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2023

Seeing Themselves: White Preservice Teachers as Raced Individuals and as Members of Their Future School Communities

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Seeing Themselves: White Preservice Teachers as Raced Individuals and as Members of Their
Future School Communities

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Richmond, Virginia
November 2023

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my committee members for their patience, guidance, and support throughout the process – particularly Dr. Bill Muth, who continued working on this project even after he retired. I'm truly grateful to him and Dr. Gabriel Reich, Dr. Ross Collin, and Dr. Kiara Lee for their careful readings and really quite brilliant insights, all of which made the final product so very much better.

I am also grateful for the love and support of my family and friends, who insisted I take a break every now and then.

Abstract

Students of color, of poverty, and with disabilities continue to slide into the school to prison pipeline (STPP.) Very often, an antecedent step is harsh exclusionary discipline that removes them from the classroom. Teachers, who play a major role in the decision whether to keep students in or eject them from the classroom and the school, are one of multiple forces driving students toward or away from the STPP. A salient feature of the issue is that nearly 80% of teachers are white and their most vulnerable students are not. In this study, my goal was to add formative information to what teacher educators and professional developers know about their learners in hopes of helping teachers hone their antiracist praxis. Rooted in critical race and care theories, and buttressed by self determination theory, I used aspects of grounded theory methodology in this critical inquiry to explore the following research questions:

1. How do white preservice teachers with experience as students in public K12 classrooms within the past ten years and some experience as educators (e.g., practicums, observations, substitute teaching, coaching) in diverse settings view themselves, both as raced individuals and as contributors to the diverse students, families, and communities they intend to serve?
2. How do those preservice teachers view the context – the diverse classrooms and communities – in which they will teach?
3. How do those preservice teachers perceive relationships with diverse students and their own ability to build trust in the classroom?

Six preservice teachers from a public research university in the southeastern United States participated in a total of eight semi-structured, hour-long interviews. (Two of the participants engaged in a series of two interviews each.) Several themes emerged from their words:

1. The participants' descriptions of and reactions to interactions between students and teachers fall along a continuum from careless through carefree, conscious, and controlling to contentious.
2. When confronted with negative student-teacher interactions, generally in the careless or contentious ranges of the previously mentioned continuum of student-teacher interactions, the participants offered allowances with alacrity, with hesitation, or not at all, depending on the perceived level of egregiousness and the degree to which they were able to empathize with either the student or the teacher involved in the situation.
3. To improve their antiracist praxis, new and experienced teachers could benefit from interventions and supports that offer them time and space to reflect on moments throughout that continuum of student-teacher interactions and their reactions to them, including thoughts about the internal and external forces that led those interactions to unfold as they did.
4. Teachers' biases, both implicit and explicit, are often rooted in the systemic racism in which we have all grown up and continue to live. Teacher education and professional development that dwells in the paradox, exploring the struggle between teachers' inevitable and unavoidable implicit biases and the sincere drive to become and to continue to grow as an antiracist practitioner, might help teachers to better understand

and, thus, act in more informed and effective ways inside their classrooms and as advocates for students outside their classrooms.

Suggestions for practice include constructivist, collaborative, critical teacher education and professional development that offers teachers time and space to reflect on whether and how quickly they offer allowances to colleagues for interactions in the careless and contentious ranges of the continuum.

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Overview

Statement of Problem

The overarching problem that inspired this study is that students, particularly those of color, of poverty, and with disabilities, continue to slide into the school to prison pipeline (STPP.) According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020),

in 2013–14, about 2.6 million public school students (5.3 percent) received one or more out-of-school suspensions. A higher percentage of Black students (13.7 percent) than of students from any other racial/ethnic group received an out-of-school suspension, followed by 6.7 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native students, 5.3 percent of students of two or more races, 4.5 percent each of Hispanic and Pacific Islander students, 3.4 percent of White students, and 1.1 percent of Asian students.

At the same time, 80% of teachers, who play a major role in the decision whether to keep issues and students inside the classroom or escalate the matter to administration, are white (IES, 2020). Lac et al. (2020) declare "we know that … racial mismatch between teachers and students also contributes to racial differences in educational opportunities and outcomes" (p. 2). Ahmed (2007) and Fasching-Varner et al. (2014) talk of the accumulation of individual decisions and discrete actions of mostly well-meaning people working within a flawed system sedimenting into the barriers that are channeling students toward prisons. Ahmed (2007) maintains "institutions become given, as an effect of the repetition of decisions made over time" (p. 157). "The system," Fasching-Varner et al. (2014) contend, "is functioning as it was intended" – directing some students toward the STPP while protecting others from it (p. 1547). Gastic (2017) points out that time spent away from school can contribute to students' disengagement and disconnection from it (p. 164). Nolan (2011) describes a typical path following ejection from the classroom through

negative interactions with School Resource Officers (SROs) inside the school and, particularly while a student is suspended or expelled, with law enforcement officers outside of school. Many teachers' in-the-moment decisions and actions, cumulatively, over many years, work to help drive students toward or away from the STPP. No single decision, no one teacher is responsible for any student's trajectory; it is, instead, the culmination, over years, of a variety of forces, including classroom interactions and exclusions, that sometimes drives students, often those of color, of poverty, and with disabilities, toward the criminal justice system.

Rationale for Study of Problem

Throughout American history, the same groups of students currently being driven toward the STPP have been excluded from and denied the educational opportunities enjoyed by their peers who are white, wealthy, able-bodied (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Ladson-Billings (2006) talks of an education debt, asking "What is it that we might owe to citizens who historically have been excluded from social benefits and opportunities?" (p. 8). Teachers are in a position to help repay that education debt. They can and often do help to keep students out of the STPP by forging and maintaining relationships organized around helping each student rise to meet high expectations, engaging in learning rather than in risky behavior. In the sort of reciprocally caring relationship advocated by Noddings (2012) and Freire (1970), the student and the teacher have established a level of trust that discourages both misbehavior, on the part of the student, and the decision to eject, on the part of the teacher. Teachers who excel at forming positive and productive relationships with their students often engage them in conscientização, helping them understand the impact the world has on them and the ways they, in turn, can navigate within and effect change on the world – to succeed and to understand their own success within the context of their current and future lives (Cammarota and Romero, 2006; Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Without such a relationship, students are more likely to resist the efforts of a teacher they do not trust and of a school system that demands compliance while offering little of apparent relevance or value to them in return (Grumet, 1988; Willis, 1977).

Teachers grow up, live, are steeped in a white-supremacist society. Bourdieu (1984) talks of habitus, the comfortable way of being people acquire over a lifetime of experience. The social capital derived from the habitus of white, middle class, cisgender, heterosexual, Christian men is generally valued within the education system; for others, the value placed on their social capital might decrease with each step away from that implicitly imagined ideal (Bourdieu, 1984). Those steps, it would seem, create barriers between teachers who are, more often than not, white and their most vulnerable students, who are not. For a white person who has grown up in a white bubble, it can be difficult to recognize – let alone circumvent – those barriers. To help the reader understand what students of color might see and experience and how they might interpret it, I have woven small, vivid vignettes throughout this dissertation, including scenarios that two of the participants responded to during interviews. The vignettes are intended to approximate student voice, which does not appear in this study of preservice teachers. They are drawn from Black@FCPS (2020), an Instagram account comprising 339 short accounts of lived experiences, examples of the implicit bias and microaggressions that can occur every day in public schools. The tiny stories are not data; they are anonymous social media posts, left with no opportunity for rebuttal or for questioning, without much contextual information. Some ring true; others, perhaps less so – that is left for the reader and, in their interviews, my participants to ponder. They should be treated like the literature students enjoy in my English class: as windows into the experiences and perceptions of others, images that spark contemplation and discussion, possibly even empathy or action. In the aggregate, the posts offer insight into the all-too-common

microaggressions that can make it difficult for some students of color to trust, to form

relationships with, to realize their potential in the classrooms of their white teachers. Without an

idea of what the barriers are and how they form, it is difficult to dismantle them. For example,

one student observes

> I went to Tulip Elementary School and there was one black student in our entire grade of
>
> 400 students (im not joking) Throughout my time there the student was always called out
>
> for no reason and teachers payed extra attention to him. When it came to learning, all of
>
> the history we learned circulated around white men and the only poc of color I remember
>
> learning about was George Washington Carver (the guy who discovered peanuts i think).
>
> Still to this day Tulip lacks diversity tremendously and any student that is not white and
>
> christian feels like the odd ball out (Black@FCPS, 2020).

While the poster may not have access to school demographics and is clearly speaking for

someone else, it is nonetheless possible that some students do feel othered and isolated, not

seeing themselves in their peers, their teachers, the curriculum. A teacher who is aware that such

a barrier could exist can prepare to address or avoid it for their own current and future students.

Collin (2011) describes student behaviors in mock job interviews: the middle-class male

students earn praise for violating social norms in very specific yet minor ways while the female

and rural students do not enjoy that privilege. In Black@FCPS (2020), students often describe

adults treating white males more gently than their peers. A student contributed the following:

> At Daffodil teachers would put down a POC student's INCREDIBLY INSIGHTFUL
>
> discussion point about race in a novel for a basic and sometimes unrelated comment from
>
> a wealthy white student, especially the "jokester" males. There were amazing, talented

POC students in my IB class but the ones in the spotlight were always the white students

(Black@FCPS, 2020).

Worse, within those posts, students frequently mention what they perceive as the failure or the

inability of administrators and teachers to support vulnerable students:

Everytime anyone (myself, my peers, and even testimonies Ive heard from strangers who

attend fcps) bring instances of racism from other students up to the FCPS admin we are

told "its out of our hands, its 'he said she said.'" Or freedom of speech. Why is that okay?

Why isnt this addressed? Racism, sexism, and homophobia disrupts our ability to learn in

a safe environment (Black@FCPS, 2020).

The often implicit need to protect and to understand able-bodied, middle class, cisgender,

heterosexual, white males at the expense of others might seem normal and natural, even

unavoidable, to the adults in the building; it can, however, feel like a betrayal to members of

other groups.

In a system constructed, in part, by an accumulation of decisions based on implicit biases,

one might wonder how much agency students have. Sapolsky (2023) suggests some lucky

students have more agency than their less fortunate peers. Brain development, beginning in utero

and continuing throughout one's time in K12 classrooms, affects a person's decision making

ability (Sapolsky, 2023). He offers a reminder of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and

explains that

for every step higher in one's ACE score, there is roughly a 35 percent increase in the

likelihood of adult antisocial behavior, including violence; poor frontocortical-dependent

cognition; problems with impulse control; substance abuse; teen pregnancy and unsafe

sex and other risky behaviors; and increased vulnerability to depression and anxiety

disorders. Oh, and also poorer health and earlier death (Sapolsky, 2023, pp. 60-61).

Sapolsky (2023) goes on to say, "the socioeconomic status of a child's family predicts the size,

volume, and gray matter content of the prefrontal cortex in kindergarteners. Same thing in

toddlers. In six-month-olds. In *four-week-olds*" (p. 115). The children most at risk of falling into

the STPP are also the least able to easily and fluidly make the choices that might protect them

from it. In other words, the cognitive load of a stressful life, inside and outside of school, makes

it harder to engage, to self-advocate – sometimes, just to sit still, to listen, even to keep one's

hands to oneself. The challenges are not the same all of the time for everyone. Environment

changes constantly, impacting the brain. Sapolsky (2023) points out, for instance, "hunger makes

us less forgiving. Specifically, across more than a thousand judicial decisions, the longer it had

been since judges had eaten, the less likely they were to grant a prisoner parole" (p. 51).

Alternatively, some students will deliberately and purposely choose to defy, to disrupt, to depart

– maintaining their agency but risking their futures, as Willis' (1977) lads and Nolan's (2011)

UPHS students did. Children, then, can be more or less agentic depending on a variety of factors,

many out of their control, but over some of which a teacher might have some influence.

Of course, there is no way of knowing which student is struggling to make good choices

or has chosen to be defiant for reasons that make sense to them at any given time. The challenge

for a teacher, then, is to support all their students, to create an environment in which students can

(or might even want to) make better choices, can engage with the learning, can strive to live up

to high expectations. Designing engaging lessons with students' interests in mind, incorporating

their lives outside the classroom into the lessons, creating and maintaining a climate in which it

is safe to make mistakes will make it easier for all students – the lucky ones for whom it comes

easily and those for whom it does not – to make the sorts of choices that will nudge them away from the STPP. Ladson-Billings' (2009b) Dreamkeepers worked hard to eliminate any obstacles standing between their students and academic success. Heath (1982) worked with teachers, students, and families to ensure they were able to work together to succeed, despite their very different communication styles. As they work against the system Fasching-Varner et al. (2014) and Ahmed (2007) describe, teachers could benefit from considering ways to help their students to succeed, to make good choices, to engage with learning.

Statement of Purpose

It is incumbent upon teachers to forge the sorts of relationships with their students that will allow them to thrive and to succeed academically. It is unrealistic, though, to expect teachers to be anything other than products of the society in which they grew up. Audley (2020), for example, considers two white, female, middle class, novice teachers working in schools serving "low social-economic status and African American … majority" students. The new teachers struggle to understand that, rather than simply being respected as an authority figure, they have to earn the students' respect through care and high expectations (p. 881). It is not difficult. Liang et al.'s (2019) participants merely wanted to be greeted, supported, and challenged. It is a dramatic shift in thinking, though, for someone who grew up in schools where students respected a teacher's authority simply because they were the adult in the classroom. The "racial mismatch" Lac et al. (2020) name can manifest, at least in part, as a demand from teachers for and refusal by students to just give unearned respect, making new teachers' days difficult, leaving them feeling unsupported because they do not yet understand that administrators cannot simply force students to respect them, and, at times, helping to drive new teachers to other schools or out of the profession entirely. Siegel-Hawley et al. (2020) explain, "Largely because of difficult working

conditions, schools serving high concentrations of students of color and students in poverty experience higher rates of leader, teacher and student turnover" (p. 1). As teachers leave, more teachers, then, will be new to schools serving students of color and of poverty. It takes time to acclimate to a new job, to understand the community, to find one's place in it. In a school with a high turnover rate, students are more frequently assigned to the classes of teachers new to the school, patiently (or not) helping teacher after teacher to understand the community and their role in it – to learn that respect must be earned, for example. Many of those teachers, like Audley's (2020) participants, will come in not knowing how to forge relationships with their students, expecting their students to behave as they did when they were students. Like Heath's (1982) participants, some teachers can benefit from learning more effective ways of communicating with students. Support, in the form of teacher education and ongoing professional development, can help both new teachers and experienced teachers who are new to their schools to improve their antiracist praxis, shortening the learning curve and helping them deliberately and effectively form positive and productive relationships with students of diverse and divergent habitus, which is particularly important since "students of color now make up a majority of Virginia's K-12 enrollment" (Siegel-Hawley, 2020).

In this dissertation, following Freire (1970), the word *praxis* is used to indicate the result of iteratively cycling through practice and reflection – on one's own actions and on the actions of others – in an ongoing effort to better serve each and every student in one's classroom, as distinguished from the quotidian *practice* of delivering curriculum while managing behaviors and motivating students. Effective interventions and supports targeting implicit bias offer teachers time and space to reflect on their practice, to consider their own actions and reactions

and those of their colleagues in a safe, calm space away from their classrooms and students in
order to reflect on and improve their praxis.

    Grinage (2020) describes his critical reading group:

    the goals for our learning community consisted of increasing the department's racial
    literacy while simultaneously working to develop and revise the English curriculum we
    use with our students. We established that we would meet as a department once a month
    and then branch off into grade level groups (9-12) once a week since administration
    provided us with time during the school day to meet as PLCs. We chose three organizers,
    myself and two white English teacher colleagues, to select critical readings and facilitate
    the monthly meetings. A reading was assigned each month and then during the monthly
    meeting we would discuss the reading in relation to how the topic corresponded with
    issues occurring in our school and in our lives as teachers (p. 24).

Grinage (2020) and his group were able to select texts that related to their current situation,
placing their own classrooms into a larger context, and discuss ways to advocate at the school
level. Lac et al. (2020) studied a year-long critical book club:

    The following themes emerged from our research: (a) reading a critical text compelled
    many participants to move away from cultural explanations for racial inequality toward
    more structural and organizational explanations, (b) reading and reflecting on a text that
    centered the lived experiences of Black youth encouraged teachers to reconsider how
    Black students at OMHS experienced the school environment, and (c) engaging in critical
    reflection throughout the book study shifted how white teachers reported addressing
    racial disparities in their daily practices (p. 57).

Lac et al.'s (2020) book club members worked to develop empathy with their own students while understanding the larger structures surrounding them, perhaps guiding some of those students toward the STPP. Like Grinage's (2020) group, the work they did in the book club affected their praxis, to the benefit of their students. Menash (2009) studied a book club that was part of a teacher education course and included reflective writing and conversation. She reports the following:

> The findings focus on five themes: (a) Relevancy, using a multicultural text in a science methods course; (b) Revelation, revealing assumptions and biases about issues of diversity and teaching science; (c) Responsiveness, forcing a response to issues of diversity in science education; (d) Reflection, developing critical and reflective science teachers; and (e) Reformation, gaining a deeper understanding of diversity by changing ideological beliefs. These five themes suggest that the overall structure and theoretical foundation of the book club promotes teacher learning about complex issues in urban science education and issues of diversity and equity … After reading a multicultural text, participating in school-based experiences (i.e., observations microteaching and student teaching), and reflecting on course assignments, the PSTs in this study demonstrate a change in beliefs on multiple levels, such as science, curriculum, teaching, and diverse learners (Menash, 2009, p. 1055).

Menash's (2009) participants will start their careers already reflecting on their praxis. Kempf (2022), who asked his participants to read and reflect over a ten-month period found the following:

> Classroom effects are notable in four areas: (1) developing a new sense of responsibility, (2) building excitement and emotional capacity for authentic engagement with race and

anti-racism, (3) critically reflecting on past practice, and (4) making plans for future

professional practice. Each focuses on changes to understanding, and operationalizing

race-informed teaching practices (p. 16).

The preservice and inservice teachers in these reading groups/book clubs reflected on their own

praxis, gained a more critical view of their worlds, and found ways to advocate for students

outside their classrooms.

Student-teacher relationships must be more than just feeling warmly toward each other;

they must contribute to academic success, preferably measured by each student's own metric,

and a lifelong ability to thrive for every student – the accumulation of countless caring decisions

made in solidarity with students over years protecting them from, instead of pushing them

toward, the STPP. The learning curve for teachers, products of their society, inevitable and

unavoidable holders of the implicit bias to which we are all vulnerable, is steep and fraught with

peril. To start too far along the learning curve risks upsetting the learner and causing them to shut

down, rendering training useless and putting their current and future students in harm's way; to

start too early along the curve, on the other hand, risks wasting an opportunity to help the learner

progress, instead subjecting them to the same introductory material over and over (Amos, 2016;

Leonardo, 2018). For adults conditioned to treat some groups differently than they treat others,

training on how to forge and maintain positive and productive relationships with all of their

students is essential and must be delivered with tact and purpose. The students posting in

Black@FCPS (2020) do not trust the adults in the schools to protect them; there is evidence from

multiple studies that some adults do not know how to build that trust and offer that protection.

Some console themselves with explanations rooted in meritocracy (Behm Cross et al., 2019;

Onnie Rogers and Brooms, 2020); engage in deficit thinking (Beneke and Cheatham, 2020);

struggle to understand the relationship between their own privilege and the systemic inequity their students face (Bennett et al., 2019); and, in the presence of implicit bias, do less to encourage students from different groups to treat each other respectfully (Kumar et al., 2015).

No single experience, no single adult is responsible for a student's trajectory. It is the accumulation of a student's experiences over years of PK12 education with dozens of educators that can help to direct students toward or away from the STPP. Each interaction colors the next, as students grow increasingly open or wary. A student whose interactions are mostly antagonistic might approach a new teacher defensively, alert to any slight, whereas a student whose interactions are mostly positive could assume good intent, shrugging off that same slight. It is incumbent, then, on the adults charged with children's education (and therefore futures) to do their best work for all of their students, continually honing their antiracist praxis.

Literature/Research Background

This study rests on two intuitive assumptions: (1) teachers, in general, care about and want to help children and (2) teachers grow up and exist in the world and are as vulnerable to implicit bias as anyone else. Starck et al. (2020) offer a reminder that "both teachers and nonteachers hold pro-White explicit and implicit racial biases" (p. 1). Recent research offers examples of pre- and in-service teachers fumbling in their sincere and well-intentioned efforts to form student-teacher relationships. Kumar et al. (2015) found that

> teachers who held more implicitly favorable attitudes toward white rather than [the Arab American and Chaldean American] adolescents [included in the study] were less likely to promote mutual respect among students and were consequently less responsible for engaging in culturally adaptive practices and for resolving interethnic conflict among students (p. 533).

Beneke and Cheatham (2020) point out that "despite stated intentions to advance educational justice – teacher candidates drew on discourse models that reinforced status quo notions of normativity" (p. 245). Bennett et al. (2019) find "many White preservice teachers had difficulty connecting race-based privilege with systemic inequities" (p. 891). Onnie Rogers and Brooms (2020) found

> the persistence of meritocracy as [white male] teachers (a) located the problem [of underachievement in their black, male students] with Black boys' identities; (b) constructed race, masculinity, and social class as barriers to students' academic success and teachers' effectiveness; and (c) positioned themselves relationally away from their students and the problem itself (p. 440).

Behm Cross et al. (2019) follow a white, male pre-service teacher through "continuous attempts to make his situation not be about race" as he battled through the dissonance of "[wanting] to be a different kind of White … but not knowing how to get there" (p. 316). In other words, teachers need effective interventions and supports in their ongoing efforts to become the teachers they want to be and their students need them to be.

While teacher education and professional development could help teachers to develop and grow their antiracist praxis, not all strategies are equally effective. In their meta-analysis, Lai et al. (2014) learned that "no intervention consistently reduced explicit racial preferences" (p. 1766). There are, however, effective interventions that can help teachers manage their own implicit bias, potentially enhancing trust and improving relationships with their students. Lai et al. (2014) explain that

> from hundreds of studies conducted, we can conclude that implicit preferences (a) are related to, but distinct from, explicit preferences, (b) are constructed through different

mechanisms than explicit preferences, and (c) have distinct mechanisms for change

compared with explicit preferences (p. 1766).

They found interventions "that provided experience with counterstereotypical exemplars, used

evaluative conditioning methods, and provided strategies to override biases" were effective in

reducing implicit bias against African Americans (Lai et al., 2014, p. 1766). Howell and Ratliff

(2016) show that their participants "generally believed that they were less biased than others

[and] responded defensively to feedback indicating they were biased" (p. 125). López (2017)

found that "teachers' critical awareness moderates their expectancy, resulting in higher

achievement; and teachers' critical awareness and expectancy beliefs were found to be directly

associated with teachers' behaviors, which were in turn related to students' ethnic and

achievement identities" (p. 193). Skiba et al. (2014) explain "teacher judgments that a behavior

is too severe to be handled at the classroom level are influenced by a host of factors: a student's

disciplinary history, the immediate context of the behavior, the teacher's general tolerance level

and skill in behavior management, and the resources available to the teacher for managing

disruptive behavior" (pp. 646-647). Banakou et al. (2016) use virtual reality to demonstrate that

"embodying White people in a Black virtual body is associated with an immediate decrease in

their implicit racial bias against Black people" (p. 1). Thus, both qualitative and quantitative

studies demonstrate that it is difficult, yet possible, to help teachers see themselves as raced

individuals within a flawed system and to leverage that understanding to forge the sorts of

positive and productive relationships that can help students to succeed. In fact, in Virginia, under

the previous governor, the African American Superintendent's Advisory Council (2021)

recommends the state:

require Educator Preparation Programs to include programs of study and experiences that

prepare teachers to be culturally responsive by revising regulations Governing the

Review and Approval of Education Programs in Virginia 8VAC20-543-10 et seq to

include guidance on:

- Diversity, equity, cultural responsiveness and competence

- Anti-racism

- Diverse field placements (Slide 15).

It is incumbent, then, on teacher educators and professional developers to create the sorts of

interventions and supports that will meet teachers where they are and help them grow and

develop their antiracist praxis.

Research Questions

To aid in the creation of those interventions and supports, this study sought to answer the

following research questions:

1. How do white preservice teachers with experience as students in public K12

   classrooms within the past ten years and some experience as educators (e.g.,

   practicums, observations, substitute teaching, coaching) in diverse settings view

   themselves, both as raced individuals and as contributors to the diverse students,

   families, and communities they intend to serve?

2. How do those preservice teachers view the context – the diverse classrooms and

   communities – in which they will teach?

3. How do those preservice teachers perceive relationships with diverse students and

   their ability to build trust in the classroom?

Methodology

Classroom teachers rely on formative assessment to guide instruction. Knowing what to expect allows a teacher to differentiate for learners with varied needs so that everyone remains, as much as possible, in their zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). Teacher educators and professional developers, likewise, can benefit from knowing about their learners as they plan, prepare, and deliver interventions and supports. In this critical inquiry, I used aspects of grounded theory methodology (GTM) to contribute to what teacher educators and professional developers know about their learners, looking specifically at how six young, white preservice teachers see themselves as individuals and as part of the communities in which they expect to teach.

Design

I used GTM's constant comparative analysis, which allows patterns to emerge from the data, to analyze the participants' descriptions of and reactions to their own lived experiences, descriptions of other people's experiences, and a variety of scenarios in the richest and most vivid detail possible (Black@FCPS, 2020; Kay, 2018; McCann, 2006). Data collection, in the form of semi-structured interviews, happened at a specific point in time and that context matters, coloring participants' perceptions and affecting how they will deal with their future students as they find ways to address controversial issues without jeopardizing their employment (Charmaz, 2017, p. 34). In this study, the participants have shared experiences: they have lived through the Great Recession; Donald Trump's presidency; a pandemic with social distancing; racial strife manifesting, most recently and immediately, as peaceful protests against police brutality toward people of color, in general, and the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, specifically; an insurrection on January 6, 2021. Their teacher education has occurred as Virginia has

transitioned from the Democratic gubernatorial administration that produced the previously

mentioned recommendation to help teachers grow as antiracist practitioners to a Republican one

that created a tipline to report teachers who mention critical race theory (CRT) in classrooms

(Leonor, 2022).

Population

The sample of six young, white preservice teachers came from the population of

preservice teachers at a public research university in the southeastern United States. Preservice

teachers offer a unique perspective: they have recently been PK12 students and are becoming

teachers. Because a salient issue seems to be a mismatch between white teachers and their

students, it made sense to talk with people who identify as white. In the interest of maintaining a

focus on student-teacher relationships in classrooms as they exist today, the sample includes

participants who were PK12 students within the past ten years, meaning they would have

graduated from high school no earlier than 2013. Constant comparative analysis painted a

complex picture of the ways preservice teachers see themselves and the schools and communities

in which they have been and will be students and teachers.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were intended to be a safe space in which participants and I

co-constructed an understanding of how some preservice teachers see themselves and the context

in which they have learned and will teach, beginning as they reflect during the interview and

continuing throughout the constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2014). In Phase 1, John,

Patrick, and Constance each participated in a single, hour-long, semi-structured interview over

Zoom. That did not generate sufficient data, so in Phase 2, Doug and Renae participated in two

semi-structured interviews each, again via Zoom; Troy, whose speech challenges made the

process more difficult, dropped out after a single interview conducted via email.

Procedure

The procedure began with recruiting the three Phase 1 participants. In keeping with the

research question, participants were white preservice teachers who have been PK12 students

within the past decade and have at least a bit of experience as an educator (e.g., coach, tutor,

volunteer.) All three were near the beginning of their time as student teachers. The participants

responded to an invitation emailed to preservice teachers at the public research university in

which they were enrolled. Interviews, which took roughly an hour, occurred over Zoom for

Covid safety. The interviews offered surprising results as the participants had not yet noticed

racism in their classrooms. Such an observation was very different from what I have seen in

schools where I have taught, what my students have told me over the years, and what I had found

in the scholarly literature. I turned to the counterstories in Black@FCPS (2020) to help me see

the barriers that can be invisible to teachers. To generate more data, I recruited three more young,

white, preservice teachers from the same School of Education, again emailing an invitation. Two

of the participants engaged in two interviews each, again over Zoom. Doug's interviews were 30

days apart; Renae's, 21 days. I relied on an e-mail interview with Troy because I could not

understand him when he talked and neither Zoom's closed-captioning nor Temi's transcription

software could pick up his words; he did not participate in a second interview.

Interview protocols for the two phases of interviews appear in Appendices 1 and 2,

respectively. In the first set of interviews, John, Patrick, and Constance talked about their own

whiteness; shared their experience as teachers; explored their privileges and challenges; defined

success for their students; hesitated to describe where they hoped to teach; responded to

scenarios from Kay's (2018) *Not Light, But Fire* and McCann's (2006) *Talking in Class*; and took

and shared thoughts about the Implicit Association Test. I also pursued a thought John shared

about his own becoming, specifically the difference between being a student and being a teacher.

The first round of the second phase of interviews was very similar to the interviews with

the Phase 1 participants. Renae, Doug, and Troy, like the previous participants before them,

talked about their own whiteness; shared teaching experiences; considered their different roles

within the school; explored privilege and challenge; defined success for their students; and talked

about where they hoped to teach. In the second round of interviews, they read, responded to, and

answered questions about the transcript of their own previous interview; shared what they had

learned about student-teacher relationships in the time since the first interview; and responded to

some of the posts from the Black@FCPS (2020) Instagram account.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began as soon as the first interview ended. GTM does not include a set of

steps to follow. The process is not linear. Morse and Clarke (2019) describe the process thus:

> You are coding daily, and data are being sorted into categories and themes. You are
>
> memo-ing as fast as you can, and recording ideas. You can recognize an important lead
>
> when you are given one, and are gaining confidence in chasing the leads. But you are
>
> still only beginning. As you move forward with this analysis, do not forget the library as
>
> a resource. Keep searching the literature as new articles are released (p. 13).

"Coding," Charmaz (2014) explains, "is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing

an emergent theory to explain these data" (p. 113). Codes coalesce "as elements of a nascent

theory that explains these data and directs further data-gathering" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). She

recommends "1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data followed

by 2) a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data" (p. 113). Because this critical inquiry was grounded so deeply in CRT and care theory, I moved iteratively among empathizing with the participants' words in isolation and considering them against the background acknowledged in CRT and described in the posts in Black@FCPS (2020). The social media posts are not data, but they do serve as a proxy for student voice, often aligning neatly with the words of my own students over years and across schools, offering a vivid description of the barriers teachers want to dismantle, but often cannot see. As the difficulty of planning a lecture-based or whole-group professional development that could help both the participants and the teachers described in Black@FCPS (2020) became increasingly apparent, I returned to Self Determination Theory (SDT), which is an important part of my own teaching practice. SDT holds that for learners to feel intrinsically motivated, they must feel competent, as if they are able to complete a task; autonomous, as if they have some choice in the matter; and connected, as if they are part of a community or working toward a larger purpose (Ryan and Deci, 2020). Teacher educators and professional developers, in other words, must differentiate for their learners, attending to where they are in order to get where they need to be, nurturing motivation, and striving to keep everyone in their ZPD (Tomlinson, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978).

Findings

Several themes emerged from the eight interviews with six young, white preservice teachers. The participants' stories and reactions to the stories of others fell along a continuum that began at careless interactions, those in which a teacher is negligent or does harm. It can be adults defeated by students who cannot or will not stop fighting; English teachers whose curriculum only includes works by authors with whom they – not their students – identify;

teachers scolding Black students speaking in African American Vernacular English (AAVE); a system that leaves a student with the impression his feelings do not matter. It continues through carefree, when a teacher is able to simply enjoy their students. The participants shared jokes, conversations, hugs with their students. Conscious interactions, the center of the continuum, are those in which the teacher considers the students' lives and interests, wants and needs while planning and delivering lessons. The participants thoughtfully discussed forging relationships with their students and reflected on encounters with them. They described how that reflection informed their strategies for maintaining those relationships and nurturing their students, seeking out common interests or bringing students' lives and cultures into the classroom. Controlling interactions are those in which teachers manage their students' behaviors. Participants talked about settling an unruly class and considering whether or not they should require students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The continuum culminates in contentious interactions, much like the stories posted in the Black@FCPS (2020) Instagram account. Interactions happen constantly and flow freely up and down the continuum throughout the school day. For example, a teacher could show up at school in a bad mood and start out contentious, snapping irritably at a student for continued annoying activity; move smoothly into controlling as they offer some routine carrot or stick to de-escalate the situation; continue through conscious, perhaps apologizing to the student as they calm down and their mood improves; stop briefly at carefree to enjoy a conversation and begin to repair the relationship with the child; then, maybe, violating school policy by carelessly sneaking a quick snack while the students are working to keep their mood up and interactions positive throughout the day.

At the ends of the continuum, for careless and contentious interactions, the participants had to decide whether to offer allowances for the behavior of other educators. An allowance, for

purposes of this dissertation, is when one person gives another grace, offers the benefit of the

doubt, empathizes and excuses actions that might otherwise be considered negative. There is

insight to be gained in the alacrity with which the participants offered allowances, their hesitation

in nuanced situations, their decision not to offer them in particularly egregious interactions.

When the participants were able to picture themselves in the situation, possibly making the same

mistakes, they were quick to offer allowances. Renae, for example, described inexperienced

teachers managing a chaotic classroom, a situation in which she may find herself very soon.

When considering nuanced situations, the participants hesitated, pointing out errors and trying to

explain how they may have happened. Some teachers' actions were too much, and the

participants did not offer allowances. In the Kay (2018) scenario, the participants understood and

allowed for failing to consider the implications of the cotton-picking activity. Failing the student,

though, was too much and the participants did not offer allowances for that.

The participants voiced a need for support as they learn to be antiracist educators. Some

of them found the examples in their coursework interesting and compelling in the abstract, but

they said the examples did not transfer well to their classrooms. Neither Patrick nor his students,

for example, enjoy hip hop, which had come up in his teacher education coursework. They long

for teacher education and professional development that is constructivist, collaborative, critical

and that they can easily and immediately implement in their classrooms.

Limitations

The study could have benefited from student voice. Noddings (2012) insists, in her care

theory, that the caring relationship is reciprocal, with cared-for students expressing their needs

and wants; Freire (1970), similarly, calls on teachers to work with, neither for nor on behalf of,

students. The participants, young adults who were recently PK12 students, brought with them

memories of their time in classrooms, but those are the memories of white students. The counternarratives in Black@FCPS (2020) offered a proxy of the voice of students of color, but those stories are social media posts, brief, lacking context, not subject to further inquiry. Future research should include students: how they see their teachers and how they wish they could (or did not) see them.

There is always concern that participants will answer in ways that will make them look good to the interviewer or feel good about themselves; it is possible, though, that those answers will lead to what Charmaz (2014) calls "reflexive progression" as participants construct meaning during the interview (p. 82). To ensure a safe and welcoming interview space, Charmaz (2014) goes beyond the standard human subjects protections to ensure she interviews her participants with tact and consideration. That means analyzing and adjusting between interviews to ensure the questions elicit the richest, most vivid data and that participants feel safe talking openly and honestly about sensitive topics.

Summary

This critical inquiry, rooted in critical race and care theories and supported by SDT, was intended to offer helpful information to teacher educators and professional developers as they support teachers at all levels of experience and at all places along the learning curve to becoming an antiracist educator. The conceptual framework follows.

1. The school to prison pipeline (STPP) endures, disproportionately affecting students of color, of poverty, and with disabilities, who are suspended and expelled at rates far higher than those of their white peers.

2. Ample research demonstrates that teachers can (but often do not) form the sorts of positive and productive relationships that help to insulate and inoculate their students against the effects of exclusionary discipline and the forces comprising the STPP.

3. It is incumbent upon teacher educators and professional developers to support preservice teachers in their efforts to learn how to form positive and productive relationships with all of their students. This effort is particularly important for white teachers serving students vulnerable to the STPP.

4. Knowing how white preservice teachers see themselves and the context in which they will teach, both as raced individuals and as contributing members of the diverse school communities they expect to serve, can help teacher educators and professional developers to design effective supports and interventions.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This study is grounded in two different theories, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and care

theory, and buttressed by Self Determination Theory (SDT). CRT describes white supremacy as

"a regime of assumptions and practices that constantly privilege the interests of White people but

are so deeply rooted that they appear *normal* to most people in the culture" (Gillborn, 2010, pp.

5-6). It is also a political theory that "advances in race equality only come about when White

elites see the changes as in their own interests" (Gillborn, 2010, pp. 5-6). For example, the

Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, decision came about, not solely because

desegregation was the right thing to do, but because "outlawing segregation would greatly

increase the international credibility of the United States in the fight against Communist

regimes" (Caraballo, 2009, p. 3; cf. Bell, 1980).

While CRT offers a macro view of the impact race has on institutional outcomes, care

theory is a micro approach to student-teacher relationships, deeply concerned with ways in which

individuals act, interact, react. Grumet (1988) details the teacher's role in students' ongoing

disconnection from their families, predicting today's options for marginalized students:

Foucauldian docile body or fodder for the school to prison pipeline (STPP.) "Schools …

requiring order and stillness, replacing touch with the exchange of performance for grades," she

says, "are dominated by the images of adulthood and childhood and organize their curricula to

mark the developmental space between them" (Grumet, 1988, p. 157). Darling-Hammond

(2010) maintains "students perceive that the system is structured for not caring," describing

schools thus:

> Close connections between students and their teachers are most markedly absent in large
>
> urban schools most low-income students of color attend. These schools are run like huge

warehouses, housing 3,000 or more students in an organization focused substantially on

the control of behavior rather than the development of community … Heavily stratified

within, and substantially dehumanized throughout, most students are likely to experience

such high schools as noncaring, even adversarial environments where "getting over"

becomes more important when "being known" is impossible. (p. 63).

Noddings' (2012) ethic of care counters ideas of social reproduction and control, voicing concern

for the unique child and addressing student resistance with connection. She stresses an empathy

that is dialogic, more about understanding than imagining another's thoughts and feelings,

explaining that:

receptive listening is a powerful intellectual tool. But, from the perspective of care theory,

it is more than that; it is the basic attitude that characterizes relations of care and trust …

The other may sometimes be right, and we should be persuadable. Even when the other

is wrong, however, we should respond with care to his or her need for human regard. (p.

780).

She echoes Freire's (1970) notions of working in solidarity with – rather than on behalf of –

students, explaining:

the carer attends, identifies the needs of the cared-for, and responds as positively as

conditions and resources allow. In classical liberalism, this description of the carer's role

might easily lead to paternalism. But care theory insists on the equally important

contribution of the cared-for. He or she must recognize and somehow respond to the

carer's efforts. If such response is not forthcoming, the relation is not one of caring – no

matter how much credit is owed to the carer in the virtue sense (Noddings, 2002, p. 442).

Researchers concur that racism and cultural stereotypes, defensiveness among white teachers surrounding implicit bias and explicit racism, internalization of societal attitudes and assumptions by students, and the generally accepted myth of meritocracy play a significant role in classroom interactions, in whether a student feels safe and valued in the classroom, in a teacher's decision to address an issue themself or escalate the matter to the administration or a School Resource Officer (SRO). Teachers can only interpret and react to situations based on their necessarily limited understanding of their students and those students' lives, the accumulation of their experiences inside and outside the school. (Berlowitz, 2017; Bryan, 2017; DiAngelo, 2011; Fasching-Varner, 2014; Heath, 1982). Sapolsky (2017) explains "there are patterns in how we view Them. A consistent one is viewing Them as threatening, angry, and untrustworthy" (p. 398). It is in the space between the theories, in understanding ourselves as raced individuals within a larger system of white supremacy, that teachers have room to operate, to forge positive and productive relationships with students within a larger system. McCarter et al. (2020) maintain "teachers of all races, ethnicities, and experiences are largely unprepared to work with urban, public school populations increasingly comprised of low-income children of color with special needs, trauma histories, and/or limited English proficiency" (p. 388).

It should not be surprising that white teachers, who often live, work, and attend school mainly with other white people and consume media with limited or stereotypical representation of people of color, sometimes struggle to form relationships with their students of color. Generations of white schoolchildren in the South might never think about people omitted from their textbooks, redlined from their neighborhoods, segregated from their lives (Coates, 2014; Dean, 2009; McRae, 2018). Thomas (2013) describes continuing efforts to maintain discord between poor whites and people of color during and long after the Civil Rights Movement,

including Reagan's references to "welfare queens" and his War on Drugs that disproportionately harmed people of color (pp. 5-6). The roots of those efforts stretch back to Colonial times, when plantation owners fomented discord between enslaved people and poor whites, hoping to distract from the harm they were inflicting on both groups (Isenberg, 2016; Zinn, 1980). Owusu-Bempah (2017) recalls the transformation of the image of young African American men from "petty thief or rapist into an ominous criminal predator" (p. 26). Many educators do not even realize they harbor fears of and low expectations for the students of color they serve, something Rist (1970/2000) cautions can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Bryan (2017) describes a single classroom observation in which a new elementary school student, an African American boy, does nothing wrong, yet the teacher, the student teacher, and a classmate all harshly chastise him. Having broken no rules, the student must be confused about what he has done wrong and what he should have done differently (Bryan, 2017). It is likely the cooperating and student teachers in Bryan's (2017) article have absorbed countless examples of the image Owusu-Bempah (2017) describes, which may have affected their treatment of the new student. Sapolsky (2017) cites four reasons to believe implicit bias between members of different groups is to be expected:

> (a) the speed and minimal sensory stimuli required for the brain to process group differences; (b) the unconscious automaticity of such processes; (c) its presence in other primates and very young humans; and (d) the tendency to group according to arbitrary differences, and to then imbue those markers with power (pp. 392-393).

Dawkins (2016) speculates about the role of what he terms the selfish gene:

> Conceivably, racial prejudice could be interpreted as an irrational generalization of a kin-selected tendency to identify with individuals physically resembling oneself, and to be nasty to individuals different in appearance (p. 129).

We are, it would seem, evolutionarily hard-wired to form and cling to groups based on salient features for a variety of reasons, including safety and security, comfort and connection. This hard-wiring existed long before race emerged as a social construct, and those features do not have to be phenotypical, merely recognizable (e.g., a clan tartan in medieval Scotland or Klan garb in the postbellum South, a military salute or the quick flash of a gang sign.) The disagreeable obverse of that coin is, of course, mistreatment of groups perceived as outside or other. Teachers are as susceptible as anyone else to implicit bias, but they can work diligently and continually to overcome it, just as people overcome other negative impulses, resisting the urge to overeat or share unkind thoughts, for example. Helping teachers to see themselves and the structures they inhabit can enable more honest reflection, equipping and empowering them to forge and maintain positive and productive relationships with all of their students, overriding their own implicit biases. That help, however, must be thoughtfully and tactfully delivered to avoid rendering teachers defensive. Engaging teachers in the paradoxical gray areas, offering them space to consider their own and others' actions and reactions, might make it easier for them to act in antiracist ways later, in the moment, in the classroom, where things move fast and every action matters because students – even the quiet onlookers – scrutinize everything a teacher does as they decide whether it is safe to trust and to try.

Ryan and Deci's (2020) SDT holds that intrinsic motivation requires that a person feel competent, as if they are able to complete a task; autonomous, as if they have a choice in the matter; and connected, either as part of a community or to a larger purpose. Teacher educators and professional developers would do well to keep this in mind as they plan and deliver instruction that is meant to enhance a teacher's antiracist praxis but runs the risk of rendering that teacher defensive and unwilling to change. Amos (2016) describes white preservice teachers

refusing to engage in a required multicultural education course. Alghamdi, 2022; Boyd et al., 2021; Grinage, 2020; Lac et al., 2020; and Menash, 2009, on the other hand, all mention book clubs, a situation in which members would not be overwhelmed by the idea of reading and discussing a book in small pieces, would be able to choose the book, and would be part of a community of learners all trying to improve their antiracist praxis to help their students avoid the STPP.

School to Prison Pipeline

The U. S. Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) (2019) defines the STPP as the ways in which "education policies implemented over the past several decades have worked to remove students from schools and funnel them onto a one-way path toward prison" and points out that "since the early 1990s, states have passed laws making it easier to try juveniles as adults and increased sanctions against youths for a variety of offenses" (pp. 38-39).

Consistency belies chance.

The USCCR (2019) reports on the dramatic disparity in rates of detention among young people of different groups:

black juveniles represent only 15 percent of the general juvenile population, but about 40 percent of all confined juveniles [and] more than two thirds (68 percent) of juveniles placed in correctional settings are youth of color (p. 41).

In general, adults of color are much more likely to be incarcerated than whites (Greene, 2013; Miguel, 2017; Omori, 2017). Temin (2016) cites use of drugs in general, and marijuana specifically, to make the point:

whites and blacks use drugs at the same rate, but blacks are far more likely to be charged and convicted on drug charges than whites; … blacks constitute about 14 percent of the

population and 40 percent of inmates, making blacks three times as likely as whites to

end up in jail … Blacks are almost four times as likely to be arrested for marijuana

possession, although whites and blacks use marijuana at the same rate (p. 109).

It is difficult to conclude anything other than the punitive exclusion from school of children of

poverty, of color, of non-dominant classes, and with disabilities and their subsequent economic

and carceral containment as adults are of no real concern to some members of the dominant

group (Bourdieu, 1984; Fasching-Varner, 2014; Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2009a).

Some schools are more affected than others. Skiba et al. (2014) describe higher rates of

suspension in schools with more Black students:

It is somewhat striking that attending a school with more Black students increases one's

risk of out-of school suspension nearly as much as engaging in a fight or battery. It is

even more startling to realize that this relationship holds even after controlling for student

demographics or behavior. This is not simply a matter of higher rates of suspension in

poor urban schools with higher concentrations of African American students.

Simultaneous entry of a number of individual and school characteristics in the

multivariate model means that in rich and poor schools alike, regardless of one's gender,

one's school achievement level, or the severity of one's behavior, simply attending a

school with more Black students substantially increases one's risk for receiving an

out-of-school suspension (p. 661).

The USCCR (2019) points out that, in schools with SROs, more students are arrested.

After controlling for socioeconomic status and poverty levels, schools with more school

resource officers had higher arrest rates for subjective offenses such as 'disorderly

conduct' than other schools, which suggests that officers may be criminalizing normal

adolescent misbehavior" (p. 45).

They explain "behavior that once led to a trip to the principal's office and detention, such as

school uniform violations, profanity and 'talking back,' now often leads to suspension,

expulsion, and/or arrest" (USCCR, 2019, p. 38). That conclusion comports with Nolan's (2011)

findings that students routinely, in the course of violating the school's code of conduct – not state

or federal law – encountered SROs whose only or most familiar and comfortable tool was to

issue a court summons, leading to a criminal record and its inevitable lifelong truncation of

opportunities for the student.

It is teachers who decide whether to work with students inside their classrooms or

escalate the matter to the administration or an SRO. Gastic (2017) claims that such factors as

"misread social cues" or "prejudice or other unfairness" contribute to racial disparity in

discipline (pp. 164-165). Skiba et al. (2014) suggest, among other things, looking into the role of

implicit bias, saying

> that systemic, school-level variables appear to contribute to disproportionality in
>
> out-of-school suspension far more than either type of infraction or individual
>
> demographics. Such a finding strongly suggests that those wishing to have a positive
>
> effect on reducing or eliminating racial disparities in discipline would be well advised to
>
> seek interventions that focus on school policies and practices—principal leadership,
>
> achievement orientation, and the possible contributions of implicit bias—rather than on
>
> the characteristics of students or their behaviors" (p. 664).

Berlowitz et al. (2017) explain

interviews with teachers and administrators reveal that they see no alternative to their

implementation of zero-tolerance policies, because they believe that violent behaviors

manifested by racial minority students are grounded in cultural norms beyond the control

of public educators (p. 7).

Huang and Cornell (2017) counter that mindset, using data from 38,398 students across 236

schools to debunk claims that "racial differences" in student behavior exist (p. 298).

The USCCR (2019) posits connections among academic underachievement, disciplinary

issues, and the STPP:

> The demographics of the juvenile justice system and adult prison populations also
> suggest a strong relationship between disciplinary policies and the school-to-prison
> pipeline. For instance, the majority (70 percent) of inmates have not completed high
> school. Nearly half of all students who enter residential juvenile justice facilities have
> academic achievement levels that are below the grade equivalent for their ages. Many
> incarcerated youth are marginally literate or illiterate and have already experienced
> academic failure at some point in their educational careers. Seventy-five percent of youth
> under the age of 18 who have been sentenced to adult prisons have not completed the
> 10th grade.

> The rates are even more striking when looking at the population of youth with
> disabilities within the general juvenile justice population, where 70 percent have been
> identified as having learning disabilities and 33 percent have a reading level below the
> 4th grade level. Youth and adolescents in the juvenile justice system are identified as
> eligible for special education services at three to seven times the rate of similarly aged
> peers outside the system. (pp. 40-41).

In Black@FCPS (2020), a student describes differential treatment of groups:

> I went to Rose High School Center for the Arts. As a white student in a predominantly
> black local school, I saw my own privilege in a different light. I can't even tell you how
> many times I walked freely through campus while black students were consistently
> harassed by administration or accused of causing trouble simply for being outside. One
> particular day, I was skipping class. No pass. Nothing. I was going home. The
> administrator and resource officer waved at me, and both told me to have a great day.
> They then proceeded to harass a black student who was a few paces behind me, with a
> hall pass stretched out in his hand.

The students' behavior, then, is not all that is driving some of them inexorably toward the STPP. A host of other factors, including unfair policies unevenly enforced, come together to drive students one way or another.

Everyone – teachers and students, administrators and SROs – is vulnerable to implicit bias. Negative images, many and varied, saturate all of our lives and contribute to the perception, explicit and implicit, among members of both dominant and non-dominant groups "of non-white groups in the United States as racial 'others' who do not 'truly' belong to the U.S. social fabric and can be treated accordingly" (Simson, 2012, pp. 11-12). Students absorb and internalize the same cultural images and stereotypes that sometimes drive teachers. The accumulation of these barriers, rooted in culture and perpetuated in the media, in communities, and in schools, endure despite ostensive efforts to combat them (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2016; Berlowitz, 2017; Coates, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Owusu-Bempah, 2017). Ladson-Billings (2009b) explains "the teachers have to work hard to help [the students] see beyond the decimation caused by federal, state, and county neglect to the real strengths of their community" (p. 78). It is possible that, as

the boy in Bryan's (2017) article grows up, he will begin to internalize the message described by

Miguel and Gargano (2017) that he is "dangerous, without value, [needs] to be surveilled,

hounded, followed, attacked, gunned down, and dead" (p. 5). That message could be reinforced

every time a well-meaning teacher overreacts to a (mis)perceived (mis)behavior, every time the

student faces a microaggression, every time he is made to feel less or other. If disengagement

from school feeds the STPP, it stands to reason that students who are engaged in school are better

positioned to avoid it. That is why student-teacher relationships, which can be an unpredictable

push-pull between teacher expectations and student reactions to their often-implicit perceptions

of those expectations, are so important in protecting students from it.

Student-Teacher Relationships

Teacher Expectations

Teachers' implicit bias and unspoken expectations can drive their students to act in ways

that push those students toward or divert them from the STPP. Rist's (1970/2000) ethnography

reveals the impact of habitus-driven expectations on students' trajectories. Assignment to reading

groups, determined by the eighth day of Kindergarten and enduring through the end of second

grade, comported with students' outward appearance and their families' socioeconomic status

(i.e., their cultural capital and coherence with white middle class norms) (Rist, 1970/2000).

Teachers devoted more time and effort and engaged in more positive interactions with students

of whom they expected better performance (Rist, 1970/2000). In other words, the teachers'

expectations affected their own, and thus the students', behavior and elicited the anticipated

results, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy, possibly reproducing the students to their habitus of

origin, following lockstep in the occupational and financial footsteps of their parents and

grandparents. Those expectations emerged from the Kindergarten teacher's first impression of

her students, with whom she did not forge positive and productive relationships, whose accomplishments she never seemed to recognize (Rist, 2000/1970). The effects continued throughout the study as first and second grade teachers recreated the same groupings and continued to neglect and overlook the accomplishments of students previously deemed unlikely to succeed (Rist, 1970/2000). Chetty et al. (2011), using test scores as a proxy for class quality, further demonstrate the lasting impact of their early education classrooms on children:

> Kindergarten class quality has significant impacts on both test scores and earnings. Students randomly assigned to a classroom that is one standard deviation higher in quality earn 3% more at age 27. Students assigned to higher quality classes are also significantly more likely to attend college, enroll in higher quality colleges, and exhibit improvements in the summary index of other outcomes (p. 3).

That is, Chetty and his colleagues (2011) "find that [Kindergarten] class quality has significant impacts on non-cognitive measures in 4th and 8th grade such as effort, initiative, and lack of disruptive behavior," traits the researchers correlate with future earnings (p. 3). Student-teacher relationships – at times affected by divergent habitus and the attendant misunderstandings – cumulatively affect current and future student achievement.

Anyon (1980, 1981a, 1981b, 2011) looks between rather than within schools and finds a similar, albeit macro, phenomenon: schools reproduce children to the neighborhoods and class status in which they live, preparing the children of working class, middle class, affluent, and executive elite families for the sorts of tasks their parents perform in their working lives. In a similar refrain, Diamond et al. (2004) find that in predominantly low-income and African American schools, teachers emphasize students' deficits and have a reduced sense of responsibility for student learning. In contrast, when a larger proportion of the students are

middle-income, white, or Asian, students' intellectual assets are emphasized and teachers feel more accountable for what students learn (Diamond et al., 2004, p. 76). In Nolan's (2011) study, SROs looked for violations, such as a refusal to show a student identification card to an adult, and used tools that were comfortable to them, but dangerous to students (e.g., court summonses.) In the no-excuses charter school Marsh and Walker (2022) studied, administrators and teachers scrutinized students for minor violations, unsurprisingly finding the issues with uniforms and hallway transitions for which they looked. No matter how one looks at the data, then, classroom events and teacher behavior help to drive student trajectories, too often reproducing students to the lives from whence they came, whether they like it or not. Ladson-Billings (2009b) quotes a participant in her *Dreamkeepers* study who speculates, "You know, I think the thing that causes discipline problems is that we just don't know the kids well enough" (p. 71).

Students, well aware (albeit perhaps implicitly) of teachers' expectations and of the futures they are likely to face as they are reproduced to their own neighborhoods, can choose to resist. This resistance preoccupies students and challenges and confuses teachers, particularly those mired in the myth of meritocracy. Anyon (1984) explores the nuanced interplay between public and private resistance and accommodation to the expectations and demands traditionally imposed on girls and women. She describes behaviors reminiscent of Willis' (1977) working class lads resisting the expectations of their school and Morris' (2015) adherents to a hegemonic view of masculinity who "[view] academic work and striving as feminized and lower status" (p. 289). Such resistance is risky, as students inadvertently eliminate their own opportunities (Anyon, 1984; Morris, 2015; Willis, 1977). In Nolan's (2011) ethnography of an urban public high school located in the STPP, students fared even worse, their resistance leading directly to the criminal justice system. The teachers in Rist's (1970/2000) study failed to recognize that the

children for whom they had low expectations learned the material. Likewise, the children in

Heath's (1982) ethnography did not communicate in ways familiar to their teachers, effectively

lowering the teachers' expectations of them. Divergent habitus often blurs teachers' vision of

students and of their accomplishments. Looking at the hidden curriculum and its impact on

students of various social classes, Anyon (1980) points out the working-class participants in her

study

> are not learning to be docile and obedient in the face of present or future degrading
>
> conditions or financial exploitations. They are developing abilities and skills of
>
> resistance … [and just] as the children's resistance prevents them from learning socially
>
> legitimated knowledge and skills in school and is therefore ultimately debilitating, so is
>
> this type of resistance ultimately debilitating in industry (p. 88).

Students who resist an education they find distasteful grow up to be workers who resist

oppressive corporate policies and suffer similar psychic rewards and negative financial

consequences for that resistance, the school dynamic reproduced in the workplace.

Longstanding issues of divergent worlds continue to reproduce some students to their

habitus of origin while driving others toward the STPP. There are effective strategies to combat

the STPP; yet students continue to slip into it. Freirean critical pedagogy offers teachers a way

to help students see the constraining and containing structures and to imagine ways to change or

work around them, enabling resistance that will help rather than harm students in the long run

(Freire, 1970). Heath (1982) helped students and teachers meet the challenge of divergent

habitus, guiding teachers to new ways of understanding and students to new ways of asking and

answering questions. Cammarota and Romero's (2006) Critically Compassionate Intellectualism

combines critical pedagogy, authentic caring, and social justice to help students to succeed and to

understand their success in a broader context. Warm demanding pedagogy bridges the gap between families and schools, insisting teachers both care about their students as people and maintain high expectations for those students, taking concrete steps (e.g., tutoring, extracurricular activities, referrals to social service agencies when appropriate) to ensure their students reach their potential (Abi-Nader, 1990; Antrop‑González, 2006; Bishop, 2014; Bondy, 2008, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2009b). Love (2019) and Jones and Hagopian (2020) offer suggestions for abolitionist teaching and for incorporating Black Lives Matter into schools. In each of these strategies, teachers work in Freirean solidarity with their students, demonstrating respect for each student's unique strengths and weaknesses, interests and goals, heeding Noddings' call to honor the wishes of the receiver of care while working against a system that oppresses their students.

Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Perceptions of Them

The obverse of teacher expectations is student perceptions of their teachers' behavior and attitude – and those of the school system writ large. The vignettes in Black@FCPS (2020) offer a glimpse of the worst that can happen, of dramatic and traumatic encounters whose effects have lingered in the minds of the people who took the time and made the effort to post their stories to the Instagram account. Those perceptions can drive student behavior and, thus, the trajectories of their lives. Willis' (1977) lads, for example, responded to an uncaring system by not caring. In the three classrooms Rist (2000/1970) observed, behavior varied across groups. The students for whom the teachers had high expectations participated enthusiastically and demonstrated their learning in ways familiar to the teacher; the lower the teachers' expectations fell, the less the students' behavior aligned with academic norms. Wilson et al. (2020) recount discussions with school administrators in which

the issue of socioeconomic class and the possible relationship between 'economic disadvantage' and stress on family cohesiveness were offered as possible explanations for behavioral problems and subsequent (and therefore appropriate) racial disproportionality in school disciplinary practices. Economic distress, so the argument goes, leads to stress on the family, which in turn leads to behavioral problems and necessary disciplinary interventions (p. 142).

Participants suggest to Payne et al. (2023) that white teachers "already have a biased look on the children" and "are young, white and they don't care" (p. 10). A participant remembers

When I was in school ... it was quite evident there still was segregation ... inside the school. … You had special ed classes [and] basic classes and you had the College Prep I and II; and then you had the Honors. … The majority of the 'hood, we were all in [low-level classes]. .. It seemed like our education was monitored ... [or] development was more contained. … The suburban white kids that were goin' to these schools, that we were being bussed to, were in the high College Prep classes that were preparing them for college ... [I didn't] realize what was going on, while I was in it. But when I got older, and actually it was when I was in prison that I realized my brain was just as capable of learning the high algebras, the calculus and ... different parts of English ... as well as somebody ... from the suburbs. … The bussing really didn't do anything but mask the presentation, that they was giving us an opportunity to ... learn with them. But actually, we wasn't (Payne et al., 2023, p. 9).

Marsh and Noguera (2018) studied a group of students who were members of an ongoing named and shamed remediation group at a no-excuses charter school. One student shares his perception of the teachers' expectations: "They make it seem that everything is our fault. And everything we

do is bad. Everything we want to do is wrong" (Marsh and Noguera, 2018, p. 463). Leverett et al.'s (2022) students expressed frustration with a lack of academic support, receiving what they considered an excessive amount of homework or just an answer instead of an explanation of how to figure out that answer, something that would make excessive homework even more difficult and time-consuming (p. 259). Bottiani et al. (2020) found that "perceived frequency of discrimination, including personal experiences, witnessing, hearing about, and observing societal forms of discrimination was associated with lower levels of school engagement and more negative attitudes toward teachers;" conversely, "teacher cultural responsiveness was associated with more school engagement and less school disconnection" (pp. 1024-1025). Gottfried et al. (2021), using longitudinal data for one school district in California, found Latinx students – particularly 11th and 12th graders, who have more control over their own attendance – were less likely to have unexcused absences when their race/ethnicity matched that of their teacher (p. 149). Goldberg and Iruka (2023) found that "close teacher–child relationships serve as a promotive factor for Latino and Black boys' teacher-reported language gains. Simultaneously, teacher–child relationships characterized by high levels of conflict predicted larger change scores in conduct problems for Black boys compared to boys of other races" (p. 301). SDT suggests that connection is vital to intrinsic motivation and teachers who know and understand their students offer that connection (Ryan and Deci, 2020). For white teachers of students of color, that can require effort.

The teacher traits and actions that students appreciate, though, are neither expensive nor difficult to implement. Liang et al. (2019) found their participants appreciated it when their teachers greeted them, offered emotional and academic support when appropriate, and maintained high expectations. Leverett et al. (2022) found that their participants appreciated

"recognition of individuality," in which teachers demonstrated interest by bestowing

good-natured and respectful nicknames or remembering birthdays. Encouragingly, Leverett et al.

(2022) say

> Teachers who offered relationships and facilitated a warm, inviting atmosphere impacted
>
> the boys' perspectives of the school as a whole … Students that identified with at least
>
> one positive teacher within their building were able to describe changes they hope for in a
>
> more positive light … In contrast, students who struggled to identify a teacher with
>
> whom they had a positive relationship in their building tended to frame school changes in
>
> terms of what is wrong about their school and needs to be changed" (p. 259).

Reyes (2021) observes a "well-respected teacher who students identified to be caring and

supportive" treating her outgoing and inquisitive female student differently than either the male

or the quiet female students (p. 107). In spite of what the researcher perceives as biased

treatment, the outgoing and inquisitive girl learns the material, albeit with additional emotional

labor to obtain the support she needs and knows she deserves, and the students continue to enjoy

both the teacher and the class. Audley (2020), in her case study of two white, female novice

teachers, found "two interrelated themes consistently emerged throughout iterative processes: the

belief that *the teacher is the respected authority* and that *students show respect by fulfilling*

traditional White-middle class 'student' roles and behaviors" – in other words, quick, cheerful,

unquestioning compliance with requests made by any adult in a position of authority inside the

school building (p. 883). Audley (2020) cautions that "when teachers fail to see the importance

of earning [rather than receiving automatically] their students' respect, teachers can recreate the

structural inequality and oppression that youth experience within their own classrooms," which

she fears will "reinforce the ethnic achievement gap" and "prime the school-to-prison pipeline"

(p. 894). Reyes (2021), focusing on gender inequity, explains, "Power is replicated when we all operate with default understandings of gender and taken-for-granted norms," insisting female students remain still and quiet compared to their male classmates, forcing the female students to decide among demanding their due, finding alternative ways to learn the material, or giving up (p. 119).

There is nuance, then, and every interaction can be seen from multiple perspectives. Reyes (2021) sees a teacher treating one student differently, and she offers no allowance for it; even that student, though, engages with the learning and demonstrates proficiency. In terms of teacher education and professional development, one might ask Audley's (2020) participants to weigh in on the interactions from Reyes' (2021) article, analyzing it and considering how the students demonstrate respect; when they do not; whether or not they agree with the teacher's approach and, if they don't, how quickly they offer allowances for the behaviors of which they do not approve; and what those insights mean for their own praxis.

Teacher Education and Professional Development

Teachers who do not see students as they are, who view them through a deficit lens, perhaps, can miss opportunities to create the sorts of critically caring relationships that buffer their students from the forces driving them toward the STPP. Leonardo (2018) is careful to distinguish between whiteness, an ideology, and white, an evolving racial identity that expands and contracts to include various ethnic groups (e.g., previously non-white Irish and Italian people) (p. 371). He describes whiteness as "demoting and denigrating non-Whites even if it has been known to promote the relative interests of some groups over others, such as the much talked about 'model minority' status of Asian Americans" (Leonardo, 2018, p. 372). Because some people who grow up white have little to gain personally or materially from analyzing race in

general and their own position in a racist and classist society, specifically, they have often neither

encountered nor taken advantage of opportunities to develop "the basic emotional, praxiological

tools that could shed light on their development" (Leonardo, 2018, p. 372). Crowley (2019)

maintains "white teachers often lack awareness of the functioning of racism, view the students in

urban schools through deficit frameworks, and know little about the communities in which they

plan to teach" (p. 1463). He asserts that whiteness "operates in large part by obscuring its

existence, as many of the privileges of a White racial identity seem natural rather than the result

of specific institutional arrangements or practices" (Crowley, 2019, p. 1466).

Amos (2016) describes the white preservice teachers in her required multicultural

education class shutting down, unwittingly silencing and intimidating the students of color who

are reluctant to alienate classmates with whom they will continue to interact academically and

professionally long after the class ends. Leonardo (2018) draws on Vygotsky (1978) and Freire

(1970), calling for "a teacherly concern for students [particularly pre- and in-service PK12

teachers] who need the most help while also being attentive to those who are ready for a space

that is unsafe, uncomfortable, and unapologetically democratic" (p. 373). For many white

teachers, the products of white schools and churches and neighborhoods, the learning curve is

steep. They have to discover and accept that the history they learned in school was misleading,

often deliberately; that the idea of meritocracy is a myth that harms students; that they have

unearned privilege; and that they have a moral obligation to behave in anti-racist ways in their

classrooms, even if it is uncomfortable and feels, at times, professionally risky (Ballantine, 2015;

Loewen, 2007; McIntosh, 2019; Zinn, 1980).

Utt and Tochluk (2019) "[suggest] that a positive, anti-racist White racial identity

supports White teachers to implement more effective, culturally responsive, anti-racist teaching

practices," asserting that "the task before White educators includes fully accepting that one's life is shaped by historic and contemporary forms of oppressive White culture and that, regardless of one's disavowal of racially prejudicial thinking and systems, White people remain complicit in upholding the status quo" (p. 126-134). Crowley (2019), however, points out that "White privilege pedagogies make White folks both the subjects and objects of a form of critique in which redemption is earned through confession. In contrast, White complicity pedagogy is informed by a vigilance that is grounded in uncertainty, humility, and critique" (p. 1480). Acknowledging one's complicity and moving from there to an antiracist stance is a steep and fraught learning curve requiring tactful and sensitive support from teacher educators and professional developers. The lack of trust that adults will protect them revealed in the stories in Black@FCPS (2020) suggests students desperately need their teachers to move past self-awareness and learn to take action to protect the children in their care, perhaps establishing a trust that may never have been, but could be.

For that trust to exist might require teachers to advance along a learning curve, going beyond understanding the existence of white privilege and systemic racism, of their own privileges and challenges, and expanding on currently popular practices of culturally responsive pedagogy to engage, alongside their students, in antiracist work. There is much room for improvement.

Currently, some students do not expect much. Liang et al. (2019), in a series of focus groups with African American males between the ages of 12 and 19, found

> students will openly acknowledge the importance of teachers showing care through simple greetings to students, supporting them through difficult social and academic struggles, and maintaining high expectations (p. 352).

Those student expectations, while low, can be rooted in their own lived experiences, either with teachers who did those things or teachers the students wished did them. Valenzuela (1999) describes school as "subtractive," explaining, "it divests these youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure" (p. 3). Internalized messages, borne of widespread implicit bias and outright racism and classism, systemic and individual, rely on the unconscious and unquestioned myth "that schools operate based on meritocracy where each child is able to achieve to the highest level of his or her own ability so as to better meet the needs of society," leading students and their teachers and parents to believe any failure is their own, individually, as bad students, bad teachers, bad parents (Ballantine, 2015, p. 25).

Love's (2019) explanation comports with Freire's (1970) exhortation to work in solidarity with those who are oppressed:

Abolitionist teaching is choosing to engage in the struggle for educational justice knowing that you have the ability and human right to refuse oppression and refuse to oppress others, mainly your students (p. 11).

She asks far more than Liang et al.'s (2019) students, who simply wanted to be greeted, supported, and challenged. Galloway et al. (2019) learned that

the phrase "culturally responsive" led educators to emphasize individual practices to be inclusive; develop positive interactions and relationships in the classroom; and bring students' cultures and voices into the curriculum. In contrast, educators felt the terms "anti-racist" and "anti-oppressive" entailed enacting practices to call out and engage in critical dialogue around race, racism, and oppression in the classroom and to highlight the systemic barriers that maintain gaps for minoritized students (p. 485).

To become an antiracist practitioner, teachers have to understand how oppression happens in a school and the part teachers (more often than not unwittingly and unwillingly) can play in it. It requires understanding one's own implicit bias in the context of the existing structures and constant reflection on one's actions and reactions with students and within the context of the school. Epstein (2019) learned from research with five ambivalent teacher participants that "teacher educators can enact differentiated forms of instruction so as to meet teachers at their point of readiness" (p. 499). Cobb (2017) found inequality frames, "a local meaning system that mediates the dominant race/class ideology, arising from teachers' shared experiences of inequality in the school-as-workplace," to be similar within, yet different across, schools – meaning that, within a district, professional developers might need to offer differentiated training designed for the learners in each setting. Crowley and Smith (2020) "urge teacher educators to move away from the individualized and over-essentialized representations of racism inherent to White privilege pedagogy in favor of historical, structural, and intersectional discussions of race, racism, and the construction of White privilege" (p. 1). Grinage (2020), exasperated by a professional development offering of "a watered-down curricular approach to multiculturalism … that functions to persuade white teachers to embrace a non-critical definition of racial equity," organized a critical reading group in which teachers could reflect on their practice within the context of their school (p. 7). Lac et al. (2020) describe a year-long critical book study that offered participants time and space to reflect. Menash's (2009) qualitative analysis of 23 preservice teachers shows "the book club structure and theoretical foundation fostered critical, reflective inquiry and served as a method for effecting ideological change which is needed in order to embrace issues of diversity" (p. 1041). Gregory et al. (2017) recommend My Teaching Partner™, which includes coaching sessions with time to reflect between and proved effective in

"reducing racial disparities in teachers' discipline practices" (p. 1). It is possible for teachers to learn and to grow as antiracist pedagogues, overcoming the hardwiring Dawkins (2016) describes in order to forge positive and productive relationships with all their students.

And that effort matters. López (2017) found that "teacher-reported training (e.g., university coursework) that has been shown to increase teachers' critical awareness … was directly associated with lower levels of perception of discrimination among students" (p. 206). Johnston et al.'s (2019) review of a decade of literature that demonstrates the following:

> students react to teachers' differential treatment in ways that improve or limit student achievement, and *that* this effect can vary substantially across students and groups of students. Research also continued to establish *that* this process happens through teacher effects on students that vary according to teacher and context. Interventions designed to raise teacher expectations have seen some success in improving student outcomes (p. 61).

It is vital, then, that teacher educators and professional developers offer effective interventions and supports to help teachers advance along their own learning curves in order to help their students feel safe and protected so they can succeed and thrive in school.

Chapter III: Methodology

There are things about the STPP we know from decades of research. Exclusionary discipline and the STPP disproportionately affect students of color; nearly 80% of teachers are white and their most vulnerable students are not; student-teacher relationships, which can be driven by teachers' expectations of their students, affect student outcomes (GAO, 2018; IES, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2009b; Rist, 1970/2000). "New teachers walk into classrooms," frets Love (2019), "believing that inner city schools cannot have a strong community, caring parents, and brilliant dark children" (pp. 92-93). White teachers, who have a professional – and, I maintain, moral and ethical – obligation to develop and continually enhance their antiracist praxis, need the most effective support possible from teacher educators and professional developers throughout that ongoing cycle of reflection and action. For any educator, understanding where a person is on the learning curve makes it much easier to help them progress along it. Hoping to add to the formative information teacher educators and professional developers have, I conducted semi-structured interviews with six young, white preservice teachers in an effort to answer these research questions:

1. How do white preservice teachers with experience as students in public K12 classrooms within the past ten years and some experience as educators in diverse settings (e.g., practicums, observations, substitute teaching, coaching) view themselves, both as raced individuals and as contributors to the diverse students, families, and communities they intend to serve?

2. How do those preservice teachers view the context – the diverse classrooms and communities – in which they will teach?

3. How do those preservice teachers perceive relationships with diverse students and their

own ability to build trust in the classroom?

Critical Inquiry Using Aspects of Grounded Theory Methodology

I used aspects of grounded theory methodology (GTM) to analyze the data in this critical

inquiry. Charmaz (2017) describes critical inquiry as "embedded in a transformative paradigm

that seeks to expose, oppose, and redress forms of oppression, inequality, and injustice" (p. 35).

She points out that

> Many grounded theorists, particularly those influenced by Glaser, aim for explanations of
>
> narrow slices of data, but treat them as separate from their origins. Subsequently, links to
>
> structural conditions remain unexamined. A close focus on what "is" all too often results
>
> in leaving out larger "why" questions that locate individuals and interactions in larger
>
> structures. In addition, a focus on what is does not… address what "could be."

Addressing alternative actions and directions then gets left out (Charmaz, 2020, p. 168).

This study was meant to be critical, unapologetically concerned with social justice and equity in

its stated effort to help teacher educators and professional developers as they support pre- and

inservice teachers in the ongoing work of developing and improving their antiracist praxis.

GTM, particularly its focus on abduction, grounds the findings, keeping the words of the

participants at the forefront while allowing the scholarly literature into the interpretation.

Kelle (2019) explains, "One of the most important challenges in GTM is that one has to

reconcile the claim to let categories emerge (instead of forcing preconceived theoretical terms on

the data) with the impossibility to abandon previous theoretical knowledge" (p. 2). Charmaz

(2014) describes abduction:

Researchers can incorporate abduction, a mode of imaginative reasoning researchers

invoke when they cannot account for a surprising or puzzling finding. Subsequently they

make an inferential leap to consider all possible theoretical explanations for the observed

data, and then form and test hypotheses for each explanation until arriving at the most

plausible theoretical interpretation of the observed data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 200).

Abduction is iterative, moving back and forth between theoretical conjecture and data (Charmaz,

2014, p. 201). At times, I empathized with the participants as they described their progress along

a challenging learning curve and reflected on and reacted to the actions of other educators. At

other times, I stepped back and considered their words in context. I moved among Charmaz's

(2020) "is," "why," and "could be": the words of the participants; Critical Race Theory (CRT)

and the information in the Literature Review in Chapter II of this study; Noddings' (2002, 2012)

care theory; and the posts in Black@FCPS (2020) (Charmaz, 2020, p. 168).

Sample

The sample took into account a particularly salient and concerning aspect of the STPP:

relationships between white teachers and their students of color. It matters how white teachers

view themselves, their students, and the school communities of which they will be a part and

from which their habitus might, at times, set them apart. Participants whose time as PK12

students happened within the past decade are likely to have had more experiences similar to

those of today's students, with far more attention to school shootings and standardized tests than

in previous generations. Having some experience as an educator, someone who has considered

what and how students will learn and has tried to manage those students' behavior at the same

time, offered a nuanced perspective of student-teacher interactions. The participants were

actively becoming teachers, and their memories of how it feels to be a student were still fresh.

Those memories, though, are the memories of white students; the Black@FCPS (2020) posts serve as a reminder that every student's experience is different, that people of color often see microaggressions – and, sometimes, outright racism – that white people miss, that even honest mistakes borne of good intentions can be seen as microaggressive and contribute to barriers guiding students toward the STPP. Charmaz (2020) explains that "constructivist grounded theory is useful for studying both macro and micro discourses and how, when, and why people invoke, ignore, or challenge them" (p. 171).

The sample comprised six young, white preservice teachers from a public research university in the southeastern United States. They participated in a total of eight semi-structured interviews across two phases. In the first phase, I interviewed John, Patrick, and Constance over Zoom; in the second phase, I interviewed Doug and Renae twice over Zoom; Troy, once, via email. The participants were well aware of the macro, of the STPP, of the systemic oppression their students will have to face. They are learning how to address those issues in a micro way by forging and maintaining positive and productive relationships with all of their students. This study looked at the ways teacher educators and professional developers can help and support them as they figure that out.

Instrumentation

The data in this study come from semi-structured interviews. Warren (2002) expounds on the interview as a source of data:

> The epistemology of the qualitative interview tends to be more constructionist than positivist. Interview participants are more likely to be viewed as meaning makers, not passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers (p. 83).

Johnson (2002) recommends in-depth interviews for topics such as "an individual's self, lived

experience, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspective" (p.

104). The interviews, through constant comparative analysis, led to a co-constructed

understanding of how some preservice teachers see themselves as teachers, how they see the

context in which they expect to teach, how they interpret their own stories and lived experiences,

as well as the stories and counterstories others share. "Interviews," suggests Charmaz (2014),

"can also give research participants a space, time – and human connection – to reflect on these

events anew and to clarify meanings and actions while providing rich data that spark analytic

insights" (p. 80). She talks of "reflexive progression [meaning] that the participant's views arise

through the conversation and may not precede it" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 82). Doug, for example,

changed his thinking between interviews. In our first conversation, he described students

behaving in racist ways toward teachers (e.g., calling one woman a Karen, accusing teachers of

being racist.) When we met again a few weeks later, though, he stressed that children cannot be

racist. He had not yet resolved the dissonance, continuing to describe and deny racism

simultaneously. Thoughtful and articulate, he may continue to reflect in the days and weeks to

come. I have devoted space in the Findings chapter to further exploring his changing and, at

times, contradictory thoughts as he worked to reconcile his own experiences as a PK12 student

and as a substitute/preservice teacher.

Offering two of the participants an opportunity to consider the Black@FCPS (2020) posts

created a chance to see more clearly how they intend to become and to grow as antiracist

educators within the schools and communities they hope to serve as they decided whether to

offer allowances for the behavior of the teachers described. The social media posts in

Black@FCPS (2020) are not data; they do, however, offer an approximation of student voice, an

idea of the sorts of barriers that some students see, a foil for the ways in which the preservice

teachers in this study say they want to interact with students, an idea of the "is" the participants

will face as they enter the profession and find their places within it (Charmaz, 2020, p. 168).

Charmaz (2020) says "documents, speeches, and Internet discussion groups all become grist for

discourse analysis" or, in this study, for reflection by the participants (p. 171). I have woven the

vignettes from Black@FCPS (2020) throughout this dissertation to offer a vivid picture of the

experiences of some students of color, of poverty, and with disabilities in schools. It is not the

experience of every student of color. Teachers who believe that such situations can exist and

understand the harm they might cause, though, are in a better position to recognize and work

against them, more effectively protecting vulnerable students from the STPP.

      The process was intended to be an almost-Freirean journey of co-discovery, working in

solidarity with a broader goal of helping ourselves (since I, also, have students who can benefit)

and other teachers (through teacher educators and professional developers who might choose to

consider the findings.) Charmaz (2014) explains that "a constructivist approach views interviews

as emergent interactions in which social bonds may develop. Hence this approach attends to

mutuality during the course of the interview and ways to build that mutuality" (p. 91). It was

intended to be a moment between, a pause in the participants' becomings, resting briefly among

their memories and their hopes to reflect, to look forward, to co-construct meaning.

      The six participants and I engaged in two phases of semi-structured interviews. Charmaz

(2014) describes interviews as "contextual and negotiated" (p. 71). The semi-structured

interviews were conversational, following where the participants led and tracking back for clarity

and completion, returning to the protocol when it made sense and to ensure all of the participants

had a chance to answer all of the questions. After John remarked on the difference between being

a student and being part of the staff, for example, I asked the other participants to consider and describe that transition. The three Phase 1 interviews did not yield sufficient data, so I undertook Phase 2, adding the second interview and modifying the scenarios to which the participants responded. During the Phase 2 interviews, I asked some of the participants to respond to their own words. Warren (2002) offers a reminder that each participant and the researcher embody multiple perspectives simultaneously (p. 84). In addition to taking into account the world in which the participants have grown up, the study took place at a particular point in time, following months in isolation as a pandemic raged virtually unchecked; after a summer filled with peaceful protests in response to the brutal murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of the police; as mask requirements in Virginia schools were lifted; before the 133 superintendents of Virginia school systems wrote the new governor criticizing, inter alia, his efforts to remove CRT from schools – an initiative that includes a tipline for complaints against teachers who run afoul of the administration's wishes for a whitewashed curriculum (Leonor, 2022).

For a sensitive topic like race and racial identity, it was vital that participants feel safe to say what they think, rather than what they think I want to hear or what will make them feel better about themselves. Adler and Adler (2002) argue that "the conduct of the interviewer during the course of the interview is a crucial determinant of how comfortable the respondent will be" and suggest such strategies as providing frequent reassurances of acceptance and safety, using humor, deflecting attention from the participant when they seem uncomfortable, not reacting visibly, and purposefully sharing limited personal information, as appropriate (p. 529). Critics might argue that the topic invites evasion as participants project a desirable image. Doug explains

I'm afraid of being labeled a racist, to be completely honest, because it's not me. And it's,

we live in environments right now where you could very easily be pinned as one. So, and

you know, like, it's, it's tough. It's tough. And I think it's just tough for everyone because

there definitely is racism still out there."

If the participants appear to be saying what they think I want to hear or offer some seemingly-

correct answer, Charmaz (2014) "would ask what is happening in the interview," using that to

direct future data collection and alter aspects of the interview, both its content and setting, to

ensure the safety and comfort of the participants. In the first set of interviews, I used scenarios

from books (Kay, 2018; McCann, 2006). The scenarios – or, perhaps, the tone in which I read

them aloud – seemed to drive the participants to an obvious seemingly-correct answer with

limited nuance. In the Kay (2018) scenario, there was general agreement that the insensitive

activity was an honest mistake and the failing grade was unacceptable. In the McCann (2006)

scenario, the obvious question was what had gone before the teacher's apparent overreaction.

Switching to the Black@FCPS (2020) posts and pasting them into the chat box rather than

reading them aloud for the second set of interviews offered more ways to interpret the stories.

Doug and Renae reacted differently to different posts; at times, one would believe a post was

possible and believable, the other would not.

"How your research participants identify you influences what they will tell you,"

Charmaz (2014) points out (p. 191). The intertwining peer-to-peer relationships at play, a

doctoral student/practicing teacher interviewing undergraduate and graduate students/aspiring

teachers helped to lessen the power differential Charmaz (2014) cautions against. It was, to be

sure, the participants who were doing me a favor, giving up time and talking about difficult

topics – and they had the power to decline to share, to claim technical difficulties or off-camera

interruptions and tactfully click out of the Zoom session at any time. Asking participants to respond to their own words, to the words of the other participants, and to the counterstories in Black@FCPS (2020) offered different, perhaps less intimidating, ways to approach the topic. Charmaz (2014), further, expands the concept of consent to "[mean] that the interviewer reads the participant's non-verbal cues and checks with him or her during the interview before asking questions that could be intrusive" (p. 68). The interview was not intended to uncover and catalog implicit bias in the participants, piling blame onto new members of an already beleaguered profession. It was to be an exploration, an opportunity to co-construct a richly detailed picture of how the participants see themselves, as the students they are now, as the teachers they are becoming, and as part of the school communities in which they expect to teach. Throughout the interviews, I minimized my own comments and listened openly and without judgment, refraining from sharing my own stories or offering advice. The participants all voiced eagerness to forge the sorts of relationships that will help students succeed and they offered concrete examples that showed they were already deliberately doing so. As new teachers, they are actively exploring how their beliefs will align with their practice. Some of the participants talked about a unique focus, a group with which they strongly identify, and shared concrete examples of ways in which they had defended or befriended members of those groups. Ongoing teacher education and professional development that is constructivist, collaborative, and critical could enable them to share that expertise with peers, together building a broader and richer knowledge base from which to draw as they teach and interact with students, perhaps avoiding unwittingly committing microaggressions, possibly putting themselves in a position to help students who grapple with them.

Recruiting and Interviewing Participants

Phase 1

The first research question drove sample selection, and I recruited three young, white, preservice teachers from the School of Education at a public research university in the southeastern United States. The email that went out to all of the students in the School of Education at a public research university in the southeastern United States in January of 2022 appears in Appendix 3. John, Patrick, and Constance responded to the email, agreeing to meet with me via Zoom for Covid safety. All three meetings occurred in the evening, after school. I used a transcription application called Temi that captured and transcribed the words of the participants.

Charmaz (2014) suggests creating an interview guide, a tentative list of questions to help ensure the highest quality data possible. Following are initial questions, which I intended to edit and revise after each semi-structured interview.

1. How much thought would you say you have given to being white?

   - When did you first consider your own whiteness? What was that like? What sparked it? *Can you remember a specific experience when your whiteness mattered?* Can you tell me that story in as much detail as possible? (As the participant talks, inject particularizing prompts for sensory and contextual details.) In hindsight, what does it mean to you?

   - Can you think of a time when being white affected – either positively or negatively – a situation in which you found yourself? Again, request a story and probe for as many details, sensory and contextual, as possible to ensure a rich, thick description of a lived experience.

- What was school like for you as a white student? Tell me about a time when being white stood out to you. Do you remember a teacher playing a role? Ask for description – grade level, race/ethnicity of teacher, specific details to make the story more vivid and spark conversation. What other memories do you have of that teacher and/or that class?

- Have you ever witnessed racist behavior [in the classroom]? Can you tell me a story about it?

- Have recent events (e.g., pandemic, peaceful protests, presidential politics) affected your understanding of these experiences?

2. Thinking of your recent experiences teaching or student teaching, can you describe a specific event that stands out and tell me about that experience?

   - How would you describe your relationship with these children (this child) at this time? [prompt for a specific example]

   - How might you build on this relationship moving forward? [if they actually did build, ask them to tell you that story]

3. Everyone has privileges and everyone has challenges. How would you describe your life in terms of privilege and challenge? How will that affect you as a teacher? (It will be important for participants to define the terms they use, to describe both privilege and challenge and what those terms mean to them.)

4. How do you define success for your students?

5. Where do you hope to teach? What about that appeals to you?

- Can you describe in detail what you expect to find there? What do you think the students' experiences are like in and out of school? What are you anticipating in terms of your relationships with the parents/guardians?

6. Let's consider a couple of teaching scenarios.

   a. Here is an example from Matthew Kay's (2018) *Not Light, But Fire*. Think in terms of planning. What was the teacher trying to accomplish? What actually happened?

      o In 2014, a teacher in Redmond, Washington, was working through a unit on the Industrial Revolution and found her students having trouble understanding the cotton gin. She brought in cotton plants and asked her seventh graders to pull the cotton from the plant and separate the seeds. The irate mother of one Black student gave her daughter permission to not do the assignment. The teacher gave her a failing grade.

   - Let's talk about classroom management. Consider this scenario from the book *Talking in Class*. During World Geography class, as Mr. Strata lectured, Harlan Fleming noisily wadded a sheet of notebook paper into a ball and sailed it across the room and into the wastebasket next to the teacher's desk. The wad of paper rattled around the metal wastebasket before falling to the bottom. Mr. Strata stopped his lecture and filled out a disciplinary referral form about Harlan. Harlan protested: "You never said we couldn't throw paper away during class." Mr. Strata responded, "You should know by now what kind of behavior is appropriate for class." Mr. Strata called the SRO to escort Harlan to the vice principal's office.

How do you read this scenario? What might have been done differently and why?

Prompt: What does this tell you about Mr. Strata's relationship with Harlan?

7. Toward the end, if sufficient rapport exists: Have you ever taken the Implicit Association Test? (Participants could take it right then, on their phone, if they are willing. Even if they do not share their results, a conversation about their feelings about the test and their results might yield insight.)

- Do the results seem right? Important?

- How might the results of these tests inform a person's self-image, actions, teaching?

8. Is there anyone else you think I should talk to or anything I should look at?

During the second and subsequent interviews, I pursued a thought John, the first participant, expressed and asked participants to consider the differences between being a student and being part of the faculty. Other than that, the questions remained roughly the same throughout the first phase of interviews.

Phase 2

The first three interviews did not yield sufficient data. I recruited three more participants meeting the same criteria (young, white, some experience) from the same population of preservice teachers at that same research university in the southeastern United States, using the same recruitment strategy. The email I used to recruit participants for this set of interviews is roughly the same as the original email, but it specifies a series of two interviews; it appears in Appendix 3. Doug, Renae, and Troy responded to the email and agreed to Zoom interviews. Doug and Renae completed both interviews via Zoom. Troy's speech challenges were such that neither Zoom's closed captioning nor Temi's transcription software detected the words he was

saying. I had to guess and infer too much to use the data from his interview, so I asked him to respond to the interviews via email. He completed the first interview, but not the second.

The protocol for the second set of interviews appears below:

First of Two Interviews

1.   How much thought would you say you have given to being white?

- When did you first consider your own whiteness? What was that like? What sparked it? *Can you remember a specific experience when your whiteness mattered?* Can you tell me that story in as much detail as possible? (As the participant talks, inject particularizing prompts for sensory and contextual details.) In hindsight, what does it mean to you?

- Can you think of a time when being white affected – either positively or negatively – a situation in which you found yourself? Again, request a story and probe for as many details, sensory and contextual, as possible to ensure a rich, thick description of a lived experience.

- What was school like for you as a white student? Tell me about a time when being white stood out to you. Do you remember a teacher playing a role? Ask for description – grade level, race/ethnicity of teacher, specific details to make the story more vivid and spark conversation. What other memories do you have of that teacher and/or that class?

- Have you ever witnessed racist behavior [in the classroom]? Can you tell me a story about it?

- Have recent events (e.g., pandemic, peaceful protests, presidential politics) affected your understanding of these experiences?

2. Thinking of your recent experiences teaching or student teaching, can you describe a specific event that stands out and tell me about that experience?

   - How would you describe your relationship with these children (this child) at this time? [prompt for a specific example]

   - How might you build on this relationship moving forward? [if they actually did build, ask them to tell you that story]

3. You're returning to school, but in a very different role. What does that feel like? What do you notice? Has your time as a student teacher changed the way you feel about anything from your life as a student?

4. Everyone has privileges and everyone has challenges. How would you describe your life in terms of privilege and challenge? How will that affect you as a teacher? (It will be important for participants to define the terms they use, to describe both privilege and challenge and what those terms mean to them.)

5. How do you define success for your students?

6. Where do you hope to teach? What about that appeals to you?

   - Can you describe in detail what you expect to find there? What do you think the students' experiences are like in and out of school? What are you anticipating in terms of your relationships with the parents/guardians?

   - Is your ideal teaching position in a school similar to those you attended or different from them? Why does your choice appeal to you?

8. Is there anyone else you think I should talk to or anything I should look at?

Second of Two Interviews

1. Thank you for meeting with me again. How has your student teaching been?

2. I'm going to show you the transcript of the original interview. I'd like for us to read it together and talk about your answers then and how you might answer today, after some time in the classroom. *For each participant, make two copies of the transcript. On my copy, highlight passages and add probes ahead of time. Leave theirs blank.*

3. What have you learned about student-teacher relationships during your time as a student teacher? How does this differ from your thinking going into the experience? How does it differ from your thinking when you were a K12 student?

   a. What can you tell me about the racial climate of the schools you worked and studied in? Do you think race was/is a factor in:

      i. Student-to-student relationships?

      ii. Student-to-teacher relationships?

      iii. Student-to-administrator relationships?

   b. What can you tell me about your relationships with students?

      i. To what extent would you call those relationships trusting? How have you worked to build trust?

      ii. What can you tell me about building trust with students of different racial groups?

4. I'm going to share with you some anonymous posts from an Instagram account from the Summer of 2020. In the posts, people tell stories about experiences at schools in a Virginia school district. I cannot verify which of these stories are true, or which were made in good or bad faith. Social media is like that. While they are not verifiable, like evidence is, I wonder what they make you think about in regards to your experiences in classrooms? (After each story, ask these questions: Does the post paint a realistic portrait

of the places you have recently studied and taught in? If unrealistic, in what way? What

element of reality is missing from it?) (Stop reading the posts upon reaching saturation.)

a. my senior year of high school my AP LIT teacher, when i was discussing the lack

of diversity in his choice of literature to teacher, told me that he could not teacher

other works (ie books written by white men) because he could not understand

their perspective and teaches an experience that was not the same as him….this

was a college level course (Black@FCPS, 2020).

b. In my English class my junior year at Daffodil, my English teacher was reading

Of Mice and Men to us. In the book, the n-word is in there a couple of times. My

teacher, who is white, said something along the lines of how she would read the

n-word out loud when the context was appropriate for the time period and that she

wouldn't read the n-word when it was used in a derogatory manner in the book.

Many of us in the class were clearly uncomfortable when she told us this and

multiple students voiced their discomfort and asking why she just couldn't just

skip over the n-word entirely. She continued trying to justify why saying the

n-word would be okay and despite all of our discomfort, she still went on to say

the n-word in the book when it was "used in the appropriate context" and skip

over it when it "was not" (Black@FCPS, 2020).

c. There was a bracelet stolen at school. There were two black girls and two white

girls at a table in art class. I was one of the black girls. One of the girls that was

white had her bracelet stolen at our table. The administrator at my school only

took me and the other black girl to investigate us but they never took the white

girl because they thought that "white people are good people and black people are bad so they must of stolen the bracelet."

d. I have a thicker body type POC and throughout the years I was constantly dress coded for wearing shorts, shirts, and dresses that were within the rules and always be told that i'm not allowed to wear it and have to sit in ALC all day long but I would always see skinny white girls wear big long tee-shirts that came to just below their butt cheeks and covered their shorts or white girls that walk around with crop tops with their entire midriff out and I've never seen a white person in ALC for dress code and Admin's excuse was "oh we can't catch everyone" even after I pointed out someone as they were talking to me and they did nothing (Black@FCPS, 2020).

e. I'm a latinx immigrant. I was a student at [Name of Segregationist] Middle School (now Marigold) one day in my theater class my friend and I (another immigrant) were discussing how other countries including the USA were destroying the Amazon Rainforest. Our teacher got offended and raised her voice at us. She told us both, "Why don't you go back to your countries then?" The whole class looked at us, it was humiliating (Black@FCPS, 2020).

f. In 7th grade I had this one teacher that would mix up me and another girls names. We sat next to each other the whole year and the only similarities we had were we were black and had box braids. He continued to mix up our names the whole year when we repeatedly corrected him (Black@FCPS, 2020).

g. When I was in 8th Grade, we had just come back from thanksgiving break. While we were in class my teacher went around the room asking what everyone ate for

thanksgiving. He called on an Asian student in the class and asked what he ate. Before the student was able to talk the teacher said "you didn't eat someone's cat did you." The student said no and the class awkwardly laughed it off not knowing what to do. Multiple students reported him for this incident including others and he still works there (Black@FCPS, 2020).

5. In the first round of interviews, the preservice teachers with whom I talked described deliberately forging positive and productive student teacher relationships. In contrast, in the Instagram account, students describe racism they have experienced or witnessed in public schools. The stories range from near-benign examples of teachers putting their feet in their mouth to explicitly racist jokes and comments. There's also a lot of talk about how white males are treated more gently than any other group. How would you account for the differences between you and other preservice teachers, who obviously want to connect with all of the students, and the lived experiences of the people posting in Black@HCPS?

If appropriate, ask the participants to consider things the other participants say in their first interview.

Changing from the Kay (2018) and McCann (2006) scenarios, which were included in their books to make specific points, to the Black@FCPS (2020) posts offered more authentic and nuanced fodder for discussion and reflection. In this phase, I also copy-pasted, rather than reading aloud, the scenarios in order to avoid leading the participants to say what they thought I expected or wanted to hear.

Data Gathering and Analysis

GTM does not offer a step-by-step procedure for data analysis that works in every study. Constant comparative analysis follows the data. The work was iterative, looking at each new datum in relation to all the other, previously collected and considered, data. I coded entirely by hand, writing and rewriting this and the following chapters as a way of breaking the data apart and then bringing the fractured data back together. "Grounded theory," Charmaz (2014) reminds us, "aims to make patterns visible and understandable. Gathering data with broad and deep coverage of your emerging categories strengthens both the precision and theoretical plausibility of your analysis" (p. 89). Emerging patterns during Phase 1 drove Phase 2 data-gathering efforts, both in terms of participants and the information co-constructed with them in interviews. Each interview contributed to an initially formless swirl of data. In the first phase of interviews, my approach aligned with grounded theory methodology, as I followed wherever my participants led. After the first reading of the Phase 1 data, for example, John, Patrick, and Constance were dedicated to becoming antiracist practitioners, yet they had not noticed racism or microaggressions in their classrooms. These findings flew in the face of the extant STPP research, the posts in Black@FCPS (2020), and stories I have heard from my own students over the years. I needed to have what Charmaz (2020) calls "the willingness to doubt one's convenient explanations [which] takes reflexivity to a deeper level and simultaneously can spark new conceptual insights," possibly "[kindling] methodological questions" (p. 169). In the second phase, I unbridled CRT and looked more deeply at the emerging paradox between the endurance of the STPP and the sincere efforts of teachers to help their students avoid it. I modified the protocol to include two interviews and took a more direct approach to the context in which the participants expect to teach by using the Black@FCPS (2020) posts as scenarios on which the

participants commented. It is what Charmaz (2020) describes as "the iterative nature of constructivist grounded theory [which] fosters recognizing and following up on a surprising finding" (p. 170).

Coding and memoing allow the data to coalesce, cohering into codes and categories, which "simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 110). This sorting makes the swirl more manageable, allowing for analysis. Once the data are sorted, memoing allows the researcher to capture and pursue thoughts and questions as they occur (Charmaz, 2014, p. 110). "When you write memos," Charmaz (2014) explains, "you stop and analyze your ideas about codes in any – and every – way that occurs to you during the moment" (p. 162). As the interview offers participants a space to reflect, so the memos offer that to the researcher, allowing for asynchronous co-construction of meaning (Charmaz, 2014, p. 191). The data accumulated; Phase 2 participants Doug and Renae reflected and returned; and I tried to engage in what Charmaz (2020) calls "'methdological self-consciousness,' a deeply reflexive gaze on how our perspectives, privileges, and priorities affect our data, actions, and nascent analyses" (p. 167). As the Phase 2 participants reacted to their own words and to the posts in Black@FCPS (2020) and as I moved back and forth among the interview data, theory, and my own positionality and experience, two continua emerged.

Limitations

The most significant limitation to this study is the absence of student voice, particularly the voices of students most vulnerable to the STPP. Noddings (2012) insists that the caring relationship be reciprocal, with the student/cared-for expressing a need and the teacher/caregiver either meeting the need or helping the student understand why, perhaps offering alternatives or compromise solutions. Much could be gained from learning what students see in their teachers –

and what they wished they did (not) see. Recruiting young preservice teachers offered fresh memories of their time as students; however, the participants are all white, meaning the voices of people of color are not included in the data. Inclusion of the Black@FCPS (2020) posts addresses that weakness, but it is important to remember that the posts include only the lived experiences of students or former students who were (1) aware of the social media account and (2) so affected by what they had seen or experienced that they took the time to write and post their thoughts. There is also no way to ask follow-up questions, no opportunity for the people described to defend themselves, and not much in the way of context. They are not data; the participants' reactions to and reflections on them, however, offer a way to understand the participants and how they see themselves and the school communities of which they will become part.

Charmaz (2014) admits that "interviewing has received sharp criticism from ethnographers, discourse, and conversational analysts as well as from methodologists who address power, race, gender, colonialism, and/or class in social research" and offers a reminder that they necessarily consist only of "retrospective narratives" (p. 78). Johnson (2002) warns of participants saying what they think the interviewer wants to hear, something that can absolutely happen in any discussion of implicit bias. Warren (2002), however, maintains that "the purpose of most qualitative interviewing is to derive interpretations, not facts or laws, from respondent talk" (p. 83). This study was not an attempt to recreate incidents accurately. It aimed to capture the way the participants see themselves – or want to see themselves – and their future school communities at the time of the interview, allowing for the possibility that participants may actively reflect and construct meaning during the interview or, in the case of Doug and Renae, between the two interviews. The Phase 1 participants, who were further along in their teacher

education, appear to have embraced their training and given a great deal of thought to becoming antiracist educators. In Phase 2, asking participants to reflect and to respond to their own remarks, to the Phase 1 cohort and to each other, and to the Black@FCPS (2020) posts offered them a chance to consider situations that were more realistic and nuanced and resulted in richer, more helpful data.

Grounded theory is qualitative, relying on thick description, and making no pretense of generalizability. Beginning with participants who attend a school of education in a university located in an urban environment, a school with a history of and mission that includes working in Freirean solidarity with its neighbors, could yield a different result than might come from a suburban or rural university or one less involved with its surrounding community. Amos's (2016) students, for example, were very different from the participants in this study. She reports that students often "hold 'negative and racialized dispositions toward diverse students,' and tend to be naive about the issue of race, hold stereotypes about people of color, and bring little awareness or understanding of discrimination, especially racism" (Amos, 2016, p. 1002).

The findings, described in Chapter IV, suggest that teacher education and professional development ought to be differentiated for learners; should be constructivist, collaborative, critical; should include time for both solitary reflection and conversation. There is insight to be found in the ways in which the participants think about allowances, and that insight could be applicable to teacher education and professional development, something the participants said they need and want. If, when, and how quickly each unique teacher offers allowances – and whether those allowances are deserved – can suggest areas for further reflection, discussion, or study and offer teachers a chance to consider how to improve their own antiracist praxis. I talk more about that in Chapter V.

Chapter IV: Findings

The intent of this study was to add to the formative information available to teacher educators and professional developers charged with helping teachers hone and refine their antiracist praxis. Just as I would not teach a lesson in my eighth-grade classroom without assessing the students' prior knowledge, teacher educators and professional developers need to know where their own learners are in order to effectively and efficiently help them move forward. To that end, I talked with six young, white preservice teachers, trying to find answers to these research questions:

1. How do white preservice teachers with experience as students in public K12 classrooms within the past ten years and some experience as educators in diverse settings (e.g., practicums, observations, substitute teaching, coaching) view themselves, both as raced individuals and as contributors to the diverse students, families, and communities they intend to serve?

2. How do those preservice teachers view the context – the diverse classrooms and communities – in which they will teach?

3. How do those preservice teachers perceive relationships with diverse students and their own ability to build trust in the classroom?

Phase 1 Participants

In Phase 1, participants drawn from the population of prospective teachers at a research university located in the southeastern United States responded to a single semi-structured interview.

John

John is a young white man who, at the time of the interview, had recently begun student teaching World History II Honors and AP United States History in an affluent, mostly white high school located near his university. John described maintaining an awareness of how people might view him as a cisgender, heterosexual, white man. He considered how his words might be interpreted by members of various groups, eschewed political bumper stickers on his car, and talked about being careful not to loom over students while working with them. He displayed respect for his students, recognizing that he arrived at the school in January and had no way of knowing about prior "lived experiences in the classroom." He had already considered routines and procedures for topics that might "cause people discomfort." As one might expect from a new teacher still learning the craft, he was better able to reflect on race, his own implicit bias, and student-teacher interactions and relationships before and after school, not in the moment as he was teaching.

During his time as a student teacher, John had not noticed anything racist in his classroom, even though local press had recently published stories of racist graffiti found in the school's student bathrooms. He explained that his girlfriend is a member of the LGBTQ+ community and, while he

> [hasn't] seen anything racist in the classroom, now, I have seen some sort of passing things that would be sort of homophobia. Like, I've seen kids use gay as an insult and I, you know, obviously put an end to that, right? Like, don't use somebody's identity as an insult.

As a high school student, John was aware of the systemic racism surrounding him. He graduated from a less-affluent, majority-minority high school in the same county in which he is student teaching. He grew up aware of and talking about

> those subjects of, like, race and police brutality and all those sorts of touchy things that we think about in the sort of broader American context. I was definitely exposed to that very early on, so I was very sort of aware of that.

John recognized the privilege he enjoys as a white male. "I don't have to deal with, sort of, any adverse effects of law. I don't have to deal with any form of racial discrimination, conscious or unconscious." He grew up "lower middle working class" and expressed empathy for students whose families may struggle financially.

John talked a bit about the transition from student to faculty. He mentioned learning of decisions slightly before the students, but still felt as if most things are dictated to members of the school community. "The head sort of admin still read off the decision," he explained.

He described sharing humor with his white, male students while maintaining the ability to motivate them to complete schoolwork. When John was in high school, he and his friends "were the little hoodlums running around town, pointing at people and sort of making fun of the rich kids with their cars." As a student teacher, he and his students enjoyed class-based jokes at the expense of Elon Musk and Tesla.

Patrick

When I talked with Patrick, he had just started student teaching in an eighth grade civics classroom in a middle school near his university. Raised in an Orthodox Jewish community, Patrick first recognized his own whiteness around the sixth grade, when he entered public school and "was like, oh, like there's all these different types of people, you know?" He described "this

lingering feeling, like, almost that, like, my understanding of, like, America was that it was like a

Christian place, you know?" Patrick, who came "from a middle class background,"

acknowledged his good fortune (e.g., being able to live with his still-married parents during

graduate school.) He explained that "I kind of see myself through more of like my religious,

ethnic identity," but

> on the national level, like, I can't help but see myself through, like, a white identity in a
>
> sense and so that carries certain privileges with, you know, like, how mandatory
>
> minimums and sentencing for, like, crimes and stuff and profiling get carried out.

He was able to consider his privilege

> in [his] day-to-day … because it aligns with, like, my, I guess, like, moral and political
>
> outlook on being a responsible citizen, you know, and being aware of, like, how to act
>
> equitably in the classroom [but] I don't put it at the front. Like, that's something that I'm
>
> aware of, but I wouldn't, I don't start my relationships with, like, my friends or, like,
>
> people I interact with.

He explained, "it can damage what you're trying to do, like, when I'm working with the students,

unless it comes up" organically in conversation. For example, he struggled with "inauthentic"

advice like incorporating hiphop into lessons and sought, instead, to find common interests on

which to build relationships with his students.

Constance

Constance was early in her student teaching placement in a fifth grade classroom near her

university when we talked. Her background is "white, upper class" and she attended "a private

Christian school." Constance spent time in the military, where "I was actually a minority. I was

white, female, and straight." The experience created the opportunity "to put myself in the shoes

of a minority … and it just kind of gave me some different perspectives on, like, what it means to be a minority." She described

> just being around all different cultures and the different people, just all the different people. It was truly amazing, just, like, seeing how all of us from these different races and cultures and socioeconomic statuses, how we could all kind of come together and work together.

Constance first considered her own whiteness "when the Black Lives Matter movement really happened, that's when I took [race and my own whiteness] into more consideration." She explained, "it made me think about the privileges I had, you know, what they were, if there were any, and then, you know, just, like, different ideas about other races." Constance worked hard to connect with her students. She described teaching an English language learner with Down syndrome to ride horses, working with Kindergartners who had recently arrived in the United States and were learning English, and incorporating her students' lives into her classroom.

Phase 2 Participants

In Phase 2, two new participants engaged in two interviews each; a third halted participation after the first interview. The first interview was quite similar to the interviews with the Phase 1 participants; in the second interview, participants responded to their own words, the words of other participants, and scenarios drawn from Black@FCPS (2020).

Doug

Doug, who valued experience over education, was doing his practicums and substitute teaching while completing his coursework. He switched from studying engineering to elementary education, which "changed [his] entire outlook on life." Like Constance, he served in the military, as his father did before him. A white man, Doug explained, "I've definitely caught

myself with, you know, with racist thoughts and there was definitely a time in my life where I

was under the impression that everybody, you know, is naturally going to be a little bit [racist.]"

In the interview, he described that line of thinking as "negative and toxic." He offered an

allowance, of sorts:

> So I get it, you want white people to stop being shitty, fine, fair, you know, that's, like,
>
> fine and fair, but it, you know, it's going to be a journey in itself too. So I think, and in
>
> that, I think everybody should start understanding that everybody's going through
>
> something, everybody's going to have something to work on. We all need to help each
>
> other out and support, give each other the support that we need.

In his second interview, Doug mused,

> I think that there is a lot to be said about the history of white Americans and I think a lot
>
> of it, I think a lot of white Americans have, you know, an issue identifying with a lot of
>
> that, and, because of that, I think that not just identifying but also acknowledging and also
>
> taking into account. And I think because of that, that builds some prejudices against white
>
> people.

He continued,

> So I think that, I think that there is, you know, a large, you know, prejudice against white
>
> people because of their identity and their past. There's a lot of assumption that they have
>
> privilege, and a lot of that assumption is very true, you know? And, although it's true, I
>
> don't necessarily have an opinion whether it's prudent to, you know, act a certain way
>
> because of it, or think a certain way because of it, especially knowing that a lot of people
>
> just happen to benefit from those privileges completely [without realizing it].

He offered an allowance, though, suggesting "and that's not all their fault."

As a student, Doug moved around a lot, associated with a diverse group of friends, and displayed "severe behavioral issues." That time has helped Doug become "a very good advocate for children who go through the same wringer" that he did and has prompted him to ask "they're telling us in college there's different types of learners, there's different types of learners. Well, then, why isn't there different types of teachers?" Doug has given "a decent amount" of thought to his own whiteness and is careful "to remember the environment that [I'm] in and who [I am] … and what that represents," maintaining an awareness of "how some people are going to perceive me because of the color of my skin" – something John had also mentioned. Doug finds value in understanding the students' slang and cultural references, both in making connections and in managing his classroom. He is helped in this by the fact that "[he has] consumed a lot of Black culture and [he enjoys] it a lot."

> In his first interview, Doug said he had
>
> not witnessed any racist behavior from a teacher to a student, but from a student to a
>
> teacher, yes, I've seen kids call teachers 'white-ass hos' and this and that and, you know,
>
> and technically calling … one woman Karen, that's being racist.

He modified his stance in the second interview, maintaining students could not be racist and suggesting they were repeating something they had heard without fully understanding it.

Doug explained part of his teaching philosophy: "that's why I teach is, you know, partly because, like, I think that the more positivity you harbor in children, the better humanity will benefit." He described his approach to teaching as "kindness and questioning," calling to mind Noddings' (2012) brand of dialogic care. Doug voiced dismay at much of what his students see on the Internet and at the learning loss suffered during the pandemic and suggested schools

should offer more social-emotional learning. Like Constance, he believed it is important to get to know his students, to "understand a place where they're coming from."

Renae

When I talked to Renae, she was early in her coursework, majoring in elementary education. She had spent some time during high school in elementary school classrooms through a program for aspiring teachers. Renae considered her whiteness "I wouldn't say like daily, but at least a couple times a week, especially when it does come up in my coursework." She first considered it during her eighth grade civics class during the Trump-Clinton election of 2016. Class discussions included Black Lives Matter and immigration; Renae conducted her own "research outside of class" to learn more about white privilege. She talked about carrying that awareness of "how students of color are, like, disproportionately punished compared with white students" into her classroom. In terms of her own privilege, Renae explained that her family is "lower middle class," but she was able to attend an "upper middle class," better-resourced school. She appreciated her good fortune, but she also developed empathy for "how, like, on the fringe it can feel if you are like a lower income student." Renae attended "a mostly white school" with teachers who "did try to teach us diversely, but, again, most of my teachers were also white, so it was definitely lacking in some departments." She commended them for their efforts to "make us aware of, like, both sides." She has witnessed an occasional microaggression, but she had not seen overt racism in a classroom.

Like Constance, Renae shared memories of working with a nonverbal student, getting to know her over the course of the year until

I remember this one morning I came in and she ran up to me and she, like, grabbed my hand and, like, pulled me over to show me something. And that was, like, I feel like that was a really special moment for me.

Renae said that she is looking forward to forging positive relationships with her students. She described some of the teachers at the high school she attended as "just kind of there to teach. They didn't really want to know what was going on in their students' lives." Her words evoke Liang et al.'s (2019) students who explicitly hoped their teachers greeted them, supported them through challenges, and demonstrated high expectations. She plans to be more like her

favorite teacher, he was always asking, like, how you were and, like, what was going on. And he always remembered what was going on. So we had a big test or something coming up, he would ask you afterwards, like, oh, how did the test go? Like, how did you feel about it? Stuff like that. And that really made the difference in his classroom because I felt like I knew that he cared about us and cared about our success and it made me want to do better in his class.

Troy

Troy is a white preservice teacher with speech challenges. I could barely understand him, finding myself inferring and guessing at his meaning when he talked; neither Zoom's closed captioning function nor Temi's transcription application could pick up his words. To accommodate for his needs and ensure I captured his words accurately, I conducted his initial interview via email. He did not complete the second interview. Like Constance, "up until the year 2020, I gave [being white] little thought. When the BLM movement happened, I realized how privileged the white community was, as far as being involved in a traffic stop and not getting killed." He related a story about his father receiving a speeding ticket:

A few years ago, I was riding home with my dad and got pulled over for speeding. The

cop asked for his registration, which was in the glove compartment, and when he reached

for it, the cop had no hesitation whatsoever. After being released, I was in such disbelief

and my dad was not phased at all. Experiencing white privilege firsthand, made me feel

guilty about my ethnic background.

In terms of his own privilege, Troy explains,

As an individual with a disability, privileges and challenges are the two outstanding

categories in my life. Examples of privileges I have are: handicapped parking, priority

boarding on airplanes, and SSI benefits (I do have a job and I rather work for my money

like everyone else.) Challenges I have includes: not being treated as everyone else, being

limited in independency, and having to work twice as hard with daily living activities. It

will not affect me as a teacher because I will not allow it.

Themes

Continuum of Student-Teacher Interactions

Throughout the interviews, the participants shared stories of interactions between

students and teachers, encounters they had experienced or witnessed. They also reacted to other

stories, from scenarios in Kay's (2018) and McCann's (2006) books and, in the Black@FCPS

(2020) posts, to brief descriptions of moments in time without much context. Every participant

in, witness to, interpreter of an event will see it in their own way, and that view can change over

time. Reyes (2021) points out that the teacher she observes treats one student, an engaged but

rambunctious girl, differently from the others, but that teacher enjoys a reputation for

demonstrating care toward students and earning their respect. The students, who Reyes (2021)

describes as enjoying their interactions with the teacher and learning the material, might have

seen things differently. In my study, John was cognizant that much had happened in his classroom before he arrived in January; Reyes (2021) does not share any details about the trajectory of the observed teacher's relationships with her students, limiting her article to observations of a single class period. In response to the McCann (2006) scenario, in which a teacher seems to overreact to a student tossing a paper ball into the trash can, John, Patrick, and Constance all wondered what had gone before, how many times the student had disrupted in minor ways.In this study, participants described their own lived experiences; they also reacted to incidents they had seen and stories they had heard, often from the Black@FCPS (2020) posts. Their interpretations and descriptions of a variety of student-teacher interactions fell along a continuum stretching from careless through carefree, conscious, and controlling to contentious.

Careless student-teacher actions are, for purposes of this dissertation, those in which the teacher behaves in a way that is negligent or harmful. A teacher who pauses a lesson to take care of a mandatory administrative task, who continues to teach an unquestioned literary canon from their own childhood, who is not feeling well or having an off day might have a careless moment. They are to be avoided, but probably can never be completely eliminated, since teachers are fallible humans working in school buildings with other people, who are also fallible. None of the participants described themselves or their own interactions as careless. Doug, for example, described adults seemingly defeated by a student who engaged in frequent fights: "the principal and everybody just seems apathetic, so, like they just can't get him to put his, you know, to keep his hands to himself." Doug offered allowances, though, describing "a fine kid" who, after being isolated during the pandemic, "just doesn't know how to, how to interact with other people, so when people say mean things to him, he just, just throws hands" and adults who cared and wanted to help, but lacked the resources to do so. Rist (1970/2000) might ask what preceded the

string of fights, whether he had lived down to expectations borne of implicit bias. Noddings (2012) might wonder whether anyone had asked the student what help he needed.

In three other examples, though, the participants did not offer allowances, seemingly comfortable to judge such egregious behavior. Regarding the English teacher described in Black@FCPS (2020) who only teaches literature by white men, Doug exclaimed, "I completely believe that!" and described teachers from his own "super nice high school" who "completely believe that." Renae cites an article from her coursework in which "there was a black student in his classroom who was using AAVE and the teacher was, like, kept scolding him and, like, punishing him for using that, which I don't think is appropriate at all." Troy's comment that "attending college is a drastic change from high school. I feel my feelings are validated and when I have a concern, it is not overlooked" implied his feelings were, in fact, overlooked in high school.

Carefree interactions are those times when a teacher is able to enjoy their students. All four of the carefree interactions were self-descriptions. John talked about a group of boys who "crack [him] up." Patrick enjoyed listening to a lunchtime conversation in which students explored ideas of race and ethnicity. Doug was touched when a student hugged him in the hallway and shared a separate conversation in which he helped students understand their relationship, saying

> right now you're a kid, you know, I'm up here, you're down here. Like, but someday you'll be up here. You know, do plants just turn into big trees overnight? And they go, no. I'm, like, yep, okay. So like, it, it is the same thing, you know?

These moments are rare, generally happening in the small breaks scattered among a structured and busy day, but they can be invaluable in helping teachers build relationships with students.

Conscious interactions occur when teachers consider the broader implications of their craft and the impact of students' lives and the world around them on classroom interactions. Of 30 conscious interactions the participants discussed, 25 were self-descriptions. Doug thought deeply about an encounter in which students joked in a manner that could be considered homophobic, trying to find ways to bring "kindness and scientific thought to teaching instead of, uh, you know, lecturing," in other words, correcting possibly-accidental misbehavior while maintaining his connection with the students. Renae talked about asking students about their lives and sharing relevant and appropriate parts of her own.

John and Doug shared an awareness of how they, as cisgender white men, might be perceived. John considered "if I, a white guy, a cis-het white man am sort of saying, saying a thing, you know, how might that be interpreted differently by, sort of, different groups of students." He went on to explain that, since he joined the class in January for his stint as a student teacher,

> when I, we cover topics that involve, you know, historical racism, systemic oppression, anything that involves those sort of delicate subjects, I, you know, it feels like it's important to keep in mind that, you know, I am a, you know, a cis-het white man, I, you know, there are, there are lived experiences in the classroom that I don't know about.

Doug expounded on the advantages of being able to understand his students' slang and cultural references, saying

> there's a lot of black culture that I happen to enjoy. So, like, you know, just personally, so 'cause just my personality. So, I'm able to kind of understand and connect with the kids a lot because of that. It's kind of fun. So, because they'll, they'll also say some stuff that

they think I don't know. So that also allows me to understand, you know, when they're

doing things and saying things that they're not supposed to, which I think is important.

John, Constance, Doug, and Renae displayed an empathy rooted in their own felt

otherness. John said, "If a kid doesn't have, you know, if they, if they don't have a notebook, if

they don't have a binder, I wouldn't necessarily be annoyed by that." Constance, a straight, white

woman, said "I was able to put myself in the shoes of a minority" during her time in the military.

Doug reflected on how his own troubled youth helped him understand one of his students:

> He wants to make you laugh. So I was that kid, you know, and it got me in trouble all the
>
> time. And I had IEPs and I had every medication up and down and can tell you as a
>
> functioning adult on none of those types of drugs. And I just like, that's like deep down
>
> what I wanted. I just wanted to make people laugh. So he just doesn't understand that
>
> that's not how to do it.

Renae drew on her own experience, saying

> when I was in high school, I was one of the very few people in my high school who had,
>
> like, free and reduced lunch. Um, and, like, none of my friends had that. So I think it just
>
> made me more, like, aware of how that can feel.

The participants were intentional about building relationships with students. John

considered how future lessons might affect members of different groups and had procedures in

place so students knew they could "step out of the room, collect yourself." He was quick to put a

stop to homophobic remarks like using the word *gay* "as an insult," protecting members of that

group. Because he has used humor to build relationships with his students, when he asked them

to close their laptops and get to work, "they instantly shut them." He expected that those

relationships would continue to grow, "[keeping] the dialogue lines open because, you know, if

any, anytime they have a problem, right, the more that I talk to them, I feel the more comfortable they will be able to talk to me." Patrick pointed out that "there's a lot of teachers who've left school during this year. So a lot of students feel abandoned" and described his efforts to repair and maintain his relationship with the student who was falsely accused of stealing the substitute teacher's phone. Constance found unique ways to communicate with students who were just learning English or had special needs. She incorporated students' lives into her classroom, asking them questions and including what she learned in her lessons. Doug worked hard to prevent fights in his classroom and, when they happened, offered students a fresh start, making the "dumbest little goldfish face" and promising to "forget about this, like, literally, in a second." Doug offered compassion to restless students, telling them "you don't need to be in your seat. I just need you to stay in your area." He took the time to tell the students he cared about them and their academic success and found common ground in cool shoes because "I've seen firsthand that getting children to like you works." Renae won over a nonverbal student who "did not want to have anything to do with me" by consistently and deliberately interacting with and helping her.

The participants, eager to grow into their new profession, reflected on their identities and their own lived experiences. Renae had considered what helped the nonverbal student succeed and planned to have "a very set routine" with reminders before transitions in her own future classroom. She also remembered her own time as an eighth grader and the presidential election of 2016, describing how her Civics teacher "did do a good job. She tried as hard as she could to make us aware of, like, both sides" and "making sure that we had, like, multiple news sources available to us." She also described how her English teacher taught *To Kill a Mockingbird* without saying the n-word. As they planned and delivered instruction, the participants used their own lives to empathize with and understand their students and the adults around them; at the

same time, they maintained an awareness of how they, as the new teacher or as a young, white person, could be perceived. John, Doug, and Patrick talked explicitly of how they, as white men, might be perceived; Constance and Renae did not mention it. Audley's (2020) participants were disappointed and a bit baffled by the idea of earning, rather than expecting, their students' respect. Constance talked about transitioning to the teacher role and finding it a challenge to step into the role of authority figure. Renae shared stories of inexperienced teachers in chaotic preschool classrooms.

Leverett et al.'s (2022) participants liked it when their teachers got to know them and treated them as individuals, bestowing nicknames, offering birthday treats, sharing interests. Ladson-Billings' (2009b) participant suggests getting to know the students better will help with classroom management; her warm demanding pedagogy puts a structure around that exhortation as teachers get to know their students and use the knowledge to overcome student-specific barriers to success. Heath (1982) helped white teachers in a newly-integrated school connect with their students of color. Cammarota and Romero's (2006) Critically Compassionate Intellectualism ensures students understand the systems with which they may or may not comport and within which they can succeed. In conscious interactions, teachers can comply with Freire's (1970) advice to work in solidarity with – not for – students, asking them about their wants and needs and honoring their answers.

Controlling interactions are consistent with behaviorism and can feel comfortable for teachers and administrators, many (if not most or all) of whom are familiar with the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program's ersatz currency carrots and exclusionary discipline sticks. In these interactions, the concern appears to be gaining compliance. It can devolve into a contest of wills, with students trying to find ways around rules

and teachers working to outsmart them. Responding to the part of the McCann (2006) scenario in which the student tells the teacher he had never told them not to throw paper into the trash can, John called it "classic classroom management, you didn't establish your rules specifically enough at the start." Constance talked about "slowly transitioning into that teacher role" and handling "rough days" in the elementary school classroom in which she is student teaching, explaining that she and her cooperating teacher relied on

> sharing the expectations up front and then having a discussion with them either, like, one-on-one or, if it's like a whole-class thing, just discussing with them about what the expectations are and then reflecting back on how they didn't meet those expectations.

Doug shared his dissonance around his co-teacher's insistence that students say the Pledge of Allegiance and her recommendation that he talk about his military service with the students. He further expressed discomfort with the idea that students should comply because "I'm the adult," a contrast with Audley's (2020) participants. Doug noticed how surprised the students were when he treated them kindly and respectfully, saying "that's how I can tell that people aren't actually doing that with the kids because they're, they're in shock and they're like, yo, no one's ever talked to me like that before. They'll say that out loud." Each student-teacher relationship is the accumulation of interactions, of respect offered or not, of connections made or not. They build on each other. The students in Rist's (2000/1970) responded to the teachers' implicitly-communicated expectations, the teachers responded back in kind, the cycle repeating, the students trapped in the same reading groups for years. The student in Bryan's (2017) study has already had three negative encounters in the same day, with the teacher, the student teacher, and the other student; it is possible that, the next day, he might not approach people quite as openly; that over the years he will grow defensive, approaching teachers differently, suffering negative

teacher interactions as they react, accelerating the accumulation, building a barrier that drives him toward the STPP.

In Rist's (2000/1970) study, students lived up or down to the teachers' implicit expectations. Reyes (2021) observed a student who would not be put off by such behavior, demanding the assistance and attention to which she was entitled; that, however, is a great deal of emotional labor that not every student will be willing or able to expend. The students in Marsh and Noguera's (2018) study described feeling as if their teachers saw everything they did as wrong. Anyon (1984), Morris (2015), and Willis (1977) describe their participants resisting their teachers' efforts to control them, in the process decreasing their own opportunities to thrive in adulthood. Anyon (1980) points out that students repeat their self-harming resistance after they leave school, in their working lives, to their own financial and professional detriment.

Contentious interactions challenge teachers. Doug revealed confusion and dissonance around the idea of students

> at first sight of me, first meeting me, you can tell that they have something against me that is coming from, you know, stemming from something, you know, that's not you. Do you know what I'm saying? Like, you can tell when people have a racial bias. I'm not going to call a child racist, I'm just going to say that they have a, a racial bias. So, and I can definitely tell when that's being built into a child.

He shared an experience in which he and a student argued about the n-word:

> I was subbing a fourth grade class, and the kid, one child kept on using the n-word. Right. And I, I told him, I was like, hey, friend, I don't appreciate hearing that. I, I don't think you understand it, but you know, I'm, I'm going to ask that you don't say it because I, I don't think other people might like hearing it, too, so let's just, you know, I know you

don't mean any harm by it. So, and he goes, no, that's just because you can't say it. And I,

and I go, well, hold on. I go, no, it, I can say whatever I want. It's a free country. I choose

not to say it because it's not right? It's not. It's, I, you know, like to say I'm not allowed to

say it is something, but I don't think it, I am, personally, unable to say it. So given what I

know about the word, which is more than you, and he, you know, he, he's a fourth grader,

so it, it gave him a little bit to think about.

After reading the transcript of the first interview, Doug walked back the idea of children being

racist, saying

I feel like when trying to interpret any racist behavior from a child, it's more or less safer

to just interpret it as it being a child instead of it having any nefarious, uh, you know,

intentions. Because, like I said, I don't think those kids understand what they do when

they use that Karen term.

He blamed an eye-for-an-eye ethos among students and decried the ubiquity of phones in the

classroom. In the second interview, when asked about adults exerting their authority as adults

over children, Doug conceded that "everyone is entitled to use ['because I said so']."

Contentious interactions matter. Goldberg and Iruka (2023) correlated conflict with

teachers to behavior issues in students, particularly young males of color. Payne's (2023)

participant, reflecting from prison, talks of the bias of the uncaring, young white teachers – a

stark contrast to the participants in my study. Audley's (2020) participants expected and were

somewhat befuddled when they did not receive unconditional and unquestioned respect based on

their position of authority as teachers. When administrators like those in Berlowitz et al.'s (2017)

study believe there is nothing they can do about violence, that its roots outside the school are too

deep to be addressed, it can seem the only solution is to control behavior, to demand compliance.

Nolan's (2011) SROs sometimes created and often escalated interactions leading to court summonses. The administrators in the no-excuses charter school Marsh and Walker (2022) studied found the minor violations for which they searched.

Allowances Offered with Alacrity, with Hesitation, Not at All

Vagle (2015) talks of social class-based affordances. He describes a popular professional development strategy in which teachers are taken on a school bus ride through neighborhoods near the school, ostensibly to better understand their students' lives, often culminating in a shared meal intended to encourage positive relationships among teachers. In his article, the teachers harshly judge their students' families because their yards are messy, filled with bikes and toys seemingly dropped haphazardly as children abandoned them. Vagle (2015) returns to the next professional development day with a picture of his own messy garage, which the teachers are quick to excuse since he is a busy professor with more important things to think about than tidying up. He waits for them to realize that, unlike the students' families, he has a garage door to hide his mess. It is this sort of allowance that teachers offer each other, perhaps as a professional courtesy or to protect a friend or in the hope that one day, when they err, their friends and colleagues will offer it to them. There is nothing wrong with that. As a teacher, I talk a lot, fast, all day every day, with many people, and I know that I will inevitably and inadvertently put my foot in my mouth sometimes; it would be nice to think someone might offer me an allowance.

In the center of the continuum of student-teacher interactions, things are fairly straightforward. Teachers are unlikely to witness each other's *carefree* moments as they relax and enjoy their students. *Conscious* moments do not require allowance, as teaching and learning proceed peacefully, meeting the students' needs and helping them to remain engaged in their

ZPD; teachers' in-the-moment behaviors align neatly with their desire to become and grow as

antiracist practitioners; the ongoing reflection in which antiracist teachers engage helps them

maintain positive and productive relationships with their students. They have planned their

lessons and are managing their classes in ways that honor their students' lives and engage those

students in deep, rich learning connected to their communities, as they define them, and to the

larger world in which those communities exist. During conscious moments, teachers balance

treating each student as an individual and meeting their academic and social-emotional needs

with a bracketed awareness of the larger societal issues impacting their classroom and the

students in it – understanding, perhaps, that students behave as they do because things are as they

are and finding effective and helpful ways to navigate a nuanced situation. *Controlling* moments,

for the most part, comport with school policy and receive administrative approval; behaviorist

systems of positive and negative consequences keep students calm and productive so they and

their classmates can learn; students display respect for teachers and peers in school-sanctioned

ways. In contentious interactions, the student-teacher relationship is somehow damaged, there

are bad feelings in need of repair. It is at the ends of the continuum, when teachers have *careless*

moments or *contentious* interactions with students, when emotions are or become charged and

people say things they might come to regret, that allowances can be offered with varying degrees

of alacrity or hesitation – or, in extreme instances, not offered at all.

   During their interviews, the participants described interactions they experienced or

witnessed as students or teachers and they reacted to a variety of negative scenarios taken from

Kay's (2018) and McCann's (2006) books and from the Black@FCPS (2020) Instagram account.

The scenarios came from the ends of the continuum, careless and contentious moments, real or

imagined, possibly exaggerated. Kay (2018) drew his scenario from a news story; McCann's

(2006) is purposefully imagined to make a point, albeit presumably rooted in research and experience; and the Black@FCPS (2020) stories are social media posts, an unproven possibility of what might be. The insight comes not from the incidents themselves, but from the participants' reactions to those incidents: the alacrity with which they offered allowances, their hesitation to offer them, their decision not to offer them at all for various teacher behaviors.

The continuum arising from the participants' descriptions aligns with the literature. In the careless range, Heath's (1982) teachers did not know how to communicate effectively with their students or their students' families. The teachers Rist (2000/1970) observed lavished positive attention on the students from whom they expected much, ignoring and mistreating the others. A teacher who is mired in the myth of meritocracy, who engages in deficit thinking, who struggles to understand the impact of systemic racism, who treats students from different groups differently will often find themself in the careless range (Behm Cross et al., 2019; Beneke and Cheatham, 2020; Bennett et al., 219; Kumar et al., 2015; Onnie Rogers and Brooms, 2020; Starck et al., 2020). They might center blame on a student for not trying hard enough, on the student's family for not being supportive enough, on the neighborhood for being rife with distracting conflict when their students do not succeed. The cooperating and student teachers in Bryan's (2017) article appeared to see in their new student the stereotype of a future predator. Payne's (2023) participant described young, white teachers who seemed to be biased against and uncaring toward students. Leverett's (2022) students describe benign neglect, offering answers without explanation.

In the carefree range, Reyes' (2021) participant and most of her students, at times including the outgoing and neglected girl on whom the article centers, enjoyed fast-paced bantering during the lessons. Liang's (2019) students appreciated when their teachers

demonstrated respect and regard for them: greeting them, offering them support, and maintaining

high expectations; Leverett's (2022), affectionate nicknames and birthday wishes.

In the conscious range are Ladson-Billings' (2009b) Dreamkeepers, who consistently

maintained high expectations for the students and removed the unique obstacles that hindered

each student's individual progress. Grinage (2020), Lac et al. (2020), Menash (2009), and Kempf

(2022) describe their participants actively reflecting on behaviors, in the schools in which they

taught and the books and articles they read in their book clubs and critical reading groups, which

places them squarely in the conscious range of the continuum. Cammarota and Romero (2006)

helped students to succeed in and to understand the systems of which they are a part.

In the controlling range, the focus is on maintaining a safe and orderly environment so

students can learn. The teachers Berlowitz et al. (2017) describe who believed their students

come from a culture steeped in violence "felt that the strict application of [zero-tolerance] policy

was necessary for safety" (p. 18). Marsh and Walker's (2022) adults remained laser-focused on

minor violations, constantly on guard against minor issues in the hope of preventing larger ones.

In the contentious range, Audley's (2020) participants struggled with students who did

not offer unearned respect to teachers based solely on their position of authority in the classroom.

Marsh and Noguera's (2018) charter school students, all members of a group of students known

for engaging in behaviors that challenge and frustrate adults, described teachers regularly

blaming and accusing them. Nolan's (2011) SROs escalated minor incidents into court

summonses, resulting in students with criminal records who had merely violated school policies.

Offered with alacrity. The participants offered some allowances quickly, with no

reluctance, offering compassion and understanding to a teacher they presumed to have good

intentions. Regarding a disorderly nursery school classroom, Renae explains that "a lot of the

teachers weren't as experienced as I thought they might be and I think that kind of played a role in the chaoticness a little bit." I asked participants to respond to a post from Black@FCPS (2020) about a stolen bracelet:

> the administrator at my school only took me and the other black girl to investigate us but they never took the white girl because they thought that "white people are good people and black people are bad so they must of stolen the bracelet."

Doug pushed back, wondering how the poster knew the administration had not questioned the white girl who had been at the table when the bracelet was stolen. In these cases, the participants see another educator's point of view and understand reasons for the behavior. Doug knows that, regardless of which students the administrator interviewed, he would not be able to tell anyone he had done so without violating those students' privacy. Renae, a preservice teacher, could easily imagine that another teacher's inexperience could contribute to disorder in a classroom and, presumably, knew she might soon be the inexperienced teacher in a similar situation. Their allowances were driven by an empathetic imagination.

Offered hesitantly. For purposes of this dissertation, a hesitant allowance is one in which a participant can understand how such a thing could happen but does not endorse the behavior. John, for example, thought the Kay (2018) scenario in which a teacher asked African American students to work with cotton plants was "a really bad idea," but he allowed that "it went over someone's head completely and they just did not recognize how that might be offensive." When confronted with the McCann (2006) scenario, in which the teacher asks the SRO to escort a student to an administrator for throwing balled-up paper noisily into the trash can, all three of the Phase 1 participants tried to understand the teacher's actions. John and Patrick described the referral and ejection as "dramatic" and "kind of an overreaction," respectively. John wondered if

"the character in the scenario was agitated by something else;" Patrick pointed out that "I also

don't know the context of the situation, like how many times this kid has thrown the thing into

the trash can, how many conversations the teacher's had that day about that specific stuff." Both

John and Patrick suggested the teacher's reaction could have been more of a disruption than the

student's behavior. Constance offered this line of thinking:

> I think it would depend if this is something that has been repetitively happening with the
>
> student. You know, like, this has been, like, their third reminder, I think that it was an
>
> appropriate action, especially if it had been previously discussed with the student.

Patrick pondered an incident in which an African American substitute teacher falsely accused an

African American student of stealing the phone she had inadvertently left in the teacher's lounge:

> I hesitate to, like, call this racist because it's, like, between two black people, but it was a
>
> black student and a black substitute 'cause I'm student teaching, so I can't, like, be alone
>
> with the class. So they had a substitute in the room and she left the room to go do
>
> something. And I was in the room for a second. This was during planning and a student
>
> came in to grab his hairbrush that he left. And so he, he left and she came in and he, as he
>
> was leaving, she couldn't, didn't see her phone and thought that he took her phone, which
>
> I didn't see him do. And I tried to say that I did not, that he did not take the phone. And
>
> then later, like, she accused him and it was this whole ordeal. And then later they found
>
> the phone in, like, the faculty lounge that she had just, like, left there or something. So
>
> I'm not sure, like, if I would tie, like, race to that, but there's, like, you know,
>
> criminalization, profiling, and stuff like that. Maybe it was something internalized. I'm
>
> not sure, it's hard to say, though, that, that specifically is, like, tied to race. That could just
>
> be, maybe that woman is, like, you know, had no clue.

While the participants would not have acted in the way the teachers did, they tried to understand,

reflecting on the ways in which one might err and, more importantly, how they might avoid – or

recover from – such errors in their own praxis.

Not offered. The participants, at times, neither understood nor endorsed another teacher's

behavior and did not offer allowances. Renae described her own high school teachers who "were

just kind of there to teach; they didn't really want to know what was going on in their students'

lives." Liang et al. (2019) reported her participants looked for very little from their teachers:

greetings, support, and high expectations. Like Renae, Liang et al.'s (2019) participants did not

always get even these small things from their teachers. She also did not approve of a substitute

teacher "kind of, like, preaching to us about what she thought should happen with the election."

John halfheartedly allowed that the idea of having African American students work with cotton

plants was, possibly, an honest mistake, but he maintained that the failing grade for refusing to

comply was a "mustache-twirling villain kind of evil." Patrick and Constance, similarly, did not

offer an allowance for the cotton plant activity. Patrick suggested working with, rather than

against, the parent; Constance took a more proactive approach, suggesting "the teacher should

have discussed with the parent first, before giving the child a failing grade" and "maybe

discussed a different option for the student to do." Regarding the Black@FCPS (2020) post

about unfair enforcement of dress codes, Doug and Renae wholeheartedly agreed with the poster

and made no attempt to defend adults. Doug replied, "Oh yeah, definitely a double standard for

girls of color, honestly." Renae concurred, "I definitely did notice, like, situations similar to this

at my high school, especially surrounding, like, a thicker body type compared to a skinnier body

type." Doug responded to the Black@FCPS post about a teacher suggesting students return to

their own countries without equivocation or compassion: "I think that's completely asinine for an

adult to say to a child." He said this about the teacher described in a Black@FCPS (2020) post as confusing two girls who "were black and had box braids":

> Yeah. I completely believe that, that's, that's just people being apathetic to, to, to what they don't know is a really important cause, which is our, our nation's youth. So, yeah, that, that guy's just being gross and, you know, not, not a good educator. So, shouldn't be working with children if he doesn't respect them enough to learn their names and, you know, be able to, well, fully show that he cares who each individual is.

Regarding the Black@FCPS (2020) post about the teacher who teased an Asian student about eating "someone's cat," Doug categorized the teacher as "a moron and a racist, quite a combo." Renae responded to an article she read in class about "a black student … who was using AAVE and the teacher was, like, kept scolding him and, like, punishing him for using that, which I don't think is appropriate at all." The participants were less likely to offer allowances to adults who violated their deeply held values and beliefs. The participants care about and are committed to forging positive and productive relationships with their own students, now and in the future. They offered no allowances for teachers behaving in ways that indicated a lack of care for students.

To clarify, I have included the following diagram. The irregular shape of the dark gray area is intended to convey an approximation, as this study had neither the means nor the intent to count and sort interactions; the focus was, instead, on the reflections of the participants. Note that the cloud-shaped allowances do not extend to the ends of the lines because some interactions are simply too egregious to deserve allowances. There are no allowances pictured in the center because those are generally positive interactions, times when teachers are doing their jobs properly and well. It is in the cloudy, gray areas that teacher educators and professional

developers might focus, asking their learners to analyze to whom, for what, and how quickly

they offer allowances and, more than that, to consider what that insight could mean for their own

classroom praxis and their involvement in the school community.
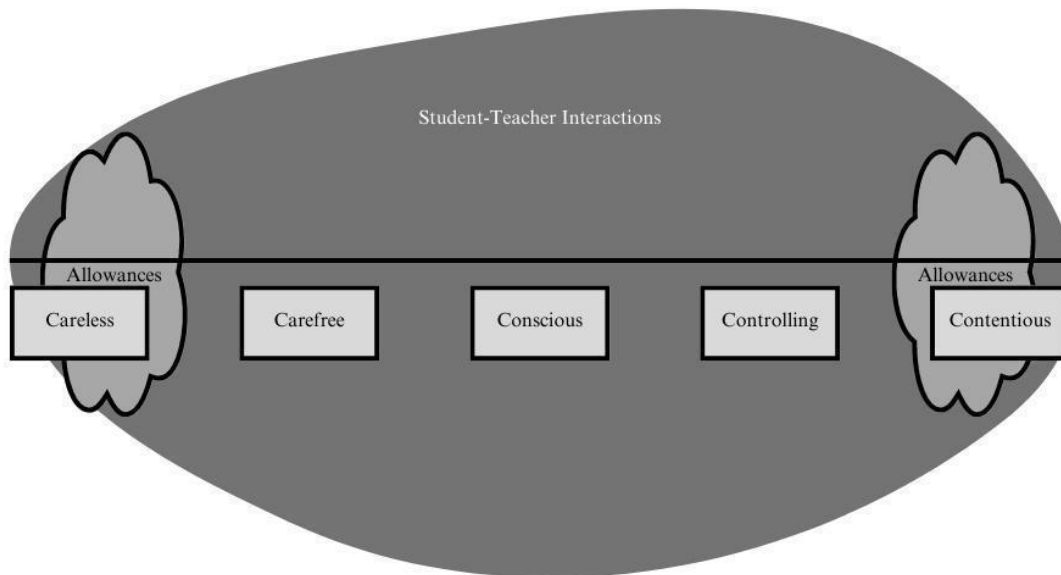
Doug generated more nuanced data than the other participants. Whether it was because

he had been substitute teaching for some time or because he participated in two interviews,

reflecting for a couple of weeks and revisiting his own words, his data warranted more careful

consideration. To that end, I have devoted the remainder of this section to his thoughts about

whether or not children can be racist. The intent is not to examine the children's behavior, but to

provide an example of how a teacher might quietly reflect and grow in their antiracist praxis,

puzzling over events, going back and forth, comparing old to new experiences.

Doug offered a particularly vivid picture of equivocation, particularly as he struggled to

understand students' behavior, saying

> I've not witnessed any racist behavior from a teacher to a student, but from a student to a
>
> teacher, yes, I've seen kids call teachers white-ass hos and this and that and, you know,

and technically calling that one woman Karen … but the kid doesn't understand that

'cause he's just a kid.

Doug went on to say, "these kids will throw the race card, they will throw it like it's paper. You

are racist. That's racist." In the second interview, he pivoted, saying

So it's like I, I can't bring myself to even, you know, conceive of a child doing something

innately, like, terrible on purpose. So, like, there has to be a reason why they were driven

to do something heinous.

Working with "kids [who] are predominantly, you know, Hispanic and Black," he maintained an

awareness of how the students might react to white teachers:

there's a lot of current social discourse towards, you know, white people in general, so I

try to take that into account, too, so as to not agitate people and to, also, understand

where they're coming from in certain instances as well.

He offered an allowance, though, keeping in mind that those judgments came before he met the

children and "that's not [me.]"

Doug offered allowances to students based on the assumption that they did not

understand the words they used. He described students referring to him as Peter Parker due to a

resemblance to Tom Holland, who played Spiderman in several movies, and said "they don't

think I know that it's funny, you know what I'm saying?" He referred to the fourth grader calling

an older, white, female Kindergarten teacher "such a Karen." "I don't believe the kid even begins

to understand what he means by that," he said. Even in his exchange with the fourth grader using

the n-word, Doug voiced the assumption that the student did not understand the word and

asserted that he knew more about it. Doug talked extensively about "knowing their lingo" and

allowed that students' families do not understand what their children are saying. "I've been

called slurs," he said, "and the parents don't understand that they're slurs." He based an

allowance on the assumption that "I doubt that all of these kids have parents who talk like this."

He elaborated on the allowance, saying it is difficult to keep up with the students' slang "because

the Internet is transforming language." On the other hand, he talked about contending with

students' families encouraging negative behaviors, quoting a student who said "well, my mom

said if, you know, if somebody pushes up on me, I got to defend myself." Doug elaborated on the

teacher's dilemma, "'cause you can't say your mom's wrong. So, 'cause that'll just get you in

trouble 'cause the, the kid will just go back and say, well, Mr. Doug said" not to fight. He offered

allowances, the benefit of the doubt, based on the children's age and vulnerability to such

influences as the Internet and the attitudes of the people in their lives. He stayed largely in the

conscious area of the continuum of student-teacher interactions when talking about his students.

He empathized, he addressed issues using "kindness and questioning," he incorporated what he

learned into social-emotional learning in his classroom.

Doug talked about demanding compliance from students, the controlling area of the

student-teacher continuum. While he maintained that "everyone is entitled" to demand

compliance simply because they are the responsible adult, he did not do that and marveled that

students explicitly stated that they were not accustomed to being treated so respectfully. He

talked about teachers who "are just dead inside," who "are doing things when they meet me or

they're doing things around me that I know that when they started, they probably wouldn't want

to be doing now." For example, when someone would arrive to substitute teach, they "feel the

need to tell them, 'Hey, these are the bad kids … they step out of line once, call the front office

and they'll come down and get them.'" He offered a variety of allowances, suggesting it could be

"a culmination of a ton of things. If maybe they're, they're not in the right spot. Maybe they

shouldn't be teaching in general. Maybe they're not teaching the right grade" and explaining it

could be "because they're so tired and because it's what's more efficient at the time." Doug

described the administration in a similar way:

> the principal and everybody kind of just seems apathetic [after a fight], so, you know,
>
> like, they just can't get him to put his, you know, to keep his hands to himself, so I think,
>
> I, I don't think they're apathetic 'cause they don't care. I believe it's because the
>
> resources are just not there.

He offered and retracted allowances as he worked to understand his students' behaviors and the

other adults' reactions to that behavior, a process he will continue throughout his career as novel

situations present themselves. Doug was empathetic. He recognized problematic behavior, but he

worked hard to find ways to offer allowances to students and to other adults alike. The students

were too young to know better; the adults were too tired or in the wrong job or under too much

stress.

Expressed Need for Support

Several of the participants hesitantly stated a need for more and slightly different training

to enhance their antiracist praxis. They enjoyed and felt good about coursework on multicultural

education and culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy, but they were surprised when the

examples did not transfer easily to their classrooms. John offered this explanation:

> It's been interesting to go through the teacher prep program … and talk about things like,
>
> you know, diversity and how we should handle diversity and, you know, bring student
>
> background into the classroom and try to work with it. But it's, I don't know. It's, it's, I
>
> feel like that's a lot easier said than done now that I'm student teaching. It seems
>
> somewhat, difficult to try and think about how to work things in based, maybe, based on

sort of individual students, but especially since we're, you know, I'm, I'm going over

history, right. Like, I, I would obviously like, I'll add things, right, if I feel they are

important, which is sort of my way of doing that, right? Like full representation, right?

Like there's not a lot of LGBTQ representation in the [standards] really at all. There

might be a section about, they know that might reference one person who might be

LGBTQ, but there's really not a lot. So I, when I think about that, I know there are some

LGBTQ students in my class, so I will add those things in, but it's interesting how easy it

sounds but how hard it actually is to do right. Cause some, sometimes it's as simple as

adding in a, a PowerPoint slide and spending class time talking about this person. But

other times it's like, well, how, how in the world am I going to integrate anything at all

into this?

Patrick expressed concern that the examples from his coursework (e.g., incorporating hiphop

music into lessons) turned out to feel inauthentic to him and inappropriate for the students in his

classroom:

There was a lot of, like, talk in my classes about, like, culturally responsive learning, that

I thought was really interesting. But I don't, like, now that I'm in the classroom, it doesn't

seem like some of it, like doesn't, doesn't make sense to do, like, there was a lot of like

articles and stuff about how, like, this was in like my, in Ed Psych class about ... Like, I, I

think the concept makes sense and I think it's like super-specific, but I think the examples

that were given in them, like, don't make sense. Like it would, like, I think my, my

students are really like nerdy and they wouldn't like, like, I don't think, like, who they are

is like anything close to like defined by their identity. Like maybe only some like

linguistic stuff sometimes. But, uh, yeah, they just like, like anime and stuff like that, you

know?

Doug, hungry for experience, maintained

to become a great educator, to become a good one. Uh, obviously the curriculars are

important, but really it's the experience I think that, you know, really helps you get

acclimated to, you know, teaching in general.

The participants, then, wanted to forge positive and productive relationships with all of

their students. They are still learning how to teach and manage their classrooms while

maintaining an awareness of larger forces, of the existence of the STPP, of the systemic racism

baked into the system and the ways their students can learn to navigate, succeed in, and work to

change a system that can seem to work against them. On the careless and contentious ends of the

continuum of student-teacher interactions, the participants varied in the alacrity or hesitation

with which they offered allowances – if, indeed, they offered them at all – for the apparently

negative behaviors of teachers. Teacher educators and professional developers might offer their

learners space for reflection and time to consider their own willingness to allow for careless or

contentious interactions, real or hypothetical.

Summary: Themes and Research Questions

In this study, I set out to gather formative information that teacher educators and

professional developers might choose to take into account as they plan and prepare to support

pre- and inservice teachers in their efforts to become and grow as antiracist practitioners. The six

participants, all young, white preservice teachers studying at a research institute known for its

commitment to social justice, are committed to forging positive and productive relationships

with all of their students. From their words emerged several themes:

1. The participants' descriptions of and reactions to interactions between students and teachers fall along a continuum from careless through carefree, conscious, and controlling to contentious.

2. When confronted with negative student-teacher interactions, generally in the careless or contentious ranges of the previously mentioned continuum of student-teacher interactions, the participants offered allowances with alacrity, with hesitation, or not at all, depending on the perceived level of egregiousness and the degree to which they were able to empathize with either the student or the teacher involved in the situation.

3. To improve their antiracist praxis, new and experienced teachers could benefit from interventions and supports that offer them time and space to reflect on moments throughout that continuum of student-teacher interactions and their reactions to them, including thoughts about the internal and external forces that led those interactions to unfold as they did.

4. Teachers' biases, both implicit and explicit, are often rooted in the systemic racism in which we have all grown up and continue to live. Teacher education and professional development that dwells in the paradox, exploring the struggle between teachers' inevitable and unavoidable implicit biases and the sincere drive to become and to continue to grow as an antiracist practitioner, might help teachers to better understand and, thus, act in more informed and effective ways inside their classrooms and as advocates for students outside their classrooms.

The participants, then, are committed to spending as much time as possible in the middle of the continuum, engaging in conscious interactions, those in which students are learning in a safe space, or in controlling interactions, managing behaviors so learning can happen. They

already engage in occasional carefree interactions in which they enjoy getting to know their students. They are aware, though, of the inevitability of engaging in, witnessing, or supporting students through careless or contentious interactions throughout their careers. When presented with descriptions of teachers at the ends of the continuum, behaving in ways that are careless or engaging in contentious interactions, the participants were more willing to offer allowances when they could empathize with another teacher's behavior, possibly imagining themselves making similar mistakes in the future. When another educator's behavior violated the participants' deeply held beliefs and values, they did not offer allowances. The participants indicated a need for support from teacher educators and professional developers, a space to discuss and to reflect on what they have done and will do to forge positive and productive relationships with their students; the microaggressions, implicit bias, and racism they will witness or experience in schools; what behaviors they will emulate and which they will avoid as they continue to learn their craft. And so, the answers to the research questions follow.

Research Question #1

How do white preservice teachers with experience as students in public K12 classrooms within the past ten years and some experience as educators (e.g., practicums, observations, substitute teaching, coaching) in diverse settings view themselves, both as raced individuals and as contributors to the diverse students, families, and communities they intend to serve?

I wanted to know how the participants, white people who will work with students of color, see themselves, both in terms of their own identities and as part of the schools and communities in which they are working and expect to work. The participants work hard to keep in mind their own identities while honoring those of all of the members of their classroom

communities, including the students, their families, and other adults in the school. John was keenly aware of the perception his students of color and female students might have of him as a heterosexual, cisgender white man, taking care to remain approachable. Patrick recognized his privilege as a white man while maintaining his Orthodox Jewish identity, which he felt set him apart from a largely Christian society. Constance's time in the military offered her the chance to consider being the other in a diverse group that comes together to achieve difficult goals. Doug, who grew up in a military family that moved frequently and then joined the military as an adult, was open about his own progress, learning not to assume that a baseline level of racism is normal. He expressed empathy for adults in difficult situations and confusion over whether or not a child could be considered racist. Like John, he maintained an awareness of his own whiteness and how his students and their families see him. Renae has been considering her own whiteness since the eighth grade and is very much aware of the STPP. The Black Lives Matter movement and a recent traffic stop, in which his white father displayed no fear, have led Troy to consider his own whiteness and privilege. They are beginning teachers, learning to move between the micro and the macro, between their own relationships with their students and their awareness of the STPP.

Research Question #2

How do those preservice teachers view the context – the diverse classrooms and communities – in which they will teach?

I also wanted to know how the participants imagine the classrooms and communities of which they will be a part. The participants appeared to view themselves as leaders, defenders, protectors of their current and future classroom communities, responsible for the relationships taking place in the classroom and beyond, including families and the wider community in their

efforts. John was quick to empathize with and recognize slights against students with whom he felt strongly connected – the LGBTQ+ community and the students and their families who struggle financially. Patrick thoughtfully considered the perspectives of both the student who was wrongly accused of theft and the substitute teacher who accused him. Constance worked hard to connect with her students, particularly English language learners and nonverbal students. Doug drew on his own history of behavioral issues as a student to empathize with and advocate for students displaying similar issues. Renae shares John's empathy for students who feel othered by their families' financial struggles and Constance's commitment to nonverbal students. Troy was pleased to discover that people in college took his feelings more seriously than did those in his PK12 experience; presumably, he will extend that same consideration to his own students. In this space, the participants bring the micro and the macro together, connecting the students and their families with the wider world through creative lesson planning, carefully-selected texts and resources, and the hard work of building and maintaining relationships with families.

Research Question #3

How do those preservice teachers perceive relationships with diverse students and their own ability to build trust in the classroom?

I wanted to know how the participants thought about the relationships they have built and will continue to forge with their current and future students. The participants cared that all of their students felt that they were a part of and not apart from the group. The participants actively forge relationships, consciously considering the members of their classroom communities and creating opportunities to build and strengthen connections. John's relationships with his students were based, in part, on shared humor. Patrick was thoughtful and proactive, consciously considering situations from multiple perspectives and pursuing carefree interactions about

common interests like television shows. Constance deliberately set time aside to invite her

students to share their lives, incorporating what she learned into her lessons and into the

classroom community. Doug worked hard to connect with his students, finding shared interests

in shoes and "getting sturdy" (i.e., dancing) while decrying much of what they saw on the

Internet and the way neither he nor their families fully understand everything to which they are

exposed. Renae intended to be like her favorite teacher, who demonstrated care by checking in

with his students about their lives outside his classroom. Here, the participants focus on the

micro, working diligently to create and maintain positive and productive relationships with all of

their students.

Chapter V: Positionality Statement and Discussion

A paradox emerges from the findings. We know that students of color, of poverty, with disabilities continue to slip into the STPP. Studies from the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights (2019), and the Government Accountability Office (2018) show quantitatively that more students of color, of poverty, with disabilities face harsh exclusionary discipline, often for less concrete reasons, than white students. We know that negative classroom interactions can be rooted in teacher implicit bias and can contribute to that exclusion. The Black@FCPS (2020) posts offer a vivid picture of how sincere, well-intentioned efforts can go awry, how caring and dedicated teachers can unwittingly, maybe even unknowingly, commit microaggressions that accumulate over years into barriers inexorably channeling students toward the STPP. The teachers in Bryan's (2017) and Reyes' (2021) articles probably did not realize they committed microaggressions, zealously managing nonexistent or minor misbehaviors differently for a single student, singled out, perhaps, for an implicitly imagined potential for further and future disruption, harkening back to Beneke and Cheatham's (2020) participants engaging in deficit thinking about their students; to Bennet et al.'s (2019) participants' inability to incorporate systemic inequity into their mental models of students and the education system; to Behm Cross et al.'s (2019) participants relying on explanations rooted in the myth of meritocracy; to Kumar et al.'s (2015) participants' lack of interest in the way students of different groups treated each other; to Heath's (1982) teachers struggling to communicate with their students of divergent habitus; to Willis' (1977) lads refusing to engage in an education they saw as irrelevant and rebelling against a system they felt was uncaring; to Rist's (1970/2000) teachers maintaining the same groupings based largely on apparent socioeconomic status for three full school years.

On the other hand, the preservice teachers I interviewed, like most of the teachers I have known throughout my career, are caring and concerned, working hard to build relationships they hope will help each of their students succeed. Like Ladson-Billings' (2009b) Dreamkeepers, my participants worked with students and their families to eliminate barriers so that students can live up to their high expectations. They go out of their way to forge and maintain positive and productive relationships with all of their students, spending their free time watching television shows to discuss with students, searching for humorous memes to include in daily slideshows, directly asking them about their lives and incorporating that information into their lessons. They enjoyed and engaged with their coursework on multicultural education, and yet they have since recognized its limits and are open to more, to different, to more advanced work. They have all recognized their own privileges and challenges; they have learned about and routinely celebrate their students' differences. Effective interventions and supports could help them to think yet more critically; to begin their journeys as teacher leaders, helping other teachers see what they see; to grow as activists, working beyond their classrooms for their students.

I find myself wondering how so many of us teachers perceive ourselves doing a fabulous, unbiased job while so many students describe painful microaggressions. It is in this paradox, perhaps, that teacher educators and professional developers might help their learners to reflect on their own praxis: on the micro interactions inside classrooms and schools, on the macro forces exerted on the people in those classrooms and schools, and on the way the micro and macro interact. Given time and space to reflect, teachers might find novel ways to enhance their own praxis, to play with a variety of ideas and perspectives, to find their own ways to know and to serve the students in their care.

Positionality Statement

This dissertation dwells in that paradox. It is a micro view of a macro issue, an exploration of what teachers like me can do from our classrooms to help students avoid the STPP and how teacher educators and professional developers might support our efforts. I am a white, able-bodied woman who teaches eighth grade English Language Arts in a specialty center for students who have been dually identified as gifted in both reading and math. During the 2022-23 school year, I managed the after-school program, which was open to all students in the under-resourced, majority-minority middle school located in the less-affluent end of the county where I work. I also serve as my school's New Teacher Mentor Coordinator, so I have a particular interest in effective ways to help early-career teachers succeed, remain in the profession, grow as antiracist practitioners. This dissertation – indeed, my entire doctoral studies program – has been an attempt to become a better teacher and to do more for the students, families, and communities with whom I work. I spent six years teaching at an under-resourced, majority-minority high school in another state and left there with questions. Why, for example, was I so surprised when recent graduates visited and told us they had enlisted in the military or taken jobs at McDonald's, both very normal things for 18-year-olds to do? It was not until years later, in this doctoral program, that I learned of the STPP and gradually came to understand that we had not been preparing all of our students to thrive as adults – we were, for at least part of the time, often to comply with administrative edicts with a stated purpose of maintaining a safe and orderly learning environment, preparing far too many of them for prison, demanding compliance and ejecting them from our classrooms (and, sometimes, the school) when they refused (Nolan, 2011). It was during my time teaching at that high school that I first considered my own whiteness; began to understand the privilege of which I had been unaware for the first 40 years

of my life; knew I wanted to do what I could to make things better for people who had not been

as fortunate as I had. Even years later, as a broke, divorced mother of three relying on student

loan residuals to make ends meet, that enormous privilege carried me through in ways

unavailable to the students I had taught back then: I had an excellent education, a solid

employment and credit history, and a financially secure family willing and able to help me and

my children.

Today, I attend to the different ways students describe their interactions with teachers.

Some of my after-school students and the students I meet when I cover classes or tutor during my

planning period (and a few of my specialty center students, to be honest) share story after story

after story of untrue accusations and unjust consequences. Many of the stories happened years

ago, relived and revisited repeatedly. It is easy to imagine those students posting to an account

like Black@FCPS (2020) someday – or slipping quietly into the STPP. And I find myself silently

offering allowances, easily able to see how a teacher could become confused and overwhelmed

and blame the wrong student for talking because I have done it myself. Or I don't, wondering

what really happened and why anyone would say or do such a thing to a child. Sometimes, I find

myself hesitating, wanting to give a friend the benefit of the doubt and struggling to justify it to

myself.

Most of my specialty center students share an occasional story of perceived unfairness,

but they have countless other stories of positive interactions, of teachers advocating for them, of

projects they have enjoyed and accomplishments that have made them proud. The positive

interactions and successes accumulate, insulating them from harm, helping them feel like an

integral part of a community of learners. They describe the negative interactions as an

understandable aberration, a teacher having an off day, perhaps, or reacting to a situation

unrelated to that child. The difference is visible in their approach to new adults. Many of the students who have had multiple negative experiences seem to be more cautious and I have to prove myself, earn their respect, gain what can be a fragile trust. Students who have had mostly positive experiences, more often than not, seem quicker to trust and accept me, eager to please and ready to learn, safe in the assumption that their teachers care about them and want them to succeed.

Discussion

Much of the literature about the STPP looks at teachers. When the students are in our classrooms, engaged in learning, preparing for what we hope and want to believe is a bright future, they are not risking involvement with law enforcement or the criminal justice system, nothing pushes them toward the STPP, at least in that moment. When a student-teacher relationship turns sour and we eject them from our classrooms, we put them at greater risk of sliding into it. They fall behind in their classwork, their grades fall, they fall out of touch with their friends. They feel less comfortable, so they do less work. This is not new information. Self Determination Theory (SDT) tells us that a student needs to feel autonomous, competent, connected; demands for compliance and suspensions for refusing those demands mean all three of those elements are missing. Vulnerable students attend or do not (or sit silently in in-school suspension, an in-between place, in the school yet not in the classroom) at the behest of the administration; they are behind and the work to be done might seem intimidating and overwhelming, both in content and in quantity; they feel isolated and left out, missing both lessons and time with friends, not like a valued part of a collegial and collaborative community of learners who care about each other's success.

Audley (2020) describes novice teachers learning that they must earn their students'

respect, rather than just demand that students automatically respect their authority as teachers.

We spend weeks at the beginning of the year getting to know our students and their families,

surveying them and playing games with them; we devote considerable time the rest of the year to

nurturing, maintaining, and, occasionally, repairing those relationships. We try to create a cache

of carefree and conscious interactions to insulate against possible future careless, controlling, and

contentious ones. John shared jokes with his students, adding a meme-of-the-day to his daily

PowerPoint; Patrick and his students discussed TV shows they enjoyed; Constance asked about

her students' lives and incorporated what she learned into her lessons; Doug regularly and openly

told his students that he was there for them and he cared about them and their futures; Renae

worked consistently with a nonverbal child and was touched when the child was excited to show

her something; Troy hoped to help his future students feel valued and validated in a way that he

did not at their age. I doubt anyone read the Black@FCPS (2020) posts and thought, "Oh! That's

me! I do that, too!" One wonders if the teachers mentioned would recognize themselves in the

posts. Reyes (2021) describes a teacher singling out one student to rigidly and unfairly control,

yet the students describe that teacher as caring and deserving of respect. Reyes (2021) does not

explain how the relationship between the teacher and the singled-out student came to be as it is,

does not include that student's or any other student's feelings about the teacher. Reyes (2021)

does not share the teacher's thoughts and feelings about the observed class period. Maybe she

believes she is being appropriately stern to keep an unruly student engaged, assuming that the

observing Reyes (2021) understands and approves of what she is doing. On the other hand,

perhaps she regrets and reflects, perhaps she does not know how to break out of a pattern,

perhaps she seeks allowances from herself and her friends. She might wonder whether the other

students notice the differential treatment. A critical book club could arrange for multiple

observations, colleagues observing the class described in the article and that teacher observing

the singled-out student in other classes; they could read a related text and reflect on it and the

observations in the days before the next meeting; they could talk about the various ways that

particular student interacts with teachers and, maybe, role play during the next meeting. Various

members could act like students who agree with the teacher that more control is warranted for

this particular classmate; like other students who might not agree and who privately wonder why

the teacher is so hard on one peer while they enjoy (and maybe, to some extent, feel guilty about)

the preferential treatment they receive; possibly some students who might worry that the teacher

will eventually begin to treat them in a similar way. The exercise might allow Reyes' (2021)

teacher time and space to reflect on how she sees herself; how she imagines her students see her,

viewing the matter from multiple perspectives she may not have previously considered;

contemplating how she feels about her relationship with the student and what she might do

differently with her and with future students like her, examining the allowances she offers herself

and those offered by friends and fellow book club members. Additionally, that work might

provide other teachers in sessions fodder for reflection as they consider similar interactions in

their own classrooms and, perhaps, adjust their praxis accordingly.

     And that matters. Teachers are part of a system that works, cumulatively, over years, to

guide students toward or away from the STPP (Ahmed, 2007; Bourdieu, 1984; Fasching-Varner

et al., 2014). No one comment, one individual, one school year, even, is responsible. The patterns

cut across people and time, accumulating as students make their way through the public school

system, the efforts of a village culminating in graduation or incarceration or somewhere

in-between. The way a student's elementary school teachers treated them colors the way they

approach their middle school teachers; the effect can compound, making it even harder for their high school teachers to gain their trust and forge positive and productive relationships with them. Rist (2000/1970) observes the way interactions accumulate in Kindergarten through second grade classrooms, the same students living up or down to three different teachers' social class-based expectations. By third grade, the seemingly lowest group's very real accomplishments were invisible to their teacher. My school is like that, almost a distillation of Bourdieu's (1984) work. As I write this near the end of the 2022-23 school year, my specialty center students have been spending their final days of middle school roaming freely through their core classrooms, creating collaborative culminating cross-curricular projects of their own design. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the school, students who failed the final high-stakes standardized tests but did well enough to earn the right to retake it are being frantically pulled from their classes for remediation in hopes they can pass, the emphasis more on gaining accreditation for the school than on lasting learning for the students.

Throughout the year, experiences in the specialty center classrooms can be very different from what happens elsewhere in the school; the way I manage students after school or when I cover classes is subtly different from the way I interact with my English students during the day. In my English classes, the majority of my interactions are conscious, with more than a few carefree interactions most days and some controlling interactions when required by the administration; after school, I engaged in far more controlling and very few carefree interactions. I spend a great deal of time reflecting on the difference, trying to determine how it came to be this way and what I can do to make it better. As I reflect, I know I run the risk of missing the implicit, of making overly generous allowances for myself, of taking false and unearned comfort in knowing that other teachers struggle with the same students I do, rather than figuring out more

effective ways to work with those individual students. I could benefit from a frank and open

discussion of my flaws and shortcomings, and I know in my heart I will do whatever I can to

avoid that. I might, however, feel comfortable talking hypothetically in a book club and figuring

out, quietly in a safe space at my own pace, how to apply what other people say and do to my

own praxis. Doug expressed fear of being labeled a racist and he is not alone. A book club that

feels safe to the participants can become the place where they question the allowances they make

and, perhaps, place those allowances in context. A well-selected book or series of readings might

point to the oppressive structures around us, to the racism baked into school policies and the

ways they are enforced, helping members to ask questions of themselves.

I like being in a classroom; I don't have the temperament to protest; I have no interest in

the sorts of jobs from which people enact district- and school-wide policies and procedures. I

can, however, do the best I can for my students, a micro solution to a macro problem, tending

trees to keep a forest healthy, perhaps. I hesitated to take the job in the gifted specialty center

when it was offered, worried that I would contribute to social reproduction, help those with more

opportunities to hoard them, become (or, perhaps more accurately, remain) part of the problem.

Swalwell (2013) maintains "ultimately, if we care about social justice and we believe schooling

can help transform society, then we should care about how students of privilege are educated," in

part by "[eliciting] compassion for the ways in which systems of oppression ultimately

dehumanize even those they advantage" (p. 14). I can work to create and maintain a climate in

which all students feel safe taking intellectual risks, even the students who do not think they fit in

a gifted classroom and whose imposter syndrome interferes with their academic achievement; I

can sow seeds of critical thinking, pointing out the structures that surround all of us and creating

opportunities for my students to reflect on them; I can engage in as many protectively positive

interactions as possible with as many students as possible in hopes of offsetting negative ones that might occur, inside or outside of my classroom, now or in the future. Importantly, I can offer a safe space to the students who arrived at the specialty center from the less-resourced schools in the county, who are a little bit behind, who often do not feel like they truly are or should be (or even want to be, sometimes) a part of things. (Am I too generously offering myself an allowance? Would I make more of an impact in a class of struggling readers? Do my doctoral studies obligate me to write critical curriculum or work with preservice teachers, instead?)

I can try to apply the findings from this dissertation in my own role as teacher and as New Teacher Mentor Coordinator. My intent is to offer a book club to the new and veteran teachers, some of whom have already expressed interest, at my school. I applied and was accepted by Rethinking Schools to host a *Teaching for Black Lives* Educator Study Group throughout the 2023-24 school year. In a school known for its behaviors; a school where we move through the hallways in straight, silent, single-file lines; a school in which students are only allowed to use the restroom as a group, within a five-minute window during each class period; a school seemingly located squarely within the STPP, it matters that teachers know how to forge positive and productive relationships that will insulate and inoculate as many of their students as possible against the forces driving them toward the STPP. To do that requires a Freirean mindset, a firm grasp of the oppressive structures in which our school exists and that exist within the school, and a willingness to work in solidarity with students to effect changes, large and small, that are meaningful and helpful to them, individually and collectively, now and in the future. Crowley (2019) offers a reminder that some teachers understand neither structural racism nor the communities in which they teach, contrasting confession-redemption white privilege pedagogy that focuses on making white people feel better about themselves and white

complicity pedagogy that leads to enhanced anti-racist praxis. It matters. Galloway et al. (2019) found that the terms used drove the actions taken: culturally responsive teachers looked inward, to the classroom; antiracist practitioners looked outward, advocating for change beyond their own classrooms. In the paradox, between the system Fasching-Varner et al. (2014) contend "is functioning as it was intended" and the participants' avowed intention to become and to grow as antiracist practitioners, teacher education and professional development in the form of open and free-flowing discussion about common readings and classroom experiences, both real and hypothetical, might offer teachers time to reflect, to toggle between themselves and the world they inhabit, to grow in ways that are helpful and meaningful to them and to their students (p. 1547). In our *Teaching for Black Lives* book club, it is my hope that new and veteran teachers will read and discuss the book and, importantly, apply it to their own classrooms, to the school, and to the surrounding community – possibly even as it extends to encompass the families of the students in the gifted specialty center, working toward an alliance, perhaps even an interest-convergence, in which all of our students succeed by more metrics than standardized tests and grades.

Research Questions

And so, from a vantage point in-between, acutely aware of the different paths that have brought my students to the specialty center and to the after-school program and the array of different specialty centers and high schools they will attend and the very different paths their lives could take after high school, I have asked the following research questions:

1. How do white preservice teachers with experience as students in public K12 classrooms within the past ten years and some experience as educators (e.g., practicums, observations, substitute teaching, coaching) in diverse settings view themselves, both as

raced individuals and as contributors to the diverse students, families, and communities they intend to serve?

2. How do those preservice teachers view the context – the diverse classrooms and communities – in which they will teach?

3. How do those preservice teachers perceive relationships with diverse students and their own ability to build trust in the classroom?

How the Participants Fit into the Literature

The six participants, who attended a university known for its focus on social justice and its involvement in the surrounding community, will be in a position to help repay the education debt Ladson-Billings (2006) mentions. They voiced awareness of the correlation between exclusionary discipline and the STPP and expressed a commitment to forging positive and productive relationships with all of their students. As a student, Renae worked harder for the teacher who took an interest in her, which he demonstrated simply by occasionally asking about her life outside his classroom. Liang et al. (2019) describe students looking for their teachers to greet them, to offer them support when they need it, and to have high expectations for them – all normal parts of being a halfway decent person and a competent teacher. John and his students enjoyed humor at Elon Musk's expense; Patrick and his student watched the same television show; Constance carved out time early in the day to ask questions and build relationships; Doug's students stopped him in the hallway for hugs; Renae's perseverance during class time helped her bond with a nonverbal student. John's, Patrick's, and Doug's efforts are carefree, simply enjoying the students for who they are; Constance's and Renae's are conscious, designed to forge positive and productive relationships with the students.

Because they were still learning how to teach, the participants did not generally think about implicit bias, microaggressions, and racism in the moment, in a fraught classroom, as they figured out how to handle a constant stream of novel situations; they reflected later, a habit that could help them continually improve their antiracist praxis throughout their careers (Grinage, 2020; Lac et al., 2020; and Menash, 2009). Crowley and Smith's (2020) call for teachers to move away from white privilege pedagogy and examine the structures that surround them and their students is appropriate for the participants. They have already done much of the thinking about white privilege. All six of the participants were easily able to list their privileges and their challenges and to talk about some of the ways those things will play out in their classrooms. John's affinity for and solidarity with with the LGBTQ+ community; John's and Renae's, with students whose families struggle financially; Constance's and Doug's, with students whose families are affiliated with the military; Doug's, with students whose behavior can challenge teachers; Constance's and Renae's, with nonverbal students; and Renae's, with curvy girls against whom dress codes seem unfavorably enforced will stand them in good stead with some of their students. Like the teachers in Grinage's (2020) book club, the participants are ready for a challenge, for Leonardo's (2018) unsafe and uncomfortable space. They could both benefit from and help their colleagues by participating in constructivist, collaborative, critical professional development, bringing attention to the challenges faced – and the structures that create and maintain those challenges – by the various groups with which they identify, helping each other see the roots and ramifications of student-teacher interactions from a wider variety of perspectives, considering their willingness to offer allowances and whether those allowances are deserved, discussing strategies for responding effectively to possible classroom situations.

In Bryan's (2017) article, both the elementary school teacher and her student teacher chastise a new African American male student, even though he has done nothing wrong. The fact that Bryan (2017) was in the room observing at the time could indicate neither woman thought she was revealing implicit bias, that they assumed the observing professor saw what they did and agreed with the way they handled the student. They may have been trying to be on their best behavior because they were being observed. (I would have.) It is unlikely, unless Bryan (2017) brings it up, they will have reason to reflect on the incident. Likewise, Reyes (2021) was in the room when her participant singled out the loud female student, treating her differently from the male and the quiet female students. It is at times like this, when implicit bias drives teachers to see things one way and their students to see them another, that interactions grow contentious and ejections can happen. Nolan (2011) offers a warning that, by ejecting a student, the teacher has ceded control of the situation to others – perhaps to administrators who might suspend or, more ominously, to SROs who might issue a court summons. Reyes' (2021) student has handled the differential treatment by demanding her due, persisting in requests for help until she receives what she needs and deserves. The student Bryan (2017) describes could grow up compliant and cooperative, going along with his teachers and doing well academically. Alternatively, confused and frustrated by inconsistent rules and made to feel unwanted and unwelcome by his teachers and his classmates, he might opt to resist, to refuse to complete his work, to disrupt or skip his classes, inadvertently consigning himself to the STPP, reminiscent of Willis' (1977) lads and Nolan's (2011) UPHS students. The same could happen to Patrick's student who was accused of taking the phone the substitute teacher had left in the teacher's lounge or to Doug's student who continued to fight despite the efforts of teachers and administrators to stop him. Countless factors that teachers cannot control contribute to their students' decisions and actions. However, inside

their classrooms, teachers can work to forge positive and productive relationships with students, particularly those most vulnerable to the STPP.

A variety of research shows pre- and inservice teachers struggling to reconcile their own idea of themselves as fair and unbiased practitioners with the reality that they, just like the rest of us, have implicit biases to address. Kumar et al. (2014) demonstrated a negative correlation between implicit bias and interest in culturally responsive pedagogy in their participants; Beneke and Cheatham's (2020) participants, despite good intentions, fell naturally into deficit thinking; Bennett et al.'s (2019) participants were unable to connect privilege and inequity; Onnie Rogers and Broom's (2020) and Behm Cross et al.'s (2019) participants clung to ideas of meritocracy to explain students who did not achieve or behave as they could or should have. Without help from teacher educators and professional developers, the participants in these studies will continue the same behavior, engaging in contentious interactions, perhaps being offered undeserved allowances by their colleagues and friends, possibly allowing some of their students to slide into the STPP. All of that leads to several themes.

Themes and Suggestions for Practice

1. The participants' descriptions of and reactions to interactions between students and teachers fall along a continuum from careless through carefree, conscious, and controlling to contentious.

2. When confronted with negative student-teacher interactions, generally in the careless or contentious ranges of the previously mentioned continuum of student-teacher interactions, the participants offered allowances with alacrity, with hesitation, or not at all, depending on the perceived level of egregiousness and the degree to which they were able to empathize with either the student or the teacher involved in the situation.

3. To improve their antiracist praxis, new and experienced teachers could benefit from interventions and supports that offer them time and space to reflect on moments throughout that continuum of student-teacher interactions and their reactions to them, including thoughts about the internal and external forces that led those interactions to unfold as they did.

4. Teachers' biases, both implicit and explicit, are often rooted in the systemic racism in which we have all grown up and continue to live. Teacher education and professional development that dwells in the paradox, exploring the struggle between teachers' inevitable and unavoidable implicit biases and the sincere drive to become and to continue to grow as an antiracist practitioner, might help teachers to better understand and, thus, act in more informed and effective ways inside their classrooms and as advocates for students outside their classrooms.

Insight could be gleaned by reflecting on the alacrity with which one offers allowances to the people involved in careless or contentious interactions. For some interactions, particularly those in which it was easy for the participants to imagine themselves, they offered allowances with alacrity. For others, the most egregious offenses, those that clashed with their own deeply held beliefs and values, the participants did not offer allowances at all. In-between, they hesitated and ruminated, sometimes offering partial allowances. Regarding the Kay (2018) scenario, for example, the participants were quick to allow that the lesson plan could have been an honest mistake, that perhaps the teacher didn't think it through well enough before delivering it. The participants have been in schools enough to know that teachers plan constantly and quickly. John explained, "There's the, sort of, always looming stress of, like, all right, got to plan the next lesson, got to plan the next lesson." On the other hand, they did not offer any allowance

whatsoever for the failing grade, particularly after the parent complained. In a constructivist, collaborative, critical professional development session, teachers could explore the alacrity, the hesitation, and the decision not to offer allowances; they could consider these things in context, taking into account the oppressive structures and systemic forces that surround us, the students, the parents; they could quietly apply what they learn in their own classrooms, growing as antiracist practitioners.

Teacher educators and professional developers would do well to keep SDT in mind, creating a space like Grinage's (2020) book club in which teachers feel autonomous, as if they chose to participate; competent, as if they can fit the reading and discussions into an already-overloaded schedule; and connected, as if they are part of a group of people similarly honing their antiracist praxis. Legault, Gutsell, and Inzlicht (2011) offer a warning that interventions that appeared controlling to learners did more harm than good, "[producing] more explicit and implicit prejudice than did not intervening at all" (p. 1472). Amos (2016) describes her white students behaving in that manner, shutting down and derailing the class, silencing the students of color and making them feel unsafe. John talked about learning of the administration's decisions just slightly before the students did, a difference of timing not voice. Mandating participation in professional development violates the tenets of SDT, possibly making teachers less willing to participate and undermining efforts to help students.

The participants talked about the difficulty of applying the examples from their coursework in an authentic way, indicating a need for more and different support from teacher educators and professional developers, a closer transfer, perhaps. As new members of the profession, the participants are, presumably, inclined to pay attention to what experienced teachers do, to consider whether they want to emulate or avoid those behaviors and strategies, to

compare and contrast reality with what they learned in their classes. Doug described teachers acting in ways of which he did not approve, offering allowances that they had never planned to become the way they were, that they were tired and overworked and frustrated following the pandemic and during the seemingly endless teacher and substitute shortage. Done well, teaching requires an immense amount of time and energy and offers little down time for reflection and introspection. To carve out structured time to reflect is both important and nearly impossible. When offered as a choice, it can seem like a gift; when required, it can anger teachers, undermining efforts at introspection and ultimately making things worse for students.

Care should be taken when designing the readings, roster, and regimen for any book club (Lee, 2023). Facilitators should take time to consider deeply and purposefully the intersectional identities, existing relationships, and personalities of the members in order to create a safe space in which they can all grow (Lee, 2023). It might be helpful to invite school administrators or SROs, who have very different perspectives on and relationships with students, to join the discussion (Lee, 2023). If they cannot (or should not, if there are trust issues) be part of the group, soliciting and sharing their perspectives and insights could add depth and nuance to discussions.

If the professional development is mandatory, facilitators should design it in a way that comports with the principles of Self Determination Theory, making sure members feel as if they have a choice about the ways in which they participate, are able to participate, and are a welcomed and important part of the community to be formed in the critical book club or other professional development (Ryan and Deci, 2020). Allowing members to help choose readings and including a variety of choices, from academic books to novels, some of the Black@FCPS (2020) posts, even videos and TED talks, can motivate them to participate enthusiastically (Lee,

2023). Carving out shared planning time during the day could make attending meetings more palatable. Creating and enforcing norms in the first few meetings enables the group to decide, together, what they need to feel safe as they grow into a community of ever-improving antiracist practitioners.

Facilitators ought to guide conversation away from "simplistic dualisms like racist/anti-racist tropes," instead concentrating on the allowances offered in a variety of nuanced situations (Lee, 2023). Including classroom experiences and observations can deepen the ensuing discussion of carefully-selected texts as members share their thoughts and feelings regarding authentic events they have witnessed or experienced (Lee, 2023). Members can reflect on and attend closely to classroom events, attempt and practice new strategies in the interstice between meetings, bring reflections and questions back to the group, helping each other to grow as antiracist practitioners.

Over time, members ought to consider factors beyond themselves and their students (e.g., policies and procedures that affect student-teacher relationships, the ways students and teacher see each other.) Ultimately, group members might find ways to work in solidarity with students to make their school a safer, more welcoming place in which everyone can succeed academically and thrive socially and emotionally.

Limitations

This study was limited by a lack of student voice. The participants' memories of their own time offered a hint of the memories of white students; including the Black@FCPS (2020) posts was an effort to include the voices of students of color. There was not, however, an opportunity to listen carefully and ask probing questions of the students who posted. Future research might focus on students assigned to in-school suspension, a place between engagement

and ejection where students decide how to be in a system that can seem designed to work against them. A student like most of my specialty center students, who has enjoyed countless positive student-teacher interactions to insulate them, might decide to comply in order to avoid future unpleasantness; students like the boy in Bryan's (2017) study, beset from the beginning, might opt out and slip into the STPP. It would be helpful to know what students are thinking in that moment, in that space.

The roots of the STPP stretch back hundreds of years and include virtually every aspect of our lives; to expect more than a baby step from a dissertation would be hubristic and unreasonable. This study might, however, yield some insight into how to support pre- and inservice teachers in their efforts to grow and develop their antiracist praxis. Part of being an antiracist teacher is recognizing what students perceive as microaggressions and knowing what to do about them. It does not matter whether the microaggressor intended harm. The job of the antiracist teacher is to handle the situation in a way that makes the student feel comfortable and safe in the classroom so that they can continue to learn and to advocate for students outside the classroom. Well-meaning teachers, products of the world in which they grew up and continue to live, engage at all points along the continuum of student-teacher interactions, even at times careless or contentious; they also make judgments, possibly implicit, about whether and how readily to offer any sort of allowance for their colleagues' apparently negative behaviors. Doug's description of a student with a propensity toward fighting asking "what if you're not there [to protect me]?" suggests some students have an unmet need to feel safe in the classroom. Safety goes beyond the physical; students need to feel comfortable taking intellectual risks and being their authentic selves. It matters whether the participants believe the stories in Black@FCPS (2020) are possible; if they do not believe such things can happen, they might not believe and

support their own students in those situations. The more prepared teachers are to face situations,

the more likely they will be to help their students avoid the STPP.

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Appendix 1: Interview Protocol for Phase 1

The interviews were semi-structured, with a guide that could be followed and, for the second and future interviews, revised. Initially, questions included the following:

1. How much thought would you say you have given to being white?

   ● When did you first consider your own whiteness? What was that like? What sparked it? *Can you remember a specific experience when your whiteness mattered?* Can you tell me that story in as much detail as possible? (As the participant talks, inject particularizing prompts for sensory and contextual details.) In hindsight, what does it mean to you?

   ● Can you think of a time when being white affected – either positively or negatively – a situation in which you found yourself? Again, request a story and probe for as many details, sensory and contextual, as possible to ensure a rich, thick description of a lived experience.

   ● What was school like for you as a white student? Tell me about a time when being white stood out to you. Do you remember a teacher playing a role? Ask for description – grade level, race/ethnicity of teacher, specific details to make the story more vivid and spark conversation. What other memories do you have of that teacher and/or that class?

   ● Have you ever witnessed racist behavior [in the classroom]? Can you tell me a story about it?

   ● Have recent events (e.g., pandemic, peaceful protests, presidential politics) affected your understanding of these experiences?

2. Thinking of your recent experiences teaching or student teaching, can you describe a specific event that stands out and tell me about that experience?

   ● How would you describe your relationship with these children (this child) at this time? [prompt for a specific example]

   ● How might you build on this relationship moving forward? [if they actually did build, ask them to tell you that story]

3. Everyone has privileges and everyone has challenges. How would you describe your life in terms of privilege and challenge? How will that affect you as a teacher? (It will be important for participants to define the terms they use, to describe both privilege and challenge and what those terms mean to them.)

4. How do you define success for your students

5. Where do you hope to teach? What about that appeals to you?

   ● Can you describe in detail what you expect to find there? What do you think the students' experiences are like in and out of school? What are you anticipating in terms of your relationships with the parents/guardians?

6. Let's consider a couple of teaching scenarios.

7. Here is an example from Matthew Kay's (2018) *Not Light, But Fire*. Think in terms of planning. What was the teacher trying to accomplish? What actually happened?

   ● In 2014, a teacher in Redmond, Washington, was working through a unit on the Industrial Revolution and found her students having trouble understanding the cotton gin. She brought in cotton plants and asked her seventh graders to pull the cotton from the plant and separate the seeds. The irate mother of one Black

student gave her daughter permission to not do the assignment. The teacher gave her a failing grade.

- Let's talk about classroom management. Consider this scenario from the book *Talking in Class*. During World Geography class, as Mr. Strata lectured, Harlan Fleming noisily wadded a sheet of notebook paper into a ball and sailed it across the room and into the wastebasket next to the teacher's desk. The wad of paper rattled around the metal wastebasket before falling to the bottom. Mr. Strata stopped his lecture and filled out a disciplinary referral form about Harlan. Harlan protested: "You never said we couldn't throw paper away during class." Mr. Strata responded, "You should know by now what kind of behavior is appropriate for class." Mr. Strata called the SRO to escort Harlan to the vice principal's office. How do you read this scenario? What might have been done differently and why? Prompt: What does this tell you about Mr. Strata's relationship with Harlan?

7. Toward the end, if sufficient rapport exists: Have you ever taken the Implicit Association Test? (Participants could take it right then, on their phone, if they are willing. Even if they do not share their results, a conversation about their feelings about the test and their results might yield insight.)

   - Do the results seem right? Important?

   - How might the results of these tests inform a person's self-image, actions, teaching?

8. Is there anyone else you think I should talk to or anything I should look at?

During the second and subsequent interviews, I pursued a thought the first participant expressed

and asked participants to consider the differences between being a student and being part of the

faculty.

These interviews did not yield sufficient data, so I conducted a second phase of

interviews. I used the following guide, which included two rounds of questions for three new

participants.

Appendix 2: Interview Protocol for Phase 2

Round 1

1. How much thought would you say you have given to being white?

    - When did you first consider your own whiteness? What was that like? What
      sparked it? *Can you remember a specific experience when your whiteness*
      mattered? Can you tell me that story in as much detail as possible? (As the
      participant talks, inject particularizing prompts for sensory and contextual
      details.) In hindsight, what does it mean to you?

    - Can you think of a time when being white affected – either positively or
      negatively – a situation in which you found yourself? Again, request a story and
      probe for as many details, sensory and contextual, as possible to ensure a rich,
      thick description of a lived experience.

    - What was school like for you as a white student? Tell me about a time when being
      white stood out to you. Do you remember a teacher playing a role? Ask for
      description – grade level, race/ethnicity of teacher, specific details to make the
      story more vivid and spark conversation. What other memories do you have of
      that teacher and/or that class?

    - Have you ever witnessed racist behavior [in the classroom]? Can you tell me a
      story about it?

    - Have recent events (e.g., pandemic, peaceful protests, presidential politics)
      affected your understanding of these experiences?

2. Thinking of your recent experiences teaching or student teaching, can you describe a
   specific event that stands out and tell me about that experience?

- How would you describe your relationship with these children (this child) at this time? [prompt for a specific example]

- How might you build on this relationship moving forward? [if they actually did build, ask them to tell you that story]

3. You're returning to school, but in a very different role. What does that feel like? What do you notice? Has your time as a student teacher changed the way you feel about anything from your life as a student?

4. Everyone has privileges and everyone has challenges. How would you describe your life in terms of privilege and challenge? How will that affect you as a teacher? (It will be important for participants to define the terms they use, to describe both privilege and challenge and what those terms mean to them.)

5. How do you define success for your students?

6. Where do you hope to teach? What about that appeals to you?

- Can you describe in detail what you expect to find there? What do you think the students' experiences are like in and out of school? What are you anticipating in terms of your relationships with the parents/guardians?

- Is your ideal teaching position in a school similar to those you attended or different from them? Why does your choice appeal to you?

8. Is there anyone else you think I should talk to or anything I should look at?

Round 2

1. Thank you for meeting with me again. How has your student teaching been?

2. I'm going to show you the transcript of the original interview. I'd like for us to read it together and talk about your answers then and how you might answer today, after some

time in the classroom. *For each participant, make two copies of the transcript. On my copy, highlight passages and add probes ahead of time. Leave theirs blank.*

3. What have you learned about student-teacher relationships during your time as a student teacher? How does this differ from your thinking going into the experience? How does it differ from your thinking when you were a K12 student?

   a. What can you tell me about the racial climate of the schools you worked and studied in? Do you think race was/is a factor in:

      i. Student-to-student relationships?

      ii. Student-to-teacher relationships?

      iii. Student-to-administrator relationships?

   b. What can you tell me about your relationships with students?

      i. To what extent would you call those relationships trusting? How have you worked to build trust?

      ii. What can you tell me about building trust with students of different racial groups?

4. I'm going to share with you some anonymous posts from an Instagram account from the Summer of 2020. In the posts, people tell stories about experiences at schools in a Virginia school district. I cannot verify which of these stories are true, or which were made in good or bad faith. Social media is like that. While they are not verifiable, like evidence is, I wonder what they make you think about in regards to your experiences in classrooms? (After each story, ask these questions: Does the post paint a realistic portrait of the places you have recently studied and taught in? If unrealistic, in what way? What element of reality is missing from it?) (Stop reading the posts upon reaching saturation.)

a. my senior year of high school my AP LIT teacher, when i was discussing the lack of diversity in his choice of literature to teacher, told me that he could not teacher other works (ie books written by white men) because he could not understand their perspective and teaches an experience that was not the same as him….this was a college level course (Black@FCPS, 2020).

b. In my English class my junior year at Daffodil, my English teacher was reading Of Mice and Men to us. In the book, the n-word is in there a couple of times. My teacher, who is white, said something along the lines of how she would read the n-word out loud when the context was appropriate for the time period and that she wouldn't read the n-word when it was used in a derogatory manner in the book. Many of us in the class were clearly uncomfortable when she told us this and multiple students voiced their discomfort and asking why she just couldn't just skip over the n-word entirely. She continued trying to justify why saying the n-word would be okay and despite all of our discomfort, she still went on to say the n-word in the book when it was "used in the appropriate context" and skip over it when it "was not" (Black@FCPS, 2020).

c. There was a bracelet stolen at school. There were two black girls and two white girls at a table in art class. I was one of the black girls. One of the girls that was white had her bracelet stolen at our table. The administrator at my school only took me and the other black girl to investigate us but they never took the white girl because they thought that "white people are good people and black people are bad so they must of stolen the bracelet."

d. I have a thicker body type POC and throughout the years I was constantly dress coded for wearing shorts, shirts, and dresses that were within the rules and always be told that i'm not allowed to wear it and have to sit in ALC all day long but I would always see skinny white girls wear big long tee-shirts that came to just below their butt cheeks and covered their shorts or white girls that walk around with crop tops with their entire midriff out and I've never seen a white person in ALC for dress code and Admin's excuse was "oh we can't catch everyone" even after I pointed out someone as they were talking to me and they did nothing (Black@FCPS, 2020).

e. I'm a latinx immigrant. I was a student at [Name of Segregationist] Middle School (now Marigold) one day in my theater class my friend and I (another immigrant) were discussing how other countries including the USA were destroying the Amazon Rainforest. Our teacher got offended and raised her voice at us. She told us both, "Why don't you go back to your countries then?" The whole class looked at us, it was humiliating (Black@FCPS, 2020).

f. In 7th grade I had this one teacher that would mix up me and another girls names. We sat next to each other the whole year and the only similarities we had were we were black and had box braids. He continued to mix up our names the whole year when we repeatedly corrected him (Black@FCPS, 2020).

g. When I was in 8th Grade, we had just come back from thanksgiving break. While we were in class my teacher went around the room asking what everyone ate for thanksgiving. He called on an Asian student in the class and asked what he ate. Before the student was able to talk the teacher said "you didn't eat someone's cat

did you." The student said no and the class awkwardly laughed it off not knowing what to do. Multiple students reported him for this incident including others and he still works there (Black@FCPS, 2020).

5. In the first round of interviews, the preservice teachers with whom I talked described deliberately forging positive and productive student teacher relationships. In contrast, in the Instagram account, students describe racism they have experienced or witnessed in public schools. The stories range from near-benign examples of teachers putting their feet in their mouth to explicitly racist jokes and comments. There's also a lot of talk about how white males are treated more gently than any other group. How would you account for the differences between you and other preservice teachers, who obviously want to connect with all of the students, and the lived experiences of the people posting in Black@HCPS?

6. If appropriate, ask the participants to consider things the other participants say in their first interview.

Appendix 3: Recruiting Emails

Phase 1

Subject Line: Please Help with Dissertation Research

Dear Future Teacher,

My name is Laurie Koth. I am a white doctoral student in the School of Education's Curriculum, Culture, and Change track. I am conducting research for my dissertation. I am really interested in how, given today's racial discourses, teacher educators and professional developers can help teachers develop authentic relationships with all of their students. I am particularly interested in how young, white preservice teachers experience teaching and learning in diverse environments.

If you would like the opportunity to share your thoughts about these complex and important issues, please contact me (REDACTED) to schedule a confidential interview. The interview would take 60-90 minutes, occur over Zoom at your convenience, and be completely anonymous. If you feel you have more to say, we could schedule a follow-up interview.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Phase 2

Dear Future Teacher,

My name is Laurie Koth. I am a white doctoral student in the School of Education's Curriculum, Culture, and Change track. I am conducting research for my dissertation. I am really interested in how, given today's racial discourses, teacher educators and professional developers can help teachers develop authentic relationships with all of their students. I am particularly interested in how young, white preservice teachers experience teaching and learning in diverse environments.

If you would like the opportunity to share your thoughts about these complex and important issues, please contact me (REDACTED) to schedule a series of two confidential interviews. The interviews would take 60-90 minutes each, occur over Zoom at your convenience, and be completely anonymous. If you feel you have more to say, we could schedule another interview.