Through these seemingly mundane accounts, prevalent teacher attitudes, values, frictions, conflicts, and ethics become more visible.

Professional Friction:
Racialized Discourse and the Practice of Teaching Art

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Language is crucial in situating our selves and others. Discursive patterns create alliances or factions, establish hierarchies, and subjugate individuals or groups. In this autoethnographic study, I consider how I, as a White woman teaching art, participate in, maneuver, and manipulate spoken and unspoken racialized discourses within the context of a high school with a diverse population of students. Through the data collection process of journaling over one school year, I recorded reflections on conversations, speeches, and written communication with, between, and regarding teachers, students, parents, and school administrators.

I employed discourse analysis on these texts and draw upon Critical Race Theory and Whiteness Studies to examine the discourses that govern the school and inform its social conventions as manifested in my professional identity as it intersects with various collegial spaces. I also show the value in performing an autoethnography as a way to evolve as a social justice educator and scholar as well as a means to give voice to teachers' stories so that we can render visible the way radicalized discourses and discords they create can shape the daily practice of teaching art.

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Discussions of racial discrimination often only exist as history lessons, but the lessons taught throughout U.S. schools about racial identity are deeply embedded within the daily practices of all members of a school community. Racial identities are established on a daily basis through (seemingly) casual interactions and microaggressions between teachers, students, parents, and administrators. The discourses that position and subjugate individuals can be as simple as an informal email or a casual hallway conversation to more public approaches like disciplinary hearings or faculty meetings. These messages establish relationships of sameness or difference, power or subordination, and allegiance or contention. Beyond the interactions of daily personal relationships, there are normalizing school practices; ways of doing things, guiding principles, and procedures, that define and shape parties in relationship to each other as well as ascertaining a dominant value system over the school context. Rules as well as social norms are communicated through highly visible social etiquette conventions as well as formalized policies and legislation (Hodge & Kress, 1988). The discourses that define these rules are often structured to ensure dominant parties remain unchallenged (Hodge & Kress, 1988). In the context of U.S. schools, censorship of speech or imagery, management tactics, and disciplinary policies are often designed to fit the interests and desires of dominant White educational leaders.

As a seasoned White art teacher in a school with a predominately Black student population and predominately White faculty[1], I started to reflect on how race is situated, discussed, and defined in my particular school context. The original catalyst for this investigation was ongoing conversations with other faculty members regarding our students. On far too many occasions, the negative (and often stereotypical), discursively constructed images my colleagues painted of students did not coincide with my own impressions of the young adults I had come to know. I considered the process of navigating through these texts[2] and how I confronted interactions that created (or had the

possibility to create) friction between my pedagogical/moral beliefs and the discourses of my colleagues or myself. In doing so, I was forced to consider my own Whiteness and the ways in which I exercise Whiteness and benefit from the privilege it affords me.

In this autoethnography, I share two instances (as told through journal entries) that reveal a glimpse of my own interactions with the racialized discourses expressed by/with/between my administration and my colleagues. These are intended to illuminate the polarizing effect of racialized discourses within schools as well as provide examples of how I, a White art teacher, am shaped by, conform to, challenge, manipulate, and navigate these discourses through my daily practices. One journal entry describes how a subtle action of resistance against the status quo was silenced by a conversation between me and an administrator, both in the speech of the administrator and in my responses to this speech. Another entry highlights explicit silence in a racially-charged conversation with colleagues and examines the privilege of silence and the effect it has on a discursive context. This study considers how professional practice and social norms inhibit me from freely speaking about my understandings of the racialized identities of both students and staff and the effect it has on my teaching practice. By exhibiting my own moral conflicts and personal challenges as they exist within these discourses, I can highlight the implications of personal, social, and professional frictions within the workplace and the effect they have on teacher beliefs and practice. I also offer insights into coming to terms with one's Whiteness and moving towards becoming a White ally for students of color.

This study exposes my own weaknesses as I fall in order with dominant discourses. I did not expect this study to examine my *self* as much as my *role within a particular school*. As the study progressed, I learned about how my need for collegial support and fears of isolation led me to participate in racist conversations in ways that I did not expect. As a result, I was forced to examine my *self* as a White racialized person/educator and challenge the strength and immovability of these dominant discourses.

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[1] The school of this research site is an Title I high school on the outskirts of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

[2] For the purpose of this article, *texts* refer to the presentation, participation, and response(s) to written, oral, and non-verbal communications.

(In)forming the Study

I am drawn to autoethnography because of its salient characteristics: (a) it allows for *research topics* with intense emotional connections to the researcher and acknowledges, but permits, their biases and sees these biases as part of the research; (b) it allows the *reader* to understand a larger social system through the eyes of those living it; and (c) it gives voice to *researchers/practitioners* who might not otherwise have their important stories heard in academic circles (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Denzin, 2006, 2014; Ellis & Bochner, 1996, 2000; Jones, 2005; Miller, 2005; Rolling, 2008; Toyosaki, 2012). One of the most difficult aspects of this study is the way it allows for both cultural *and* personal critique (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014) by illuminating racist practices in education as a whole, but also within my own practice. As an art teacher of 14 years, I had to face the challenge of exposing how my teacher self might bolster racialized discourses that my academic self knows to be discriminatory. I had to face how I participate in conversations that feature ableist banter that teachers exchange, such as "those crazy/wild/out-of-control kids!" as a way to vent our frustrations with our own failures in the classroom while simultaneously maintaining a sense of collegial alliance.

According to Zander (2007), discourse is a "philosophical umbrella that encompasses narrative and other forms of communication such as dialogue and conversation" (p. 189). In this study, I utilize critical discourse analysis under a lens of Critical Race Theory and Whiteness Studies[3] to examine a portion of my professional practice and the social justice-oriented teaching philosophies of anti-racist teaching that I work towards. Critical discourse analysis is a methodological approach that probes texts and speech for underlying philosophical assumptions, ideological commitments and implicit knowledge-power dynamics (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). It helps me understand the sociocultural and linguistic discourses (ways of thinking, being, doing, speaking) that govern my context and inform the practices and representations I (and others) employ.

To understand racist discourse in my school and how I fit into it, I had to examine semiotics, social structures, professional expectations, and interpersonal relationships for their effect on the discourses at play. Foucault (1988) says that discourse is more than just linguistic speech, it is also a sign system that relates to other social systems and symbols established through social constructions. Hodge and Kress (1988) define semiotics as the life of the sign systems in society. They understand discourse as the site where social forms of organization engage with the production of messages and their social context to reproduce or change the meanings and values that make up a culture. Every exchange in a culture is a form of communication and these communications are managed by commonly understood rules and principles that are policed by concrete social agents such as parents, teachers, employers, and other authority figures. The production of any communicated message constructs a social identity for both the producer and their hearer. Foucault (1988) also considers how language and discourse—which are regulated, mediated, and defined by social structures—create subjects and assign individual meanings. He (Foucault, 1982) claims that discourse creates taken-for-granted assumptions that are established by society as a way of governing ourselves and each other and has an incredible impact on power, discipline, and normalization. He considers the notion of a stable subject or a fixed, autonomous identity, unaffected by discourse to be a fiction; he maintains that all subjects are created through language.

As I consider how individuals are subjugated by language, I also consider the use of racial signifiers in my own practice as well as how they are utilized in this study. I recognize the danger of fixed racial categories as a limitation for those who understand racial identity to be more complicated than a polarizing label. However, each child is assigned a label in his or her school profile as one fixed race. These (often falsely) stable categories are how these students are categorized and sorted throughout their educational careers. For the purpose of this study, I will use *Black students* to refer to individuals with African ancestry and that have been described as such in their school profile. Likewise, I recognize that the identity of *White* is not

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[3] See *Theoretical Framework* section for further explanation of Critical Race Theory and Whiteness Studies.

a clearly defined category, but typically describes a Caucasian person with origins from European nations. Since it is a Western tendency that White is discursively represented as the polar opposite of Black, these racial identities are often seen as a binary in opposition to one another (Kincheloe, 1999).

In addition to using semiotics to establish labels that create subjects and establish identities, I also argue that subjects and discourses could be established through allegiances and relationships. This speaks to the social aspect of identity formation and how individuals situate themselves in relation to others. All systems of language are socially constituted and should be treated as a social practice (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Therefore, racial labels and categories are "social constructions in that they can be invented, analyzed, modified, and discarded. They are not unchanging, fixed biological categories impervious to cultural, economic, political, and psychological context" (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 165). Race has been defined as a controversial concept that was originally grounded in biology, but is now generally understood to be exclusively socially constructed (Lee, 2012). With that understanding of race as a social construct, racism is also a socially constructed mechanism that is designed to create an Other to exclude from equal resources and opportunities as a means of maintaining one's own superiority (Lee, 2012).

Data Collection

My primary means of data collection for this study was daily journaling over the course of one school year (August 2013-June 2014). During the school day, I took shorthand notes that were records or transcriptions of dialogues or events. Specifically, I recorded discourses and actions that positioned the racial identity of myself or those around me. These included, but were not limited to, interactions with colleagues and administrators, discipline referrals, school-wide correspondences, and professional development sessions. I considered semiotics, behaviors (public/private/intentional/unintentional), texts, questions, and speeches, as well as ways of being, speaking, responding, and not responding. Pregnant pauses, body language, eye contact, and the way people physically situate themselves in a space are all integral elements in analysis of school discourse. After the school day concluded, I wrote more detailed accounts of the events as well as my personal interpretation. As my journal entries grew longer and more in-depth as the year went on, I was faced with the theoretical challenges that Jenks (2002) describes as the technical issue autoethnographers face in discerning what is observational and interpretative. By analyzing my data through critical discourse analysis, I allowed myself to be considered as a participator rather than observer of discourse. I started to realize how my own participation in racialized discourses exposed my fears and weaknesses, caused me to question my effectiveness, and reinforced the immovability of dominant, normalizing discourses and my inabilities to change them. Themes of hesitation, reluctance, and silence in the face of racialized discourses started to emerge through many journal entries regarding communications with other adults in my building. To interpret these journal entries, I employed a theoretical framework guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Whiteness Studies.

Theoretical Framework

Educators and scholars employ CRT to explore the social, political, and moral aspects of how race is translated into education (Bell, 2002; Blum, 2002; Kraehe & Acuff, 2013; Kraehe, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lewis, 2001; Rolling, 2008; Spillane, 2015; Vaught, 2009, 2011). CRT has provided a lens through which one can examine individual practice and attitudes as well as school/district level policy and practice as windows onto structural ideologies and mechanisms of race and racism (Vaught, 2009). Through a critique of White hegemonic discourse and power and the social disparities between races, CRT rejects notions of objectivity and neutrality and rebuilds knowledge based on individual stories about systemic racial oppression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT is not just a theoretical endeavor, but is also concerned with activism that effects social change by eradicating all facets of discrimination (Spillane, 2015). CRT seeks to remove the dominant ideologies of race talk and valorizes narratives drawn on experiential knowledge (Rolling, 2008). Stories of one's experiences with

discourses in particular classrooms highlight not only exclusionary acts of racism by school personnel, but also how racialized practices are maintained and normalized throughout educational systems.

Acknowledgment of the influence of power relations associated with Whiteness is typically absent from art education research (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013). Whiteness is not a particular thing or concept one ascribes to or rejects, but can best be described as an individual's *White experience*, which is elusive and is constantly shifting along with changing meanings of race in the larger society (Kellington, 2002; Kincheloe, 1999). Whiteness studies examines the historical nature of how Whiteness is defined as a racial identity with specific attention to the nature of White privilege (Garner, 2008). Privilege is maintained by social structures that protect the dominant groups and preserve the status quo (Sacks & Lindholm, 2002), as well as construct norms by which all others are judged (Castagno, 2013). This White normativity creates the illusion of a status quo that maintains a singular way of being and knowing in the world (Bhandaru, 2013; Blum, 2002; Kellington, 2002).

Racism in U.S. schools represents one of many institutionalized practices in the U.S. that maintain and perpetuate the domination over racialized Others "through a discourse that presents the racial status quo as the natural order of things" (Ostertag & Armaline, 2011, p. 276) that serves to disregard the need for a critical re-evaluation of policy and practice. Through discourses and practices that cater to a White desire to deny this power and privilege, colorblindness[4] continues to pervade schools in the U.S. This façade of colorblindness serves the interests of White people who do not want to confront the racial disparities that surround them and helps them avoid facing their own racist presumptions and understandings by a de-racialization of education (Lewis, 2001). This ideology leads me to believe that education is somehow disconnected from the world of power, partisanship, and the shaping of the social order (Watkins, 2001)

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[4] Colorblindness refers to the notion that one does not engage in racial discrimination because the subject does not see differences in others' skin color. A failure to acknowledge such important components of identity such as race and culture causes many educators to ignore important elements of their students' understanding of themselves and the world.

and grants Whites the privilege of not questioning what is presented to be the natural, normal order (Blum, 2002; Watkins, 2001). Conversely, I have witnessed and experienced that when White teachers *do* question the dominant power, the responses can be unsettling.

Discourse with Administration

As a public school art teacher, I have often felt restricted by the dominant discourses exercised in the school community and by the school administration, which potentially silences, hinders, or limits my educational epistemologies. Wegwert (2014) speaks to a culture of fear that is constructed around discourses of cautions and consequences between teachers and administrators and is heightened by media's general assaults on education. In my experience, many art teachers appease administration to ensure support for their program. Therefore, art teachers, like me, tread this particular discursive landscape with a certain degree of trepidation.

Desai (2010) and Knight (2006) note that art classes are ideal spaces for creatively articulating students' perspectives on the complex issues surrounding racism in their personal lives and in society. Furthermore, Desai (2010) posits that the public display of student works can foster important dialogues about racial inequality in school communities. However, in some school communities, these dialogues become monologues that silence challenging viewpoints in order to maintain a dominant colorblind mentality. This is demonstrated in the following entry from my journal:

> May 16: I had to get a vice principal to approve my work for the art show today. Part of this makes me very proud because my students are producing work that is challenging status quo notions of art creation in schools. At the same time, it's demoralizing that I have to get prior approval to hang work in the hallway.
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> Last year an incident arose when a project based on the Guerilla Girls prompted students to create black-and-white text-based posters confronting one of their most personally relevant social issues.

These posters were hung around the school in the evening, but were torn down the following morning by several teachers and security guards. I was promptly summoned to speak with a White, male administrator regarding "school appropriateness" of several of the posters, particularly those that addressed issues of racism and discrimination. Before the posters were removed, however, they garnered positive attention from the student body and many other teachers. The supportive and enthusiastic responses from students and teachers that were in favor of the work versus the faculty and administration that opposed the notion of bringing attention to racism and discrimination drew my attention to polarizing perspectives on racialized dialogue in schools. It also provided my students teachable moment that revealed the power of student voice to rattle the dominant power structure of the school.

Since that episode, administrators race to approve my "controversial work." The annual art show is coming, so I invited one vice principal to come to my room and go through what I am hanging for the art show. He pulled about 10 works relating to gun control, racism, immigration issues, and sexism. As always, I was told that they appreciate what I'm doing, but these works are "too much" for a school display. With the vice principal still present in the room, I immediately hung them up in my room under the "Too Real for School" wall. This administrator, always uncertain of how to respond to my blatant acts of resistance, tells me all the time with a laugh, "Oh, Kirker, you're too much."

In a way, it's pretty condescending to what I'm trying to achieve. It's as though they are politely exercising their way of taking away my social justice agenda, and do it with a smile and a wave. My pedagogical goals are trivialized and I think I'm seen as just some radical activist, not really worthy of any real consideration. (J. Kirker, personal journal entry, May 16, 2014)

What happens when asking the necessary questions is not welcome in schools? A teacher's propensi-

ty to interrogate may depend on institutional structures such as tenure status, the open-mindedness of their superiors and peers, or the nature of the broader discourse around the school (Berchini, 2014). In light of these considerations, Berchini (2014) warns against essentializing White teacher stories as collectively embodying privilege and ignorance or assuming all teachers bring a lack of experience with diversity to their classroom. Rather, I must consider the complexity of how a teacher's story is developed over time through frictions within their teaching environment.

The reality is that the politics of teaching warrant a particular professional discourse, but this discourse looks different in every school, district, region, and state in the United States. Furthermore, what is considered acceptable speech changes through time and across different contexts. Art teachers, much like me, have to find their place and voice within this context. This requires a negotiation of beliefs with the desire to remain actively employed. For some of my educator friends/colleagues, the inability to push back against restrictive confines became too frustrating to continue in the field. Other passionate colleagues have to find ways to live with the friction, even if it requires them to temper their voice against or towards dominant parties. This is the situation in which I find myself.

The Benefits of Whiteness

Foucault (1975) claims that discourse creates assumptions that are established by society as a way of governing ourselves and each other and has an incredible impact on power, discipline, and normalization. In Western culture, White is assumed to be the human norm, making Whiteness unmarked and unexamined (Knight, 2006), but it is also intimately involved with issues of power (Kincheloe, 1999). This White-centric power structure dominates not only my own school context, but also the overall culture of power in education throughout the U.S. (Delpit, 2006; Watkins, 2001). As I have witnessed, this White-centric, color-blind discourse is so powerful that it has the potential to threaten the professional or social well-being of anyone who blatantly confronts it, causing individuals to self-police their own discourses that may contradict these assumptions of normativity.

People take advantage of White privilege in many ways. All Whites possess some degree of benefit of their Whiteness (Clarke & Garner, 2010; Garner, 2008). However, Garner (2008), Kellington (2002), and Kincheloe (1999) all warn against essentializing Whiteness. Despite the fact that my research, scholarship, and experiences have made me keenly aware of the presence of an unjust (White-dominated) racialized power structure in education, I still benefit from my own Whiteness. One particular aspect of privilege that is often unnoticed is the ability, or perhaps opportunity, to *not have to* consider issues of race unless the topic is raised by someone else. Even when it is mentioned, White privilege grants White individuals the ability to detach themselves from conversations of race (Sacks & Lindholm, 2002) or even avoid the topic altogether. Therefore, I would be remiss if I failed to note that the ability to avoid, self-police, temper, or resist conflicts regarding the topic of race are some of the ways in which I exercise my own White privilege. Even though my desire is to challenge White normativity, I have the option of choosing the battles I wish to fight. As Spillane (2015) notes, people of color do not have the choice to ignore race in (self-) selected contexts.

I wonder if my students' Guerilla Girls posters forced my White administrator to consider his own Whiteness. Or, perhaps, there was a desire to keep the conversations about racism and discrimination in our school positive and uplifting by focusing on diversity rather than discrimination. Vaught (2009) notes that when there is discourse of races *getting along* in schools, this discourse only targets student-to-student relationships and omits the important conversations surrounding teachers. Once again, privileged White teachers can omit themselves from these conversation and never consider the effects of their actions (Mills, 1997). When they do arise, discussions of Whiteness often center exclusively on the position of the White person's experiences and challenges (Kraehe, 2015; Mills, 1997; Spillane, 2015) in such a way that it actually elevates their discomforts associated with racism above the pains of those experienced by non-Whites (Choi, 2008; Garner, 2008; Kellington, 2002; Kincheloe, 1999; Matias, 2013; Mills,

1997). In the case of my students' poster backlash, it was exclusively White teachers that removed the artworks and claimed to be offended by the display. Kincheloe (1999) talks about the "charade of White victimization" and subtle promotion of White supremacy through stories that use the language of White normativity to inadvertently mock multiculturalism (p. 180).

I consider the praise, criticism, and censorship of my students' artworks, inspired by the Guerilla Girls, and the works rejected from the art show while considering Banks' (2006) dimensions of multicultural education that strive for an empowering school culture and structure. The principal-approved artworks showcased technical talent over compelling subject matter. In lieu of my students' more thought-provoking works, the colorful *Day of the Dead* masks fulfilled the proverbial multicultural component of the annual art show. In my school, like many others, multicultural art education is relegated to tokenizing and trivializing traditions and celebrations (Desai, 2010). As I attempt to transform the formalist art curriculum that emphasizes skills—exhibited by the elements and principles of art—to a social justice-oriented art program that responds to social inequities through the study and creation of artworks, school administrators often (politely, but firmly) exercise their ability to dis-empower those who challenge the traditional ways of practice as per the dominant power structure. "Diversity" may be celebrated in my curriculum, but this version is merely a view of diversity that is established and maintained by White authority figures. This version of diversity does not threaten or challenge White power or privilege. Challenging the painful realties of power, privilege, and racism in one's context or their own practice is a challenging and laborious task (Yeung, Spanierman & Landrum-Brown, 2013). The comfort and pain this could potentially cause privileged Whites seems to outweigh the pain felt by people of color as a result of the actual lived experiences of marginalization and discrimination.

Discourse with Colleagues

Even before my research began, conversations with my colleagues raised more moral and ethical

conflicts and considerations than any other category of discourses at work. Fairly early in my career, I became troubled and disillusioned as I listened to White colleagues speak about the students, families, and community values in racially polarizing ways. I heard teachers criticize and complain about everything from music and clothes to family structures that did not fall in line with White normative values. These unsettling racist conversations with colleagues sparked my initial interest in researching this subject and the need for collegial support; the avoidance of professional frictions maintains the complexity of my participation and navigation within these discourses.

People spend a large portion of their lives at work and most work environments require collaboration and cooperation. Schools are no exception. Teachers may not like every one of their colleagues on a personal level, but they have to maintain a professional work environment in order to maintain a feeling of community for their students. Given the frequency of racist speech by colleagues, I fear that I may become a social pariah for directly confronting these discourses. Therefore, I have to be strategic in how I address these topics and calculate my words and timing. Often, my responses to racist discourses will arise days later, in the context of a different conversation so as to avoid direct blame. Other times I say nothing at all because I cannot come up with an effective response, or I am just too timid to create social tension.

Garner (2008) notes that one of the pitfalls of recognizing Whiteness is the assumption that all work that challenges Whiteness will have an anti-racist effect. As a White woman with a PhD who benefits from various aspects of privilege, I am conscious to not position myself as an *enlightened individual* and thus further bolster my own White privilege. I must be clear in noting that not all discourses with colleagues are disparaging to students. I have many colleagues who serve their students well and maintain nurturing and positive relationships with all students. I even have several colleagues who are keenly aware of racial discrimination in school and also strive to eradicate these injustices in and beyond our building. However, it is the conversations that conflict with my beliefs in

which I find myself stammering for words. Here are a few examples from my journal:

> September 11: After school, I saw a group of teachers sitting on the tables and chatting in a nearby classroom. In the room were two White female teachers and two White male teachers. I stopped in to say "hello."
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> "...that kid has no business being here. He can't read, he can barely write his name, and all he wants to do in life is shoot people and steal their money," said Allen[5].
>
> Scott added, "yeah, and there's not a damn thing any of us can do about. We are given these kids and we're supposed to teach them and we all know they're going to fail. [The administration] doesn't even care. We'll just keep being the dumping ground for these kids because they have nowhere else to put them."
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> Scott complained at length about certain electives being a "dumping ground" for "them" or "those kids." He's told enough stories to know who he is referring to when he speaks of "those kids": the Black students who have academic trouble and long discipline records.
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> Allen concurred. "You don't have to tell me. That's all we teach anymore. That's all [counselors/administrators] give us. I can't even let them anywhere near the [expensive] equipment we have. Just give them worksheets and keep them quiet. If they act up, kick them out. Eventually they're all going to wind up in [alternative school] anyway. Or jail."
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> I cringe when I hear "dumping ground." It is also common to refer to students as "those students" or "them," implying there is a fixed group for all low-achieving students with discipline records. What also concerns me is my own silence towards their rhetoric. The phrases "dumping ground" and "those kids" have bothered me for years. I even vol-

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[5] All names used are pseudonyms.

unteered to teach all general classes just so I could change the discourse of "dumping ground" through my own actions. It was a passive-aggressive attempt get other teachers to stop discussing these courses, and hence using disparaging language to describe them, but subtle efforts have not changed this discourse.

I want to respond by telling my colleagues about how we, as educators, need to be aware of the language we use to describe both individuals and student groups, but I'm not sure how to do this without being dismissed as academic nonsense. I think about how my own race, gender, and academic status position me in relation to my colleagues and it makes me consider how my speech will be received by them. The anticipated reaction, unfortunately, keeps me locked in silence until I can find the key to addressing these topics in a way that will be well received. By the time I thought of a response, the conversation had ended and everyone went back to their individual classrooms to finish the day's work. (J. Kirker, personal journal entry, September 11, 2014)

Black students enter U.S. schools with the disadvantage of stereotypes that have been constructed throughout U.S. culture, in which they have been positioned as disrespectful, threatening, un-teachable, and in need of control (Bianco, Leech & Mitchell, 2011; Davis, 2010; DeAngelis, 2014; Ferguson, 2003; Gause, 2008; hooks, 2004; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Kunjufu, 2005; Love, 2014; Majors & Billson, 2003). My colleagues' words paint a clear image that corresponds to these prevailing thoughts, focusing on the students' low academic achievement ("he can't read, can barely write his name"). Although the student did not have a history of violence, my colleague speculated that the student would have a violent future ("all he wants to do in life is shoot people and steal their money"). This speaks to what Crozier (2005) describes a "pathologizing discourse [that blames] the children themselves as inadequate and innately delinquent" (p. 588). This

notion of deficit thinking[6] marginalizes students of color and discursively places them at risk, making it difficult for these students to break past these stereotypes to succeed in a White-centric educational system (Valencia, 2010).

My colleague's language implied that this student was unworthy of even attending school ("He has no business being here / we are supposed to teach them and we know they are going to fail."). The assumption that this student was going to wind up in jail echoes the concept of the school-to-prison pipeline that shows how school systems mimic oppressive legal systems that prepare Black students to be the subject of White domination as early as elementary school (Ferguson, 2003) and uses harsh punishments and a perpetual cycle of marginalization to groom them for incarceration (Davis, 2010; Fanon, 1967, Ferguson, 2003; Gause, 2008; Kunjufu, 2005). Discourses that exclusively blame the child and their families while ignoring the presence of a racialized system mimics the racially sanitizing "law and order rhetoric" that mobilizes White, working-class men against Black activists in a post-Civil Rights era (Alexander, 2010, p. 96). This racially charged discourse continues to serve as a way to disenfranchise Black youth and bolster White normalization while maintaining a veil of colorblindness.

Breaking through the silence

I am notorious for going after certain student needs. The maintenance department still has not installed the kiln vent? I am on it. We do not have enough funding for mat board for the art show? I will take care of it. Take down or censor my students' artwork? My fists are drawn. Racial discrimination runs rampant in our daily discourses? I am nearly silent. But I know that silence is still a way of participating in discourse, even though it does not feel like direct participation at the time. When I am not silent, I am extremely careful and sometimes a little snarky. One might say *subtle.* The racism is overt, but my responses are not. When it comes to raising attention to these issues—the issues I actually feel *most* passionate

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[6] Deficit thinking, as described by Valencia (2010), assumes that all minority students come with inherent intellectual and situational handicaps that they have to overcome without recognition of the social structures that construct these false assumptions.

about—I am insecure, timid, and fearful of offending. Hodge and Kress (1988) note that silence is a transparent signifier of exclusion from a relationship or a lack of power. Furthermore, transparent signifiers of solidarity are based on simply a lack of transformational modification or individual power (Hodge & Kress, 1988). I made the choice to allow my silence to indicate solidarity with my colleagues rather than taking the opportunity to challenge or shift the dominant paradigm exhibited during that particular exchange.

I have a need to belong, at least on a cordial level, with my group of colleagues. In doing so, however, I am letting my own self, my passions, and my beliefs be muted by the status-quo discourses that dominate the work environment. My journal entries reveal numerous personal defeats where my moral and ethical desires lose to my silence. The truth is, I don't feel powerful enough to dismantle the dominant order of the school.

Boylorn and Orbe (2014) state that autoethnographers need to understand the inevitable privilege we experience alongside marginalization and take responsibility for our subjective lenses through reflexivity. It was difficult to realize that I am *both* a subject of my context *and* one who helps maintain students as subjects in educational systems. Cheng (2002) states that once an individual comes to terms with the grief of her ignorance, she must be able to move on to a place beyond mere personal healing, which suggests that these discomforts must always remain complicated, thus opening the space for more work to be done. Tatum (2009) distinguishes between *guilty Whites,* those who direct their racial feelings inward and focus on the effect it has on their own sense of self, and the *White ally* that uses this knowledge to incite change. Once I realized my place in maintaining the status quo of White normalization, I was able to refocus my attention away from myself and back towards my students—to see that educational conversations frame them with hope, dignity, promise, and respect.

Discussing Discourse

In performing this autoethnographic study, I became aware of how much these discourses affect my practice. My analysis shows that professional conversations in the context of my teaching position challenge my practice without changing my fundamental beliefs that align with my academic research interests. Throughout my year of journaling, my entries reveal that I never wavered in my desires to teach for social justice through art education. However, there were repeated instances in which my actions that conflicted with these desires were responses to directives that mandated acquiescence to dominant discourses. The intersection of these conflicting personal and professional discourses are complicated and difficult to maneuver, and attending to one discourse is often reliant on dismissing, silencing, or forgetting the other. However, the intersections of these discourses are complicated and difficult to maneuver, and attending to one discourse is often reliant on dismissing, silencing, or forgetting the other.

Alkins, Banks-Santilli, Elliot, Guttenberg, and Kamii (2006) identified teachers' concerns for maintaining their own teaching values when confronted with conflicting views held by those around them. I live in a space of constant conflict between my ethical beliefs as a teacher-scholar and the limitations that are created by discourses of *professional practice*. It is the same battle that wages between my academic self that tells me to continue to push boundaries with my pragmatic teacher self that tells me to find a way to quietly exist within these boundaries. I am not satisfied with subtle or quiet resistance. Smith (2013) says,

> Essentially, we are all guilty of being a part of this machine whether by turning the oppressive gears ourselves, by "buying in," or idly sitting by for fear that we are only powerless individuals. . . . Do we allow ourselves to be trapped in a reality that is riddled with injustices, using the excuse that "I'm just one person?" (p. 41)

I do not seek to use my experience to generalize the experience of the White teacher in school with a diverse population of students or even make assumptions about others teachers' racialized identity based on how they engage in racialized discourses. Such generalizations would be dangerous and counter-productive (Kincheloe, 1999). However, I

am noting that many teachers, such as me, are very calculating in their attempts to be socially accepted by their colleagues and maneuver through institutional mandates, all while still considering their racialized positions as teachers of diverse students. This discursive landscape is not easy to navigate when it is riddled with conflicting perspectives and contradictory interests.

Through my year of data collection, I did not find any evidence of a teacher or administrator raising the possibility of racism in our school's practice. Conversely, many instances arose where colleagues denied accusations of discrimination that came from students or their parents. This homogenous community of teachers seemed to form an alliance that armors itself under the veil of colorblindness, placing its membership further into opposition to its diverse student body. The *us-verses-them* mentality is clearly defined by age, position, and racial markers. Though not every teacher in the school is friends or even friendly with one another, dominant discourses, like "those crazy/wild/out-of-control kids," position teachers as a common group that represents the alternative group: stable/grounded/in-control. No matter where we fall on the continuum of racist practices, the dominant discourses maintain the assumption of innocence and well-meaningness on the part of the teacher or administrator, protecting us from ever having to do the challenging work of self-reflection.

Foucault (1988) writes optimistically about hermeneutics and the care of the self and notes that caring for oneself is dependent on a knowledge of one's own subjectivity. He also says that, "power is not evil, power is a strategic game," and power always leaves room for liberty and possibilities, as every individual is ultimately eminent to their own self (p. 18). This provides me with hope as I know that although I feel subordinate to administrative jurisdiction, selecting my methods of resistance is an intentional and calculated response. My subtle, but ongoing, discourse of resistance against racist educational structures *is* my own power strategy. Even if I temper my discourses with administration and colleagues, I have found that the students I teach yearn for honest conversations centering around race and power. Even if our artworks

get taken off the high school walls, there is important intellectual work that was developed in the creation of their art. I hold tight the promise that those students will use their knowledge and voices against oppressive discourses as they go out into their world.

However, I cannot simply expect my students to carry out my wishes for my own philosophical desires. Rather, I must make it my responsibility to model how I exercise my individual power by demonstrating active participation in school discourses. Understanding my place in the semiotic systems of my professional context allowed me to see how my participation in discourses had the potential to reinforce the status quo, but it also began to show me ways to change it.

Transparent signifiers of power are based on self-suppression, magnitude, and elaboration (Hodge & Kress, 1988). These discourses are upheld by silence. Silence implies acquiescence and this is no longer acceptable.

At the conclusion of this study, I found myself examining the benefit of maintaining collegial relationships that are both professionally and personally toxic. As I started to speak up more in the copy room line or lunch duty conversations, I found that a few teachers started to drift away from me in social contexts. Striking up conversations has been replaced with nods of acknowledgement, yet these "friendships" have not been missed. I have found myself having more meaningful and productive professional relationships with like-minded colleagues and my own willingness to verbalize my position has inspired others to speak up more as well. Together, with our students, we continue to make determined strides to change the dominant school discourse regarding racism. Guided by the interests of our students, the school's art club has become more social-justice oriented and has founded successful collaborative projects with other clubs throughout the school whose students and sponsors share a vision for a discursive context in which teachers and students can freely address issues of race, power, privilege, marginalization, and discrimination.

Further considerations

The implications for my work reach much further than my own classroom practice. By illuminating

discourses that appear in my school, I am also framing many conversations that take place in schools everywhere as a way to invite scholars into the daily conversations of educational life, to give a better understanding of "the personal, concrete, and mundane details of experience as a window into understanding relationships between self and other or individual and community" (Jones, 2005, p. 766). Through these seemingly mundane accounts, prevalent teacher attitudes, values, frictions, conflicts, and ethics become more visible.

For the practitioner, an example of self-examination can lead to a teacher's own transition in their teacher identity and practice. Additionally, an encouragement to explore the colorblind discourses of their own classrooms/schools can lead to more just schools *if* large groups of teachers begin to alter the way they communicate to and about the students they teach. For the pre-service teacher, a sample of a teacher's daily moral conflicts as situated in, with, or against

administrative mandates or regulations can provide a sort of case study as they prepare themselves for ethical tensions in their own careers. Teacher education programs ill-prepare inexperienced teachers to critically respond to contexts laden with teachers' fears and pressures associated with workplace socialization (Wegwert, 2014). However, knowledge of the powers of domination and oppressive school discourses over an individual can only help our future.

If art education researchers, pre-service teachers, and practicing teachers come into these discourses with a better knowledge of their force and ability to work with and against opposition, then we can begin to prepare a better strategy for using our own discourse(s) to overthrow dominant discriminatory practices. Since teachers are deeply involved in shaping childrens' minds, we all have the incredible power *and* responsibility to challenge and change harmful ideologies that have been and continue to be entrenched in U.S. schools and society.

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