years at Belmont. Both of these teachers, as Carrie described them, were positive and supportive and made her feel like she made a difference. Carrie shared a conversation she had with her cooperating teacher towards the end of her student teaching experience. Carrie was discussing schools with her cooperating teacher in which she was interested in pursuing a job—all of them predominantly White environments. Carrie cited her cooperating teacher’s response as, “‘I’ve always told student teachers to go to other schools to get other experiences, but, she said ‘You belong here. This is your type of population’” (Interview 1). Though Carrie does not recall ever having a discussion on race with her cooperating teacher, it is apparent that this teacher was cognizant of the students’ races and, perhaps, realized that Carrie had qualities that could make her successful with non-White children. Carrie summarized her relationships with

these two teachers by adding: “Their largest influence on me was that all decisions they made were made with students’ interests first. I can honestly say that I can not think of any decision that either of them made that wasn’t in the students’ best interest” (Interview 3).

Teaching Experiences

Carrie has embraced the many qualities she admires most about these two teachers over her 8-year teaching career and like her cooperating teacher and mentor, she strives to make each decision with her students’ best interest in mind. She is energetic in the classroom giving them an occasional high-five of “Woo hoo” to celebrate their accomplishments, but she also follows them outside the classroom to support them in academic and extra-curricular activities. Carrie recollected:

> I think what I was most proud of probably the past couple of years, I feel like I’m there a lot. I feel like if they invite me somewhere, I’m there. I’ve gone to Boys’ Club speeches, I’ve gone to dance recitals, I’ve gone to violin recitals, basketball games, football games, and I know they always say that in your undergrad how if you’re there it makes a difference, but I really do feel that if you’re there it makes a difference. I feel like if they see me there, then they know I care. I feel like just stopping them in the hall and saying “How are you doing in such-and-such class?” or when you walk around and they’re working on math, ask them what they did on the weekend. It’s just forming those relationships and showing that you care—that you’re more than just their teacher. (Interview 1)

The effort she makes to support students outside the classroom is, in Carrie’s opinion, vital to her success with students in the classroom. In fact, Carrie spent more time talking to me about the importance of relationship building with her students than any other topic over the course of our interviews.

Carrie currently teaches AP Calculus (AB and BC) and the on-level freshman mathematics course, but for a couple of years, Carrie taught only upper-level classes. She

explained to me how she felt this time away from teaching on-grade level freshmen helped her later to build relationships with younger students:

> Maybe I've been able to work with the upper-level kids—I haven't had to work so much on explaining with the upper-level kids, so I've been able to understand more of what it's like to form a relationship with kids. And then I can take that experience down to the lower-level and still form the relationship. I think when you step out of it for a second, you realize that teaching Algebra I or teaching Math I isn't just teaching how to write the equation of a line or a quadratic but it is forming those relationships. (Interview 1)

Because Carrie teaches both levels of calculus, she has many of those students 2 years in a row and has strong relationships with many calculus students. From them, Carrie has learned how to build relationships with students. And when she reflected back on her experience teaching freshmen, she began to realize the importance in building relationships with those students as well. Carrie emphasized this importance, stating:

> But teaching freshmen, especially freshmen at a place like Belmont, I feel like it's my personal responsibility to be their go-to person. And I go in there knowing that they need one teacher at that school, and they probably have more, I'm not saying that I'm the only one at the school, but they need somebody in that school to believe in them, to push them, to help them, and to care about them. And this is the first year that I can honestly say that I think all of my freshman, whether they made a 10 or a 90, they really feel that about me. (Interview 1)

Unfortunately, Carrie admitted never having had that type of relationship with any teacher in her K–12 schooling. In fact, she believes those relationships simply did not exist between teacher and student at the time. Even her parents and brother are surprised at the relationships Carrie maintains with her students because they, too, never had that experience. So how did Carrie come to value these relationships and learn how to form them? She attributes this valuing of relationships to several of her pre-teaching experiences. At the 2-year liberal arts school she first attended, she had strong relationships with professors who showed interest in their students. Her calculus

professor held a cookout at his home for students at the end of the semester—a tradition that Carrie has continued with her own calculus students. Carrie also had a close relationship with two professors that guided her through her student teaching experience. And finally, Carrie shared, "Young Life taught me that if you want to get through to teenagers, you need to build a personal relationship" (Interview 1).

Carrie feels that her lack of any close relationship with teachers in K–12 may be due, in part, to a homogenous, all-White upbringing—not necessarily having to do with the time period in which she grew up. Carrie offered a possible explanation:

> And maybe you're not forced to form those relationships, and I don't know because I've never taught in an all-White school, but maybe you're not forced to have those relationships. Maybe you're not in a position where that makes or breaks the deal with the kids. Maybe you just teach to teach and that's as far as you go—you don't put all of yourself into it, as opposed to Belmont. I feel like I put all myself into my African American students and, in turn, do it for my White students also. I feel like I have the same relationships with all the kids that I may not have formed those relationships at another school. [Carla: Do you feel like you have to—it's part of breaking that barrier?] I do. I feel like it's part of the job. I feel like at Belmont if you're not ready, or a school like Belmont, if you're not ready to make those relationships, that's not where you should be. I think you have to go above and beyond. You have to commit yourself to staying after, to being there for them to show them that you're there for them more so than in another school. Because I don't remember anyone giving a crap about me in high school and I had favorite teachers, but when I see the relationship my favorite teachers had with me opposed to what I have with my students, it's like, why did I even like them? I mean, did they even remember my name? (Interview 1)

Even though Carrie feels that building relationships with students "makes or breaks the deal" for them, she voiced concern that most other teachers she knows do not make that effort with students. When fellow mathematics teachers have observed Carrie teaching, they are often surprised at her interactions with the students. While Carrie stays 4, sometimes 5 days a week for after-school tutoring, many of her colleagues stay only 1 day, or not at all. As Carrie excitedly told me about how great the girls' basketball team at

her school was last season, she was saddened to share that at some games, she was the only non-parent there:

> I was there to support them and just coming up to one [student] made such a huge difference. They were so excited to see teachers! And you know, you don't have to "woo hoo" or high-5, but you can show up to things every once in a while or you could call a parent every once in a while, even say so-and-so did good today. (Interview 1)

Carrie feels that this lack of support is due to a "me-versus-you" attitude amongst teachers rather than, as Carrie puts it, "We're working through this together" (Interview 1). Likewise, Carrie claimed that often teachers simply do not treat students like people.

Carrie said that it is important for teachers to realize that kids are not going to "get better"; in fact, it is likely that they will continue to study less and less. Some teachers, Carrie thinks, will make this connection and work to adjust their own instruction accordingly while others will simply settle for less. Carrie commented: "I think everyone else is just satisfied with mediocrity—I think that has a lot to do with it. They don't see it as their problem. They see it as just the kids' problem" (Interview 1). Carrie mentioned fellow teachers who also value strong teacher–student relationships, so she certainly does not mean *everyone* else but she does feel like she is in the minority. As Carrie expressed frustration over teachers who prefer to teach upper-level classes because the pass rates are higher, she shared her view on student success in mathematics and what she strives for her own students to achieve:

> And successfully math—they're not all going to be engineers, math teachers. And I know most calculus teachers will tell you that's what they want, but as a math teacher, as a freshmen math teacher, as a math teacher of African American students, I just want them to feel success. I want them to feel like someone has faith in them, feel that they can start thinking on their own and feel like their trying their hardest. I just want them to work to their potential and know that I'm there for them all the time, and I don't think a lot of teachers see it that way. (Interview 1)

Unlike the other three participants in this study, Carrie does not discuss race with her students. Although Carrie admitted that she's not sure she would feel comfortable in those discussions, she also feels the topic does not arise because the majority of teachers at Belmont are White. Regardless of the reason, Carrie does value the Black culture and feels it is important for teachers to be open-minded and adjust when necessary. Carrie shared a story about a Black student, Demarco, whom she grew very close to over his 4 years at Belmont. She recalled a particular incident and shared how she chose to handle the situation:

> I remember with Demarco, I remember one time he dropped the F-bomb like eight times in one sentence and I just gave him the look and he said "Well, I'm allowed to say it at home, why can't I here?" And so I sat down with him and we talked about "Well you know, sometimes things are appropriate here or there," but I think that was more meaningful for both him and me, as opposed to "Get out! Go see so and so! Get out of here!" And I think the open-mindedness helps you to adjust to things. (Interview 1)

Carrie recognized that her non-aggressive approach to Demarco's behavior benefitted both her and Demarco, and allowed them to form a relationship that otherwise might not have been possible.

Even though students at Belmont are accustomed to White teachers, Carrie pointed out that race does create a barrier between her and her students at first. Carrie believes that her Black students assume she is "out to get them," and she has to make a conscious effort to break down those barriers and show students that she can be trusted. Carrie takes pride in the relationships she forms with each of her students while maintaining high expectations for them, but in her eyes, she can never fully provide for her students what a Black teacher could: "I think being a Black math teacher, you could be their teacher, you could have a relationship, but you could be even more of a mentor.

You're an example of success that I could never be" (Interview 1). In other words, to Carrie it is important that her students have successful Black role models in their lives. She believes that no matter how closely she bonds with them, she can never fully be the role model that a fellow Black teacher can be.

Irvine (2003), on the other hand, argued that teachers of color bring much more to the classrooms of African American and Latino students than simply being good role models. And while she cited research that show teachers of color[17] act as cultural translators, have higher expectations for their students, and implement culturally-based teaching styles that are focused on student achievement, all in all, Irvine stated, "They [teachers of color] teach through a lens of cultural experiences that is different from the lens of mainstream teachers" (Irvine, 2003, p. 58). Without such cultural experiences, Carrie feels African American teachers will always have a deeper cultural connection to African American students.

Reflections on Howard's Book

When Carrie and I sat down to discuss Howard's book, *You Can't Teach What you Don't know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools* (2006), she chose to begin at chapter 3 and continue page by page reading notes she had made in the margins and discussing lines from the text she had underlined. Part of our conversation stuck very closely to the book—Carrie would comment, for instance on a statement made by Howard and then talk about it in very general terms. A larger part of the conversation, however, was centered on personal stories Carrie shared that were triggered by something she had read in the book. Although most of our discussion would fall under the topic of

[17] Like Roman (1993), I trouble the term "people of color" because it implies that White culture is the "norm." I use the phrase here only because Irvine (2003) used it to refer to non-White people in her book.

White dominance, Carrie also spoke in depth about color-blindness, the economic divide in her high school, and White racial identity development. Additionally, Carrie offered insight into an element of teaching that she feels is a vital part of the profession: reflection.

Carrie talked extensively about White dominance both directly and indirectly. Our conversation was broad, covering topics from the achievement gap, to Chris Rock's (Stilson, 2009) recently released documentary on Black hair, to more personal topics like religion, and her own students. All of these topics, in one way or another, fit under the umbrella of White dominance and led to Carrie's realization of how prevalent White "norms" are in our society. One of the first things Carrie spoke of was religion. She began by citing a comment written in the margin of her book, which stated: "I think a lot of racism is in the name of Christianity, but I don't see Christianity as the cause" (Interview 2), but soon began talking about the often inaccurate portrayal of Jesus in artwork. Carrie recalled as a child seeing images of Jesus as a White man with long, flowing blonde hair and later in life realizing that he was middle-eastern and could not have possibly been White. Carrie pointed out, "It's one thing to picture God to be the same race as you but Jesus was a person and for us to automatically assume that he was a White, English-speaking male is just so ignorant on our parts" (Interview 2). Carrie feels this common image of Jesus is an example of ignorance that illustrates White dominance in our society.

Carrie also refers to Howard's (2006) mention of studies done on racial identification and self-perception in children as another example of White domination. Carrie was saddened that in these studies, Black children often chose White dolls over

Black dolls. Carrie even stated, "You see Black children that would choose White dolls, but you'd never see a White kid that had a Black doll walking around" (Interview 2). These studies reminded Carrie of Chris Rock's documentary, *Good Hair* (Stilson, 2009) in which Rock exposes the lengths Black woman go to in order to straighten their hair. Just as a White baby doll is often seen as more attractive to a Black child in our society, a White woman's hair is also often times seen as more attractive. Carrie believes this desire to "be White" is, in part, due to White dominance.

Several times throughout our three interviews, Carrie referred to a former student who, as Carrie said, "had to play dual roles" at Belmont (Interview 2). Jasmine was a light-skinned Black girl who Carrie taught for 3 years, but unlike most Black students at Belmont, Jasmine was in a prestigious honors program which meant most of her classes were predominantly White. According to Carrie: "Jasmine was kind of lost here. You know, she had to bridge two worlds and it was rough on her. She had to bridge the [honors] world with her other friends that weren't necessarily [honors]—her Black friends" (Interview 2).

Carrie was troubled by a conversation she had with another student about Jasmine. Paul, a White honors student, and Jasmine were close friends throughout high school, but when they both began applying to colleges, Paul had trouble understanding why Jasmine would consider applying to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Carrie recalled the conversation between her and Paul:

> And I forget what he said, he was talking to me personally, Jasmine wasn't there. We were talking about where everyone was applying and he goes, "Yeah, Jasmine applied to Howard, she shouldn't apply there. She's too diverse for that." I remember him saying that and—I don't know, it just gave no—he didn't give any notice to her cultural reason for maybe wanting to go to a Black college. (Interview 1)

Carrie felt that Paul, like most of Jasmine's teachers, viewed Jasmine as White because she was a nicely dressed, well-mannered, honors student. Jasmine, however, identified as Black, and Carrie believed that, perhaps, Jasmine was drawn to an HBCU because she had spent 4 years at Belmont fighting the White–Black divide that had separated the culture in which she self-identified, with the dominant culture in which she was surrounded.

As a mathematics teacher of both honors students and regular college-prep, on-level freshmen, Carrie is fully aware of the White–Black divide at her school. In regards to Jasmine, Carrie felt that "her race wasn't seen" and because of that, Jasmine "wasn't able to be a complete person" (Interview 2). Carrie recognizes and values the differences between her honors and college-prep students but she realizes that many of her colleagues are there to only teach the honors students. Just as Carrie feels strongly that Belmont teachers are not at the right school if they are unwilling to form relationships with students, she also feels they should go elsewhere if they are not there to teach the non-White students. Carrie understands the danger of a color-blind ideology and emphasized, "If you don't see color then you're assuming people are just like you" (Interview 2).

Although students at Belmont are clearly separated by race—mostly White students in the honors classes and everyone else in the college-prep classes—Carrie stressed that this separation is not simply a racial divide. She explained:

> And that's really how our [honors] program is—it is socioeconomic. You don't see any poor White kids or poor Black kids in [honors classes]—you just don't. So here I think that's one of the bigger lines that's drawn in the sand than color. I mean, that's a big one too, but here I think it's more of an upper middle-class–poor-kid line. (Interview 2)

Carrie shared another story about a conversation she had with a former student that substantiates her theory of the socioeconomic divide in her school. Jason was a Black honors student who, despite being visually impaired, graduated with honors from Belmont:

> Well, Jason was the only Black male that graduated with honors last year and he pointed that out to me. I remember it was after the AP exam and I had to sit with him and we were walking up and he goes "You know what, at graduation practice, you know what I noticed? I'm the only Black guy that's going to be sitting in the front couple of rows." I said "Well, what do you think about that?" and he goes "It's sad. I just don't understand." I mean, here's a color-blind [visually impaired] kid who's got everything against him—I mean, he can't see a book, can't see a board, but he's graduating with high honors. (Interview 2)

Carrie does realize that the deck is not completely stacked against Jason. Despite his physical disability, Jason has educated parents and a father, in particular, who advocated throughout Jason's K–12 education to make sure teachers were adhering to his Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and to assure that Jason had access to any technology that would support his learning. Carrie concluded:

> But to me, the biggest issue is the socioeconomic issue. If you have educated parents that know what they're doing, they're going to put you on the right track and you're going to move on. But if you have parents that move around every 6 weeks and chase the different free rental places, you're going to just be put in a class because you're going to get out of there soon and the White–Black line just kind of falls with that. (Interview 2)

Like Caroline, Carrie recognizes that people in general are more often divided socioeconomically. But in our country, socioeconomic and racial lines are often the same.

After much discussion about White dominance and its imprint in our society that Carrie pointed out again and again, I asked her a question I had taken from the back of Howard's (2006) book—one that I asked each of my participants: "Do you agree with Gary Howard's assertion that the achievement gap in education today is, in many ways,

the result of our history of White social dominance?" In a particularly reflective manner, Carrie replied:

> Yes, I do. I don't know how to fix it. I wonder if part of the White dominance keeps us from fixing the problem too. Not only did it start it, but is it kind of masking our eyes on a way to fix it. You know what I mean? Educators mainly are a bunch of White people, so our racial dominance started it but is it blinding us from a solution? Can we not think of a solution because we think they should be educating themselves like we do? And where does that end ever come? Where does that solution ever come from? (Interview 2)

Carrie continued on expressing concern that a solution to White dominance will not be achieved until we recognize that there is a problem and understand the roots from which it originated. Carried stated, "How do you ever break it and how does society ever break it when some people won't even admit that it exists or matters" (Interview 2)? Carrie fears that we are in a "never ending cycle"—that we will continue to be ignorant of a solution because we do not fully understand the problem. Likewise, Carrie believes that the White dominance that we currently maintain leaves us unable to arrive at solutions. Carrie explained: "We can't step out and say 'Ya'll, this is stupid. This is what you need to do' because we're in it and we're kind of blinded to the causes and the solutions. No one is at the point where they can step out and say 'This is what you need to do'" (Interview 2).

What Carrie uncovers here is a fundamental question of how to break down White dominance. In other words, "What are the chances that we will be able to dismantle the master's house while standing in it" (MacMullan, 2005, p. 276)? Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) also addressed the contradiction, or as they wrote "impossibility," of keeping justice for the oppressed while maintaining White hegemony. It is Freire (1970/2000) who once explained that the oppressed must be the leaders in the fight for justice because

"the oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead the struggle" (p. 47).

According to Howard (2006), the stage of White racial identity development in which one actively fights White dominance is autonomy—a stage that Carrie feels is a "big step" from her current immersion-emersion stage. When Carrie and I discussed the autonomy stage, she shared:

> Like, I know I'm not to that level because I don't say anything to my aunt and uncle—I don't. I just let them talk. I don't want to go there because I don't know where it's going to lead, and that's me being a wuss. I know it's me being a wuss. But Mom and Dad, I'll say things to. (Interview 2)

Carrie expressed a desire to do a better job speaking out against racism but, like all the other participants in this study, she, too, finds it especially difficult to refute racial comments, which she knows will cause discord. Carrie also shared that she was in the contact stage during her years in high school. She even brought attention to one of the few Black boys in her graduating class that was viewed as an exception to his race—an indicator from Howard that one is in the contact stage.

Howard's (2006) mention of culture, in particular, the idea that we Whites see ourselves as "cultureless," sparked interest in Carrie as she recalled a project assigned to her during her undergraduate work. The assignment was simply to report on "your culture" but as Carrie revealed in the story below, reporting on one's culture is not always as easy as it sounds:

> So I asked if could do my Southern culture and I could talk about the instruments my grandfather made, and he said "No, that's not a culture." He [the professor] would not let us talk about Southern culture. And to me, that's my culture. That's where I come from. I come from my grandpaw that built a mandolin and played in a band in the back, but he would not let us talk about that. We had to trace our ancestry back … to where we came from. I did it on Southern anyway, and I made an A. Because there were people presenting on where they think their family

> came from, England 5 or 6 generations ago, but that has nothing to do with who I am now. But he did not want us to talk about—he told us he would take off if we talked about Southern. I brought in a tape of my grandpa playing in a bluegrass band and the instruments he made. I was kind of offended by that. If you want us to trace back to our country, that has nothing to do with who I am—I don't know where my family's from, I really don't. So I'm not going to talk about that because that has nothing to do with me. (Interview 2)

Carrie described this assignment as a difficult one for the students in her class—all of whom were White. Howard (2006) attributed this uncomfortableness of reporting on one's own culture as what he called "the assumption of rightness" (p. 54). He explained, "As Whites, we usually don't ever think of ourselves as having culture; we're simply 'right.' Dominant groups don't hold 'perspectives,' they hold 'Truth.' This assumption has been a powerful force in the establishment of White dominance" (p. 54). This assignment had potential to open up important discussions on the very topic of White dominance and its affects on other cultures—particularly as it relates to K–12 students—however, it seems that Carrie's professor missed an opportunity to truly teach multiculturalism by forcing students to research a culture that to many of them was meaningless.

Much like most other pre-service teachers, Carrie was required to take a single course in multiculturalism. But in Carrie's case, the course not only failed to address White dominance, but also it did not expose her to other cultures. In fact, Carrie admitted that there was no coursework during her undergraduate degree that helped prepare her to teach Black children. Irvine (2003), building on the research from several scholars, advocated for comprehensive multicultural education programs, which include cultural-immersion experiences for pre-service teachers, and claimed, "superficial and cursory discussions of culture in teacher education classes impede pre- and inservice teachers'

ability to teach effectively in diverse classrooms" (p. 20). For White teachers like Carrie, who grew up in homogenous White environments but who found their way into schools with diverse populations of students, a superficial multicultural course was a missed opportunity.

Another frustrating moment for Carrie during her undergraduate studies led to a riveting discussion on the importance of personal reflection. Carrie told a story of a classmate in one of her education classes that stated he was unable to teach homosexual students. After explaining how she "went off" on him about how she feels her job as a teacher is to teach everyone without judging them, she began to reflect on that discussion. Carrie stated, "The fact that he said it means he at least thought about it. I'm sure there are teachers that feel the same way but have never thought about it" (Interview 2). Carrie offers this valuable advice:

> I think everybody needs to be challenged in your thoughts. Some people think—you know, whatever you think about your students if you're not voicing it, if you're not being reflective, you're not challenging those thoughts—you're just taking those the way they are and you're not growing. Just like if you don't do any professional development you're not changing how you teach. If you're not doing any reflection on how you feel towards students—and I feel like I've evolved completely since my first days teaching here, I really have, but it takes that reflection of "how do I handle this situation" and discussions and it takes other teachers to discuss that with, if that makes sense. (Interview 2)

Carries hopes that the conversation about teaching homosexual students moved her classmate at least a small step in the direction of tolerance and open-mindedness. She strongly believes that teachers need not only to reflect themselves but also to share their thoughts with others. Without those discussions, teachers like Carrie's classmate may never be challenged to think otherwise. As Howard (2006) stated, "Our individual acts of

speaking out may not always have national and global repercussions, but they can be a powerful reeducative influence in the lives of the people we encounter each day" (p. 84).

Patt's Story

Family Background

Patt is a 57-year-old mathematics teacher in the Southeastern region of the United States. She currently teaches in the same high school where she first began teaching 23 years ago. Patt is a proud Catholic, and although her family lineage has ties to many different cultures, she admitted identifying with her Irish roots "because I thought they were more interesting than the others" (Interview 2). Patt loves being politically incorrect "as long as it's not going to hurt anybody" and described herself as "an old hippy type but I'm now a card carrying Republican and certainly not a liberal" (Interview 1).

Patt was born and raised in a Southeastern state in the Appalachian Mountains. The daughter of a housewife and a father who ran a trucking line, Patt lived most of her childhood as an only child until she was 14 and her sister was born. Patt talked a great deal about her father who, despite his legitimate trucking business, was "a player in the community" (Interview 2). He was involved in illegal gambling, among other things, and according to Patt, "taught me to shoot a gun when I was really small, too, and not just like for hunting. I never did want to go hunting animals with him" (Interview 2). Patt described her father as having a lot of power in the community: "My parents were country but they were known. A lot of boys wouldn't date me because they were afraid of my daddy because he would kill them" (Interview 2).

Although Patt recalled a very happy childhood, she did refer to her family as "totally dysfunctional" due to her father's often indiscreet affairs with women: "The

women stayed home and read the bible and the men played. And it was not liked and not really accepted, but it was just the way of life in the mountains" (Interview 2). While Patt did admit that her mother had a difficult time with her father's infidelity, she recognized a slight sense of humor about it when she recalled, "I can remember when I was a teenager and dating, she [her mother] said 'You can date who you want, but when you get ready to get married, you better pick somebody that's not from around here because you might be kin'" (Interview 2).

Born in 1952, Patt grew up during the Civil Rights era. She remembered seeing evidence of the Civil Rights Movement on television but noted that it did not touch her small mountain city: "I think civil rights was an issue where the minority was large enough that people were afraid—I don't mean physically afraid, but afraid of their territory being encroached upon" (Interview 1). And even though the Black population in the city was small, Patt explained that there was prejudice towards Blacks. Patt shared that her paternal grandmother was very prejudiced. "She used the N-word just naturally—not with any animosity though, it was just what people her age called Black people and it wasn't meant in any sort of derogatory term" (Interview 1). Patt also acknowledged hearing derogatory remarks against Blacks from a great uncle who was a member of the KKK.

K–12 Schooling Experiences

Patt's family always had high expectations for her. Her success was especially important to her mother whose family suffered tremendously during the Great Depression. Patt recalled some pertinent advice that her mother gave her at a very young age:

> I can remember when I was little my mother telling me when I first started to school "Now you listen to your teacher and learn to talk like she does because we don't talk right." And her grammar wasn't bad, but just the old mountain things that I was always ashamed of like instead of "you" they would say "Can I get ye some water?" or "Are yoins goin'?" (Interview 2)

Patt's mother made it clear that it was important for her to speak correctly and excel in school. Patt admitted that she spent years trying to "correct" her accent and "trying to get away from being a hillbilly" (Interview 2).

Patt received a public education until she was in tenth grade and transferred to a Catholic girl school—tuition, which she noted, was paid for by her father's gambling. Patt's public high school was integrated during her ninth-grade year and, until then, Patt could not recall ever speaking to or even noticing a Black person. During that year, she remembered being fascinated with the few Black students in her school: "But, there were no issues, as a matter of fact, they were sort of like celebrities…heaven forbid we never would have dared to think about dating—this was in 1966" (Interview 1). Patt pointed out that a Black girl was homecoming queen that year and her escort was the star football player who was also Black. But again, Patt reiterated that the Black population was so small that they were not viewed as a threatening minority. As a result, she felt distanced from the more violent Civil Rights Movement viewed on television.

The following year, Patt transferred to a Catholic girl school which she explained:

> I was a horrible ninth grader. It was before I decided to change schools and go to Catholic school, and that was really my decision. I joke that daddy put me in the convent after I dated all the boys in the senior class my freshman year, but I actually felt that I had such a bad reputation with the teachers that I needed to start over because, you know, in elementary school and everything I had always been teacher's pet and made all A's and all that, and middle school started going downhill a little bit, and then ninth grade I was just totally wild. (Interview 2)

Patt shared a story about a ninth-grade teacher at her public high school that brought attention to her father's power: "I just kept talking and talking and wouldn't shut up. And I mean, he—I'm sure he wasn't serious, but he threatened to paddle me—that was back when they still paddled kids. I went home and told my daddy. That man didn't have a job the next day" (Interview 2).

Once in Catholic school, Patt had little-to-no exposure to any Black people. The nuns encouraged the students to do sit-ins for peace in Vietnam, but they did not have discussions about race. Patt, however, explained that "it was understood that we were supposed to help everybody" (Interview 1).

College and Pre-Teaching Experiences

Patt got married after graduating from high school. Her husband, Charlie, was in the Marine Corps, and he and Patt made several moves with the military before having children. While stationed out West, Charlie and Patt befriended a Black couple, Dave and Mary, and went out with them a couple of times to the club on base. Patt recalled, "I remember being so excited to dance with Dave because I knew my father would die" (Interview 1). Later, Pat explained: "I just thought it was so cool—I mean, I didn't take it as something natural. I thought it was so cool to have Black friends, you know, modern" (Interview 1). Throughout the remainder of Patt's military experience, she does not recollect having much interaction with Black people. Charlie got orders overseas during Vietnam while Patt was pregnant; when he returned, he left the military and took a civilian job. In the late 1970s, Charlie was transferred from their small hometown city to the large, Southeastern city where they currently reside.

At first, Charlie and Patt moved into a totally White suburban neighborhood—"'I have a dream,' 1960s ranchers," as Patt recalled (Interview 1). Patt had been active in the pro-life movement in her home town and now that she had an extra bedroom, she and Charlie signed up to take in a pregnant teenager through Catholic social services. The organization paired them with a Black girl, which caused some discord in their homogenous neighborhood. According to Patt:

> We found out our neighbors weren't too nice. As a matter of fact, our oldest son, who at the time must have been 8 or 9, was given such a hard time on the school bus that he told the kids she was our maid. We didn't exactly have a cross burned in the yard, but we just decided that wasn't where we wanted to raise our kids. (Interview 1)

Patt revealed that this incident was certainly not the only reason they decided to move out of the neighborhood. She wanted to live in a more urban environment; she wanted to go back to school and needed to be closer to the city in order to do so. But the prejudice to which Patt's children were exposed confirmed for her that she did not want to raise her children in those surroundings.

During our conversations, Patt realized that there was possibly one more factor that contributed to her desire to move out of the all-White suburb. While Patt and Charlie were still living in the mountains, Patt had read a Catholic publication titled, *Raising Children for Peace and Justice in the World*. Patt mentioned this book several times throughout our conversations and described it as a book that encouraged readers to do good things for the environment, to give a homeless person food, and to teach children to be kind. She offered several examples of how she had applied these principals in her own life when raising her children—most examples were of carrying extra food to the city to share with the homeless. Patt recognized that the book did influence her as a parent when

she explained, “I didn’t think it had a profound effect on me, but its had a lastly effect with the way I’ve raised my children” (Interview 2). Toward the end of the second interview, Patt began to consider that perhaps there was a connection between reading this book and her desire to move away from the all-White suburban neighborhood. While discussing this newly discovered connection Patt explained, “The fact that I had read that book made me think that I really wanted the boys to have a different experience” (Interview 2).

Although Patt enrolled in college while Charlie was still in the military, they ended up starting a family and put her college education on hold. Years later, when they moved out of the suburbs and closer to the city where they currently live, Patt returned to school: “I got a degree in math—never planned to teach. I’ll brag—I don’t care. I graduated summa cum laude with a 4.0 and never planned to teach. I was going to graduate school and I was going to work for IBM or SAS, you know, be a mathematician” (Interview 1). After funding fell through for a masters/PhD program in which Patt had been accepted, she opted for a master’s degree in theoretical mathematics from a state university. While working on her master’s degree, Patt learned that a local school district had a shortage of mathematics and science teachers and were looking for people with degrees in those fields to teach high school. Because she and Charlie had relied on one income for years and could use some extra money, Patt applied for a job as a mathematics teacher. In her words, “And I thought ‘I’ll do that for a year. How hard could it be’” (Interview 1)?

Teaching Experiences

What Patt thought would be one year, turned into a 23-year career. She calls herself the "accidental teacher" (Interview 1) because, as she puts it, she was "going to go in and make some money and have a fun time while I'm here" (Interview 2). Patt's goal was never to teach high school. But, the job she took to make some extra money 23-years ago is still the same one she has today, at the same school, populated almost entirely with Black students.

As a teacher, Patt described herself as "laid-back" and "easy-going" (Interview 1). She doesn't believe in strict policies regarding cell phones and restroom use, but admitted that she is picky about some classroom procedures due to what Patt described as her obsessive-compulsive nature. "I love what I do. I can't wait to get to work every morning! I really can't! Now I don't like getting dressed and I don't like doing makeup but I love my students. I miss them in the summer, especially now that my kids are grown" (Interview 1). Patt repeatedly mentioned throughout the interviews how much she loves her job and stressed how vital that is to her success in teaching.

Patt has adopted a classroom motto that she shares with her students on the first day of school. This motto emphasizes the importance Patt places on respect for and between everyone in her classroom. Patt explained:

> I have a classroom motto; it's so corny—*unconditional positive regard*. "In this room, there will always be unconditional positive regard. That's what we will have for each other. You will have it for each other, you will have it for me and I will have it for you. This does not mean that I will not give you an F, but I will still think highly of you as a person. I may think you have wonderful eyes and a sweet laugh but you still get your F. But, I don't hold that against you, that's just a grade. But emotionally, we will have unconditional positive regard for each other in this classroom." (Interview 1)

Patt's use of this motto in her classroom was evident throughout our conversations as she further described her classroom environment, teaching style, and the relationships she builds with students.

Patt has taught almost every mathematics course offered by her department. This year she taught Analysis, Calculus, and a course from the new state curriculum, Accelerated Math I. Patt voiced some concern about the pedagogy of the new curriculum:

> And I'm not great with the new pedagogy where "never say anything that you can get the kid to say" and all that. I love having an audience and they love being my audience. I try to do as much group stuff and having them interact as I possibly can, but then I get bored—that's kind of not my thing. (Interview 1)

Despite her reservations of being a facilitator rather than the "sage on stage" in her classroom, Patt's description of her students and her experiences teaching in an all-Black high school leads me to believe that there is much more going on in her classroom than a dry, teacher-centered mathematics lesson. No one could doubt from hearing her speak that she loves her students and feels very strongly that it is important to get to know students, especially Black students, on a personal level: "I am very personal with my students—I don't mean inappropriately personal, but I mother them; even my seniors" (Interview 1). She feels that Black students are fun and that White students would "bore" her: "I mean, if you were a doctor, wouldn't you want to work in an emergency room? Wouldn't you want to do triage" (Interview 1)? By this, Patt revealed a thrill she feels from teaching Black children—a thrill she does not believe would be achieved by teaching in a White school.

Patt and I discussed, at length, her experience teaching in an all-Black environment compared to her perception of a predominantly White school. She conveyed a sense of freedom working in a Black school that she doubts she would enjoy in a White

school: “I feel freer even though I know you’re never supposed to touch a kid, but I feel freer to give a kid a big ole’ hug if I’m happy with them or whatever” (Interview 1). When I asked Patt to elaborate on this comment she claimed: “Because the White culture is stuffier. I mean, yeah, the White culture is stuffier. And Black kids, to me, I think, are easier to teach if you reach—if you reach them. You can teach them if you reach them” (Interview 1).

Throughout our conversations, Patt and I often compared stories of her experience in a Black school with my experience in a culturally diverse school. As I discussed the segregation that occurs in a diverse school separating the White students into honors classes and everyone else into regular college-prep classes, Patt shared that same experience in her school, “even though they’re all Black” (Interview 1). Patt believes that this division is based solely on socioeconomic status and has nothing to do with race: “If you look at my calculus class and then you look at my class which I didn’t have this year but last year I had Algebra I repeaters with some seniors in it—if you looked at one class and then the other, you’d think you were in two different schools” (Interview 1).

In addition to our discussions on Black teaching environments versus White schools and comparisons of students in those schools, Patt also offered insight into the differences between White and Black teachers. Patt is and always has been a minority amongst the faculty at her school—currently less than 10% of the faculty are White. The White teachers at her school are either veterans who will soon retire or are young and do not stay long. One reason that White teachers often struggle with Black students, according to Patt, is that “They [White teachers] don’t get down and get Black with the kids. Now, I know I can’t really get Black with them, but they laugh when I try. I mean,

you have to reach them in a way that they accept—not try to force them into your little structure" (Interview 2). On several occasions, Patt explained that while she is viewed as "the crazy White woman," this "freedom" is afforded her only because she is a White women teaching all-Black children: "I don't think a Black teacher could get away with it. They would lose respect for a Black teacher" (Interview 1). When I asked Patt whether or not she felt race played a role in her teaching, she replied: "Oh, I definitely think it does. I can get away with a lot more, in a sense. I don't mind making a fool out of myself to entertain the kids and the Black teachers can't do that—they don't seem to be able to do that" (Interview 1).

Other White teachers, Patt explained, work well with Black children but leave the school because of the Black administration:

> Most of the White teachers who have moved out of Jackson, friends of mine, it's not because of the kids; it's because of the administration. Administration in predominantly Black schools tends to be very authoritarian. They treat the teachers like a lot of the Black teachers treat the kids. You know, I've always had this idea, and I've whipped it out to every single new principal that's come along and I haven't gotten anybody to buy it yet, that one of the reasons our kids, our students act the way they do is that we treat them like cattle. They don't have a break where they can just mingle because they might fight. Well hell, let them fight and get rid of the ones who fight. Treat the other kids like human beings. (Interview 1)

Patt expressed discontent that her school had lost great teachers because the administration treats teachers like "bad children" (Interview 1).

Within her classroom walls, Patt makes a concerted effort to treat her students respectfully, abiding by her motto of unconditional positive regard. She prides herself on getting to know the kids and how they learn, but she also feels that talking openly about race is important as well. As Patt pointed out: "We can talk about race. It's not like a

taboo subject, because I'm open to it" (Interview 1). When I asked Patt if she was uncomfortable discussing race with her students at first, she replied:

> I was uncomfortable about it but I was so curious about their attitudes, and because I had those really low-level classes to start with, older students at a real low academic level, they know no discretion. They'll tell you anything and everything. [Carla: So it's nothing you felt you had to tip-toe around.] Well, sometimes I would if I wasn't sure how I was going to come across, because I didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings and I certainly didn't want anybody to think I was a racist, of course not. And that was before the community and the neighborhood knew me, so I had to prove myself to every class. (Interview 2)

Not only has Patt become more comfortable in racial discussions with her students but also she seems to be very open with them and listens to their concerns. In both of the first two interviews, Patt shared a story of her first year teaching when she learned not to say "you people" to her students.

> I didn't realize that was a racial thing. I meant "you people" like you "young" people—you people that are not teachers, and finally one kid said "You ought to not say that" and I said "Why?" and they explained to me that it was, you know, almost like using the "n-word." I had no clue. I was like "Oh, gee, I'm sorry!" (Interview 1)

Patt also acknowledged that the Black teachers in her department will let her know if she is off-base with anything—a sign that she is not easily offended by constructive criticism. Unfortunately, Patt pointed out that there are still White teachers in her school that use the term "you people." "The teachers that still do it," Patt claimed, "are not in-tune with the kids" (Interview 2).

According to Patt, she is "really real" with the kids (Interview 2). She feels it is important for kids to discuss race and to hear about it from a White perspective. When I suggested that these conversations perhaps make Patt's job a little easier because they help in building relationships with students, Patt remarked:

> Yeah, well that's why I do it. I'm not altruistic enough to do it because I feel obligated to. The only thing I feel obligated to do is teach a really good math lesson and be kind. And all the other stuff is for my own benefit— I'll admit that in a heartbeat, because it makes me happy. I like a happy atmosphere in the classroom. (Interview 2)

As Patt admitted that the racial conversations are beneficial to her as well as her students, she never eluded to these conversations as optional. In fact, Patt remarked: "If you like them, you'll find that it is your place to bring it [race] up. I mean, if you're a White teacher, and especially in my situation where most of the kids live very insular lives and they don't deal with a lot of White people, it's their chance to know you" (Interview 2). Patt considers the absence of racial conversations to be missed opportunities for students and teachers to get to know one other, and because Patt also feels that building relationships with students is the foundation for their success, racial discussions will always be a component of Patt's teaching.

Regrettably, in the age of high accountability in education, little emphasis is placed on the importance of teachers building relationships with students. Administrators are forced to focus on essential questions, word walls, and lesson plans. Patt, for instance, feels that it is very important to work with students on metacognition. She tells her students, "I want you to think about how you think because how you think determines how you learn, and so I want you to think about it" (Interview 2). Patt mentioned: "If my Word Wall slides a month or two, I don't think that's nearly as significant as if I'm not asking a kid 'How do you remember something? How can I help you remember it?'" (Interview 2). The policing of teachers that Patt described when we spoke of high accountability unveiled a fallacy in the way teachers are evaluated. Patt explained:

> But all that "i" dotting and "t" crossing, and there are teachers in our school who have every lesson plan on time, they do everything absolutely right and can't

> teach their way out of a paper sack…. Their lesson plans are beautiful, they follow the plan, but there's no connection and the kids just don't get anything from it. (Interview 2)

Although Patt admitted that the high accountability is necessary in her low-performing system, she clearly feels that her school system is too focused on the aesthetics of the classroom rather than the quality of education each individual child receives.

While Patt brings attention to administrators whose focus may be misaligned with the needs of individual students, Martin (2007) also questioned policies that label a teacher "highly qualified" without somehow measuring a teacher's ability to connect with students, especially those who are marginalized in schools:

> Research and policy focusing on mathematical content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, degree, and certification of teachers as the sole criteria for being highly qualified, without a simultaneous focus on teachers' ability to function effectively with African American and other children who are marginalized in schools, has the potential to render some children expendable. This is because the particular, most pressing needs of such children become subsumed under what is assumed to be best for *all*. (p. 14)

This one-size-fits-all approach to education is what both Patt and Martin view as widespread failure—from the school level on up to state government—to recognize that there are different skills needed to be effective with non-White children and that one of those important skills is for a teacher to be able to connect with her individual students.

Patt seems to have the ability to connect with her students and there is no doubt from our conversations that she truly loves her students. A large part of our conversations was stories she told about her students that both draw attention to how she came to be "Mama Hunt" in the community and how protective her students are of her. Patt absolutely glowed when she told stories about her students. One such story below is of a student whom Patt and her husband opened their home to in a time of need:

> I had a calculus student one year—Cedrick, big ole' Cedrick. He's about 6'4," dark as night. You would never believe he was an athlete because he was just so gawky and clumsy, but he was a track star. He had a scholarship to [ ] but he came from a real bad neighborhood and the day he turned 18 his stepfather threw him out, and I've always given the kids my phone number, always—the calculus kids anyway. And so, I got this call one night about 9:00 and it was Cedrick calling from the [subway] station. He said, "I don't know what to do. Don't know where to go." And he was very not street savvy. He was a big, goofy kid—smart and dumb at the same time. And so I sent Charlie up to the [subway] station to pick him up and so he lived with me the rest of the year and the summer. And he called his mom and we planned a time when his stepfather was not there, and we went over and got his stuff, and brought it and put him in the guest bedroom. That was when the little ballet dancer, little White girl, was living in the little cottage out here. Well, I guess I just didn't think about it. I didn't know the neighbors very well cause they were older, you know, they weren't parents of my children's friends, so I didn't think about telling them Cedrick was here and I guess they just never saw him. Well, one day he forgot something so he came home in the middle of the day and nobody was here. I guess I was teaching summer school. And he's getting whatever out of his room and all of a sudden there's a knock at the front door, and he opens the front door and there are like 6 Jackson city cops with guns drawn. The neighbors had reported him—thought he was breaking in. He peed his pants it scared him so bad. He had to show them he had his band uniform in the closet. He said "See, here's my band uniform. Yes, I do live here, I really do, I really do!" I mean, they were ready to haul him off until Summer, who was the little White girl, comes driving in… and she was like, "Yes, he really does live here." She could have been no telling who, but they believed her and left him alone…After that story got around and the kids knew that Cedrick was living with me, I went from being Mrs. Hunt to Mama Hunt. My kids call me Mama Hunt. (Interview 1)

Cedrick's story is just one of several that have helped establish Patt's reputation in the community as a teacher who cares about her students. And although Patt claimed that to students she is the "crazy White woman," she is also a teacher for whom students have become very protective. One story Patt told is of some students at her son's high school who "egged" her house. When she told an Algebra II class about it the next day, some football players in the class offered to sit in her driveway and wait for the kids to come back: "They didn't come back to the house again, but the kids came over and sat in the car for hours. It was so cool" (Interview 2)! Patt also mentioned that the Rodney King

riots in 1992 had caused some riots in the city where she resides, and a White man that she knew was beaten badly as a result. Some seniors that Patt taught that year offered to drive her home: "I had students offer to drive me home. I mean, they were very aware of the fact that I was White, and they were worried. I mean, is that sweet or what" (Interview 1)?

Reflections on Howard's Book

Although Patt enjoyed reading Howard's (2006) book and admitted reading it in its entirety rather than only the 5 chapters in which she was asked to read, of all four participants, she was the only one to challenge Howard's ideas. Most of Patt's concerns with the book dealt with the depth in which Howard analyzed race and White teachers. In short, Patt felt he overcomplicated the issues. On the topic of White racial identity development, for example, Patt claimed: "I really just think he's mostly trying to quantify and classify beliefs and feelings into neat little stages that really don't exist as he describes them. If you really think about it, it's just much too 'fluid' to put into his stages" (Interview 3). Likewise, when Howard wrote, "The work of transformationist educators is that of dismantling the dominance paradigm and healing the wounds of past and present racism" (p. 143), Patt responded:

> Yeah, okay, maybe I heal a little wound here and there or maybe just a little rub, but not intentionally. I'm lacking an agenda. I don't have an agenda for that, and I don't think you have to have an agenda for that to be a good teacher. He's trying to turn everybody into a bunch of crusaders. That's not the way to get things done. (Interview 2)

Patt firmly disagrees with Howard (2006) that it is the work of White teachers to not only transform themselves but also to educate fellow Whites as well. Where Howard

advocates that Whites should fight racism by directly confronting those who display it, Patt argued:

> Like he talks in here about how we shouldn't have tolerance with people who are racist and we should call them on it and that kind of thing, but you can't go around living your life like that, you know? Creating discord everywhere. I mean, they're as entitled to their opinion as I am. It'll change with the generations, but sometimes it takes generations. (Interview 2)

Patt does not believe that in order to be a "good" White, you must be committed to changing others; instead, she prefers a more passive, "lead by example" approach to fighting racism: "I've had some friends over the years that have kind of adopted my methods because they've seen them work for me and seeing how happy I am with my job. And I've never preached at them, 'You ought to do this, or do that'" (Interview 2). Patt also disagrees with Howard that as White teachers, we should fully understand our own Whiteness and the history of White social dominance in order to effectively teach Black students. According to Patt, "You just have to find out what works with the kids and have fun with them and their culture" (Interview 2).

Unlike the other participants in this study, Patt believes that White social dominance is a thing of the past, but she does agree that the achievement gap is a result of that dominance. Rather than a White teacher thinking introspectively about her own Whiteness, Patt feels it is more important for the teacher to know each of her students and let them know her. Patt had a particularly reflective moment during our conversation when she re-evaluated the need for White teachers to understand White dominance:

> No, wait a minute, maybe he [Howard] has a point. Because they [Black students] are sensitive to a perception of White dominance, maybe White teachers that try very hard to have really great control and be very domineering—from the kids' perception, that's White dominance. Yeah, right. And the teacher just thinks they're being all good and strict, but looking at it from the kids' perspective. So I think you might have to understand that much about it, but I don't think you need

> to know all the history of all the awful stuff we've done and all that kind of thing—I mean everybody knows we have. (Interview 2)

Patt summarized her thoughts, stating: "I don't think it takes a lot of White introspection about White dominance. I just think it takes cut and clear and dry understanding that this is what the kids see…from their perspective. I don't think you need to understand it from your own or go into a guilt trip" (Interview 2).

Whether or not a teacher of Black students understands White dominance, in Patt's opinion, is not related to success in teaching, but she does believe success with Black students can only occur under certain conditions. Although Patt disagrees with Howard (2006) on several topics discussed in his book, she does agree with him that White teachers need to understand cultural differences in order to be successful with Black students:

> But there are cultural differences that Whites need to learn to enjoy. I mean, if you want to be a successful White teacher, I think you've got to be a happy teacher. And if you don't enjoy the cultural differences, you know—the emotiveness, the hugging and all—you need to get out of it. Because if you can't enjoy the positive aspects of the culture that you're working in, you can't possibly do a decent job. (Interview 2)

Patt also feels that a White teacher not only needs to enjoy her job but also that her students, especially Black students, need to *know* she enjoys her job. Black students need to know that their teacher cares about them and wants them to succeed.

On the other hand, Patt emphasized that this "caring" must be genuine in order for a successful classroom environment to exist. Patt cited this as a common problem she has witnessed with many young, idealistic teachers:

> They think they're going to come in and save these kids. Maybe because they were fortunate enough to have a better life than the kids or whatever, or maybe because they struggled and pulled themselves up, and they want all the kids to do it. But if they don't enjoy what they're doing, if they're just doing it through a

> sense of idealism, kids pick up on it in a minute and they don't respond well, I don't think, and then the teacher becomes bitter. (Interview 2)

According to Patt, she has seen this happen many times before with both Black and White teachers who she claims have a "do-good attitude" that "turns into bitterness" (Interview 2). Martin (2007) described such a teacher as a "missionary" who attempts to "save African American children from themselves and their culture" (p. 13). Likewise, Patt would agree with Martin that a requisite component of teaching African American children is racial competence (Milner, Flowers, L., Moore, E. Moore, J., & Flowers, T., 2003)—not just strong mathematical content and pedagogy. In the end, Patt believes that success with Black children requires a love and understanding of different cultures, genuine caring for the students, and a sense of realism.

Oliver's Story

Family Background

Oliver is a 33-year-old high school mathematics teacher in the Southeast region of the United States. He is currently in his fifth year of teaching and is now in a mathematics education Ph.D. degree program.

The son of a retired Army officer, Oliver spent most of his childhood in the same Southeastern state where he currently resides. He lived mostly off base, in a middle-class neighborhood and attended public school. Oliver described his parents as "very, very intelligent, good people" (interview 1). Both his mother and father had military fathers themselves. Oliver's paternal grandfather was a decorated Army colonel. His maternal grandfather was a soldier in the army.

Oliver talked in great detail about the vast differences in the upbringing of his mother and father and the impact that had particularly on his mother's life. His father's

mother was college educated and returned to her job as a teacher in the 1950s after having children—a feat that Oliver recognized as quite rare for that time period. His mother, however, came from a family of coal miners and was the first to go to college in her family. Oliver's maternal family had a history of drug and alcohol abuse. He described his mother's father as an "abusive, awful drunk" (Interview 2) and later stated in regards to his mother, "There's always a sense of wonder in me that she made it long enough that I'm here" (Interview 2).

K–12 Schooling Experiences

Oliver's K–12 schooling experience was "very racially stratified" (Interview 1). Similar to many Southeastern cities, the city where Oliver grew up was racially segregated with the White students attending schools in the suburbs and the Black students attending the inner-city schools. In elementary school, there was one Black boy in his grade. And although Oliver's high school was on the "fringe" of the city, and according to him had a "60-40 White–Black mix," he remembered only 3 or 4 Black students in his high school honors classes (Interview 1). Much like the students that Carrie teaches at Belmont, the honors classes at Oliver's high school were almost entirely White and all other students took the regular on-level classes.

Oliver admits that this segregation within his high school was not something he thought about: "And I didn't think that was weird because it's just what you know. And I think that's what you find, reading most of the stuff, is that most White people just don't question that, I mean, why would you" (Interview 1)? In regards to the segregation he experienced, Oliver went on to state: "I believe that that … is a part of the prejudice forming part of our society. That I grew up watching all White kids and 'Oh, Black

people don't come to honors classes. They must not be as smart'" (Interview 1). Although Oliver stressed that he never would have thought or said that himself, he feels certain that it contributes to our White dominated society. In a particularly introspective part of the first interview, Oliver displayed empathy towards the few Black students in those honors classes:

> And I think about that a lot. I think about the couple of people that were in classes with me in high school, and how—especially reading about it now, how hard that must have been for them. They lived in the Black neighborhoods but hung out with the White people in class, and trying to navigate that. (Interview 1)

The empathy that Oliver showed for these students later in life and the fact that he simply didn't think about the reasons why so few Black students were in his honors classes, Oliver believes, is due in part to his upbringing. Oliver's parents are baby boomers and he believes that children of his parents' generation, especially those raised by college-educated parents, were raised to "to live in this lie of the post-racial world" (Interview 1):

> And so we grew up thinking that everybody was the same and "Oh, Marlon's no different from you. He just happens to be Black." Even though he's the only Black child in this whole school, but he's no different…. And so, we were raised that way and I didn't question that—even going to a high school that was so stratified. It just didn't occur to me. I think I bought into that—that everybody's the same and it's just random that only one Black child can live in my neighborhood, and it's just random that there's only three Black children in my honors AP classes. (Interview 1)

Oliver's parents grew up during the Civil Rights Movement and he understands the desire to "buy in" to the idea of a post-racial society. During his primary and secondary education with little exposure to Black children, Oliver never had a reason to question the stratified society in which he was a part. As explained in the next section, Oliver's post-

secondary experience continued to be predominantly White, laying the groundwork for some eye-opening, life-changing experiences.

College and Pre-Teaching Experiences

Oliver attended two major universities for his undergraduate degree—both major universities in Southeastern states. At the first university Oliver attended right out of high school, he remembers being "stunned by how few Black people there were" (Interview 1). Oliver stated, "That's the first time I remember thinking to myself that something's going on in this country, in this city, in this state, something, in this world—there's something wrong here" (Interview 1). In a state with a large Black population, Oliver expected to see more Black students but noticed that, stereotypically, most of the Black students he saw were athletes. Oliver continued to live a somewhat insular life as he transferred to a university whose student body had a similar racial composition. He graduated with his Bachelor's degree in mathematics, but still could not recall seeing one Black student in any of his upper-level mathematics courses.

During those 4 years in college, his mother, Oliver explained, was becoming more and more frustrated by male privilege, and she and Oliver would often discuss ways in which male domination takes form. While in his senior year of college, Oliver's mother introduced him to a well-known feminist novel, *The Women's Room,* and, after reading it, Oliver became what he called "hyper aware" of male privilege (Interview 2). Reading this novel and engaging in dialogue with his mother about male privilege was a monumental time in Oliver's life. Despite his family lineage in the military, which he believed made him destined to take the "alpha male" role, Oliver continues to dialogue

with both his mother and wife about his "active desire to break down those parts of myself" (Interview 2).

Although my study does not look at privilege in terms of gender but rather in terms of race, it became clear to me during our conversations that Oliver's early exposure to feminist literature had given him a different lens through which to view White privilege and would be instrumental in my understanding of his success in teaching Black children. Oliver was somewhat critical of himself due to the time that had elapsed between age 22 when he first read *The Women's Room* and 9 years later when he became introduced to Critical Theory and the idea of White privilege in his doctoral program:

> It's interesting to me that as conscious as I was and still am of male privilege and actively trying to disrupt it and in my interactions with my wife and now looking forward to actively disrupting that with my daughter, it's interesting to me that I remained so ignorant of the concept of White privilege. (Interview 2)

In this conversation, Oliver was troubled that despite his efforts to combat male privilege, he failed to connect male privilege and White dominance until beginning his Ph.D. coursework. Oliver acknowledged in our conversations that he and his mother now dialogue about racial privilege as well as male privilege. Oliver gave a tremendous amount of credit to his mother, whom he called "an exceptional person," and stated:

> I think that my mother's journey and my, not phase, but my reading of that book *The Women's Room* and active dialogue with her, really laid the groundwork to be here…. I really think that all the work my mom and I did about male privilege gave me the tools to be able to see White privilege once I had the opportunity—once I put myself in a place to see it. (Interview 2)

Oliver shared that throughout his 4 years at college, he never seriously considered teaching. At the time, Oliver was also not interested in taking a job in business, industry, or anything for that matter, that would require him to apply the mathematics he had learned: "I didn't want to know how to apply it. I just liked the intellectual challenge of

it" (Interview 1). So, Oliver signed up for AmeriCorps and worked for the next 9 months in homeless shelters:

> And as a Christian I did feel—at that point I did feel a sense of social injustice—I would say I definitely had a keen sense of, like, social injustice; although I would not have equated it with race. And I took this job working with the homeless out of the sense of wanting to rectify that social injustice, again, nothing racial about it at the time, until I got there. (Interview 1)

What Oliver immediately noticed at the shelters was that the vast majority of the homeless in that city were Black males:

> And that was when I really all of a sudden felt that I realized I saw that there was something wrong with this country that had to do with race and it wasn't just about economics, it wasn't just about opportunity, it wasn't just about education—I mean it was mixed up with those three things, but it was also mixed up with race and it would have been irresponsible to try to shift that out of the equation. (Interview 1)

Oliver attributed his work in the homeless shelters with opening his eyes to the racial inequality that exists in our country. He admits that, prior to that experience, he had very few interactions with Black people and had certainly not formed any solid relationship with someone outside his race.

During this time in his life, Oliver went through what he called a "missionary" phase. But although this experience inspired him to "combat poverty" and the "injustice that's been done to Black Americans," Oliver became frustrated at the shelter and felt a need to be more proactive in this fight (Interview 1). He realized that the homeless shelter was not where he needed to be: "I thought certainly an attack upon homelessness would be just as effective at an educational level when they're in middle school or high school, as it is now" (Interview 1). Oliver had been tutoring a few middle school students during his time at the shelter and realized, "When I conjoined that sense of enjoying doing this

[tutoring] to this sense of 'I want to be proactive about poverty and race,' it made sense to try to teach" (Interview 1).

Rather than return to school for a teaching certificate, Oliver decided to go straight into the classroom and began applying at all the middle schools in the inner-city. He was granted two interviews, offered jobs at both of those schools, and accepted a job at the middle school that he felt would be the most challenging:

> And I thought it'd be hard, but I thought I could do it. I thought "I've had this year of experience with working with Black men or Black Southern men and I have several years of experience working with White kids. So, mix that together I'll be alright." And I was not alright. And it was—I'm really surprised I lasted as long as I did. (Interview 1)

He lasted 2 ½ months. Oliver said that he was "dying by day three" and "had no clue" what he was doing (Interview 1). He admitted fault in assuming that due to his experience tutoring White kids and his experience with Black homeless men that he would be able to teach Black children. Oliver called his first teaching experience a "colossal failure" and described it as the "first failure of my life" (Interview 1).

Oliver blamed his failure not only on the false assumption that he'd be okay having had experience with White children and Black adults but also on a lack of a student teaching experience and insufficient support at the middle school. And though Oliver was assigned a mentor, he pointed out that with a full-time teaching load himself, his mentor simply couldn't give him the support that was necessary: "He couldn't give me what I needed. I needed someone in there watching me. I needed a student teaching experience" (Interview 1).

Oliver revealed that it took him close to 2 years to come to terms with this monumental experience in his life, but he was able to draw from his continuing work

with his mother in fighting male privilege to reflect and better understand this failure: "I was very much operating under this White male hegemony. This sense of 'I can do whatever I want and I will succeed' and I'd always succeeded to that point" (Interview 1). Oliver recognized that his status as a White male perhaps gave him an inflated confidence to teach in an inner-city school without any background in education. Oliver continued:

> I was raised middle class by college-educated parents and did well at school; so, of course, I can do anything I wanted. It's bad for any White person, it's worse for a man. You just feel invincible. If you want to do something, you will succeed because you always have. I put myself in the worst possible situation I could have and thought I could do it. I mean, there was no worse place I could have been. It was completely arrogant. It was ridiculous. It was insane. (Interview 1)

Although White male hegemony was certainly not the sole cause of the failure, Oliver acknowledged that being a White male allowed him to feel invincible, gave him the courage to go into that situation, and, consequently, made the failure even more devastating.

After leaving the middle school, Oliver spent the next 4 years tutoring, delivering pizzas and playing in bands—four years that he said were "important for me personally" (Interview 1). But Oliver shared that he became frustrated with tutoring and again, felt a desire to go back to the classroom. He credited the tutoring for helping him remember: "Yes, I do like math. Yes, I do like kids. Yes, I would like to teach" (Interview 1). At this time, his intention was to only teach in a private school, but after someone more experienced was picked over him for a private school position, Oliver realized that if he wanted to teach he needed to get certified.

When Oliver went to a local university to interview for admittance into a master's degree program, he was also offered an opportunity to interview for an urban education

program. This program came with a scholarship, provided that he would commit to teach in one of two urban districts for 2 years. Oliver explained that the money was "too good to pass up for something I wanted to try" (Interview 1).

Oliver believes that the 2 year teaching requirement helped him to refocus on the fight against poverty that his job in the homeless shelter had sparked. In regards to the middle school experience, Oliver commented, "I had a vision of how things could be different in America, but that experience just shocked that out of me and now I still felt that things should be different, but I had no vision of how to fix it" (Interview 1). Oliver credited the urban education program for giving him "the push" he needed to try teaching in an urban school again and forced him into a school that would allow him to fight against poverty firsthand. Without this opportunity, Oliver felt that he would have taught in a private school and never left.

Despite the credit he gives to the urban education program, Oliver asserted that it did not do everything it could have to prepare him for the urban environment. When asked, "How much of what you know about teaching African American children do you attribute to your post-secondary education?" Oliver explained that he has learned a lot in his doctoral program, but during his master's program, "I don't feel like I read the right books that year" (Interview 1). Later in the third interview, Oliver reiterates, "I think we didn't quite do it right." However, Oliver did emphasize that despite a lack of pertinent literature on teaching in urban schools that was missing from the coursework, the program did provide him with the much needed student teaching experience.

Teaching Experiences

Oliver completed his student teaching at Clark High School where he currently teaches. While discussing Clark, Oliver recalled "I just loved it from the get go" (Interview 1)! He has taught at Clark for 4 years and currently teaches ninth graders. Oliver and I discussed reasons why he has chosen to remain at Clark High School and he concluded, "I think it's the people—I think" (Interview 1). His description of the school included "a good cadre of math teachers," some of whom provided a great deal of support and encouragement when he was a new teacher and whom he now considers to be good friends. Despite initial intentions of teaching in a private school without any plan of becoming certified to teach, Oliver revealed that he now feels tied to the school and at this point has no intention of leaving public schools.

One important aspect of Clark High School that has kept Oliver there is the strong sense of community. Many of the teachers at Clark are alumni of the school, and many of the students have parents who graduated from there. Oliver also claimed to feel "rooted" in the school because he has now been there long enough to teach younger brothers, sisters, and cousins of former students. Oliver's connection to the school is so strong that he and his wife have considered moving closer:

> I'd like to see more kids at the grocery store. I'd like to see kids out. Whenever I go anywhere around Clark, I see kids and I meet kids' parents and stuff like that. You know, if I go to Target or we go out to eat or if I go to Starbucks or if I go to Publix or wherever I go, I see kids and I think that's one of the neat things about being a teacher is that experience. So, I don't get that here. (Interview 1)

Oliver made it very clear in our discussion that the need to move closer to work has nothing to do with a shorter commute. He is committed to being a member of the school community while at home and at work. Oliver concluded that he does foresee himself

staying at Clark for the long term and felt certain that his family would soon make the move away from their middle-class home in the suburbs to the city.

Oliver's sense of connection to the community and his desire to be an active participant in the daily lives of his students is a characteristic recognized by Ladson-Billings (1994) in her study of successful teachers of African American students. As she explained:

> Because many African American students live in and attend schools in communities that their teachers neither live in nor choose to frequent after school hours means that few have the opportunity to interact with their teachers outside the classroom. Teachers who practice culturally relevant methods work to find ways to facilitate this out-of-school (or at least out-of-classroom) interaction. (p. 63)

Although each of the other three participants of this study connected in some way to her students outside the classroom walls, Oliver is the only one that expressed a commitment to live in his students' community.

The connection to the community that Oliver yearns for outside of school hours begins in his classroom with the connections he makes with individual students. Oliver is not shy about the importance he places on initiating racially based conversations in the classroom and sustaining those conversations throughout the school year. As Oliver explains, "I try to be not just conscious of race but I try to talk about it too" (Interview 1). He expressed the importance of creating a space to discuss race through a "Freirian dialogue"[18] or as Oliver more bluntly explained, to talk about "the fact that I'm White

[18] Stinson (2009) summarized Freirian dialogue as "a loving, humble, hopeful, trusting, critical, and horizontal relationship between persons, a 'relation of 'empathy' between two 'poles' who are engaged in a joint search'" (p. 516).

and you're not" (Interview 1). Oliver feels that if the students see that he is willing to discuss race, then they will see the more human side of him.

Oliver revealed that playing music in his classroom is one way in which he opens up conversations about race. Playing everything from Johnny Cash, to the Killers, and from Bob Dylan to rap music and even jazz, Oliver mentioned, "As we do it, it opens up some space to talk about White music, Black music" (Interview 1). He continued by providing me with further insight, "I do that because one, because I think it's important to have those conversations—those are things I didn't have in high school, and two, I don't think they're having them" (Interview 1).

Oliver and I had a lengthy conversation about the importance of having racial conversations not only between a White man and his Black students but also for all teachers and all students, regardless of race. He did, however, explain in detail why he feels it is particularly important for him to discuss race with his students. Although Oliver freely admitted that he engages in those conversations because building those relationships with students makes his job easier, he also brought to my attention that he is the only White person his students see on a daily basis:

> They live in all Black neighborhoods. They go to an all-Black school… so race isn't a conscious part of their life, I don't think, it doesn't have to be, let's put it that way. Race does not have to be a conscious, active part of their life just like it didn't have to be for me in high school. I was able to separate that. (Interview 1)

Oliver pointed out here that one thing he shares in common with his students is that he, too, grew up in a homogenous environment. Just as his students have little exposure to the White culture, Oliver's schooling experiences left him sheltered from other cultures as well. Students who grow up in these homogenous environments, Oliver argues, are not forced to think about race.

In listening to Oliver describe his all-White schooling experiences and then his submersion in all-Black environments, the homeless shelter, the middle school, and now at Clark High School, I began to realize the long journey Oliver has traveled in a rather short amount of time. Oliver also brought attention to this transformation when he explained:

> I would never have had the guts to look at 20-30 Black children and talk about their ancestors having been enslaved. I would never have been able to say that 5 years ago. But now, I think it's really important that I do say it. Because I think that as a White man I represent White power structure, whether consciously or unconsciously, I represent that to them and I've got to disarm that in some way. And if I just try to pretend that we live in a post-racial world and Barack Obama's President and everything's going to be fine now, I think that I'm just reproducing the cycle of White power. (Interview 1)

It is not only Oliver's recognition of the White power he represents to his students but also his commitment to discuss *their* history that signifies his dedication to teaching for social justice. As Gutstein (2003) explained, "Teaching for social justice also includes helping students develop positive social and cultural identities by validating their language and culture and helping them uncover and understand their history" (p. 40).

Aside from the important racial conversations in his classroom, Oliver shared his approach to the curriculum as well as his views on testing. Oliver teaches in a state currently undergoing curriculum reform in mathematics and, like Caroline, is dissatisfied with the student tasks provided by the state's Department of Education. Although reading is a key element in Oliver's classroom, he felt that the tasks are too reading intensive and have a tendency to "turn kids off." Oliver's strategy in rewriting the tasks is to make them more accessible to the students, provide easy questions in the beginning so students are not immediately overwhelmed, and, if possible, "make them more culturally appropriate" (Interview 2). Oliver also feels that the length of the tasks is overwhelming

and he divides them into parts so that students are given a section that is reasonable to finish in one class period. And although we talked only briefly about testing, it is clear that Oliver strongly disapproves with the amount of times his students are tested and the often unrealistic expectations placed on them by No Child Left Behind. As Oliver disclosed, "If I have to force test prep down my kids' throat all year to make AYP [Adequate Yearly Progress], I'm not willing to do that" (Interview 1).

Reflections on Howard's Book

Oliver had much to say about Howard's (2006) book and most of the second interview was centered on topics addressed in the book. Keep in mind, though, that Oliver had much more time to process the text than the other participants given that he first read it at the beginning of his doctoral program almost two years prior to his interviews for this study. Oliver often referred back to a time in his life "a year and a half ago" when he first began the doctoral program—an experience that has clearly been significant to Oliver in developing his racial understanding. During this second interview, the topics Oliver discussed primarily fell under the broader topics of White racial identity development, White dominance, and color-blindness. As is true with the other participants, Oliver connected each of these with his personal life experiences.

Oliver began by discussing White racial identity development, a theory in which Oliver, Caroline, and Patt all admitted being unaware of prior to reading Howard's (2006) book. "It never would have occurred to me that we had steps of identity development," Oliver stated, "and if it did, I never would have thought I did too" (Interview 2). Oliver recalled a time period about a year before this interview when he

felt he had transitioned from the pseudo-independence[19] stage into the immersion/emersion stage. In other words, he felt that he no longer played the role of the "missionary" aimed at saving the Black race and had become more introspective about how he himself could begin to fight White dominance. Oliver conveyed that he currently remains in the immersion/emersion stage because he is still working on the advocacy and action that characterize the final stage, autonomy: "I feel like I have finally come out of the closet of ignorance and denial, but it's in this beginning to break down the dominance paradigm that I'm still struggling and that's why I don't feel like I'm at autonomy" (Interview 2).

Despite the fact that he is a White man teaching in a predominantly Black school and despite the efforts he makes to break down racial barriers in his classroom, Oliver firmly believes that he has not yet reached the autonomy stage. In reference to working in an all-Black school, Oliver stated, "It's more than just working there" (Interview 2). Oliver recognized the importance of actively fighting racism in his school environment and conveyed here that simply teaching at Clark does not imply that one is actively working to disrupt White dominance. He explained:

> I still want to get to the place where I feel like I'm daily dealing with White privilege. Like right now, I can definitely go through days where, sure, I'm teaching at Clark but I'm not actively doing anything about White privilege. I'm just teaching and some days are like that, that's life. (Interview 2)

As Howard (2006) explained, the autonomy stage is characterized by engagement in activities that actively fight oppression. And although Oliver works to resist White

[19] Howard (2006) described the pseudo-independence stage as one when White people acknowledge responsibility for racism yet the focus is on "helping" people from other racial groups rather than trying to change White dominance.

hegemony by having racial conversations with his students, he does not feel that he does enough on a daily basis to be at the autonomy stage.

This idea of White privilege, Oliver recognized, was something he had not made sense of prior to entering his doctoral program. He also seemed somewhat embarrassed that he had worked so hard to fight male privilege, yet for years had not connected that to race: "It's ignorant of me to, like, have such a fully—to have had such a fully articulated sense of male privilege and not be able to translate that to White privilege" (Interview 2). Oliver stated that prior to the doctoral program:

> I don't know that I would have been able to really talk about how that White privilege is not just something that my father experienced when he was a child but something that I experienced as a child and is something my daughter will still experience when she goes to school. I don't know that I would have known that a year and a half ago. (Interview 2)

Again, Oliver reiterated that not until he entered the Ph.D. program did he really begin to understand and "see" White privilege and the effects it has and will continue to have on his family: "What people want to forget is that we're not just a product of who we are right this second, we're a product of who our parents were" (Interview 2). Oliver seems to understand the effects of White privilege as it is passed down from generation to generation, not only as a White man who benefits from that privilege but also the effects of White privilege on the racially oppressed groups who suffer from it.

In addition to White privilege, Oliver also mentioned the idea of Whites being culture free as contributing to continued White dominance. Oliver noted that the absence of discussions about a White culture in a society that frequently refers to the Black or Hispanic culture helps to "establish our hegemony…we're culture free because we *are* the culture" (Interview 2). Oliver again brought attention to his doctoral program where

he first read Howard (2006) and Tatum (1997)—books on which Oliver comments: "It was in reading either this book [Howard] or Tatum, well just say in tandem, my eyes were really opened to the fact that it is this belief that we are culture free that really perpetuates this notion of social dominance" (Interview 2).

Oliver believes that White social dominance exists in our society and expressed concern for the effects that this dominance, along with a "culture free" White society, has on our schools. He stated, "We're trying to make every school in the country look the same and what is the same in this country but middle-class White" (Interview 2)? Oliver realizes that schools are social institutions that were built upon White social norms, and although the students in our classrooms have certainly changed since the days of the one-room schoolhouse, the way we "do" schooling has changed very little. Oliver took time to reflect on his role as a White educator of Black students: "A year ago, this was revelatory to me, that…my assumption of White middle class education should work, and these students are deviant in some way because this doesn't work. That's the logical fallacy" (Interview 2).

This statement brings to light the possibility that non-White students struggle to find success in school because schools function under White social norms that are, perhaps, drastically different from the social norms they are taught at home and in their communities. As Delpit (1995) explained, "To provide schooling for everyone's children that reflects middle-class values and aspirations is to ensure the maintenance of the status quo, to ensure that power, the culture of power, remains in the hands of those who already have it" (p. 28).

This "assumption" that Oliver referred to as the "logical fallacy" is based on the idea that if education works for middle-class White students, then it should work for everyone. A White teacher who chooses to teach Black children the same as she or he would teach White children is essentially ignoring the race of her students and is said to have adopted a color-blind ideology. In regards to color-blindness, Oliver revealed:

> The danger about not seeing color is that people like us get into classrooms where we don't see color and then, we talked about this already, you teach these Black kids as if they're middle-class White kids because "that's how I was raised. I was raised middle-class White, so I will teach them as if they're middle-class White because it's not okay to see color. It's not okay to teach them as if they're Latino students who have a completely different heritage and cultural foundation. I have to teach them as if they're middle-class White students." (Interview 2)

Although Oliver now clearly feels it is imperative for teachers to recognize and appreciate the race of their students, he admitted that his parents raised him to not see color: "I know if I'd gone home and said 'the Black boy' my mom would have said 'It's just a boy'" (Interview 2). Even in conversations with his mostly White, middle-class friends today, Oliver feels there is an unstated belief that race should be ignored and, moreover, effort should be made to not see it.

This color-blindness is a general sentiment, however, in our society; not just in Oliver's circle of friends. I agree with Oliver that people usually make every attempt to describe someone without racial markers: "When we try to describe someone, we won't say 'that Black guy.' We'll go to great pains to describe what he was wearing or, you know, 'he had earrings,' or 'he was wearing a White t-shirt.' But we won't say 'that Black guy.' My kids, they do the same thing to me" (Interview 2). Oliver explained that when his students attempt to describe another White teacher to him, they avoid calling that teacher White. Oliver feels that the students fear they will offend him and, therefore,

avoid labeling anyone as White. Oliver critiqued, "Trying to describe somebody that you don't know very well without resorting to some really obvious marker—it's hard, and, in a sense, stupid that we do it that way" (Interview 2).

Nonetheless, Oliver recalled a time period in which he too was uncomfortable with describing a student based on the color of their skin:

> I remember very vividly where I was the first time I said it. I was sitting in Cynthia Adams's—that was my mentor teacher, but it was 2 years later—I was sitting in her office and I was trying to describe this Ryan that hadn't been in my class in 3 days, and she goes, "Wait, is that the same Ryan that's in my class?" And I said, "I don't know." And she said, "What's he look like?" And I go, "Da da da and he's real light-skinned." And she goes, "Oh, yeah, yeah, that's the boy." And I was like (sigh of relief). And I was like, "Okay, I did it, I can do it now." And I've done it ever since. But it was huge! But I think it does speak to—in the same way that when I'm with White people, I'm not supposed to say "Black." And when I'm with Black people, I'm not supposed to say "light-skinned." And then we're supposed to not, you know, we're supposed to steer so far away from that. (Interview 2)

Oliver's story of the first time he said "light-skinned" is a prime example of the uncomfortableness associated with describing someone from a different race. Oliver concluded that in order to avoid the uncomfortableness we tend to not use racial markers at all. This buy-in to a color-blind society reinforces the dominant White paradigm that is so damaging to our students. Haymes (1995) asserted that this buy-in occurs "because white people do not recognize their own whiteness" (p. 112). As Oliver so precisely explained: "The more we don't say it at all, the more we don't see it—or we think we shouldn't see it. If we think we shouldn't say it, then we think we shouldn't see it" (Interview 2).

Oliver and I ended his second interview by returning to more conversation on President Obama. And though Oliver and I both believe that President Obama could not have won the campaign had he chosen to run with race on the ballot, like Al Sharpton and

Jesse Jackson before him, Oliver worries that the campaign may have allowed more people to buy-in to the idea that we are living in a "post-racial" world:

> I feel like I hear and read a lot about how Obama has ushered in our post-racial societal phase and now that we have our first Black President, we can stop referring to him as a Black president—just call him a president. Once we do that, we can just stop calling everyone—Black doesn't matter. You can be president, you can be anything and there's no Black or White anymore. (Interview 2)

Summary

The previous stories were written to draw attention to each of the four teachers as individuals, individuals who were identified as successful mathematics teachers of Black children. My intention was to tell each teacher's story with as little bias as possible—all the while remaining cognizant that the presence of my own subjectivity was inevitable. I sought to present enough detail of their own life histories—their family, education, and teaching experiences—in order for the reader to have a substantial understanding of each teacher's perspective. And though my intention has never been to make generalizations about successful White teachers of Black students, it is important to cross analyze their data in order to look for commonalities and differences that might contribute to the body of research on how best to prepare White pre-service teachers to teach students from backgrounds different than their own.

This study was loosely based on the research of Ladson-Billings (1994) who also examined successful teachers of Black students. The main difference, however, in this study and Ladson-Billings's study is the focus I have placed on the race of the teacher—White teachers, in particular. Although Ladson-Billings identified two of her eight participants as being White teachers, she sought strictly to look for commonalities in philosophy and teaching practices amongst all of her participants regardless of race. In a

sense, my study builds upon Ladson-Billings's study by questioning how White teachers come to be successful with Black students and how they are able to connect with a group of students with whom they likely identify very little.

As I wrote each story and later performed a cross-case analysis (Hays, 2004; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003) on all the data, many of the characteristics of culturally relevant teaching which Ladson-Billings (1994) found in her teachers were also common practices of the teachers in this study. In particular, teachers in both studies believe that their students *can* succeed and, rather than expecting prior knowledge, they help students develop that knowledge by scaffolding the mathematics. They build strong relationships with students both inside and outside of the classroom, and encourage that same connectedness between students by allowing them to work collaboratively. And finally, all of these successful teachers see themselves as part of the community and consider that tie to the community as part of the job.

Even though there are clearly many commonalities between the teachers in this study and those whom Ladson-Billings (1994) studied, it is not simply enough to label these four teachers as culturally responsive pedagogues and move on. I must point out again that the focus of my research was not just on the teachers' pedagogical practices but rather, how they got to be the successful teachers they are. What were the teacher's childhood experiences? What were her or his educational experiences? What does a successful teacher of Black students do inside and outside the classroom that affects her or his teaching practices? All of these questions are important in understanding the factors that led them to be the teachers they are. And so, in addition to the characteristics of culturally relevant teaching shared with the participants in the Ladson-Billings study, it

is important that I bring attention to the commonalities in the teachers' upbringings, their journeys to becoming mathematics teachers of Black students, the practices shared inside (and outside) their classrooms, and lastly, their views of themselves as successful teachers of Black students.

There are certainly too many differences in the upbringings of the participants in this study to conclude that certain elements of their childhood led to their success with Black students. But there are several commonalities, at least between some of the participants, that must not be overlooked. Caroline, Carrie, and Oliver all had parents that raised them to be open-minded. On the other hand, these same three participants recognized they were raised to not "see" color. Caroline and Oliver specifically pointed out that their parents expected them to *not* describe any non-White person using racial markers. This avoidance is understandable considering that Caroline, Carrie, and Oliver all have parents that are baby boomers and grew up in an era when the standard practice for dealing with race was to ignore it. Much like the majority of White people in the United States, all four participants grew up in almost all-White communities with little exposure to persons of other races. Perhaps the most shocking connection between these teachers is that three of the four admitted having a family member with ties to the KKK shedding light on the early exposure to racism these teachers had to overcome.

Several researchers (see, e.g., Irvine, 2003; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings,1994) have explored how best to prepare teachers for urban schools. Most of the works cited in the literature review of this study focused on pre-service teachers enrolled in some type of multicultural coursework. But only one participant in this study, Caroline, gave credit to her university coursework for helping prepare her to teach Black children. Carrie

questioned the relevance of a multicultural class she took with mostly White students in which the main project was for students to report on their own culture. And even though Oliver was enrolled in an urban education program, he was disappointed with the lack of exposure to literature on teaching Black children. Patt, like Caroline, began teaching on a provisional license but was required to take only a few courses through her school system in order to get certified, and none of them focused on urban education. Caroline, on the other hand, was assigned literature in her courses that taught her about Black children, and one of her professors, in particular, centered all class discussions on race.

Although these four teachers may not have felt prepared to teach Black children going into their first teaching (or student-teaching) experience, they all went in with a strong background in mathematics. Perhaps what is most alarming about their journeys into the mathematics classroom is that only one of these teachers ever intended to teach. Caroline and Patt had originally planned to use their degrees to work in industry. Oliver had no plans to use his mathematics degree—he simply did it because he was good at it and enjoyed the abstract element of it. Carrie is the only participant in this study who always knew she wanted to teach, and when she realized she had a gift for doing mathematics, teaching mathematics seemed like a logical fit.

Although Carrie felt she was destined to teach, she questioned the reasons why she chose teaching as a profession. Caroline found her way into the classroom as a result of being unhappy with her degree in industrial engineering coupled with the encouragement of a recruiter to teach in a low-income school. Oliver, after having worked with Black men in a homeless shelter and White, middle school children in tutoring jobs, came to the classroom out of a desire to fight poverty while teaching the

subject he loves. Patt thought she would give teaching a try to earn some extra money while working on her master's degree in theoretical mathematics. But during our first interview, Carrie revealed, "I've always wondered if I became a teacher because I didn't know anything else." She explained:

> My parents didn't go to college. My dad worked in a warehouse. My mom worked in payroll. So I never really had exposure to any professions outside of teaching. So I wonder if that's part of it—if that's the only profession I was ever really exposed to, so I thought I should do it or if I really thought I should do it. I don't know where all that started. It always amazed me how people in high school said they wanted to be an engineer, because what the hell did an engineer do? I didn't know any engineers. I'd never met an engineer. I didn't know anybody. The only professions I really knew were teacher, doctor, lawyer, and then what my parents did. So I wonder if that's part of why I wanted to do it is because it was comfortable. (Interview 1)

Despite the different routes these teachers took to become secondary mathematics teachers, they each placed upon themselves a set of "extra" responsibilities not owned by all teachers. In other words, there are certain aspects of the profession that these teachers considered to be part of the job but that many other teachers and administrators may not. Amongst these responsibilities are the racial conversations occurring in the classrooms of Caroline, Patt, and Oliver. All three of these teachers see conversations on race as non-negotiable. For them, to openly discuss race with students is necessary for several reasons. First, all three teachers feel that these conversations are especially important for students who have little exposure to people from other races. Now that Caroline teaches both Hispanic and Black students, she feels that racial conversations are just as important with these students because they are exposed to a multitude of different backgrounds daily. Second, all three teachers feel the best approach to take in dealing with their own Whiteness is simply to expose it. Both Oliver and Caroline bring attention to the racial

differences between themselves and their students within the first few days of school. Caroline, in particular states:

> Usually, I bring it [race] up right in the beginning, like in the first day we'll talk about it. I'll be like…"Well, obviously I'm White and you're not; so are there any questions you want to ask me?" or stuff like that, and some of their questions are so funny. So we usually try to get that out of the way pretty fast. (Interview 1)

Patt recalled addressing the issue of her Whiteness with students when they often "slip up" and call her Mrs. White, instead of Mrs. Hunt. To this, Patt takes a light-hearted approach—trying to disarm the tension and make the students feel more comfortable. And third, Caroline, Oliver, and Patt all admit that facilitating these conversations makes their jobs easier. The conversations help to not only "break the ice" with students but also they help the teacher establish a relationship with students.

When I first began interviewing participants, they had just completed the 2008–2009 school year. Caroline, Patt, and Oliver each shared that the historic 2008 presidential election had naturally opened up conversations on race in their classrooms. While sharing that he strives to create space for Freirian dialogue in his classroom, Oliver acknowledged, "It's been really easy with the election in the past year, because there were just days when we just punted school all together and talked—the day after the election, the day of the inauguration, we didn't do—we did Obama" (Interview 1). And although Patt's conservative political views very rarely align with those of President Obama, she admitted:

> I was going to vote for Obama because he's Black. I'm totally against most all of his policies, but I was going to vote for him because he's Black—because I love my students and I know they feel disenfranchised….Whatever havoc he reeks on the country as far as the financial and whatever, it's worth it to me for my kids; for him to be there and for his family to be in the White house so they have that example. (Interview 1)

Patt also pointed out that during the election, her students had a sense of patriotism that she had not seen before in her teaching career.

By engaging in open dialogue about race, whether the teachers are aware of this or not, they are working towards what Giroux (1996) called "decentering power." All four teachers in this study, either consciously or unconsciously, take action towards dismantling White hegemony first, by recognizing that their Whiteness does play a role in their classrooms. Oliver, Caroline, and Patt all use their Whiteness to, as Patt said, "Get down and get black with the kids" (Interview 2). Oliver and Caroline both reinforce the "White men can't dance" stereotype to initiate racial conversations and to let students see the human side of them. Oliver explained:

> I think most White people would say I can't dance, but they [the students] *really* think I can't dance. So we get to use those stereotypes to—just to break things up sometimes, which I kind of was doing unconsciously for a while and then was kind of doing consciously. And now I've sort of started letting them lead the conversations. (Interview 1)

Carrie feels that her Whiteness creates barriers with students in the beginning. Because the faculty at Belmont is largely White, Carrie believes her students see her as "another White female" and make assumptions about her based on bad experiences they may have had in the past with other White teachers. Although Carrie does not engage students in the types of racial conversations that help Caroline, Oliver, and Patt break down those initial barriers, Carrie does put tremendous emphasis on building relationships with students early in the year to build trust.

All four participants, in fact, spoke of close relationships they have with students both inside and outside of the classroom. Patt described a maternalistic relationship she has with her students, whom she admitted to "mothering." Rather than stay home from

school the day after her husband was diagnosed with a serious illness, Patt went to school because, as she explained, “I had to tell my kids what was going on in my life” (Interview 2). Patt has extended this relationship with her students outside of school by opening up her home to students like Cedrick, whose stepfather had kicked him out of the house. Caroline and Carrie also talk about their extended relationship with students beyond the classroom. Caroline spoke of participating in community rallies and visiting students’ homes to talk to parents about a graduation program at her school. Carrie is committed to supporting her students after school as they participate in extracurricular activities. For Oliver, the level of involvement he desires with his students extends beyond the after-school events and into the community with them, where he and his family hope to one day live.

Lastly, each of the participants in this study values their students’ cultures. In fact, Caroline, Carrie, Oliver, and Patt all feel that learning about their students’ cultures is a necessary part of their jobs. They all denounce a colorblind ideology and believe, that as teachers, we should appreciate the differences each child brings to the classroom. But Caroline, very insightfully, insists that not only should we reject a colorblind ideology but also a “cultureblind” one as well. Her experience with Hispanic children from many different countries has made her realize how important it is to not simply categorize all students from the same race into one group. Instead, each child needs to be recognized individually and as having their own individual set of values and beliefs.

In Chapter 1 of this research project, I address the problematic nature of language when discussing others. Tatum (1997) pointed out that although the words and concepts we often use to describe others were created out of oppression, those words and concepts

are often necessary in order to engage in race-based conversations. Often times during this study, my participants talked about "Black culture." One could read excerpts from their interviews and infer: (a) the participants were essentializing all Black people to each participant's own "definition" of Black culture and (b) the participants were assuming an insider status with Black culture. Anytime one speaks of a different culture, or their own, for that matter, there is risk of essentializing. The participants in this study spoke of Black culture from their own personal experiences teaching Black children. They spoke candidly, as they should have, and because they did not have access to any other language, they often used language that could be perceived as "deficit," in that, they often reduced Black culture into an essentializing monolithic single culture. I do not believe there was any intention from the four participants to essentialize all African Americans; instead, I think their purpose was simple—to each tell their own stories of their personal experiences with African Americans over the course of their lifetime, in general, and specifically, pertaining to their classroom experiences teaching Black children. Likewise, although each participant shared aspects of Black culture in which they had become familiar from teaching Black children, none of these teachers claimed to "know" Black culture. They did not speak of Black culture as an insider; again, they spoke of their experiences learning about Black culture from Black children as an outsider.

All four teachers in this research project are evolving as "transformationist" educators (Howard, 2006) as they continue to learn about and reflect upon teaching Black students. Although Patt did not agree with Howard that stages of racial identity development exists, Caroline, Carrie, and Oliver all stated they currently are situated in the immersion/emersion stage of their transformation. Interestingly, all three teachers

spoke in depth, not about the immersion/emersion stage, but about reasons why they can not consider themselves to be in the autonomy stage. Howard defined this stage as a time when "we are engaged in activities to resist the many manifestations of oppression" (p. 97). Caroline, Carrie, and Oliver all shared that they each do not do enough on a daily basis to fight racism. As Oliver stated, "It's not enough to just teach in this school, but I've got to be active or I'm not going to disrupt anything" (Interview 2).

In the previous discussion, I have revealed some characteristics shared by the participants in this study in regards to their upbringing, their journey to becoming teachers, and their teaching practices. They all grew up in predominantly White communities. Three of them had no intention of becoming teachers, and most of them learned to teach Black children from "on the job training" rather than through a university program. They all have strong backgrounds in mathematics, but each of them came to teach mathematics for very different reasons. In the classroom, they engage students in racial dialogue, build lasting relationships with students, respect and appreciate their students' differences—all the while mindful of the implications of their own Whiteness as they interact with students. All of these elements combined have, in some way, contributed to their own success. But do the teachers consider themselves to be successful? And if so, what factors do *they* feel contribute to this success?

Three of the participants, Carrie, Patt, and Oliver, recognized themselves as successful teachers of Black children. Aside from a couple of common ideas, each teacher offered different reasons for why they feel they are successful. Carrie and Patt, for instance, both measure success in terms of individual students. Carrie named two students, in particular, that she considers her "successes." Patt shared that she has

embraced advice once given to her by a fellow educator: "[You can't fix everything,] but you can make it better a little here and there" (Interview 2). Both teachers feel that, for them, success has to be viewed one student at a time.

Patt and Oliver both attribute their love of the job to their success. Oliver remarked:

> I think I'm successful because one: because I enjoy it. I think there's a certain amount of if you enjoy what you do then that's good for you, and good for who you're doing it with. I think if a teacher enjoys teaching, then they're probably a good teacher or that's at least a mark in the good teacher column. (Interview 1)

In regards to her success, Patt modestly expressed:

> I wouldn't consider myself anymore successful than any of the other math teachers, except in the fact that I'm so happy doing what I do and that's part, to me—that's part of my success is that I'm happy doing it. And I think the kids feel that. Well, I know they do. (Interview 1)

In our interviews, Patt repeatedly mentioned that her happiness with her job is largely due to the fact that she does not have to work. Patt's husband had never intended for her to work—she only began teaching to earn some extra money. As she explained:

> It's kind of like people that are old enough to retire and don't. It's a whole different attitude. It gives you a sense of freedom and much less—much less anxiety when you know if it gets to where I don't like it, I can walk out today. (Interview 1)

Although Patt may have always had the option to quit, her love of the job and the students have kept her in the profession for over two decades.

Aside from Carrie and Patt's shared philosophy on success, and the fact that satisfaction with their jobs has contributed to the success of Oliver and Patt, each teacher has a different perception of the factors that contribute to their own success. In addition to truly enjoying his job, Oliver also feels that his willingness to openly discuss race and address what he calls the "White–Black power differential" with his students helps him

be successful (Interview 1). Carrie pointed out that the support she gives her students, both in and out of the classroom, plays a role in her success. According to Carrie, "I just think that's why I'm successful. I think, if nothing else, all my students really think I'm on their side" (Interview 1). Patt was particularly insightful about factors that she feels have led to her success with African American children. Patt firmly believes that, as a teacher, she is molded by her role as a mother. She pointed out that she was a mother for 15 years prior to beginning her career as a high school teacher. Because of this, Patt asserted: "I did not go in as a teacher. I never saw myself as a teacher—I saw myself as a mother temporarily teaching. So I mothered the kids" (Interview 1). Overall, Patt's light-hearted personality, sense of humor, and her love for her students have all contributed to her success. "I'm not shy about letting them [students] know I love my job," she admitted (Interview 2). Caroline, on the other hand, does not feel ready to label herself as a successful teacher. In her words:

> I mean, I don't really think I've reached that point yet. I feel that I have a lot to learn….I feel that I have a good relationship with my students, and I try my best to teach it the best I can, but I still feel like I have a long way to go in terms of becoming an excellent teacher. (Interview 1)

Despite Caroline's humble outlook on her status as a teacher, she certainly possesses many qualities of a successful teacher and continues to reflect on and refine her practices.

Caroline, Carrie, Patt, and Oliver have all been identified as successful teachers of African American students. And while they each possess distinct characteristics that set them apart from many other White teachers of Black students, they cannot be held up as exemplars for fellow White teachers. By sharing their stories, these four teachers have allowed us the opportunity to learn from their successes with Black children, but we must remember that they, too, are constantly reinventing themselves with each new experience

(Freire, 1970/2000). All of those involved in this research, including myself, continue to transform and progress on a continuum that has no end. We must all remember that we never "get there"—rather, we keep strengthening our understandings of race, culture, class, and gender in order to create a classroom environment that best meets the needs of all students.

Although the life histories of the teachers in this study unveiled a long list of characteristics of successful teachers of Black students, in no way can this list be used as a "cookie-cutter" approach to describing a successful teacher. The attention to students' cultures, the relationships that are formed, and the openness to talk about race seem to be common practices that all make these teachers successful; however, it is also important not to forget the less complex ideas that surfaced: a love for the job and the students. All of these teachers are passionate about mathematics, their students, and the career they have chosen; nevertheless, it is in looking closely at their individual successes that really assists in understanding what makes up true success in educating Black students.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

> The challenge of improving the mathematical performance of African American students must be fought on three fronts: programmatic, personal, and political. Programmatically, we must participate in the development of meaningful and challenging curricula. Personally, we must come to develop caring and compassionate relationships with students—relationships born of informed empathy, not sympathy. Politically, we must understand that our future as a people is directly tied to our children's ability to make the most of their education—to use it not merely for their own economic gain and personal aggrandizement, but rather for a restructuring of an inequitable, unjust society. (Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 706)

In this chapter, I revisit some key elements of my study and provide final thoughts on the findings. I then discuss some limitations and conclude with possible implications and recommendations for teacher preparation, professional development, mathematics education research, and educational policy.

The idea for this research topic was born from my own desire to better understand how I became personally and professionally passionate about teaching African American children. Why did I show interest in being placed in a diverse school for my student teaching experience despite having little prior exposure to people of non-White races? How did my racial experiences growing up possibly influence this passion? Why was I—a middle-class White woman—not completely satisfied to teach in a White school like the ones I attended? I sought answers to these questions through the experiences of my participants—four White teachers who, like me, made a conscious decision to teach Black children; yet, I still don't have all the answers. What I did learn through this

research project is that there is no "cultural prerequisite" to being successful with Black children. We cannot discount the worth of a White teacher's ability to connect to Black students simply because she has no experience with other cultures. If this were the case—if these teachers had been discouraged from teaching Black children, like I am sure many others before have been, then there are thousands of students whose lives would never have been touched by these teachers.

Discussion of the Study

The inspiration behind this project developed because I wanted to learn more about my passion for teaching African American children; however, the ultimate intent of implementing the project was to inform far more teachers and teacher educators than just myself. I engaged in this project to learn about successful White teachers of African American children by asking them some of the same questions I had often asked myself. The purpose was to examine their lived experiences in hopes to better understand their decision to teach Black children and the factors that may have led to their success in teaching Black children. I listened to stories of their childhood, their early adulthood, and their teaching experiences. I also engaged them in conversations about race and encouraged them to teach me about the role race plays in their individual classrooms. The following questions served as a guide throughout the project:

1. How do the life histories of successful White mathematics teachers of African American children influence their decision to teach African American children?
2. How do these life histories influence their pedagogical practices as successful teachers of African American children?

3. How do successful White mathematics teachers of African American children view the role of their Whiteness in their teaching?

A collective case study (Stake, 1995) was employed to help answer these questions. This methodology allowed the focus of the project to remain on each individual participant. And although there were certainly some interesting similarities (and differences) amongst the teachers, those similarities and differences were not formally considered until after each teacher's story was written. Stake explained, "we do not study a case primarily to understand other cases" (p. 4); however, examining multiple cases can offer insight into a phenomenon.

The data for this project were collected through three, semi-structured interviews conducted over a 5-month time period, beginning in the summer of 2009. The first interview allowed participants the opportunity to (re)tell their stories, beginning with childhood and continuing on to the present as mathematics teachers of African American students. The conversations documented during the second round of interviews centered on Howard's (2006) book *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools*, which the participants were asked to read and reflect upon prior to the second interview. The book engaged these teachers in complex discussions on race, White hegemony, color blindness, and the development of an anti-racist White identity. Howard's book assisted in making the often difficult task of discussing race approachable, and gave both the participants and myself a language to engage in "race talk" that permitted richer and more descriptive conversations. The third and final interview was followed by an opportunity for participants to critically read and provide

feedback on the transcripts of their previous two interviews and served as a follow up to those conversations as well.

As a qualitative researcher, I had a responsibility from the beginning of the project to monitor my biases—understanding how my subjectivity not only informed the project but enriched it as well (Peshkin, 1988). Throughout this project, the focus remained on each individual participant; therefore, I was obligated to ensure that each participant's "voice" was not silenced in my final report. Marshall and Rossman (2006) explained, "The participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it" (p. 101).

As I stated earlier, it is impossible for a researcher to completely remove herself from the study and any attempt to do so would be in direct contradiction to the theoretical foundation on which the project was built. Critical theory is the lens through which I view the world, and the project would be very different if I had not had any previous exposure to the works of critical theorists. I could have researched successful White mathematics teachers 10 years ago. I could have used the same methodology and the same methods of collecting data, but without critical theory, I would not have questioned every aspect of the research process. I would not have had the language to communicate my thoughts, and I would not have been able to effectively engage in conversations with my participants. In short, the data and the analysis of data would be very different.

While critical theory served as my lens and voice throughout this project, critical race theory (CRT) and Whiteness studies brought race to the forefront of the conversations. The open-ended interview style employed in this study embraced the important element of storytelling key to critical race theory. These stories, according to

Ladson-Billings (1998), "add necessary contextual contours to the seeming 'objectivity' of positivist perspectives" (p. 11). CRT and Whiteness studies allowed participants (and me) to challenge racial hierarchies, to reflect upon and discuss the role of race in their teaching, to examine the racial dynamics between student and teacher, and to begin to understand how their racial experiences may have impacted their own teaching practices. I argue no study on race, particularly one focusing on the dynamic relationships formed between White teachers and African American students, should be absent of these two theories.

Final Thoughts on Findings

The four participants in this study allowed me to listen to their stories, which often included intimate and uncomfortable details of their lives. They led the discussions. They chose which stories to share and which would remain unspoken. And through these conversations, I came to know four uniquely different individuals who shared some common ideas on teaching and learning, particularly as it pertains to African American students.

Although most of these teachers had very limited exposure to critical theory, through our conversations, they all demonstrated tenets of critical pedagogy. They were willing to be disruptive and were extremely reflective about every topic we discussed. Not one of these teachers accepts poor performance from their students as "just the way it is." They are so comfortable in their professions, that they are willing to change a lesson while it is being taught for the benefit of their students. They question their own teaching as it happens just as they questioned the ideas we discussed in our conversations.

As I hypothesized at the onset of the study, all four teachers employed, to some degree, culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms. Similar to the teachers in Ladson-Billings's (1994) study, these teachers (a) believe that all their students can succeed, (b) see themselves as part of the community, (c) build strong relationships with students that often extend beyond the classroom, (d) encourage students to work together collaboratively, and (e) are passionate about mathematics and are willing to scaffold content for students when gaps in their knowledge become apparent. But despite the focus of both my study and Ladson-Billings's study on African American children, I believe the four teachers in this study would utilize these methods in any school setting, regardless of the race of their students.

In this research study, three commonalities emerged among the participants—two that the participants themselves felt strongly contributed to their success in teaching Black students and a third which became apparent during the cross-case analysis: (a) forming meaningful relationships with students, (b) engaging students in racial conversations, and (c) reflecting both individually and collectively with colleagues. The teachers in this study all develop strong relationships with their mathematics students and view those teacher–student relationships as an essential part of their jobs. Carrie asserted that forming relationships (or not) with students could "make or break the deal" (Interview 1) in being able to connect with students. Carrie emphasized the importance, for her, of extending those relationships beyond the classroom by attending extra-curricular events in which her students participate. Oliver desires to strengthen his relationship with students by living in the community with them rather than residing in a distant suburb. Caroline recognized the potential for her (especially as a White woman) to

be a roadblock to her students' learning if she fails to connect with each of them individually. Respecting her students and, in turn, gaining their respect is top priority for Caroline. And Patt, who is known in her community for "taking in" troubled students in times of crisis, claimed, "I think addressing a child's affective domain is the most important thing to be able to teach them" (Interview 2).

In three of the four participant's classrooms, engaging in racial conversations with students is one strategy for building meaningful relationships. Caroline, Patt, and Oliver all strongly believed that their willingness and ability to engage in racial conversations with students allowed them to seem more "real" to their students and played a vital role in their overall success in teaching Black students, in particular. In fact, for these three teachers, avoiding "race talk" was simply not an option.

> If you like them [students], you'll find that it is your place to bring it [race] up. I mean, if you're a White teacher, and especially in my situation where most of the kids live very insular lives and they don't deal with a lot of White people—it's their chance to know you. (Patt, Interview 2)

Oliver shared, "I think I'm a better teacher if we sort of address the White–Black—the power differential" (Interview 1). For Caroline, the ability to talk openly with students about race was especially crucial in her new teaching job where she teaches both Latina/o and Black students. Caroline was excited to join a faculty committed to addressing racial issues; her prior experience engaging Black students in racial dialogue helped her ease into the new position. Additionally, all three of these teachers recognized students' awareness of their Whiteness and felt it was a necessary difference to address:

> And I think there's a certain danger in a White teacher standing in front of a bunch of Black kids and them just shutting them off completely. I mean, they're already feeling oppressed being at school and they're already feeling oppressed being Black, but if this White man's going to talk to me—there's no reason for me to listen. And I think the work I do to try to get conversation—like that

> conversation on MLK day—I think that helps reach out to kids that otherwise would shut me down. (Oliver, Interview 1).

However, it is important to reiterate that in these teachers' classrooms, race is not discussed merely as a means of building relationships. They truly believe racial differences between teacher and student, as well as differences between students themselves, should not be ignored and that discussions about race, in general, are healthy ones in which to engage. Although race talk often naturally ensues from conversations amongst students, these teachers themselves, at times, initiate discussions about race and incorporate them into their mathematics lessons. These racial discussions provide not only an opportunity for students to grow and learn about racial differences but also allow teachers to grow as they move forward on the continuum of racial understanding. Caroline, Patt, and Oliver all admitted these racial conversations make their jobs a little easier because they provide an outlet for racial tension. I argue, too, that to then be able to problematize race and reflect on racial discussions with faculty helps to create a racially healthy school environment for students and teachers alike.

All four teachers in this study emphasized the importance of building meaningful relationships with their students, and three of them attributed their willingness to talk openly with students about race to their success with Black students. Building teacher–student relationships and engaging in racial conversations were commonalities amongst the participants that they individually recognized as important to their practice, and although only Carrie specifically talked about reflection, it, too. is a common characteristic among all four participants.

Through the course of the three interviews with each of the participants, all four of them were extremely reflective. Likewise, it was apparent from these discussions that

being reflective was not out of character for any of these teachers—they each took on the role of reflective practitioner in their teaching as well. These teachers were willing to be disruptive, not only with matters of race but with any issue that concerned the welfare of their students. The teachers in this study regularly reflected on every aspect of their jobs, including not only teaching but also their interactions with students and staff. Furthermore, our conversations about Howard's (2006) book lead me to believe that these teachers are reflective in *all* aspects of their lives. And, perhaps most important, they were willing to follow through on that reflection by adjusting and making changes when needed.

So, how did these White, middle-class mathematics teachers, whom prior to teaching had formed very few, if any, meaningful relationships with people outside the White race, *know* to build relationships with students, talk about race in their classrooms, and be reflective in all aspects of their lives? The answers are not apparent, but this research project does reveal some insight. First, each teacher who participated in this project resoundingly rejected a color-blind ideology despite admitting they were raised to "not see color." All four teachers credited their parents for their open-mindedness and recognized their parents as contributing to their success. Carrie, who placed particular emphasis on meaningful relationships with students, admitted that she never developed such a relationship with any of her K–12 teachers. Nevertheless, the bonds she formed with her student-teaching mentor, as well as a few college professors, taught Carrie the value of teacher–student relationships. Patt emphasized the importance of teacher–student relationships, especially when teacher and student are "culturally mismatched" (Irvine, 2003):

> I think especially with Black kids, because they are culturally more emotive—or maybe it's just if you're White and they're Black—it's more important that they know you really like them and that you care whether they learn or not. (Interview 2)

For Oliver, Caroline, and Patt engaging in racial discussions with students is one way to let students know they care. For all three of these teachers, the need to engage in such conversations seemed to be intuitive. No one advised them to initiate such conversations with students. But because the students were immersed in almost all-Black schools, race was a topic that naturally presented itself on a regular basis and each teacher's intuition led her or him to address, rather than ignore, the racial issue at hand. Carrie, who teaches in a racially diverse school with a predominantly White faculty, shared it is because her students are taught by so many White teachers that they do not discuss race in her class. Although she recognized there are occasional racial issues amongst the students (and teachers) at the school, the students are accustomed to both peers and teachers from different racial backgrounds and are not compelled to initiate such discussions.

Interestingly, Carrie and Oliver brought attention to the impact their own professions—teaching in predominantly Black schools—has had on their parents. Carrie, whose mother and father were raised themselves by racist parents, acknowledged that her parents, and her mother, in particular, have grown more open-minded since she began working at Belmont. According to Carrie, she now engages in conversations with her parents that have helped them become "more aware." Oliver also regularly discusses race with his parents—not only in regards to his teaching but also from his graduate coursework. Oliver noted that his mother "has been coming to terms with White privilege, too, over the past couple of years" (Interview 2).

All four teachers in this research study admitted experiencing some challenges in their first years of teaching, but not one of these teachers struggled with their mathematical content. Although only one teacher in this study, Carrie, began her college career with the intention to teach, all four teachers were very strong mathematically and sought to instill a love of mathematics in their students. Their confidence in mathematics allowed them time to focus on other aspects of their teaching—improving pedagogy, creating lessons tailored to their students, and building relationships with students, amongst others (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Irvine, 2003).

The teachers who participated in this study all came to teaching for different reasons. Caroline and Oliver were both hesitant to use their degrees to work in industry and chose teaching to fulfill a desire to fight social injustices. Patt began teaching to supplement her family's income while she worked on a master's degree in mathematics. And Carrie, the only one of the four teachers who went through a traditional teacher education program before pursuing a job as a teacher, simply stated "I always wanted to be a teacher" (Interview 1). Regardless, all four teachers not only chose to use their strong mathematical backgrounds to teach in secondary schools, but also chose to do so in an urban environment and have remained there ever since.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are an inevitable component of any research. My research is no exception. Fortunately, I identified early on—as I struggled with how best to select participants and as I honed in on a suitable methodological approach—some possible limiting factors of this study. In the following discussion, I identify five questions that were necessary to consider throughout this research project as possible limitations.

To begin, did I assume, even before collecting data, that the participants in this study practiced culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994)? To a certain degree, yes, I did. As a fellow mathematics teacher of African American students, perhaps my own subjectivity played a part in this assumption. Although I did not assume that each of these teachers would identify with *all* the culturally relevant characteristics described by Ladson-Billings, in my own experience, it seemed that some of these characteristics were simply implied. What I did not know as I embarked on this study was exactly *which* of the culturally relevant methods these participants would embrace. Additionally, I could not have predicted the pedagogical practices they would employ that are absent from the literature on culturally relevant methods.

Second, did reading from Howard's (2006) book influence my participants to "think" a certain way? Although this question is certainly a valid concern, I do not believe the participants were anything but completely honest and true to their own philosophies. One reason for using Howard's book as a basis for interview conversation was to allow the teachers to discuss the often difficult topic of race in the context of Howard's book, rather than in terms of their own experiences. However, all four teachers talked openly about these topics in relation to their own lives. Indeed, each teacher spent most of the second interview talking very personally about Howard's book. As previously pointed out, Howard's book provided a common language between the participants and me through which we were able to engage in racial discourse. Without reading Howard's book, I am certain the depth and richness of the data would have been compromised.

Although Howard's book made otherwise uncomfortable racial dialogue somewhat "easier," I was fully aware, during our conversations, that race is a difficult topic to discuss, even between two White teachers. Given that, I also had to consider the question: Did my own Whiteness limit, or even contaminate the data? In other words, did the participants, at times, wrongly assume that I understood their perspective simply because of our shared racial background? Again, possibly, but allowing participants the opportunity to critically read, and provide feedback on my initial analysis helped "clear up," so to speak, any misunderstandings. In fact, participants were asked to member check both the original interview transcripts, as well as their individual stories, once written. Coupling these two opportunities assisted in monitoring my subjectivity and bringing each teacher's voice to the forefront.

Each participant and I not only shared race but also we shared a common background in mathematics. Thus, it is necessary to ponder: Did a common background in mathematics limit the discussion on mathematics itself? I do believe that had my background as the researcher been outside the field of mathematics the participants would have seen a greater need to provide more detail about the mathematics they teach. There were several instances during the interviews when the participants discussed mathematics but failed to fully explain themselves because, as a fellow mathematics teacher, they knew I could relate. Although I certainly could have asked more questions specifically about mathematics, at the time of the interviews, my focus was fixed upon understanding their life histories and the presence of their own Whiteness in their classrooms.

Last, were my four participants, three of whom had less than 10 years teaching experience at the time of this study, too homogeneous? Of course, the topic of the study

allowed no room for racial diversity amongst the teachers, but would four participants with a wider range of teaching experience or, perhaps, additional participants, in general, have enriched the data? I can only assume that additional participants would have added to the body of research on successful White mathematics teachers of African American students. Nevertheless, regardless of the number of participants, the intent of this project was not to generalize the findings to *all* such teachers. Thus, the benefits from an additional one or, possibly, two more participants in this study would not outweigh the significant increase in work the additional hours of interview data would have generated. Also, finding a successful White teacher with, say, 10-20 years of teaching experience would not have guaranteed "better" data. As was explained in chapter 3, each individual's worldview and philosophies transform at a different rate over time—depending on their own individual experiences. Because two teachers with the same years of experience teaching could have radically different views on the topics discussed in this study, any attempt to diversify the participants' experience levels would have been moot.

Implications and Recommendations

The overall goal of this research project was to gain insight into the lives of White mathematics teachers who have experienced success with African American students in order to improve teacher preparation programs and, ultimately, raise mathematics achievement of African American students. The literature review of this study identifies a history of research that documents the shortcomings of White teachers in urban environments but does little to investigate successful White teachers, especially successful White teachers of mathematics. The studies discussed in chapter 2 reveal

White teachers' negative attitudes towards teaching African American children, a common adoption of color-blindness as an appropriate way to "deal with" race, and an overall denial of White privilege. These studies show that White teachers, in general, resist engaging in racial discussions and, when such discussions do occur, White teachers often transfer blame to students, parents, and their poor home lives—what Irvine (2003) called "victim-blaming." With a focus specifically on successful White mathematics teachers, the findings of this project have implications to mathematics education in three broad areas: (a) colleges (schools) of education for both pre-service teachers and faculty, (b) school systems and administration for in-service teachers, and (c) educational researchers and policymakers.

None of the four teachers in this study indicated that they had been provided the opportunity to explore or examine successful pedagogical strategies of teaching Black children before they began their careers. Somehow, despite their predominantly White upbringing, they "figured out," so to speak, how to connect to and be successful with Black children. And although the findings from this research do not provide a checklist for how to identify White teachers with potential for success with Black children, it does offer hope that White pre-service teachers—without any "cultural prerequisites"—can have experiences in their teacher education programs that provide knowledge of how to be successful with Black children without relying on "on-the-job" training or being left to feel like a White environment is the only one in which they can teach.

First, colleges of education need to incorporate a cultural-immersion component to their teacher education programs (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Immersion in a non-White culture will give pre-service teachers a chance to better

understand families, communities, and the everyday lived experiences of their students (Irvine). Although there are various ways to design an immersion program, one possibility would be to implement a host family model similar to what is commonly used in foreign exchange student programs. Such a model would place a pre-service teacher in a cultural community different than her own for an extended length of time. Whether this immersive experience takes place simultaneously with student teaching or, perhaps, prior to the student teaching experience, the pre-service teacher would then have an opportunity to gain intimate knowledge of the culture from which her students come. The purpose of such a program, however, is not to learn only about one culture but also, as Irvine explained, "to 'learn how to learn' about culture and its influence on their students' experiences in school" (p. 83). The hope is that this in-depth knowledge about one particular culture can then be carried over and applied to help learn about any culture represented by students in our schools.

Scholars (e.g., Irvine, 2003; Sleeter, 2001) agree that cultural immersion programs are difficult to organize and require a significant time commitment to put into place, but in the end, these programs allow pre-service teachers to gain a more in-depth understanding about the students they teach—an understanding that cannot always be acquired from classroom conversations with students during the school day. Teacher educators who develop these cultural immersion programs also have a responsibility to assure that immersion in different cultures does not serve to reinforce existing stereotypes. Therefore, such a program must also require some coursework prior to immersion to prepare students for the experience and to lessen the possibility that such an

experience will have a negative impact on the teacher and the community in which she is placed.

My unique pre-service teaching experiences were invaluable to me. Having the opportunity to speak candidly with four death-row inmates about their lives before (and after) their convictions and to hear their opinions on the role education plays in our society, in general, was unforgettable. My visit to a public housing community was also memorably insightful, and it left a deep impression upon me because the bus tour of the neighborhood showed our group of teaching interns exactly where our students lived and the environment in which they were being raised. These attempts at immersion in the community, however, fell short of giving us extended experiences that would have allowed us to learn more about our students. And although these brief experiences had a positive impact on me, for other interns, such limited exposure could have reinforced stereotypes. A program aiming to prepare teachers to work with students whose backgrounds are different than their own must be careful not to discourage those who are willing and/or desire to teach in urban schools by only giving "snapshots" of other cultures.

Ladson-Billings recommended teacher education programs select only those teacher candidates who express an interest in teaching African American children; however, in my study, Carrie is a prime example of a teacher who would have been rejected using this criterion. Although she initially had no interest in teaching in an urban school, she was open-minded and willing to try. I argue that teacher preparation programs with an explicitly stated cultural-immersion component will not attract White teachers unwilling to teach non-White students, but such a program has great potential to

recognize White teachers, like Carrie, who may not realize her or his own capacity for success with Black students.

The traditional method of teaching pre-service teachers about non-White cultures—a one semester required multicultural class—must be extinguished. Teacher educators must go beyond mere exposure to other cultures—what Ladson-Billings called a "foods-and-festivals" approach to culture (1994)—and delve into an examination of students' own cultures through multicultural anti-racist education (Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994; McIntyre, 1997). Pre-service teachers, especially those who are White, need a space in which to discuss race, challenge White hegemony, and confront assumptions about other cultures. As Howard (2006) explained, "We cannot help our students overcome the negative repercussions of past and present racial dominance if we have not unraveled the remnants of dominance that still lingers in our minds, hearts, and habits" (p. 6).

A teacher preparation program that embraces multicultural anti-racist education is also one wherein new teachers can learn about the role politics plays in education and within which teachers should be encouraged to be change agents in their schools and communities. Pre-service teachers need to learn and engage in dialogue about social injustices while being provided "opportunities to critique the system in ways that will help them choose a role as either agent of change or defender of the status quo" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 133). Such a teacher preparation program inevitably must include a study of critical theory, allowing pre-service teachers and faculty, together, to challenge the social structure in which we live. In short, teacher educators "need to think more holistically about teacher education programs" (McIntyre, 1997, p. 147).

It is not enough, however, for pre-service teachers to simply be given a space in which to discuss race and social injustices. They need to not only learn about culturally relevant pedagogy but also should be provided opportunities to put it into practice. Pre-service teachers must be taught how to incorporate issues of social justice into their mathematics lessons (see, e.g., Gutstein & Peterson, 2005) and should create lessons that are culturally relevant to their students with on-going feedback from their university professors.

Ideally, pre-service teachers must also have opportunities to observe culturally relevant lessons being taught; however, selection of mentors for student teachers is often "haphazard" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 134) and is not always based in the best interest of the student teacher. Thus, it is even more important that college of education faculty play an active role in the student-teaching experience. Communication of expectations between faculty, student teacher, and mentor is vital.

Of course, a teacher preparation program such as the one I propose is not possible without knowledgeable and sensitive faculty in teacher education (Irvine, 2003). Although Irvine questioned the legitimacy of any multicultural program whose faculties are not multicultural, I contend that African American students can not wait for an increase in culturally diverse teacher educators. Reform must begin with those currently in education—teacher educators, system administrators, and in-service teachers alike. And for those involved in training and working alongside new mathematics teachers, we must keep in mind that "teachers are influenced by their past and present cultural encounters…we teach who we are" (Irvine, 2003, p. 46). If pre-service teachers are not provided opportunities to learn about Black students and how best to teach them, they

will be left to learn on their own. This lack of opportunity could lead new teachers to either an early exit from the teaching profession or, even worse, could result in African American students being taught by a culturally insensitive teacher.

In theory, many of the experiences and conversations that take place in teacher preparation programs should continue throughout a teacher's career. In practice, however, there are simply too many other duties and responsibilities placed on teachers for school systems to provide the depth of training in urban education that teachers need. In the discussion that follows, I highlight four areas of professional development that I believe are essential in any multicultural school settings: (a) the importance of meaningful teacher–student relationships, (b) a connection to the community, (c) a commitment to multicultural anti-racist education, and (d) the development of teachers as reflective practitioners.

First, based on the importance the four participants in this study placed on strong teacher–student relationships, I recommend on-going professional development to assist teachers in understanding the importance of these relationships and strategies to help them build those relationships with students. Because of the perverse actions of a few teachers each year who fail to understand and comply with laws prohibiting inappropriate teacher–student relationships, every school year districts are required to "train" teachers on such laws. Sadly, however, most school districts fail to recognize the value in training teachers on developing healthy teacher–student relationships. Frustrated by administrators who are more concerned with classroom aesthetics than with teachers' abilities to connect with children, Patt shared, "but so much focus is on EQs [essential

questions] and word walls, that relationships with students is not top priority" (Patt, interview 2).

Second, a goal of any urban district should be not only for teachers to form meaningful relationships with students but also with the school's surrounding community. At minimum, teachers should be familiar with students' communities and stay informed about current events happening within those communities.

Third, school systems and building administrators in culturally diverse districts—especially districts with a large percentage of White faculty—need to incorporate multicultural anti-racist education in their professional development plans. The evolution of transformationist teaching (Howard, 2006) is a lifelong process and must not cease once pre-service teachers begin their careers. As Howard asserted, "An unexamined life on the part of a White teacher is a danger to every student" (p. 127), but teachers cannot be expected to examine their own lives without some direction—they need space in which to dialogue with fellow teachers about race. It is the responsibility of building-level administrators to create this space and devote time for teachers to engage in racial dialogue.

And last, school district personnel need to encourage teachers to continually reflect on their practices and provide planning time for teachers to share ideas with colleagues. One commonality amongst the participants in this study was that each teacher described her or his pedagogical practices as fluid. In other words, each teacher was willing to reflect and change the course of a lesson when and if the lesson failed to work for students. Teachers not only need encouragement to reflect on their own practices but

also common planning time to discuss content and teaching strategies, as well as opportunities to continue discussions on race and culture.

The work of improving mathematics education for African American students at the district and school levels depends in large part on decisions made by policymakers and, ideally, by mathematics educational research. The four teachers whom participated in this study shared concerns over their state's reform curriculum. Specifically, they felt a disconnect exists between students' lived experiences and the context of the mathematical tasks provided by the state Department of Education. Policymakers and Department of Education administrators can work together to assure careful plans are in place for the implementation of a new curriculum. Likewise, these policymakers and administrators should provide teachers with resources that include culture embedded within the mathematics. In this study, Caroline pointed out that the contexts of the tasks provided by the state Department of Education were not just irrelevant for African American students but for all students: "I don't think that any high school student would relate to those" (Interview 1).

Policymakers also play a significant role in the allocation of funds to school systems. The inequities noticed by Kozol (1991) over 20 years ago still exist in many school districts today. Schools with poor working conditions are unlikely to attract highly qualified mathematics teachers with the willingness and competency to teach African American children. And if they are willing to try, most often their stay is short-lived. A top priority for state policymakers should be to equitably distribute funds across schools and districts within their states. Oliver shared that an uneven distribution of funds exists even within his school due to programs that track students by ability: "We're pumping

our resources and best teachers to the White kids, and we're just pushing functional literacy to the Black kids" (Interview 1). Why should per pupil expenditures vary drastically within the same state, district, or even the same school?

At last, it is my hope that research in education continues to explore and learn from White teachers who have experienced success with Black students. Studies on White teachers' negative attitudes, unwillingness to talk about race, and their struggles with White privilege have contributed to a body of research on the unique and complex relationship between White teachers and African American students. Researchers, however, have all but exhausted these topics. The need now exists for a body of research focused on the accomplishments of White teachers, particularly in mathematics, in order to learn from their successes and figure out how to "grow" more culturally knowledgeable, racially aware, mathematically strong teachers who care about students and have a passion for lifelong learning.

Because the idea of mathematics as a "culture-free" course of study is widely accepted in the United States (and the world), even among mathematics educators, the field of mathematics education is in dire need of research that answers the question: How *do* mathematics teachers successfully relate to students' cultures through their mathematics lessons? With the majority of mathematics teachers being White, it is equally important to further investigate how successful White teachers of non-White students negotiate race in the context of their mathematics classrooms. For this research, I was not interested in classroom observations. My goal was to examine these teachers' life histories with the hope that their stories would provide insight as to how they became successful with Black children; however, there is a need to look more closely at ways in

which successful White teachers in urban schools address the cultural differences between teacher and student by conducting classroom observations.

The "culture-free" stigma attached to mathematics made this research especially important for the field of mathematics education, but one advantage of this study is that it can easily be replicated for other disciplines. Could a similar study on successful White English (foreign language, science, etc.) teachers of African American children be valuable? I believe any White teacher interested in learning how to be successful with African American students, regardless of discipline, would agree that such a study has worth. Likewise, similar studies are needed that investigate teachers who have been successful with other marginalized groups, not just African Americans.

The implications for this research and recommendations given here for teacher educators, district and school-level administrators, policymakers, and educational researchers are abundant. Together, these recommendations call for a large-scale shift in training for pre-service teachers and professional development for in-service teachers, as well as an adjustment to the way policymakers and educational researchers have traditionally conducted business. These changes will not happen overnight but those of us seeking reform in the best interest of African American students and the teachers who teach them can play a vital role in beginning this transformation. It begins with one teacher—one teacher willing to begin her own transformation: "Transformationist teachers…know that educational equity and school reform, in large part, depend on White educators' willingness to engage in the process of our own personal and professional growth" (Howard, 2006, p. 123).

Closing Remarks

I end with a glimpse of reality and a hope for the future about the continued existence of racism—an idea that looms over every aspect of this research project. Although White supremacists vehemently argue that Whites are now the oppressed race and even those less radical may believe that racism ended with the Civil Rights Movement, one only needs to read the paper or watch the nightly news to see evidence of its existence. Recently, a history teacher in rural Georgia allowed her students to parade around school in KKK attire, a middle school in Mississippi was uncovered for assigning race to specific class officer seats permitting only White students to run for president, and a well-known conservative White talk-show host argued her First Amendment rights where infringed upon after saying the "n-word" 11 times on the air.

So, I ask once again. Is Derrick Bell (1992) right? Is there permanence to racism? Though there does not seem to be evidence of possible extinction in the near future, I am hopeful that the generations to come will see its end. Rather than view racism through Bell's half-empty cup, I encourage everyone to take a look through the half-full cup of Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss. Perhaps when Dr. Seuss (1961) created the Sneetches—two groups of creatures separated only by whether or not their bellies had stars—he was signaling hope to his readers that one day the divisions of class, race, culture, and gender will not create prejudices against one another. Society has taught us, for example, to value White over Black, man over woman, heterosexual over homosexual, and, for the Sneetches, stars over no stars. One day, perhaps, we all will be "quite happy" to say:

> The Sneetches got really quite smart on that day, the day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches and no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches. That

day, all the Sneetches forgot about stars and whether they had one, or not, upon thars. (p. 24)

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Georgia State University
Department of Middle-Secondary Education and Instructional Technology
Informed Consent

Title: Successful White Mathematics Teachers of African American Students

Principal Investigator: David W. Stinson
Student Principal Investigator: Carla R. Bidwell

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate the lived experiences of successful White mathematics teachers of African American students. You are invited to participate because you were nominated by your colleagues who consider you to be a successful teacher of African American students. A total of five participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require approximately three to nine hours of your time over the course of six months (May to October) in face-to-face interviews with the researcher in addition to the time it takes you to read 84 pages of a text on your own.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will engage in three, semi-structured interviews each lasting between one to three hours in length. The interviews will be audio taped and will take place in a location of your choice between the months of May and October 2009. Following the first interview, you will be asked to read a portion of a text (84 pages) that will be discussed in the second interview.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may or may not benefit you personally. Overall, I hope to gain

information about your life experiences as they relate to your ideas on race, teaching African American children and your success with African American children.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. We will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. Only Carla Bidwell will have access to the information you provide. The digital recordings along with the transcribed interviews will be stored on a flash drive and will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. The key to the filing cabinet will remain on the researcher's key ring. A code sheet for the pseudonyms will be stored in a separate location away from the flash drive containing the interviews and transcriptions. The interviews will remain on the flash drive until all transcriptions are complete. At this time, the audio recordings will be erased and the pseudonym code sheet will be destroyed. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Carla Bidwell at (678)521-7160, carlabidwell26@yahoo.com or Dr. David Stinson at (404)413-8409, dstinson@gsu.edu if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

_____ _____

Participant Date

_____ _____

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL[20]

Pre-Interview: I will begin by introducing myself and the purpose of this study. I will discuss the informed consent form and ask the participant to sign it.

The following questions are just some of the questions that may be asked throughout the three interviews. Although discussions will be centered on the life experiences of the participants in regards to racial ideas and teaching African American children, each participant will to some degree determine the direction of the discussion.

1. Tell me about your background.

2. Describe the neighborhood you grew up in and your K-12 schooling experiences.

3. What made you want to be a teacher?

4. What college/university did you attend? Are there any post-secondary experiences you would like to share with me?

5. How much of what you know about teaching African American children do you attribute to your post-secondary education?

6. When and where did you begin teaching?

7. Why did you choose to teach in a school with a predominantly African American population?

8. Do you view yourself as a successful teacher of African American students and if so, why?

9. What things do you or have you done in your classroom that has facilitated the success of African American students?

10. Talk to me about racial experiences that you have had during your lifetime. Can you describe the first time you encountered someone of a different race than you

[20] Adapted from Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass and McIntyre, A. (1997). *Making meaning of Whiteness: Exploring racial identity with White teachers*. Albany: State University of New York.

11. What role do you feel your Whiteness plays in your classroom?

12. How do you feel teaching Black students is different from teaching White students?