

JOURNALING FOR EQUITY: A SELF-REFLECTIVE PROCESS OF  
DISCOVERY FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS IN  
PUBLIC CHARTER MONTESSORI SCHOOLS

by

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Journaling for Equity: A Self-Reflective Process of Discovery for Middle School Teachers in Public Charter Montessori Schools

This dissertation presents the results of an exploratory descriptive case study of the *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience*, a self-reflective intervention for public charter Montessori middle school teachers. The intervention is designed to elicit a reflective process to slow teachers' thinking so they can decenter Whiteness and elevate the cultures and voices of their students of color within their pedagogy. The intervention was developed in the winter and spring of 2020, drawing heavily on the author's experience as an equity consultant as well as the rich literature on ways teachers can nurture a sense of belonging for students of color. The intervention was refined with feedback from experienced Montessori teachers, with a focus on ensuring pedagogical alignment and curricular expectations within the Montessori system.

Because this study represents the first time the intervention was implemented, it is most properly viewed as a pilot study. Three middle school Montessori teachers were recruited to participate. They began the intervention in the fall of 2021. The intervention consisted of eight weeks of reading curated articles, reflection questions, the collection of evidence, and the journaling of the reflection questions. A final debrief via Zoom encouraged participants to assess the effectiveness of the intervention.

As a pilot study, the goal was to gather information on the overall effectiveness of the intervention, intervention shortcomings and strengths. Data were collected weekly in the form of written responses to questions intended to provoke thought and deep reflection on the part of the teachers. At the end of the intervention, each teacher participated in a semi-structured interview to further explore the ideas shared in their individual weekly reflective writings. Critical Race Theory, White Supremacy Culture Characteristics, and the Concerns Based Adoption Model were all used to frame the analysis and to draw conclusions.

Results suggest the intervention is effective at building teacher awareness of the cultural, academic, and social assets students of color bring to the classroom, which is the beginning point for teachers to decenter Whiteness in their classrooms to support student of color belonging.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

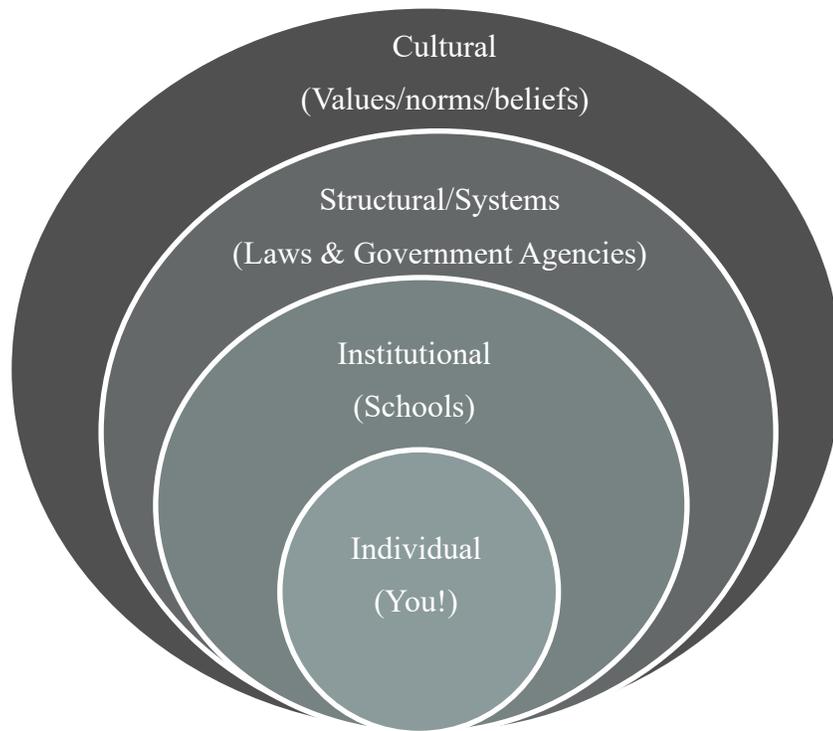
According to Ladson-Billings (1995), student narratives have the power to transform the oppressiveness and dehumanization of public education's normative expectations into an experience that can support students' cultural development and thus their development as healthy human beings. As a biracial (Black/White), cis gender female, my lived experience has been one of constant microaggressions within a wide variety of school systems across this entire country. Having gone to school and worked in education in Illinois, Oregon, Minnesota, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and Texas, I can attest to the fact that public and private schools are designed and structured to teach Black, Indigenous, Multi-racial, and People of Color (BIMPOC) to assimilate to White standards of behavior. Therein lies the trauma and the purpose for this dissertation: to help White teachers create space for BIMPOC student narratives within their classrooms by decentering Whiteness.

To build an education system that does not inflict harm through marginalization, alienation, and assimilation, and that actually centers BIMPOC students, I believe individuals within systems must begin the transformation within themselves. It is through self-discovery and building awareness of one's own culture that the head and the heart of a teacher can come together to change their actions within the classroom. I center the individual's personal equity journey within a system's equity journey, that then informs the process for systemic change by using an appropriate organizational change strategy with an equity lens. As individuals begin to see their own biases, they can begin to identify how those biases show up within their own organizations (the individual within

the organization). That is, organizational change begins because individuals inform the organization's culture. This dissertation starts with the individual teacher in support of her/his/their equity journey. (See figure 1.)

**Figure 1**

*Levels of Racism*



This specific topic of inquiry grew out of a close relationship between me (a hired equity, diversity, and inclusion consultant) and the leadership of a rural public charter Montessori school that will be identified as School A in this dissertation. Through the experience of co-creating and reviewing equity-focused survey data, examining public charter Montessori assessment instruments for dominant culture bias, and leading a book

study on *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (Hammond, 2015), the school's leaders were willing to engage in a deeper examination of their school culture and teaching strategies.

My dissertation represents an exploratory descriptive study to field test an intervention, the *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience*, that speaks directly to a lack of research within the public charter Montessori field around what equity, diversity, and inclusion within a classroom looks like in addition to a lack of research specifically targeted toward middle school public charter Montessori programs (S. Andree, personal communication, July 7, 2020). What follows is my attempt to create an equity journaling experience designed for and used by public charter Montessori middle school teachers to identify their own racial and cultural biases so they may center BIMPOC cultures in the classroom to support a sense of belonging within their students.

There are currently more than 550 public charter Montessori schools in the United States (Montessoricensus.org). Nationally, approximately 54% of the student body in public charter Montessori schools are BIMPOC (Debs & Brown, 2017). In Oregon, approximately 23% of the students who attend public charter Montessori schools represent BIMPOC communities (Oregon State Report Card 2018-2019). Nationally, White public charter Montessori teachers total approximately 75%, with 80% of all public Montessori teachers being female (Debs & Brown, 2017). In Oregon, 94% of the teachers in these schools are White women. (Oregon State Report Card 2018-2019). This cultural mismatch is concerning given Gershenson, Holt, and Papageorge's research (2016) that found that students of color may be adversely affected by their White teachers because White teachers hold lower expectations of performance than teachers of color do.

Stansbury (2012) and Yezbick (2007) also found that Montessori teachers can display cultural biases when working with their students of color. This is our starting point.

As part of my consulting work with one of the schools where my study was set (School A), middle school teachers were eager to engage in examining student behavior, teacher behavior and assumptions, and the prepared environment – the three sides of the triangle creating the Montessori “developmental core” (Cossentino & Brown, 2017). I spent four days observing teachers and students in their classrooms. Those observations led to noticing the limited nature of culturally relevant artifacts, posters, and books within the prepared environment of this school. In Montessori schools the prepared environment is considered as important as the teacher and the student in the learning process (Lillard, 2017).

The goal of this study was to explore the relation between teachers’ racial identity and cultural identity, their behavior toward students, the curriculum they develop, the curation of the prepared environment that fosters students’ feelings of belonging in the classroom, and the development of the social environment in the classroom. Through a self-paced reflective process, participating teachers examined their own racial and cultural identity and behaviors within their classroom, unearthed and reflected on the assumptions they made about their students, and assessed their learnings from this process to decenter whiteness within their classrooms. Because teachers bring their own lived experiences and cultures into the classroom, participants explored what factors were at work within themselves when they create the prepared environment, social environment, and curriculum for their students.

Implicit bias in education looks like a teacher stating they are not racist, sexist, or anti-neuro diverse, but their Black students have the highest discipline rates, their Asian students get the least academic support in math, their White, male students get called on the most, and their White female students have special projects assigned to them. Implicit bias overrides stated intentions. “Implicit bias: The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Operating outside our conscious awareness implicit biases are pervasive...resulting in action and outcomes that do not necessarily align with explicit intentions” (Staats, 2016, p. 1).

Implicit bias includes beliefs, assumptions, and cultural encapsulation – a term coined by C. Gilbert Wrenn in 1962, to “emphasize the natural tendency of counselors to be bound by culture and time to avoid difference and change that result from cross-cultural exposure and social development” (Bergkamp & Ponsford, 2020, p. 249). To apply this to teaching, teacher attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions are stable, and when challenged by students outside the teacher’s dominant cultures, teachers “can be insensitive to cultural variants in reality, perpetuate cultural stereotypes without proof, avoid consideration of alternate worldviews, and remain complacent in their own cultural values” to the detriment of student belonging and success. (Bergkamp & Ponsford, 2020, p. 250). This intervention was designed to help teachers identify and overcome their implicit biases.

### **Belonging as a Construct for Student Success**

From an intuitive perspective, *belonging* seems to be a powerful emotional and psychological construct. Gangs, families, communities, and countries all operate on the principle of belonging. Who is in and who is out has deep meaning in our American

culture (Hogg, 2001). A sense of belonging operates at the limbic, or lizard, brain level and is directly connected to personal safety (Hammond, 2015). If you do not belong, you do not have social connections to give you protection or a meaningful purpose in your life. If you are not part of the dominant group friendships, laughter, or a sense of connectedness can be difficult to achieve.

According to Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni's (2013) research in suburban schools, belonging is an important factor to students of color and is a basic human need that has mediating effects on the academic performance and peer and teacher relationships of students of color. Students who feel they belong in the classroom, particularly students of color, have better academic performance, more engagement in school, and better relationships (Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufmann, Cameron, & Peugh, 2012).

St-Amand, Girard, and Smith (2017) describe observed behaviors and assessed feelings that might provide evidence that students feel a sense of belonging in a school setting. Table 1 lists these behaviors and feelings that one might find in a school where students feel they belong, as well as behaviors that one should not find in a school where students feel belonging. These lists provide guidance to those seeking to measure students' feeling of belonging in their schools. Questions of belonging, perceived potential success, and cultural validation are factors in whether students see themselves as capable of doing the schoolwork that leads to academic success.

**Table 1***Observable Behaviors and Measurable Feelings Associated with Belonging at School*

<i>Behaviors demonstrating belonging</i>	<i>Behaviors absent when students have a sense of belonging</i>
Laughing, smiling and conversations that demonstrate positive emotion	Bullying
Friendship groups that are fluid and allow multiple perspectives and types of people to move in and out	Name calling
The ability for students to stand up for each other when necessary	Physical and verbal harassment
Students possess the feeling that teachers see them as whole people and treat them that way	Students looking despondent or withdrawn
Meaningful, deep, long conversations during lunch that signify positive relationship	Students sitting outside of friendship groups

There are several ways of measuring belonging. They include online survey questions, assessing student involvement in extracurricular activities, and nominations to be in friendship groups (St-Amand, Girard, & Smith, 2017). On the opposite side of the spectrum and in addition to low academic performance, discipline referrals could result from students not feeling they belong within the school. Social exclusion, bullying, and other discipline behaviors could stem from feeling alienated at school and in the classroom (Hammond, 2015; Kawamoto, Nittono, & Ura, 2014). When social exclusion occurs, feelings of belonging, self-control, and meaning are reduced (Gonnsalkorale & Willimas, 2007; van Beest & Willimas, 2006) and depression increases (Nolan, Flynn, & Barber, 2003).

Principals, teachers, bus drivers, and classified staff each influence how students perceive themselves within the system and within their school. When students do not feel as though they are a valued part of the school community, it can be detrimental to their educational outcomes (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). Factors in whether students see themselves as capable of doing the work that leads to academic success include the degree to which they have a sense of belonging, the perceived usefulness of the curriculum, and cultural validation (Hammond, 2015). Feelings of alienation or lack of connection can be seen by low school engagement, manifested in behaviors such as not participating in sports or clubs, high absenteeism, low academic performance, and dropping out of school altogether (Natriello, 1984).

A similar construct of student connectedness in the literature is school attachment. Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder's (2001) work delineated the affective and behavioral components of school attachment. The affective component includes student feelings of embeddedness in their community. Student participation represents the behavioral component of attachment, which includes class participation, completing homework, and taking part in extracurricular activities. They argue that taken together, the research indicates there is a positive association between the constructs of academic achievement, attachment, and belonging. Research that supports this hypothesis includes Finn and Rock (1997); Finn and Voelkl (1993); Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999); and Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, and Darling (1992).

### **Theory of Action of Program Operation in Montessori Schools**

Montessori pedagogy is based on constructing and managing the learning core within the developmental classroom (Lillard, 2017). The learning core is conceived as

having three sides: the teacher, the student, and the prepared environment. Lillard identifies the nine different principles of student learning within the Montessori model (2017). These principles include: (a) impact of movement for learning and cognition, (b) choice and perceived control, (c) executive function development through uninterrupted work, (d) students' interest in human learning, (e) extrinsic rewards are avoided and motivation is fostered, (f) meaningful contexts for learning, (g) learning with and from peers, (h) adult interaction styles and child outcomes, and (i) order in environment and mind. In Maria Montessori's own words, the prepared environment is the center of the child's work: "The teacher becomes the keeper and custodian of the environment... From this will come healing, and the attraction that captures and polarizes the child's will" (Montessori, 1995, p. 277).

In the Montessori classroom, learning happens when "we construct understanding through experimental experiences with our environment" (Cossentino & Brown, 2017, p. 6), rather than as a result of direct interactions with a teacher who delivers content. This is the hallmark of a developmental classroom (Montessori, 1976). "[W]ithin this frame, the child moves to the center of a triadic enterprise, constructing—as opposed to receiving—understanding through structured, spontaneous interactions with both adults and the environment" (Cossentino & Brown, 2017, p. 7). These are the guiding precepts that underly the theoretical premise of the developmental core, and as a consequence of this theory, the focus is shifted away from evaluating the instructional actions of the teacher, instead centralizing the focus on the child in their environment (that the adult prepares and in which s/he/they plays a role) (Cossentino & Brown, 2017).

Montessori classroom environments are designed to foster emotional flexibility, inhibitory control, working memory, social, cultural, and linguistic fluency, and initiation and concentration, which are the distinct elements of executive functions within students (Cossentino & Brown, 2017). The principles are based on the idea that human development is “integrated, cumulative, driven by exploration and self-construction, and influenced by the nature of the environment within which the learner operates” (Cossentino & Brown, 2017, pg. 7).

To underscore the importance of the classroom environment, Hammond writes extensively about how the classroom “is a critical container for empowering marginalized students” (2015, p. 142). What’s in the classroom signals to students if they belong or not and can provide visual cues that help students feel safer. When students feel safe, they are better able to learn. Because all students, regardless of racial, social, economic background, have the right to an education, the classroom must support the emotional, intellectual, and social safety of students of color (Hammond, 2015).

### **Valorization: Bringing Belonging and Montessori Pedagogy Together**

Valorization is the Montessori theory that expresses the ideal outcome for adolescents (Montessori, 2007). It is a psychological theory of engagement that has much in common with the modern Self-Determination Theory (SDT) that states there are three conditions for optimal engagement: autonomy, belonging, and competence (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). An essential component of both valorization and SDT is the experience of belonging. Montessori teachers, designing a developmental environment for adolescents, are seeking to optimize experiences of valorization for every student, and they should base their observations and responses on whether they are seeing evidence of

valorization in each of their students (Montessori, 2007). A student who feels valorized is fully engaged, knows they are valued by their community, and personally realizes that their work positively contributes to the community's health.

To support students' psychological state of valorization, teachers must create an environment that first ensures students feel they belong. Visual cues, levels of teacher engagement with students, and the beliefs, language and actions of teachers all help determine if students feel they belong. Providing opportunities for creative expression, personal expression and meaningful work are the hallmarks of successful adolescent Montessori programs that are delivered through the Plan of Work and Study. I will focus my inquiry in this area by asking reflection questions that target what teachers believe, what they say, and what they do to foster belonging within their classrooms.

This is the crucial inflection point. Creative expression, personal expression and meaningful work will not fully be accessible to all students if the curriculum and culture within the classroom are not culturally sustaining. Lack of equitable accessibility to these essential components to learning is also a potential blind spot for Montessori teachers because they feel they are already acknowledging the entire student (S. Andree, personal communication, July 14, 2020).

### **Self-Reflection for Personal Growth**

Self-reflection is a strategy for teachers to identify and assess behavioral changes they want to make in their pedagogical approach (Bengtsson, 1995) that can be traced back to John Dewey's *How We Think* (1933). While there are multiple types of reflection, my focus is on the development of a reflection process that fosters self-understanding and

self-discovery through (a) learning about one's own teaching practice and (b) taking a position on one's own teaching practice (Bengtsson, 1995).

The *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience* is a self-reflective process intended to help identify the implicit and explicit biases that are intertwined with teachers' cultural identities that unconsciously inform the curation of curriculum, the prepared environment, the social environment, the cultures centered in the classroom, and how belonging is developed within the classroom environment. Underpinning this process is the work of Feucht, Brownlee, and Schraw (2017), who describe the "epistemic reflexivity" process "where internal dialogue includes a focus on personal epistemology, leading to action for transformative practices in the classroom" (p. 234). Transformative practices, based on changed beliefs and expectations, occur in the classroom because of the internal dialogue that is stimulated in the reflexivity process (Archer, 2012).

Using these theoretical models as a basis for the intervention, my goal was to bring teachers through a self-paced process that asked them to examine their classroom behaviors through an equity lens. The framework that informs this equity lens intervention is based on Paris and Alim's work on behalf of culturally sustaining pedagogies that seeks to see BIMPOC student cultures as additive instead of deficits in the classroom, where teachers assume excellence instead of deficits, and where "cultural pluralism" enables "positive social transformation" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1). The goal of the intervention was to decenter White, dominant culture behavioral norms and expectations that are based in capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy to create classrooms that center cultures, abilities, and identities that are not White, middle-class, and cisgender (Paris, 2012).

Culturally sustaining pedagogy, informed by Critical Race Theory (Delgado, 1995) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), is built on the premise that our current school system requires students to assimilate “where whiteness is positioned as normative, everyone is ranked and categorized in relation to their points of opposition” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 9). Because racism is “normal” in America and so much a part of American culture, it “appears both normal and natural to people in this culture” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 11). Racism is invisible to white people (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In response, culturally sustaining pedagogy “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literature, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 93). By utilizing culturally sustaining pedagogies that support the multilingual and multicultural competence of BIMPOC students while at the same time supporting students in acquiring dominant culture competencies, practitioners “can move further away from the *deficit approaches* that have echoed across the decades” (Paris, 2012, p. 93, emphasis in the original).

So how does one become aware of their cultural biases, frameworks, and ways of perceiving and thinking since each of us is swimming in a sea of racism and normative whiteness? An equity lens uses a series of questions that specifically call out and center historically minoritized groups of people to ensure the policies, procedures, and practices in use or under development do not continue to harm historically and currently minoritized groups of people and that the policies, procedures, and practices under discussion create equitable outcomes. The goal of the *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience* is to build educator awareness to “de-center whiteness, to envision a world

where we owe no explanations to White people about the value of our children’s culture, language, and learning potential” (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 3). In this case, I used the model of creating a self-reflective equity lens to identify deficit mindsets and dominant culture barriers within teachers to help teachers bring culturally sustaining practices into their classrooms.

### **Domains within the *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience***

The *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience* is composed of five domains for self-exploration. They include the teacher’s identity, the prepared environment, the social environment, the curriculum, and the teacher’s actions to center student cultures to ensure belonging.

### ***Teacher Racial, Cultural, and Social Identity***

Critical studies of Whiteness suggest that students of color need a “self- and collective-reflection of Whites on their own White privilege in a system of White racism” (Allen, 1999, p. 5). BIMPOC students, as well as White students, need teachers who can move along the continuum of providing culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017) to decentering Whiteness (Carter Andrews, He, Marciano, Richmond & Salazar, 2021) to using abolitionist teaching strategies (Rodriguez, 2010). In Peggy McIntosh’s seminal work, she found that Whites are often unaware of their privilege and the “invisible protections” Whiteness affords them and that they are “oblivious to anything outside of the dominant culture forms” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 7). This can lead to the “White gaze” where students of non-dominant cultures, races, and nationalities are defined as “less than” based on their inability to acquire Dominant Academic English and other dominant culture skills (Rosa

& Flores, 2017). Another barrier to White teachers understanding their own privilege as well as their BIMPOC students' experiences is the difficulty Whites have in seeing themselves as members of a group, while easily seeing themselves as an individual (Denevi & Pastan, 1996).

Therefore, an intervention must be created for White people to wake up to understanding that the norms by which they judge others are informed by implicit bias against BIMPOC and Black communities specifically. This implicit bias is reinforced by the structural racism that teachers experienced as students, student teachers, and as teachers in White spaces (Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei & Jacoby-Senhor, 2016).

Colorblindness is critical to a White person's racial identity strategy for striving to be non-racist (McLaren, 1997). Colorblindness is used as a strategy for deflecting Whiteness and protecting oneself from the label of being racist (Gallagher, 1997). White teachers who use the strategy to minimize the difference between themselves and their BIMPOC students are ignoring students' racial identities, promoting the avoidance of conversations on race, and are likely promoting a colorblind approach on school campuses (Allen, 1999; Tatum, 1997). The use of colorblindness can help remove the White teacher's sense of historical and systemic responsibility for racism, thus helping to see themselves as simply equal to all races, while simultaneously maintaining a sense of superiority, with the assumption that the unequal access to power has nothing to do with racism (Allen, 1999).

White identity is always constructed in opposition to other races, whether a White person recognizes this or not (Allen, 1999). Through the identification of oneself within a group, other people are automatically excluded. Because of the lack of experience with

other groups, implicit and explicit biases (norms, stereotypes, assumptions) and the use of one's social norms as definitions of behavior, these weaknesses can lead teachers to label any behavior outside of Whiteness as a deficit (McLaren, 1997b). Thus, White teachers can place BIMPOC students on "lower tracks, misread their culture codes, ignore the history of their people, and silence their perspectives and lived experiences" (Allen, 1999). As a result, Black students begin to develop their sense of self in opposition to White teachers (Allen, 1999).

Decentering Whiteness in the classroom requires teachers to understand their own identity. "Whiteness needs to be identified as a cultural disposition and ideology linked to specific political, social, and historical arrangements" (McLaren, 1997a, p. 6). I used this definition to create a reflective tool that illuminated the unexamined cultural, ideological, and social arrangements within the teachers' classrooms by using a CRT lens to understand teacher behavior in a broader context than just within the classroom. Teacher racial identity is political in nature, intentionally or unintentionally, and is not a neutral organizer in the classroom. I hypothesized that teachers might be able to identify and remove barriers of belonging for their BIMPOC students by bringing attention to White teacher identity within the classroom and the political and social constructs of it.

According to McLaren "Whiteness displaces blackness and brownness—specific forms of non-whiteness—into signifiers of deviance and criminality within social, cultural, cognitive, and political contexts" (1997, p. 9.) Bringing awareness to these unexamined social constructs to create a less hostile, more welcoming classroom environment for BIMPOC students is the purpose of this intervention. And, as a researcher of color, my own perspective can both broaden and advance the field of qualitative research in

education (Carter Andrews, He, Marciano, Richmond & Salazar, 2021), adding my voice to the chorus of those who have come before me.

Deficit thinking results in assigning blame to students for their failure instead of blaming the school system or the teacher for student failures; it is a frame that imbues nearly every aspect of education (Simone, 2012). Fewer social advantages and educational supports are given to students of color, low-income students, and students from other cultures, because teachers and administrators believe they cannot alter their BIMPOC students' trajectories (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Oakes, 1995). In the Montessori classroom, which is based upon the assumption that Montessori pedagogy is a social justice intervention for all students to thrive (Lillard, 2017), unexamined assumptions about student and family capabilities can lead to less interaction and fewer supports for BIMPOC students. This is a potential blind spot for Montessori teachers: In my experience working with Montessori teachers on their equity journey, they believe they are using a social justice pedagogy, but are not examining their own cultural identity, explicit biases, and White normed behavioral expectations for their students.

Social identity refers to the differences and similarities between people in different groups and the associated group behaviors (normative behavior, stereotyping, in-group bias, etc.) (Hogg, 2001). Prototypes, sets of prescribed thoughts, behaviors, and feelings inform, describe, and delineate different social groups from each other (Hogg, 2001). According to Hogg, you have to have an out-group to have an in-group, and in the process of being part of the in-group, people are assimilated, and their behaviors are accentuated as to those delineated by the prototype through a process of depersonalization. "People are viewed as less individualized and more as an embodiment

of a group when people categorize themselves...they perceptually, cognitively, affectively, behaviorally, and self conceptually assimilate themselves to the in-group prototype; self is depersonalized” (Hogg, 2001, p. 132). The self-identity of a teacher will be informed by their fellow faculty members, and individual teachers’ identities are subordinate to group membership and collective self-conception (Hogg, 2001).

The prototypes of the collective can be so pervasive that they go unnoticed and unquestioned to the point of framing a person’s life (Garfinkle, 1964; 1967). This is the sea of whiteness in which we swim. Yet, the individual can influence the stability of the prototypes simply because group membership is derived from individual membership (Hogg, 2001). That is to say, change can happen within stable in-groups. Prototypes provide the containers in which implicit biases are held by the collective.

### ***Implicit Bias and Slow Thinking***

Implicit bias encompasses the unconscious attitudes and automatic associations of attributes and stereotypes assigned to specific groups of people (Godsil, Tropp, Goff & powell, 2014). A teacher may have specific intentions to act in supportive ways toward all their students, yet still withhold constructive or positive feedback for their Black students. Their implicit bias has overridden the intended behavior. This is also demonstrated when a White teacher ascribes “defiant” behavior to students of color more often than to White or Asian students (which can jumpstart the school to prison pipeline (Wilson, 2014). Subjective discipline categories include disrespect, non-compliance, and insubordination. Implicit bias can be found in who gets hired, who gets referred for further medical workups, as well as who is killed by police officers and who is sentenced

to death when tried for crimes they are alleged to have committed. Implicit bias works at every level of our culture and in every institution (Godsil, Tropp, Goff & Powell, 2014).

More importantly for this study, implicit bias informs teachers' behaviors toward Black and Latino students which result in racial disparities for these students (McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016; Rubie-Davies, Hattie & Hamilton, 2006). When teachers expect less from BIMPOC students, create systems to track and separate students, and then have BIMPOC students who underperform, individual implicit bias informs the structural systems that deliver the disproportionate, underperforming outcomes that seem intractable. In Tenenbaum and Ruck's 2007 meta-analysis, they found that teachers use less positive language when working with Latino and African American (author's terms) students compared to White and Asian students. They also found that teachers referred African American and Latino students less often to gifted and talented programs. Thus, the implicit bias informs the structural biases (the lack of gifted and talented referrals and the use of less positive language) that create the underperformance of BIMPOC.

Based on this work, my working premise for this intervention is that reflective journaling will help teachers identify their personal biases to make connections to their classroom behaviors that are informed by these biases that in turn create unequal outcomes for BIMPOC students, which are linked to underlying structural and systemic biases. A teacher cannot decolonize their thinking alone without some sort of intervention from prompts about beliefs, language and actions, to curated journal articles, to walking their room. I use each of these strategies to bring teachers in touch with their biases and provide some windows of insight into how they impact their BIMPOC students.

A researched mechanism to interrupt implicit bias is “slow thinking,” coined by Daniel Kahneman in 2011. When fast decisions are needed, the brain relies on assumed knowledge, patterns, relationships, and cognitive shortcuts (Gladwell, 2005). When teachers are managing students in a classroom, delivering curriculum, and feeling stressed, cognitive shortcuts can save time, but they also lead to a greater likelihood of errors in thinking because the patterns and assumptions may be inaccurate (Mears, Craig, Stewart & Warren, 2017). Slow thinking allows for better decision making by prompting people to take the time to thoroughly evaluate information (Mears, Craig, Stewart & Warren, 2017).

One of my goals was to provide participating teachers with a tool to slow down their thinking, allowing them to reflect on their actions in the classroom to identify biases that were operating at the unconscious level. When a teacher makes a fast decision and relies on inaccurate assumptions about particular groups, the “cognitive error can lead to implicit bias toward that group” (Mears, Craig, Stewart & Warren, 2017, p. 16).

Mears, Craig, Stewart and Warren identified several sources of potential bias (2017). Recency bias occurs when recent interactions are generalized, and then inform current behavior. If a recent interaction with a student was combative, then the teacher may assume similar interactions with students who are the same race. Availability bias is another source of errors in thinking. While we may assume that teachers have nine months of relationships with students, teachers still may not know the student’s home life, adverse childhood events, and other factors that go into a student’s current behavior. Again, assumptions are made as to why students behave as they do. Finally, confirmation bias can play a role in teacher behavior. A teacher may equate a Black student’s race with

criminality. The teacher then focuses on behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics of that student that confirm the idea of criminality (Fridell & Lim, 2016; Kahneman, 2011). Each of these biases are compounded by the systems that allow for unexamined assumptions to rule decision making (Mears & Bacon, 2009). The *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience* attempts to illuminate implicit and explicit biases to support behavior changes by providing time, prompts, readings, and probing questions to examine teacher assumptions about their students.

Specifically, in the time of COVID-19, with the vast majority of schools delivering content online via in-person Zoom, Google Classroom, and asynchronously, teachers had unprecedented access to students' home lives. Confirmation bias may have led teachers to confirm their assumptions of a culture of poverty or other negative connotations because they now could see into students' homes. There was also a possibility for creating deeper connections between teachers and parents because educational roles were now undefined. At this time, there is little research on the effects of how online learning for public and charter schoolteachers can enhance or detract from equitable practices within the classroom.

### ***Montessori Prepared Environment***

Visual cues in our environment go directly to the limbic brain, which processes information at twice the speed at which words are processed. The limbic brain directs the body's response to danger –fight or flight or freeze – and indicates if we are safe. It is also the part of the brain that links cognition to emotion (Hammond, 2015). When teachers cue the student brain to belonging, safety, and connection, learning can then begin. Based in part on this understanding, manipulatives and artifacts are central to the

Montessori student experience. According to the Montessori philosophy of education, “The teacher’s task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment made for the child” (Cossentino & Brown, 2017, p. 8). The prepared environment is one third of the instructional core, with the teacher and the student being the other two, and it is the main pedagogical strategy for Montessori schools (Cossentino & Brown, 2017).

Within the Montessori approach, teachers are advised that they should prepare “environments that nurture optimal development” which “are enriched, orderly, predictable, peaceful, and allow for guided choice, free movement, voluntary social activity, and extended opportunities for trial-and-error correction (Cossentino & Brown, 2017, p. 7). This tenet limits the number of posters, books, and artifacts placed in the prepared environment. Teachers are advised to create “Environments that nurture emotional flexibility, are safe places, signaled by an overall climate of tranquility and beauty” (Cossentino & Brown, 2017, p. 15). The question here is who defines safe for whom? Visual cues for safety include what is on the walls and in the classroom that support BIMPOC students.

### ***Belonging***

When researchers use the term *belonging*, they are referring to a student’s perception of their relationships with teachers and peers. Belonging is a construct that can be an important indicator of future academic success (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). Ensuring that all students, especially students of color, feel a sense of belonging is an essential part of creating a positive and supportive school experience. When teachers and administrators fail to create schools where students from all backgrounds and cultures

feel safe and welcome, the consequences can be substantial and negative (Jose, Ryan & Pryor, 2012).

Murphy and Zirkel (2015) found that a student's sense of belonging relies on his/her/their perceptions of the environment, but the researchers took the construct a step further. Using stereotype threat as their framework, Murphy and Zirkel (2015) examined how belonging was a determining factor in (a) whether college students of color saw themselves in a specific college major, (b) whether middle school students of color saw themselves working to attain higher levels of education, and (c) how feelings of belonging on campus related to the academic achievement of students of color. Belonging can be a mitigating factor in student behavior as evidenced by the decisions students made about their future (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015).

At the heart of their research, Murphy and Zirkel (2015) remind us that belonging is not just a mutual feeling between individuals, but it is also a feeling of "fit" at an organization, school, or campus (p. 22). If students cannot see themselves in the school, pursuing higher education or studying in an academic department, it could be they do not feel they are physically welcomed at that institution. Belonging has been found to predict how far students push themselves academically as well as the type of academic degrees they choose to pursue (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015).

The need to belong is a fundamental and powerful human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Baumeister and Leary's definition of belonging includes persistent caring plus frequent interaction. While Maslow (1968) is cited often, he did not have empirical evidence that "love and belongingness needs" were necessary for human happiness. Baumeister and Leary (1995) conducted a meta-analysis to identify the

empirical research to substantiate Maslow's claim. Belonging, as a construct, has behavioral as well as psychological aspects and is a motivation that operates within human beings to drive the creation of interpersonal relationships.

Using a Critical Race Theory lens, which asserts that racism is the organizing principle of this country, how can Black students feel safe in a racialized, hostile environment that they may not have the words to describe but have the experience living in every day? And, at the same time, how can White teachers who tend toward neutrality and colorblindness, who continue to perpetuate harm without their knowledge, create a safe environment for their BIMPOC students? Without slowing down, teachers are apt to miss the opportunities to create safer visual spaces and culturally sustaining curricula, build authentic relationships, and know student families all of which are antidotes to continual harm for BIMPOC students.

### ***Visual Cues and Belonging***

According to Avgerinou, "'visual language' is a cognitive ability that also draws on the affective domain" (2011, p. 7). The cognitive functions that are needed for understanding visual language include visualizing, imaging, critical thinking, and inferring. They, along with feelings and attitudes, help create meaning of visual stimuli (Avgerinou, 2001b). Feelings and attitudes are needed to construct meaning from the things that we see. The ability to construct meaning from visuals relies on context and prior experience to understand the content of a given communication. According to Moriarty (1994) visual communication skills "develop earlier than verbal skills in children" (p. 15).

Visual literacy might inform how students feel safe in their surroundings as well as supporting them in making meaning out of the things within the environment. The research conducted in the advertising and marketing industries can inform this line of inquiry. According to Barry (1998), viewing advertising images is similar to experiencing an event: both use emotional and holistic processes. In addition, his research indicates that children process advertising through their emotions, not through a logical assessment. This research supports the idea that in order to learn, students need to feel they belong in their environments, and those feelings of belonging have an effect on student academic success.

For a student to develop visual language abilities, they must interact with images, objects, and also observe body language (Moriarty, 1994; Reynolds-Myers, 1985). The process of taking in information located in the school environment may well tap into emotions that inform the reticular activating system (RAS) in the brain to be alert to “any relevant event or information that is connected to one’s social status, physical survival, or strong emotions that might signal a potential threat or reward” (Hammond, 2015, p. 38). The RAS is responsible for attention and alertness and scans the environment constantly to assess changes that may affect personal safety.

When teachers create welcoming environments where students see themselves in the books, posters, and artifacts that surround them, students’ RAS supports them in focusing on the task of learning. To promote a safe learning environment, teachers need to avoid situations that set students up for an “amygdala hijack” of fighting, fleeing, or freezing (Hammond, 2015, p. 40). To avoid triggering events that set off students’ self-protective instincts, the school environment should represent students’ cultures in the

books, posters, and artifacts in the room. Through careful curation, the environment can support students feeling safe in their classrooms, thus promoting a feeling of belonging.

### ***Montessori Social Environment***

The construct of belonging represents one aspect of school climate. Student descriptions of belonging can provide administrators with baseline data to inform school practices and teacher professional development strategies to support student academic success. When students have a positive orientation to school and feel like they belong in the community, they may perform better academically (Libbey, 2014). MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) suggest that schools with healthy learning environments report higher academic achievement of their students.

In Montessori pedagogy, the social environment is created by teachers facilitating peer learning engagements, which are a foundational structure (Lillard, 2017). Grace and Courtesy lessons are focused on social norms in the elementary grades (Lillard, 2017). The lessons support the growth of the entire child, not just the student's intellect, and are generally shown to the entire class at the same time (Lillard, 2017). Teachers tell stories of students who, despite their circumstances, behave well, and teachers demonstrate these desired behaviors (Lillard, 2017). Grace and Courtesy lessons are where cultural assimilation groundwork is laid and reinforced within the classroom.

Examining the nature of student-teacher relationships and how satisfied students are with their experiences (Wendorf & Alexander, 2005) can help to identify schools or classrooms that have healthy relationships between students and teachers and schools and classrooms that do not. Students who feel supported by teachers engage in less disruptive

behaviors (Ryan & Patrick, 2001) and experience higher engagement in school activities (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Birch & Ladd, 1997).

### ***Montessori Curriculum Development for Adolescents***

In May 1939, Maria Montessori addressed the Educational Committee of the Association of Head Mistresses where she outlined the purpose and design of the adolescent Montessori education (Montessori, 2011). “What is needed today is not rigid specialization, but self-confidence and all-around capability that makes the individual able to adapt to changing circumstances” (Montessori, 2011, p. 79). Providing students real work, focused on earning wages, was her strategy for students to become economically independent as “a more educational value than practical value; it has a closer connection with the psychology for the adolescent than an immediate utility” (Montessori, 2011, p. 81). This work results in valorization by making a girl “feel capable of succeeding in life by her own efforts and on her own merits, and at the same time it would put her in direct contact with the realities of social life” (Montessori, 2011, p. 81). This is the heart of the Montessori adolescent curriculum (ideally in a boarding school setting): to foster valorization in students at this age. Valorization is the process of building self confidence in the context of community by working for and with others through the development of autonomy, the feeling of belonging, and the demonstration of competence (Montessori, 2007).

The Plan of Work and Study for adolescents is based on three principles: (a) “facilitating student self-expression of artistic, linguistic, and imaginative abilities; (b) the development of character through moral education, language, and mathematics; and (c) practical experience (real work) and the study of theoretical knowledge through the study

of science” (Montessori, 2011, p. 123). Connecting the soul, mind, and body through genuine emotions based on these experiences builds the character of a student to become a citizen. Dr. Montessori’s adolescent framework is just that. She did not create lessons for this third developmental plane known as Erdkinder (Montessori, 2011). What she did do is explicate the approach to supporting adolescents in the process of moving from childhood to adulthood in which they become “fragile and delicate, so much so that doctors consider this time comparable to that of birth” (Montessori, 2011. p. 61). During this sensitive period, she scientifically observed, adolescents begin to develop a moral and social orientation, which is created through the process of valorization.

Although they are all built on these principles, in reality each public charter Montessori middle school program can be vastly different. Urban, rural, and suburban programs may have access to gardens, or may not in order to do real work. Cleaning and caring for the school itself as Montessori suggested brings with them culture clashes in our modern classrooms. BIMPOC parents have prevented their students from cleaning the kitchen, weeding the garden, and serving food, which are all intended to provide real work, but that have negative cultural implications for BIMPOC parents in our society (S. Andree, personal communication, July 20, 2020). This simple principle of real work can actually disrupt the goal of belonging because of the negative cultural implications of the work being done. This is a potential weakness for the Montessori teachers.

### ***The Montessori Adolescent Program***

Montessori adolescent teachers are generally responsible for multiple subjects in a self-contained room (Ewert-Krocker, 2011). There may be an assistant teacher and there may be specialists (science or math or music), but, in general, Montessori middle school

teachers are expected to be generalists. Montessori’s third plane of development, written specifically to guide work with adolescent learners, includes the *Practical Consideration of Social Organization* and the *Educational Syllabus*. These two areas comprise *The Plan of Work and Study* outlined in Table 2 as per the author (Ewert-Krocker, 2011, p. 123).

**Table 2**

*The Plan of Work and Study*

<b>A. Practical Consideration of Social Organization</b>	<b>B. Educational Syllabus</b>
<p><b>Prepared Environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical environment/occupations as materials</li> </ul>	<p><b>1. Self-Expression</b></p> <p>Music Language Art</p>
<p><b>Residence for Young People</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their Community Homes</li> <li>• Practical Life Skills, Jobs required in a household/House cleaning and Chores/Domestic Arrangement</li> <li>• Organizing for Comfort and Order</li> </ul>	<p><b>2. Psychic Development</b></p> <p>Moral Education Mathematics Language</p>
<p><b>Farm</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organic Produce and Livestock</li> <li>• Natural Resource Management</li> <li>• Machine Use and Maintenance</li> <li>• House and Building Maintenance</li> <li>• Trail and Woodlot Maintenance</li> </ul>	<p><b>3. Preparation for Adult Life</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The Study of the Earth and Living Things (geology, geography, including prehistoric periods, biology, cosmology, botany, zoology, physiology, astronomy, and comparative anatomy)</li> <li>b. The Study of Human Progress and Building Up of Civilization (physics, chemistry, mechanics, engineering, and genetics integrated into the history of science and technology – “supernature”)</li> <li>c. The Study of History of Humanity (scientific discoveries, geographical explorations, relation of humans to the environment, contact between different people, war, religion, patriotism, a detailed study of one period, the life of one person, the present day and nation, law and government, literature)</li> </ul>

**Table 2***The Plan of Work and Study (Continued)*

<b>A. Practical Consideration of Social Organization</b>	<b>B. Educational Syllabus</b>
<b>Store</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shop Produce/Goods</li> <li>• Commerce and Exchange</li> <li>• Craft Production</li> </ul>	
<b>Guest House</b>	
<b>Museum of Machinery</b>	
<b>Adolescents</b> 12-18 years or 12-15 years/15-18 years	
<b>Adults</b> (as material in the environment) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• House parents</li> <li>• Teachers living there</li> <li>• Visiting teachers</li> <li>• Technical instructors</li> <li>• Workmen</li> <li>• Parents</li> </ul>	

Dr. Montessori did not leave a scope and sequence for The Plan of Work and Study. Her goal was to ensure students engaged in real work and economic exchange in order to become contributing citizens (Ewert-Krocker, 2011). Coffee shops, bike shops, community supported agriculture and other revenue-generating activities are used depending upon the school’s location and physical plant. Internships are also important opportunities for students to “see adults at work doing real tasks with real consequences” (Andree, personal communication, October 1, 2020).

Facilitating valorization through the students’ engagement with their community is an important process during adolescence (Montessori, 2007). Students’ personal experience through group work in teams helps to build their work ethic in how to be responsible to a group. Again, real tasks have real consequences. How this is facilitated in each classroom is up to the teacher. The adults are integrating the learning throughout the entire year (Montessori, 2007). Science is built into the occupations in the work by

using The Plan of Work and Study. Students should be exposed to economics, justice and personal dignity, and social justice through humanities (Montessori, 2007).

### **Student Discipline**

There are many different reasons for removing students from class and school. Burke and Nishioka (2014) found that Oregon students who receive at least one suspension are out of the classroom for an average of 3.3 days. During the 2011-2012 school year, 6.4% of students were suspended or expelled from Oregon schools because of verbal or physical aggression, insubordination, and disruption (Burke & Nishioka, 2014). Black male students are twice as likely to be suspended as their counterparts (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). The same data indicated that Black female students are more than twice as likely to be suspended as female students from other ethnic groups. Negative outcomes like dropping out of school and lower grades have been associated with suspensions, expulsions, and grade retentions (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).

In-school suspension (ISS) is defined as the removal of a student from their regular classroom(s) for disciplinary purposes, which is generally temporary, and the student stays with school personnel (Burke, 2015). Out-of-school suspension (OSS) is defined as the “temporary removal of a student from his or her regular school to another setting (for example, home or a behavior center) for disciplinary purposes.” (Burke, 2015, p. 2). For students who access special education, OSS could mean “removals in which no special education services are provided because the removal is less than 10 days cumulatively, as well as removals in which the student continues to receive special education services according to an individualized education program” (Burke, 2015, p. 2). There are distinct and important differences within and among schools, districts, and

states “in the processes, forms, terminology, and training they employ, each of which are factors that influence office referrals, ISS, and OSS” (Fabelo et al., 2015). Even in public charter Montessori schools, ISS and OSS are used for students who disrupt classrooms (M. Pickner, personal communication, January 15, 2020).

Morris and Perry (2016) conducted a study of students’ math and reading scores over time and found that students who were suspended had a reading score 15 points lower and a math score 16 points lower than their never-suspended peers. In a study focused on students in the Miami-Dade County public schools, Arcia (2006) found that students with a high frequency of suspensions were academically three years behind classmates with no suspensions in a sample of 4th through 7th graders. Cholewa, Hull, Babcock, and Smith (2018) found that students who received an in-school suspension (ISS) were 4.7 times more likely to drop out of high school than peers who had not experienced this form of discipline. Additionally, this same study found that students who received an ISS were 0.40 grade points lower at 11th grade and 0.35 grade points lower on their cumulative high school grade point average (GPA) (Cholewa et al., 2018). It is evident from these studies that frequent discipline and negative academic outcomes are related. A recent study demonstrates that Black students are more likely to be suspended than White students, but belonging has a mediating effect, thus reducing suspension rates when students feel they belong (Fisher, Dawson-Edward, Higgins & Swartz, 2020). Through their work, Fisher, Dawson-Edward, Higgins and Swartz extended the research of Skiba et al. (2014) to explore the associations between levels of belonging and the level of risk of Black student discipline rates (2020).

Taken together, a positive school climate can foster a sense of belonging, which is foundational for academic success, and a negative school climate is associated with academic struggles as evidenced by discipline rates. Underlying the construct of belonging can be issues of race, economic status, student abilities, and other factors. Understanding the factors that impact students' feelings of belonging at school is an important part of better meeting students' needs. However, unless we also devise ways in which we can support teachers in changing their attitudes and behaviors to better support equity and inclusion in their classrooms, students—particularly students from BIMPOC communities—will continue to be under-served and under-supported.

This desire to better understand how the use of a self-reflective equity lens can support teachers in creating and maintaining classroom environments where students from diverse backgrounds feel they belong, as well as my work as an equity consultant within the Montessori school system, has led me to the design and focus of my dissertation.

### **Research Questions**

In this exploratory descriptive case study, I conducted an ideological critique of the data by using the tenets of Critical Race Theory to explore the following research questions:

RQ 1: In what ways did the *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience* serve as a tool to support teacher behavior changes and pedagogical pivots specifically focused on decentering Whiteness within the classroom?

RQ 2: What are the benefits and drawbacks to using this self-reflective instrument?

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

In this chapter, I provide a description of my epistemology, research design, and procedures. I introduce the recruitment process and explain my data sources and strategy for analysis.

As a constructivist, I socially construct meaning in relationship with those I engage through conversation and reflection that then leads to interpretations for shared understanding (Ormston et al., 2014). The *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience* is grounded in a constructivist approach and viewed through a Critical Race Theory framework (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Through reflection questions, curated content, and evidence collection teachers examined their behaviors, identified the beliefs that inform those behaviors, and then had the chance to think about new behaviors that could support BIMPOC students in their classrooms.

By using an interpretivist approach to the research design, I, as researcher, am a significant part of the process of discovery and must account for those biases (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007). My participation and interpretations are not objective, but are informed by my lived experiences, biases, and the Critical Race Theory lens I used to make meaning from the intervention I created (Hall, 1992). I constructed a theory of change (see Figure 2) based on the research data as I interpreted the participants' reflective writings, teaching artifacts, and responses to written and verbal interview questions.

### **Moses Journaling for Equity Experience Logic Model**

The *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience* journaling prompts were brainstormed and co-designed with middle school Montessori teacher Susan Andree and equity expert John Lenssen. I then refined the prompts to deliver a self-paced, reflective intervention that asked teachers to (a) uncover and reflect upon implicit and explicit bias that informs their teaching, (b) collect evidence to inform the reflections, and (c) participate in a summative journaling exercise intended to create future equity moves to decenter Whiteness within the classroom.

### **Methodology: Qualitative Case Study Approach for Deeper Understanding**

The goal of this study was to explore the relation between White teachers' race and cultural identity, their attitudes and behavior toward BIMPOC students, the curriculum they develop, the curation of the prepared environment that fosters students' feelings of belonging in the classroom, and the development of the social environment in the classroom. A case study process allowed for a purposeful examination and reflection of teachers' behaviors and thoughts *in situ* through multiple methods in order "to allow for emergent rather than tightly prefigured" data to emerge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181). To my knowledge, this type of intervention, a reflective process to decenter Whiteness in the Montessori classroom, has not been done before. To garner information about the participants' experiences as well as the instrument itself, I used a case study design.

This research is exploratory in nature because it is a pilot study in the real world on a relatively new topic; decentering Whiteness within a Montessori classroom

**Figure 2**

*Problem Statement/Situational Context: Identifying and alleviating barriers to success for BIMPOC students through teacher self-reflection*

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes		
			Short-term	Mid-term	Long-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public charter Montessori middle school teachers</li> <li>- Moses Journaling for Equity Experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers slow their thinking to reflect on current pedagogy by reading and journaling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers collect evidence of current practices to illuminate where changes can occur</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers identify their dominant culture norms, and explicit and implicit biases that inform their teaching behaviors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers revise their prepared environments to include culturally responsive books, posters, artifacts</li> <li>- Curriculum is revised to address dominant culture bias and to increase use of culturally relevant posters, books, and artifacts</li> <li>- Teachers center BIMPOC student cultures within the classroom in order to create culturally sustaining classroom environments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers' increased self-awareness ensures:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BIMPOC students feel they belong within the classroom</li> <li>- BIMPOC students experience less discipline issues</li> <li>- BIMPOC students graduate from 8<sup>th</sup> grade when they transition to public high school</li> <li>- BIMPOC students increase academic achievement as measured by SBAC and teacher evaluations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<p><b>Assumptions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating teachers engage fully in the reading, reflective journaling, and evidence collection process.</li> <li>• Participating teachers should spend approximately 2 hours per week engaging in the intervention.</li> <li>• This study focuses on short term outcomes.</li> </ul>	<p><b>External Factors:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COVID-19</li> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Participants may forget to do the reflection and collection.</li> <li>• Teachers may identify unpleasant truths about themselves and stop participating.</li> <li>• Other unforeseen variables could inhibit participation.</li> </ul>
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(Swedberg, 2020). I could not know the outcomes until after the intervention was conducted. Decentering Whiteness in the America classroom is an urgent need for BIMPOC students. An exploratory research approach allows for conducting research without waiting “till all the information on the topic is available” (Elman, Gerring & Mahoney, 2020, p. 20). In addition, exploratory research allows for small samples to build a theory of change that can be scaled later through an inductive process (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005).

My interpretations of the data are political, informed by my lived experience and based on Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). I used *The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture* (Okun, 2021) to ground my interpretations within a research base that exemplifies specific behaviors that can decenter Whiteness in a work setting within the definition of decentering Whiteness outlined by McLearn (1997) and (Carter Andrews, He, Marciano, Richmond & Salazar, 2021). Through the case study process, I was able to use multiple models to interpret the data.

This research design was appropriate for my topic because it allowed me to develop a fuller understanding of what informs teachers’ thinking when they curate their prepared environments, develop curriculum, design the social environment, and support belonging in the classroom. My goal was to look at the teaching process from a holistic perspective that provides a learning opportunity for the participant and rich data for me as a researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The rich data are provided in the direct quotes from teachers from either their journal entries or the debriefing interview I conducted with each participant individually at the end of the intervention.

Qualitative research, although it has drawbacks (including the difficulty of analysis) can provide research participants' perspectives and "rich, detailed, and valid process data" (Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, Bird & McCormick, 1992, p. 1). The richness of the resulting data and the process of reflection illuminated a path forward for behavioral change within teachers. To deepen my understanding of the survey results specifically for belonging and to potentially learn how teachers could create more welcoming environments, I interviewed participating teachers at the end of the intervention.

### **Description of the Intervention**

The *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience* is a self-paced intervention designed to elicit a reflective process to slow teachers' thinking about how they teach. The reflective process engaged teachers for approximately two hours a week for seven to 13 weeks. The reflective questions ranged from five to seven questions per week and were arranged in the following order to build upon each other (See Appendix B for full list of reflection questions).

Week 1: Level Setting Event (take the Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT), reading, reflecting)

Week 2: The Racial, Social, and Cultural Identity of the Teacher

Week 3: Student Belonging

Week 4: The Prepared Environment

Week 5: The Social Environment

Week 6: The Curriculum

Week 7: Summative Reflection

## Week 8: Zoom Interviews

Each week's reflection questions built upon prior questions. Week 1 provided a level setting event for the teacher to begin her/his/their journey of self-discovery. Each teacher took the Harvard Implicit Bias Test as an opportunity to learn about implicit bias. While implicit bias is extremely hard to identify on one's own (Wald, 2014), Step 1 in the intervention invited teachers to read McIntosh's (1997) article on White privilege, complete her questionnaire, and then reflect on the privileges they do or do not have, and how they might show up in the classroom. After their reflection, participants read an article on the limitations of McIntosh's work (Margolin, 2015). The summary questions on Friday asked teachers to identify their racial, cultural, and social identities, as well as the demographics of their students.

Week 2 focused on the teachers' own personal experience with belonging while examining how their culture and biases inform their teaching of BIMPOC students. Teachers were asked to define belonging for themselves as well as for the students in their classroom. Through reflection on personal experiences, teachers could bring forth unexamined assumptions and see how those assumptions and biases inform how they treat their students in their classrooms. Participants were assigned to read *Can De-biasing Strategies Help to Reduce Racial Disparities in School Discipline?* (Wald, 2014).

In Week 3, teachers were asked how they create a sense of belonging within their classroom. They were asked to have a conversation about belonging with their students. Assigned readings included *What is Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Why Does It Matter?* from the book *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies* (Alim & Paris, 2017).

In Week 4, teachers were asked to take photos of their room to examine their curated prepared environment. Photos of artifacts, books, art on the walls, and posters were intended to help teachers assess how the prepared environment supports and limits the cultures of students of color. I gave teachers a matrix that enabled them to count the number of artifacts, books, and art within their classrooms that support BIMPOC cultures. (See Appendix A). Teachers were asked to read *Measuring equity in Montessori communities* (D’Cruz, 2019), *Unpacking “diversity” in our lives and schools* (Peters, 2019), *Exploring diversity and inclusivity in Montessori* (Oesting, 2019) *Running in circles: Dilemmas, uncertainty, and freedom to cope* (Christensen, 2019), and *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Intersection with Montessori education* (Brunold-Consesa, 2019).

Moving deeper into student engagement, Week 5’s inquiry required teachers to describe how they create the social environment. Sample questions included: What are the behavioral expectations you have for your students? How are those communicated? When are they communicated? What assumptions are those behavioral expectations based upon? What activities and expectations do you have for students to develop their compassion for others? Teachers were asked to read Chapter 3 in *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy* entitled *Language and Culture as Sustenance* (Bucholtz, Casillas, & Lee, (2017), which illuminates deficit thinking about students of color and students who experience poverty, and how understanding and centering BIMPOC language and cultures are “sustenance” for their identities (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 45).

During Week 6, teachers reflected on their overall curriculum. Each Montessori teacher creates their own curriculum within broad standards. Teachers were asked to again examine when and how their cultures are centered. For example, they were asked,

“What are the means to fostering pro-social behavior in the classroom?” The assigned reading was Chapter 6 in *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies* entitled “*This Stuff Interests Me,*” *Re-center Indigenous Paradigms in Colonizing School Spaces* (San Pedro, 2017).

During Week 7, teachers were asked what shifts in perspective were made. Did the teacher identify deficit thinking when they were interacting with BIMPOC students? How has the teacher fostered asset-based thinking within themselves about their students? How would the teacher change his/her/their behavior in the future? How has the teacher decentered whiteness within the curriculum, environment, and interactions with students? Teachers read *Do You Hear What I Hear? Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies* (Rosa & Flores, 2017).

Finally, in Weeks 8 up to 14, which were driven by the teachers—depending upon how long it took participants to complete the reading and journaling exercises—each participant had a one-hour Zoom meeting with me to debrief the process, discuss their pedagogical pivots, and help to refine the next iteration of the research instrument. The unplanned interaction between Teachers 1 and 2 slightly modified the design of the intervention. They were able to “bounce ideas of each other” (Teacher 2), which was not anticipated when the intervention was originally designed.

### **Setting and Participants**

Purposive sampling and snowball recruitment were used to identify and recruit three public charter Montessori middle school teachers to participate in the study. To qualify to participate in the study, participants needed to be White, Montessori-trained middle school teachers, working in public charter Montessori school settings. They had to

have had more than two years of teaching experience in a Montessori middle school and indicated that they were curious and open-minded about taking an equity journey.

Three white teachers, two women and one man, were recruited through snowball referrals and through my presentation at two international Montessori middle school teacher symposia. I onboarded them in the fall of 2021 by holding individual Zoom calls. During the calls, I answered questions about the length of the intervention, the resources required, and the use of the data in this dissertation. Participants completed the initial survey that asked for demographic information, experience teaching, and other information to provide thick description of their prior teaching experience. Two teachers, Teacher 1 and Teacher 2, were located in the same school.

#### *Teacher 1*

Teacher 1 was a 44-year-old White male who taught middle school in a “rural/suburban” public charter Montessori school. His intent for participating in this experience was to “identify in myself areas that need work. I want to continuously remove my blinders and stay focused in this difficult work. I hope that the process of journey further cements a habit of self-reflection and self-reconstruction for the ongoing and endless work of dismantling systems and structures of white supremacy, inclu[ding] white supremacist thought.”

He held a Master of Arts in teaching, was a licensed teacher, had eight weeks of Montessori middle school teacher training, and had been teaching in public charter Montessori middle schools for seven years. He taught “math, humanities, literature seminar, creative writing and the Workshop (woodshop lite).”

In terms of experience with equity trainings he reported, “I’ve had two specific trainings; one was in 2017...the presenter was a pretty radical near-elderly white woman. The other was a two-part training with Chrysanthius Lathan which took place at Montessori NW (3 hours in October 2018 and 5 hours in Feb 2019.)” He reported that his current pedagogical practices that were culturally responsive and equity focused included, “Literature Seminar books by women authors of color. In my Humanities courses, I try to select topics which will lead students to learning about historical structural oppression through racism and xenophobia. I post images of historical people of color and share their stories. I try to use an equity lens: in all areas of my practice.” In addition, he said that he tried to integrate social justice into the curriculum to “imbue all of my work with social justices; this can be from the topics I choose to the presentation of the posters to put on the wall to the stories I have the students read. This also includes the t-shirts I choose to wear (typically social-justice topically based).”

Teacher 1 demonstrated a level of critical analysis by his ability to differentiate his race from his culture. “This is very difficult to answer for me. I come from rural, white [state]. My parents were working class and high school dropouts but had “educated” parents... I’m in a crisis of culture because I know that those old traditions and experiences, I grew up with are all rooted in White Supremacy. I guess my culture is primarily white, American, liberal culture.” His social identities include “...a husband, a father, a brother, a son, a teacher, a neighbor, a trusted adult, a coach, a senior staff member and a leader. Also, a friend.”

This teacher interacted with more than 62 students daily. He reported that information pulled from the school’s data base shows that five students identify as non-

binary, 27 as female, and 30 as male. In Teacher 1's terms, eight students are identified as Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latine, one as Hispanic/White, 44 students are identified as White, three as Asian, one as Asian/White, one as Pacific Islander, one as Asian/Native Hawaiian/White, one as Native Alaskan/Hispanic/White, one as American Indian/Asian/White, and one as American Indian/White. "Because most of my students are white and middle or lower middle class, they had a difficult time determining the cultural groups they belong to. Some of the students who speak Spanish at home were excited to express that their families are Mexican. One 8th grade girl is Cuban and Salvadoran. Also, three students pointed out their Asian culture, specifically the Filipino influence." When asked, the teacher took a stab at naming students' cultures. "The majority are white, liberal students, then next unknown, then Mexican, apolitical, and conversative Christian" are represented in his students. By the order of his thought process of naming his students' cultural identities, he identified students like him first, and then named others that are outgroups from his identity (Allen, 1999).

Students have a social network within and outside of school. "In a quick poll, I found that nearly all of my students use social media of some kind. About half of them acknowledge that they have a social network via social media that includes people OUTSIDE of the school community." He shared:

In our 62-student middle school program, there are cliques -- though they are not necessarily organized as they may be in a more traditional middle school. Most noticeably, our Latinx female students tend to stick together. Four out of six of them are cousins, so this informs their social organization. We have students who form friend groups based on gender-identity (those who identify as non-binary or otherwise LGBTQ+ tend to spend time together). Also, students organize around interests. There is a group of students who hang out together because of their interest in Dungeons & Dragons. Friend groups generally exist, but they don't seem to hold a lot of sway over "power" within the larger middle school group/program.

Social justice is a critical component of the Montessori middle school experience (Montessori, 2007). Middle school teachers build their literature, history, poetry, and humanities curriculum to center this work. “Social justice is at the core of most of what I do in the classroom. I provide articles examining issues, I often initiate and facilitate important discussions around race. Recently we have been discussing identity and power/privilege. Last year, I included a Humanities unit titled, “The American Freeway,” which focused on the social and environmental impacts of the development and placement of roads, especially upon neighborhoods of color.”

#### *Teacher 2*

Teacher 2’s motive for participating in this study centered on the research and their potential learning. She explained that she wanted to participate, “to help with research that I think is important, and to maybe glean some tools for equity work for myself in the future!” She has a bachelor’s degree, is licensed in two states, and attended a conventional teacher preparation program as well as training at Alternative Methods of Instruction/North American Montessori Teacher Association Orientation to Adolescent. She has six weeks of Montessori middle school training and eight years of experience teaching public charter Montessori middle school grades. Her school is in a rural-suburban location. At the time this study took place, she was teaching “Humanities, math, health, PE and electives Poetry and Journalism.”

At the time of this study, Teacher 2 was a 32-year-old, white female who had one evening of equity training with Chrysanthius Lathan, an equity trainer with 15-years’ experience as a teacher and five years’ experience as an equity consultant. Teacher 2’s

role at the time of this study was Adolescent Guide (teacher). When asked about her pedagogical practices that are culturally responsive and equity focused, she explained that she tries to "...draw on students' own cultures and home lives, give them importance, and bring them into the classroom. For example, a class called 'Sacred Land' looked at the ways in which land has been and is sacred to Indigenous people, and we made connections with places that are sacred to us. I try to give brief praise to differences at home, I emphasize that I learn with (guide), instead of teach."

She indicated that her classroom had two non-binary students, four female, ten male and ten white students, two Asian students, one Native Alaskan/Latino, and two Hispanic students. As part of the intervention, I prompted teachers to ask their students to create culture maps. This teacher's classroom encompassed "Mexican, Cuban, Latinx, Emo, genderqueer, nonbinary, gay, Christian, sports lovers, D&D nerds, music fans, Korean pop fans, El Salvadoran, Pagan, animal lovers."

Classroom cliques exist within her school and her classroom. She wrote:

There are cliques. There is a cousin clique with the four Latina cousins. About three additional students have access to them; a key feature to their social clout is proximity to the class clown, trouble-causing boys (adolescent defiance, nothing more)...There's also a group "led" by Leydia, who is characterized by being highly book smart, motivated, bossy, and having been around for a long time. People want her validation and approval, but she can be mean, probably especially when she senses social competition.

When integrating social justice into her curriculum, Teacher 2 said,

I try to connect my Humanities classes (the past) with things happening in the present (social justices issues come up in Reconstruction Era class, South Africa Apartheid, Sacred Land, etc.). We often do a Current Events assignment on a social justice topic (police brutality, climate crisis). I help sit in on student DEI committee (it began last Spring during distance learning, and we're hoping to have student interest in starting it up this year).

In Humanities we engage in Current Events assignments for articles that I try to select based on the learning that can happen surrounding social justice issues. In Poetry we engage with poets and activists like writer/poet Clint Smith, whose poems I've mentioned before and that provide a great springboard for discussion. In Journalism we have collaborative discussions about topics that are relevant and useful to the world, and we make sure that our newspaper is functioning positively by shedding light on issues of social justice. Kids are encouraged to engage with the world through research, activism, and getting involved in things that are important to them.

When asked how students were learning to contribute via their own cultures,

Teacher 2 explained,

I guide a journalism class, and I guide a poetry class. In Poetry, we're able to explore identity in a clear way, and to give a lot of time to it. I encourage students to explore poetry and what 'speaks to them.' We rotate weeks of sharing poetry that is meaningful to us, and even the shyest student (Mary) looked forward to her week. Students like to share something that they identify with, and it often is their cultures that they want to explore.

As for her hope for this intervention, Teacher 2 wrote, "I want to gain a clearer equity lens through which to teach! I want to be more thoughtful in how I plan lessons, with attention to how I can be a promoter of peace and breaking down a white supremacist and colonizing lens." Teacher 2 acknowledged that "I live the vast majority of my life as part of the dominant culture," but she did not provide any further insight into her lived experience or the degree to which she is able to critically analyze her privilege. Her identity included "White, female Teacher, friend to young people, the young person in church, curator of the Little Free Library, bringer-together-of-friends, the baker." She reported part of her lived experience this way:

My best friends today are still my best friends from kindergarten. Collectively we are 'nerds' who often congregate around celebrating a certain event; Bilbo and Frodo's birthday, or the premiere of a Shakespeare play. My part in that group is integral to my personal identity. I am a part of a very close extended family on my mom's side; her three brothers and their families all live in the area, and we celebrate holidays and just hang out a lot. My comfort level among that group is high, and that is really important to me. My belonging to that group, as a group

that has lived in the small town for many generations, is integral to my personal identity. My belonging to the community is important to me; I have a unique perspective as a 'progressive' thinker from a small, rural town, and I like to gently challenge ideas held among many of my acquaintances. I am also a Christian, which is a part of my identity that I don't really know how to feel about. The church community that I grew up in was, along with my theater group, the most shaping part of my life. It imploded when I was 22, and since then I have not been a part of a church community. In some ways my being a Christian is hugely important to my personal identity, and in other ways not at all.

### *Teacher 3*

During her initial intake questionnaire, Teacher 3 wrote, "For me, this year is all about application of all that I have learned through the equity journey that I have been on for the last three years." The 35-year-old, white, female was a middle school teacher with three years' experience teaching at a rural public charter Montessori middle school. She had six weeks of Montessori middle school training at the Montessori Adolescent Orientation. She had a bachelor's degree and did not attend a conventional teacher preparation program. She was licensed in her state.

Teachers 3's equity training experience included "ABAR (Anti-bias Anti-racism) trainings... I have also attended equity workshops at the AMI refresher conferences (led by Embracing Equity), and attended Montessori for Social Justices conference in 2019, and ongoing work with [an equity trainer]."

Recently, she reported that she had been putting the trainings to use by "building curriculum for the last two years that decenters the white euro-centric perspective and amplified other voices and perspectives. All materials are chosen that offer windows and mirrors to our students." As for what she hoped to learn from this journaling process, she stated, "Reflective processes are not something that I naturally gravitated towards as I have imposter syndrome- and self-reflections often increase this. I am hoping that this

process will help me to see the work that I have done and to continue to do in a positive light.” She has one student who is Indian/White. The rest of her 10 students are White.

She belongs to the “dominant culture” and sees her social identity as “teacher, farmer, roller derby player, dog mom, plant mom...all basic white lady.” Yet, she has had deep experiences with living her White privilege. She wrote:

Ooooh, boy is it humbling to be in a group where you are not of the dominant culture. Having lived in Rural Africa, I have made babies cry because they had never seen a white person before. I remember attending a traditional Xhosa wedding while living in South Africa. I was the date of a friend who knew the bride and groom- and he was the only person there that I knew. At the reception, I was served first, despite sitting in the back and kinda outta the way, because they were so honored to have a white guest. I ultimately left the wedding because my presence was detracting from the experience of others.

### **Data Collection**

In December 2020, I received Institutional Review Board approval to conduct the study. Because of COVID-19, I was unable to recruit participants until a year after initial IRB approval. Therefore, data were collected from the three participants who signed their consent forms during the fall of 2021. I used a running Google Doc for each teacher and individual recordings of the Zoom debriefing interview at the conclusion of the study as sources of data. During recruitment and initial onboarding, teachers were asked to provide information about their race/ethnicity, gender, years of experience teaching in Montessori, years of experience teaching adolescents, and where and when they received their teaching certification through a Google survey. The participants’ demographic information was obtained in this manner. See Appendix B for the entire instrument, including onboarding questions.

Each Friday morning, participating teachers received an email with their weekly reflection questions, reading assignments, and request for evidence within the running

Google document. Teachers were asked to reflect on five to seven questions and were prompted to collect evidence related to that week's focus. The process was designed so they could collect evidence throughout the week to reflect on their beliefs, actions, and language. Teachers were able to access the questionnaire throughout the week and were able print out their answers at the end of the study. At the end of the self-paced intervention, I conducted a one-hour Zoom debriefing interview to follow up on themes that emerged through my analysis of survey responses and weekly artifacts the teachers personally collected and shared with me through their online journaling. The only time Zoom was used was to onboard participants and to debrief participants at the end of the study. I minimized my interaction with the teachers to ensure the intervention could be replicated. Table 3 represents the data gathering process.

### **Audit Trail**

Zoom interviews were held with each participant at the beginning and end of the intervention. The first onboard interview allowed for participants to ask questions and to plan for when I would send the weekly reflection questions and readings. These onboarding interviews were not recorded because they followed a pre-developed script and were not intended or used to collect data from participants. When the participants onboarded, they had the opportunity to review all questions and readings ahead of time. During the onboarding interviews, all three participants agreed to receive the intervention information on Friday mornings. I sent the readings and reflection questions before 11 a.m. each week via email. This allowed for each teacher to review the reflection questions, do the readings, and then collect the requested data the next week and answer their reflection questions the following weekend.

**Table 3***Data Gathering Process*

Onboarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers completed the Informed Consent form and returned it to me via email</li> <li>• Teachers completed onboarding Google Survey</li> <li>• Onboarding Zoom call (not recorded) to answer questions</li> <li>• I sent one copy of <i>Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy</i> (Alim &amp; Paris 2012) to each participant by US Mail</li> </ul>
Week 1 - 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created running Google Doc for each participant to receive reflection questions and requests for evidence</li> <li>• Sent weekly email on Friday mornings to deliver curated readings and requested evidence</li> <li>• Week 1: Teacher Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Requested participants to take the Harvard Implicit Attitude Test, read, and reflect</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Week 2: Personal Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Read and reflect</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Week 3: Student Experience with Belonging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Gather student input on belonging by hosting a seminar or conversation to create a culture map</li> <li>○ Read and reflect</li> <li>○ Observe students</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Week 4: Belonging in the Physical Prepared Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Walk the classroom using the Moses rubric for quantifying culturally specific artifacts in public charter Montessori upper elementary and middle school classrooms,</li> <li>○ Read and reflect</li> <li>○ Observe students</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Week 5: Belonging in the Social Prepared Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Read and reflect</li> <li>○ Observe students</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Week 6: Belonging in the Plan of Work and Study (i.e., in the curriculum) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Read and reflect</li> <li>○ Observe students</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Week 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reflect on the process and what has been learned through participating in the intervention</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Debriefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debriefing interview: recorded and transcribed Zoom call</li> </ul>

After the onboarding Zoom interview, participants were sent the IRB-approved informed consent form. Each participant signed and returned the form. The consent form included information about a resource participants could use support if they had negative effects from the intervention. Specifically, I included the following information within my IRB protocol and within the participant consent form:

*Potential Research Risks or Discomforts to Participants*

There may be risks of stress, emotional distress, inconvenience and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research study. Psychological risks might include embarrassment, fear, or guilt. If participants feel these discomforts and want to stop participation in the study, they are always welcome to discontinue participation. Here is a resource to help manage that potential outcome.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xGKQ0238cX6m7jNnxkO7AcLzbdJ294QX/view> (See Appendix E for resource).

When Teacher 3 explained she was unable to complete the journaling questions because she felt discomfort during the journaling process and experienced nightmares during the intervention, I referred her back to the handout and asked if she wanted to discuss this issue further. She declined and stated she was able to continue the interview if we did not discuss the topic.

The Zoom calls were recorded and the transcripts were verified by me. No other person reviewed these files. Sometimes the files were difficult to interpret because Zoom's transcription is not always accurate. I took notes during the interviews and did not rely solely on Zoom transcription. No other person had access to the raw data either through Zoom or through the Google Docs where the journaling occurred.

To protect participant privacy, I limited access to the data files to only me. I coded all journal entries and Zoom transcripts using the identifiers Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and Teacher 3. I de-identified the data within the quotations presented in this manuscript

to protect participant anonymity. The debriefing interviews lasted approximately an hour and were conducted via Zoom and recorded. The debriefing interviews were scheduled once participants completed the intervention or when they indicated that they did not want to continue the journaling exercises. Teacher 1's debriefing interview was conducted on December 7, 2021. Teacher 2 completed the intervention within the eight-week period, from September 10, 2021, to October 29, 2021 and her debriefing interview was conducted on November 17, 2021. Teacher 3's debriefing interview occurred on December 8, 2021.

### **Data Analysis**

Data collected through the teachers' reflective journaling were analyzed using a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens as an ideological critique framework. This means I looked for evidence in each teacher's journaling or debriefing interview that indicated the teacher was aware of a CRT tenet or was unaware, and a CRT tenet could be used to explain the reason for the reflection that was offered. Because CRT is based within the context of the United States as a racialized political construct (Bell, 1992, Lason-Billings, 1995), CRT helped me to situate the political, social, and socioeconomic ramifications going on within the individual classrooms of each teacher. My interpretations and the teachers' journaling and Zoom reflections are "infused with political and ethical implications related to matters of power and authority" (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007, p. 12). The power the teacher possesses based on their Whiteness and the authority a teacher has in their classroom.

### *Critical Race Theory Tenets and Reflexivity*

Tenet number 1 of CRT is that the United States is a racialized project from its very inception, and racism is part of normal life (Bell, 1992, Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Tenet 2 of CRT states that racism is a social construction that permeates every aspect of our lives; from the culture we swim in, to the systems that hold racism in place, to the institutions that perpetuate racist policies, to the individuals whose lives live out those biases. This is the underlying premise of how I examined the process of creating this intervention and how I reflected on my own growth and the growth of the teachers throughout the process. The social construction of racism encompasses the relationships we have, the thoughts we have about others, and how none of these interactions have a biological basis for difference (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

As part of the normalization of racism, White people can access their privilege and their ability to be fragile, use colorblindness to deflect responsibility, and use other cognitive and behavior strategies to deflect acknowledging racism within themselves and their organizations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, Ladson-Billings, 1995). Colorblindness enables White teachers to not see the cultural, social, and economic differences of their students, while still allowing themselves the ability to not see the harm they cause by not seeing differences. This can “actually impede our move toward equality” (Eberhardt, 2019, p. 218).

The lived experience of CRT Tenet 2 is Whiteness as property (Thomas, 2009) which is delineated by Tema Okun’s White Supremacy Culture Characteristics (2021). Whiteness as a “property interest” allows teachers to possess Whiteness as a standard of behavior, the right to their own comfort in their Whiteness, and the right to teach and

transfer those behaviors and expectations to their students (Harris, 1995).

Counterstorytelling is another CRT tenet that I used as a reporting convention and as a unit of analysis. Counterstorytelling centers the lived experience of oppressed people that questions the truths held by the dominant culture (Thomas, 2009).

Using the CRT framework tenets, I analyzed the data for evidence of teachers' deepening understanding of belonging through teacher observations, teacher reflections to specifically designed questions, discoveries about themselves, how teaching behaviors could change by decentering Whiteness within their classrooms, as well as their input on the effectiveness and shortcomings of the intervention.

To address Research Question 1, I analyzed the data using the following codebook:

- Attitudes and beliefs toward BIMPOC Students
- Curriculum within the classrooms
- Curation of the prepared environment
- Development of the social environment
- Self-discoveries

#### *Reflexivity as an Important Component of My Analysis*

So, how can I as a bi-racial, cisgender female researcher who has the privilege of lighter skin and multiple degrees, who was raised by White parents, who has been colonized into White Supremacy Culture, break free from the shackles of my enculturation to see how my implicit bias is at work while examining others' implicit bias (Okun, 2021)? Reflexivity. Reflexivity is a two-step process of identifying my own "values, ethics, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life,

and social identities that shape the research” (Thomas, 2020, p. 63). This process required me to examine how the research itself has changed me as an equity practitioner and researcher. I had to interrogate my own racism, biases, and colonization to bring forth a more honest depiction of the results I discussed. The other process is “epistemological reflexivity,” which requires that I interrogate “both ethical and methodological implications” of how this study was constructed (Thomas, 2009, p. 63).

I used ideological critique for this case study (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Using this strategy for making meaning helped to illuminate my biases as I interpreted participants’ written and spoken words. More specifically, I used a Critical Race Theory lens to examine teachers’ reflections about their language, actions/behaviors, and beliefs. An ideological critique bound my interpretations within a Critical Race Theory lens. An important aspect of an ideological critique is bounding the study in the aspects of space, time, and purpose (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). To elicit deeply reflective data from the teachers, I structured at least two questions each week that asked participants to tell me a story, which led to thick, rich, descriptive examples of participants’ beliefs and behaviors, with a particular focus on the language they used (e.g., do they describe their BIMPOC student as having deficits or are BIMPOC students seen as additive to the culture of the classroom?) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

To authenticate my analysis, I used member checking through a debriefing Zoom call at the end of the intervention to determine if my interpretations accurately captured the intended meaning conveyed in participants’ journal entries (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These interviews were difficult conversations for me because we addressed

participant racial bias through the member-checking process. The screening/onboarding questionnaire and interview were critical to ensure that participants really did want to be on this equity journey.

Creswell and Creswell's (2018) steps for finding meaning informed my process for constructing meaning, while the CRT lens provided essential grounding. The following process helped to shape analysis. Using the CRT framework, I identified 13 different categories for analysis. I followed Creswell and Creswell's process to make meaning. I first skimmed and then itemized the data to create the categories of analysis. I made notes as I reviewed the data to identify the resultant themes. I made notes specifically focusing on the emerging categories to identify patterns across the participants. I organized and structured the analysis based on *belonging*, *CRT tenets*, *discoveries about oneself*, *effectiveness of the intervention*, *how teaching could change in the future*, and *improvements to the intervention*. Each teacher reflected on those themes and provided rich descriptions of their reflections. I provide thick description and full quotations in my results to give the clearest picture possible of the participants' experience. I examined entries by asking if the results could be plausible and if they make sense based on the previous journal entries the participant made. I looked to cluster and partition themes and looked for similarities between participants. I confirmed and synthesized findings via individual Zoom debriefing interviews with each participant.

#### *Process of Analysis*

Participants input their responses into a Google document each week. I reviewed all data for a general sense of the information provided. Did the participant go deep or stay superficial in their reflection? I examined the length of entries for each question and

got a feeling for the amount of time each participant engaged with the self-reflective journaling intervention.

As I planned this study, I had anticipated coding the data based on teacher *behaviors, beliefs*, and the *language* they used to describe their students. Using the Critical Race Theory framework and observed consistencies across teachers, prompted me to refine these codes, resulting in the following 12 themes:

- belonging,
- classroom characteristics,
- racism as normalized behavior,
- White Supremacy Culture (WSC) characteristics,
- counterstories,
- social construction of race,
- intersectionality of race, gender, culture, socioeconomic status,
- discoveries about oneself,
- potential teacher behavior changes,
- effectiveness of the intervention,
- recommended changes to the intervention,
- Disconfirming evidence is noted throughout the findings depending upon the area under discussion.

To facilitate the analysis process, I used the above themes to organize the data into an Excel spreadsheet that enabled me to see consistencies and inconsistencies across each of the teachers. I took verbatim journal entries and quotes from the Zoom debriefings and placed them in each of the above categories. The categories of *White*

*saviorism, intersectionality, and interest conversation* had little data so were excluded from further this analysis.

Describing the setting for the study includes describing the participants' school setting such as urban, rural, or suburban; the amount of adolescent training in Montessori pedagogy and the type of training the participant received, the student makeup of the classroom, and how social justice is centered within the classroom curriculum.

My interpretation of the data was informed by my personal experience as a former teacher, my lived experience as a bi-racial cisgender woman who identifies as Black, and the use of CRT as a lens. The relationship I developed with the participants was a factor, as was their willingness to be vulnerable in this process. I also identified similarities and disparate experiences between participants and identified questions raised in the process that are unanswerable by the type of data I received. Through this experience, I created a theory of change using an inductive process.

To confirm my findings, I used member checking via the final week Zoom debriefing interviews. I used thick description of the findings to provide as complete a picture as possible. It was critical that I identify and state researcher biases and assumptions as I proceeded through the process. In addition, I conducted a peer debriefing process with equity and Montessori experts. Presenting disconfirming facts was an important process to include in reporting the results. I was consistent in coding my findings to ensure consistent, clear, and replicable instructions and potential outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

## CHAPTER III

### FINDINGS

Teacher 1 self-reported he completed half the readings and took 14 weeks to complete the journaling process. Teacher 1's engagement elicited 4,844 words in his reflective journal and 5,765 words during the Zoom debriefing meeting. He completed the entire journaling experience. His two largest reflections were on Week 2, his lived experiences with belonging (1,016) and on Week 8, the wrap up questions for the Zoom debriefing interview (856). The topic about which he wrote the third most occurred during Week 1, when he named his identity and those of his students (767 words).

Teacher 2 self-reported she completed all the readings because "it plays to my strengths." Teacher 2 also completed all the journaling questions within the 8-week period. Teacher 2's engagement elicited 2,709 words in her reflective journal and 5,465 during the Zoom debriefing meeting. The longest reflections centered on Week 2, her lived experience with belonging (897), Week 7, Putting All the Pieces Together; from reflection and observation to a theory of action (706), and Week 3 Student Experiences with Belonging (632). Again, her writing about her personal experiences growing up were more extensive than her reflections of her curriculum choices or behaviors in the classroom. Teachers 1 and 2 were located within the same school and supported each other in the learning process through weekly conversations about definitions and teaching strategies.

Teacher 3, who was located at a different school, wrote 975 words in her reflective journal and shared 6,263 words during her Zoom debriefing session. The longest reflections were Week 2, her lived experience with belonging (488), Week 1

when she named her identity (399) and Week 4, Belonging in the Physical Environment (88). She self-reported she completed all the readings, but did not complete the journaling exercise because of heightened feelings of “imposter syndrome” and nightmares:

...there were times...I couldn't sleep because there...was just so many things in my head, and dreams where I would be teaching a lesson, that lesson was coming to life and trying to... actually consume me. I think it was over, students...just this air of like, even though we're making...rainbows this rainbow... this thought of like you're teaching something that is potentially dangerous or bringing something in that is potentially harmful, just like was like plaguing my mind even in my sleep.

Because she only completed three of the journal writings, data from Teacher 3 are limited.

### **Results Related to Research Question 1**

To answer research question 1 (in what ways did the *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience* serve as a tool to support teacher behavior changes and pedagogical pivots specifically focused on decentering Whiteness within the classroom?), I asked participants if they could identify deficit beliefs about their BIMPOC students, identify specific language they use when describing their BIMPOC students, and identify specific actions that center BIMPOC student cultures in their classrooms.

#### ***Attitudes and Beliefs toward BIMPOC Students***

Throughout the multiple weeks participants were asked to observe their students, think about their own personal biases toward their BIMPOC students and begin to reflect on their teaching, curriculum, prepared and social environments to decenter Whiteness within their classrooms. At Week 1, Teacher 1 assumed his students of color work harder and valued education more than his White, “entitled” students. At Week 8 he framed his awareness of his Latino/a/e students as:

shift[ing] over the course of this reflective work. I have re-emphasized and increased the centering of those students' cultures (with the awareness of the possibility of tokenizing those kids and really not wanting to do that!). Additionally, I have learned to not presume that a Latinx student speaks Spanish at home. Not all of them do. In fact, I asked some of these students about this to discover that in some of their homes, they speak ONLY Spanish and in others of their homes, they are not allowed to speak Spanish.

Teacher 1's examination of his assumptions allowed him to see changes within his awareness of what it means to be a Latino/a/e student in his classroom. Through his reflection about his Latino/a/e students, he began to see them as individuals, not just a group of students with a different identity than his (Denevi & Pastan, 1996).

The tendency to make unexamined assumptions about students, whether the assumptions are positive or negative, is a hallmark of colorblindness (Eberhardt, 2019).

Teacher 1 shared his new-found insights in one of his journal posts:

I'm not certain about how this [language about students] has changed, but I can say that I have noticed that I am seeing these students more as individuals than as members of a "minority group." In fact, I didn't realize that the first way I was identifying these students was as members of a "minority group" until I begin this reflective work.

In this reflective journaling process, he was able to slow down to examine what he did and did not believe about his students. He then came to different conclusions about his students that could potentially inform his future equity pivots – classroom teaching strategies that decenter Whiteness – within his classroom.

Teacher 1 discovered his assumptions about his Latino/a/e students that could have significant ramifications upon his students' experiences in his classroom (Wald, 2014). "One assumption I think I make is that my students of color tend to work harder than the white kids; they seem less entitled than the white kids and tend to value their education more." As a teacher on an anti-racist path, this discovery came as a shock.

He also discovered that he could build partnerships with Latina/o/e parents to center their cultures in his classroom. He had not thought about that strategy before.

This is something that I never considered doing before now and I love the idea. I intend to talk to my students to ask them about talking to their parents in this way.

Q: How can you use parent knowledge and experiences to inform your Plan of Work and Study to ensure a multicultural experience for your students?

A: Having discussions about the experience of my students' parents will enlighten me and open my eyes to information an experience I do not currently have. This new knowledge will help me to design curriculum that bears in mind the personal experience and ideas of these families.

Q: How might you make relationships with parents of your Latina, students?

A: I'm thinking probably just start by giving them a call. And, you know, with good news about something that their kid did at school, and just want to let you know that – 'Avery did this nice thing for another student today and, you know, just wanted to check in and then make the initiate a conversation there.' One thing that I value about where I work, and the nature of working at charter school is and it's I mean, we're not... Yeah, I think I just make a phone call.

This realization has the potential to change a great many things within his classroom (Yosso, 2002). Engaging parents authentically could bring forth a partnership in education that supports both the parents and the students. Engaging parents could increase belonging, diversify curriculum without tokenizing his students (Yosso, 2002).

Teacher 2 reflected on her Latina students throughout the intervention. She was able to build relationships with her students because she identified unexamined assumptions (Wald, 2014). This allowed a more supportive culture in the classroom to develop. The intervention brought forth the students' humanity and a place of connection between them and her as a teacher.

Q: What new insights do you have, if any?

A: "I put things through a culturally sustaining pedagogy lens now. I am starting to ask myself, "Does this celebrate their culture?" "Does this help them feel like

they have something to contribute?” And I have a deeper understanding of how deeply White-centered our school can be, and a stronger voice in my head questioning whether what I’m teaching or doing centers whiteness. And a better understanding of why that’s so harmful.”

Teacher 2’s experience with the readings, especially the radiolinguistics article by Rosa and Flores (2017) reportedly changed her expectations of her Latina students as she began to see them in an additive instead of deficit perspective. This may allow her to decenter Whiteness in her classroom.

The readings that highlighted student belonging and empowerment were most impactful for me, and the ones that gave me specific ideas for how to help them build up their own sense of belonging. The reading/s that discussed the Latina girl who gave her speech in a mix of Spanish and English, in the language that felt most comfortable for her to communicate in was enlightening for me. And the last reading, on raciolinguistic ideologies, which explained the White-centered ideas in which we often think of Spanish language acquisition and judge people’s language skills. These readings just felt relevant to me and have made me reflect on how I think of my bilingual students, and how I can do better to help them see the value of their unique skills.

It’s just this whole journey has made me more aware of how important their voices are. I can’t remember the academic terms that were used a heritage something radio was that, yes, [radiolinguistics], I felt like that was a good read for me just to understand better. Like that they’re all at different levels and different. It’s not levels but they all speak differently and have different grasp of both English and Spanish. And...that all their abilities surrounding their languages their bilingualism are amazing. And that there’s no ideal for speaking English, it’s just that...we’re taught in white centered classrooms that there is an ideal. So that has been a big change for me. Just reframing my focus and my thinking about language.

Teacher 2 had the realization that standard English does not need to be spoken to demonstrate mastery of a subject (Rosa & Flores, 2017). By seeing her Latina students as having bilanguage assets, Teacher 2 was then able to focus on her students’ learning and not on policing their behavior or assimilating them into White supremacy culture (Okun, 2021).

I have become much more aware of what I have my beliefs about them. I think this whole process has been very, in a way, introspective and forced me to constantly be thinking about things I'm holding on to and ideas that I have about the kids and their abilities, or whatever.

Q: Are you seeing your students from an asset perspective versus a deficit perspective?

Yes, there's definitely been a shift and seeing them from a deficit perspective, toward an asset perspective. And that is another example of something in the last few years that I've been trying to do but this is just really accelerated and helped give me some tools to do that with.

Teacher 2 described additional things she learned throughout the journaling process, including how she assumes negative intent when moving around the classroom. The intervention has broadened her vision about her students and given her time to assess, not assume what is happening between students. Again, Hammond's work (2015) could guide her with the acknowledgement that some students learn collaboratively while others learn individually. Teacher 2 also discovered she has "greater empathy" for all of her students within her classroom.

I'm more aware of how I move around the room and what students I spend time trying to redirect, or like, assuming they are off task and going to try to redirect. ...it's been a good process for me to question why am I assuming that that's those are the kids that need redirection right now. I now have a greater empathy for each of their unique life experiences."

Teacher 3 reported she was actively pursuing anti-racist anti-bias professional development for the past three years and the intervention has supported her in her ability to interrupt biased statements by students and parents. Neither her journaling responses nor her debrief conversation demonstrated a change in her beliefs about her BIMPOC students.

### *Curation of the Environment*

Racism is standard operating procedure in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). White people hold it in place both consciously and unconsciously through cultural expectations (the myths of meritocracy and manifest destiny, bootstraps, hard work, individualism), systems (government, legal, educational, transportation, health, etc.), institutions (schools, businesses, nonprofits, etc.), and individual actions. Racial identity development described by the Hoffman Integrated Model includes for Whites: conformity, acceptance, resistance, retreat, emergence, and integrative awareness and for people of color: conformity, dissonance, immersion, emersion, internalization, and integrative awareness (Jones, 2000; Singh, 2019). The model demonstrates how racism permeates all aspects of our lives and is informed by implicit bias. Racism influences our identities, the jobs we choose to take, the jobs we can get, where and how we live, and our health and wellbeing as well as the outcomes our institutions create (CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/racism-disparities/>).

The privilege to be oblivious to racism and to consider racism a person of color's problem allows racism to remain in place (McIntosh, 1997). The luxury of not noticing if students' cultures are represented in the classroom is part of that privilege. When asked to walk his rooms to identify artifacts, posters, literature, and other forms of cultural significance outside of Whiteness, Teacher 1 said,

I think I have ZERO teaching materials connected to student identity. Of the books present in my classroom, they are nearly all reference materials likely written from a white settler perspective. I do have a copy of the book "American Uprising," by Daniel Rasmussen detailing the mostly untold story of the 1811 revolt by Enslaved People around New Orleans. I also have a copy of The Qur'an for student perusal.

Although Teacher 1's stated intention is to teach from a social justice stance, his room does not reflect the cultures of his students, nor does it give them resources to build their self-esteem, nor understanding of their cultures, and little support for their ability to critique the current system. A culturally sustaining pedagogical approach would supply those types of materials.

Teacher 2 felt a level of discomfort when walking her room and using the rubric I developed that asked her to identify the culturally, racially, and gender-specific resources in their rooms (see Appendix A).

That was a part of realizing that I didn't have a lot there reflecting the students. It was a good practice, but no it didn't feel that good. Yeah. Although I think I am being hard on myself. It was just because I do that, which is probably good. But, uh, but yeah, it was good. I definitely did get behind on that. It was about two or three weeks that I waited to do that because it just I hadn't gotten in the habit of that activity. But it was, it was something I recommend all teachers do.

This teacher named her discomfort with the activity and then dismissed the discomfort by stating that she was being hard on herself instead of going deeper into why it was uncomfortable. This reflection demonstrates the teacher's privilege in not acknowledging her own racism and her ability to decide when to face it, if at all (McIntosh, 1997). She stated at the beginning of the intervention that she was on an equity journey, chose to put off the walking the room exercise for two weeks, and then confronted her truths in her classroom. Her ability to center Whiteness in her classroom without seeing its ramifications on her students is reinforced by her implicit bias (Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei & Jacoby-Senghor, 2016).

Teacher 1's reported experience with walking his room gave him pause, and it was an opportunity for me to support him in his learning by engaging his Latina students in the centering of their culture in his classroom.

A: I was thinking about the classroom inventory document for like counting these different things. Yeah, and it was hard, but I think it was hard because it put it right in my face. I have nothing but almost nothing that is not just white culture stuff, like in terms of books and all this stuff and most of the books I had in my classroom were just like inherited they were there but that's the thing that's on my list now is to diversify my own classroom bookshelf. Instead of just using the one that was left there was a lot of those books are there no good anymore anyway.

Q: So, find an abacus to talk about Chinese culture.

A: I want more in my classroom, just, I, it's pretty good but my classroom is always kind of has been a little bit sparse for decoration anyway because I...It's just hard for me to choose what to put on the walls.

Q: Ask your students. Ask your Latina students to decorate for you.

A: Oh, I love and see what they do. Oh, that's, I love that. That's so great. They would love that. I'm doing that tomorrow.

Here is an example of Teacher 1's privilege to center Whiteness in his classroom on a daily basis. He has not thought about engaging his Latina students in the purposeful decoration of the classroom that would center their cultures. This confirms his implicit bias of centering Whiteness demonstrated by his feeling of helpless, "It's just hard for me to choose...", while his stated intention is to "raise up student cultures."

In Teacher 1's onboarding document he spoke about historical racism and slavery, and he reported he wears Black Lives Matter T-shirts. I checked in on what that meant to him.

Q: In your onboarding document you talked about that you had learned about racism in the past. And you're also wearing T-shirts around BLM. I just wanted to check in around your comfort of talking about racism in the present.

A: Oh right, in the world we're in right now. Yeah, I'm. I am a little less comfortable. I feel a little more, like it's risky. At the same time, I'm not shying away from it. And I, the way I go about that stuff is I try to be really careful about not sounding preachy or, like, it's my opinion but more like this is just factual stuff you guys like this is how it is, draw your own conclusions. Based on the evidence, they end up with the conclusion I want them to make. But it's, yeah, so, but yeah, I feel like it's, it's touchy here."

We have evidence of Teacher 1's privilege whether to acknowledge and speak about racism in the past, while hedging the topic in the present. He discussed how important it is for all student cultures to be represented in the curriculum. The lack of cultural artifacts, learning materials, and decorations suggests he needs to center, speak about, and examine in thoughtful ways the cultures represented in his classroom.

(McKown & Weinstein, 2008).

He is aware of his lack of knowledge and has a desire not to 'other' non-dominant students in the classroom. In this teacher's case, his identity does inform his varying ability to discuss race in the classroom (past vs. present) and his ability to create an environment that centers Latino/a/e cultures on the walls and in the curriculum. In our debrief conversation, Teacher 1 began to identify equity pivots within his classroom targeted toward valorization for his BIMPOC students.

I don't know, I think maybe targeting those kids, the not white ones, and giving them more attention and ideas for things to do, and trying to get them going more, because right now. You know, there's a couple of them who just are like into their studies, all the time and not really going outside of that it's more project base opportunities. And then the other girls are just getting told to put their phones away all the time. And, you know, so I mean they're, they're ripe for validation... they just need to figure out what they need to do, I guess, spend some more time on that.

Q: Can they do it on their phone?

A: Right, that's yeah, of course. I'm sure, maybe. Yeah. No, I love that, like, there we go again with like, we have this idea that they can't use their phones, right. So, we're just constantly doing that battle, which I actually don't really pick that battle very often because it's too annoying. But yeah, how do use the tool you have and use it as a tool right instead of a battle.

The exercise of reflecting on her own experience of being othered helped Teacher 2 expand her compassion for her students. This had a direct impact on how her students

began to see themselves on the walls and in the social environment within the classroom (Bengtsson, 1995).

...the feeling of otherness that it created in my brain. This is a reminder that creating a space that is familiar to other students; one that includes maps of every students' ancestral land, music and events that are relevant to all students. Advertising local community events that are likely to be attended by my students of Latine descent and culture seems important.

Through the journaling reflections and slow thinking, Teacher 1 acknowledged his lack of knowledge about decentering Whiteness in his classroom. Through slowing he thinking, building time into his week to reflect on his teaching practices, he was able to understand the distance between his stated goal of being an anti-racist teacher and one that decenters Whiteness (Bengtsson, 1995). Seeing where one is versus where one wants to be is an important aspect of becoming an anti-racist educator.

This has been an eye-opening and awareness-building process. In recent years, I have worked to center non-dominant cultures in my teaching and to teach about White Privilege. I HAVE NOT worked to *de-center* Whiteness, but simply to raise-up non-whiteness. This is a good revelation to have: I need to work to de-center Whiteness in my teaching in order to move toward anti-racist education; this has been difficult to know how to do, but now that *I know that I need to do it*, I can more easily figure out *how* to do it.

Teacher 3 did not participate in walking her room.

### ***Curriculum Development***

The need for centering, discussing, and understanding counterstories—the personal stories and lived experience of people who have experienced racism and other forms of othering—are an important element to a culturally sustaining classroom. They help students and teachers to move from a deficit perspective of BIMPOC students to one that is additive (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017).

All three teachers have actively centered BIMPOC cultures, to a degree, in their curriculum. Teacher 3 specifically gave her one Asian/White student the opportunity to choose the reading for a unit.

Right now, we are reading the book that she chose. It's called the *Love and Lies of Rukhsana Ali*. It is about, she's Bangladeshi, but kind of southeastern Indian. And she's kind of at the intersection of, how do I be both Hindi and American? And, like my parents are very traditionalist, and I'm a lesbian, and I'm Muslim. And so how do I come to terms with all these identities? So, we're reading it out loud in class. And it's been really powerful because...they mentioned...for instance today they mentioned a Bollywood film in the book. And she [my student] was like, that's my favorite too and then she was able to just like open up and share about that movie.

I prompted her to explore the topic more deeply, asking, "How is that for her, that she gets to step into her culture in your room?" Teacher 3 responded:

...she she's gotten more and more comfortable but also, I think she gets a little, a little pep in your step anytime someone [asks] what is that? or have you had that sweet? or whatever it is that's mentioned in the book and so it's been ... really good.

This teacher reported a disconfirming experience with her interaction with her student of color when compared in a CRT lens of Whiteness as property. The teacher's ability to help her student view her cultural assets within the classroom is in direct contrast the CRT tenet. This means the teacher holds a culturally supportive pedagogical strategy for this student of color in this moment. The same teacher had an enlightening experience in the past with another BIMPOC student.

I had a student rap an entire presentation once. The assignment was to present on an element or compound that was found in some samples that we had collected and analyzed. She rapped for nearly 5 minutes on silica. It was glorious. In this particular instance, I was exceedingly proud of this student. She was very nervous about sharing this side of her, really a passion, with her majority white counter parts. I can still picture her standing in front the of the class, throwing the end of her head scarf behind her, and owning everyone's attention. The smile on her face is something I will never forget.

But using counterstories is not the same as decentering Whiteness within the classroom curriculum. There is a continuum of moving classrooms from culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017) to decentering Whiteness (Carter Andrews, He, Marciano, Richmond & Salazar, 2021; McLearn, 1997a) to using abolitionist teaching strategies (Rodriguez, 2010). Teacher 1 was able to begin to distinguish strategies for decentering Whiteness but had a difficult time specifically identifying what decentering Whiteness in his classroom would look like or the steps to take.

This will be an ongoing act that I'm learning how to do as I go. I first will continue to identify the ways in which Whiteness is centered (which I'm sure is many), then work to dismantle those things. Maybe the best way to de-center Whiteness is to re-center non-dominant cultures. This will happen in the way I decorate in my classroom, the curriculum I choose to provide, the ways I acknowledge language and culture.

This line of questioning continued in the reflective journaling questions.

Q: What else do you want to learn?

A: I want to continue to learn ways in which Whiteness pervades my teaching. I want to dismantle this centering. I want to learn strategies to re-center non-dominant cultures WITHOUT inadvertently ACTUALLY centering Whiteness.

Q: How are all of your students' cultures centered in daily activities?

A: Unfortunately, my student's cultures are not centered in daily activities. I will sometimes center those cultures, but the truth is, it isn't a daily action.

Q: Define action steps that will benefit individuals, especially non-dominant culture students.

A: Frame all curriculum development with a center on non-dominant cultures, especially those represented in the classroom. Identify and dismantle artifacts of White supremacy. Reframe expectations for behavior (including volume in the classroom, use of language).

Q: How do students' cultures inform your plan of Work and Study?

A: I'm looking for ways to have my student's cultures inform my plan -- I want my next humanities unit to be a reflection of this. Our general theme is "Empire and Colonization." I want the students to discover the history of Empiring and colonizing and I hope to emphasize the impact these actions have had upon the students' personal cultures. However, I want to be careful not to teach incorrect information or to come across as the authority on a culture which is not my own.

Teacher 1 was beginning to see how Whiteness is centered in his room. He does not have a clear idea of what decentering Whiteness means. He does possess the ability to see how unexamined behavioral assumptions (loudness) and stated intentions and impacts of assigned readings are indicators of his emerging analysis within his classroom, curriculum and himself (Wald, 2014).

Teacher 2 reported that she decenters Whiteness by asking reflective questions.

As a Humanities teacher presenting the things of the past to kids, I am confronted with this daily, and my answer centered every day to the subject. But I tend to ask myself a few questions when preparing a lesson; how did I come to learn this information? Who was left out of influencing how this info was passed on, and why? And would people of any minority agree with this take? This always leads me to new truths and opens my eyes. I can begin to better question the authors that we read in class.

Teacher 2's reflective practice of asking where her information comes from and who it affected is the beginning of examining Whiteness in the materials she uses. Additional questions like Why is this material written from this perspective? What agenda does the material advance (the victor or the vanquished)? Who are the people who were negatively affected and why? And, similar lines of inquiry provided by Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (1980), might yield a completely different experience for her students.

Teacher 3's reported ability to support her students' desire to learn outside the classroom helped her decenter Whiteness within her classroom. It also demonstrated an important aspect of Montessori education, going out (Montessori, 2007). Leaving the

classroom for a destination chosen by the student to experience the outside world “is a new key for the intensification on instruction ordinarily given in the school” (Montessori, 2007, p. 19).

I feel like...[I] generally try to highlight strengths and perspectives...that's something I've always done. Maybe not to the degree, like the fluency of like my ability to do that now...but I think back to students that I've had in the past. I've taken my entire class to the mosque because we had a student with her hijab, and she was trying to explain things and I was like, why don't we just go to the mosque and all the class went to the mosque. And then another student was like, well I'm Jewish we should go to the temple, and I was like, absolutely, let's go. And so, I think my fluency and being able to amplify their experience and their voice and their perspective, is probably stronger.

There are many ways to physically decenter Whiteness within the classroom. From readings, to music, to wall hangings, to posters, to field trips, teachers can bring other cultures into the classroom, to leaving the classroom. There are additional steps that need to happen for these teachers to create culturally sustaining pedagogies and to decenter Whiteness within their classrooms beginning with acknowledging their White fragility and other forms of White supremacy culture within themselves.

Teacher 3 reported how she has purposefully created her curriculum this year.

We have not centered a white perspective at all in any of our lessons. We talked about what was the flip side of this, because right now we're doing indigenous history, and one of the students brought up ‘Well, my mom told me that we killed indigenous people because they were killing us.’ It was like, oh, but why were they killing us? Why would they be killing white people? And they're like, because we're stealing their land and we were killing them, and I said so are they killing us or are they fighting back? Were they protecting what is theirs and standing up for their people, and they're like, yeah, that's what it was. ‘I need to go have this conversation with my mom.’ It's like, go have that conversation with your mom, let me know how it goes. So, it's been it's been really good.

This is an important skill she brought to the classroom this year. She also reportedly is teaching *This Book is Anit-racist* by Tiffany Jewel with her students. Not centering the White perspective built a curriculum that challenged White perspectives and

assumptions. She did not learn how to do this from this intervention but brought these skills into the intervention with her. Her growth from the intervention, demonstrated by this quote, was her increased ability to step into difficult racial conversations with her students and parents and to scaffold her students into critical thinking about U.S. history.

### ***Development of the Social Environment***

Tema Okun's *White Supremacy Culture Characteristics – Still Here* (2021) gave me a clear path to understanding what racism is, where it comes from, and how difficult it is to eradicate. Based in fear, colonialism, capitalism, conditioning, patriarchy, and misogyny, white supremacy culture (WSC) sustains hierarchies that damage all of us, no matter our race. As Okun says, WSC is “psychic conditioning and toxic belonging” (p. 3). We have a choice. We can eliminate racism and othering, but it will take acknowledging the multiple levels in which it exists, and it requires self-reflection and the ability to sit in great discomfort to change inherited beliefs and behaviors. According to Okun (2021), White Supremacy Culture characteristics include:

- Fear
- Perfectionism
- One right way to do things
- Paternalism
- Objectivity
- What qualified means (to fix, save or set straight)
- Either/Or thinking
- Binary thinking
- Progress is bigger/more

- Quantity over quality
- Worship of the written word
- Individualism
- I'm the only one (who can do, fix, save)
- Defensiveness and denial
- Right to comfort
- Fear of open conflict
- Power hoarding

Each of these characteristics can be found in our schools, workplaces, homes, and institutions. They are cemented within our culture and inform our behavior. The list, for me, along with Okun's antidotes, brought clarity to what I was working for and against when I stepped into the creation of this intervention. This is just one framework, one way of looking at racism, but for me it deeply resonated with how I see the world, how I construct meaning, and how my lived experience can be explained. I used this framework in my analysis within a CRT framework.

Within this study, the one right way aspect of White supremacy culture is evident in one teacher's classroom management styles. There is one right way, a White normative behavior way, to act in a classroom. According to Teacher 1 "Basically, I say "Work hard. Act right." Aside from that, I don't impose really any "rules" (Week 5 journaling). Yet, he does not post the definitions or defines what acting right means. This leads to homogenized behavior within the classroom that is dominated by a white-cis-male who is not aware of whether his BIMPOC students have been asked to act White or not (McIntosh, 1997).

“Acting right” is up for debate in this classroom. It is fluid, changeable and could be parsed out differently depending upon the student’s race, gender, and ability. It is up to the teacher’s discretion as to what acting right entails, and without clearly written guidelines or frequent conversations, this could be a trap for students who have different norms for behaviors based on their cultures (Hammond, 2015). His sentiment for questioning rules is admirable, but the lack of specifics around what ‘acting right’ means leaves a great deal unspoken with an assumption of White behavior norms left unexamined and allows for the teacher to be in his power within the classroom.

Teacher 2’s response elicited the following: “Hmm. I expect respect for one another. A lid on chaos. Behavioral expectations aren’t written, but occasionally communicated verbally when the need arises (when I can’t communicate what needs communicating, because our volume is too loud, when kids aren’t paying attention to a math lesson).” She stated that her behavioral expectations came from her teacher training and “from my own experiences as a student, from... popular culture. I have worked to question the origin of my behavioral expectations and to try to only keep what’s practical and equitable.” But what does practical and equitable mean? From a white normative perspective, it means students are quiet, yet in Montessori classrooms collaborative projects can elicit a great deal of noise.

Teacher 2’s ability to identify where her beliefs come from is a disconfirming data point, but deeper interrogation into what’s practical and equitable could lead to self-knowledge about how her cultural norms are acquired and distributed through her classroom (Walton & Eberhardt, 2016). She also names the constant conflict within public charter Montessori schools. While attending a public charter school is a choice,

parents who are not familiar with the Montessori pedagogy of a three-hour block of self-directed work can find the classroom disorganized, loud, and not representative of the education they received as a child. This is the nexus of why Montessori pedagogy is held as a possible answer to engaging BIMPOC students in urban centers...that it encourages students to work together on projects that interest them using a purposefully disruptive pedagogy of collaboration and self-actualization (Montessori, 2007).

Every behavioral expectation, every book read, every piece of poetry or music or art examined has the potential to implicitly describe and enculturate students into Whiteness or it could be a window into other cultures and ways of being. Racism is constructed through the process of socialization and assimilation if teachers are not consciously aware of their behavior at all times (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Okun, 2021).

Through this reflection process, Teacher 2 began to see how White norms and behavior expectations were communicated, enforced, and then loosened. Her reflection and reexamination on White normed behavior ultimately enabled her to create better relationships with her Latina students (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007).

Q: What are the behavioral expectations you have for your students? How are they communicated?

I wrote in my journal, like the first or second week, that there was a girl who is in class...she would always comb her hair and curl her eyelashes. And I was like, 'Why are you doing that? This is a really weird to be doing this?' And, just realizing like wait a minute is it distracting class? No, it's actually not very distracting. I'm asking, 'Why I'm so obsessed with this idea that it shouldn't be what she's doing?' I think that dropping my concern about it was really helpful for our relationship. Now that I'm thinking about I haven't seen her do that for weeks.

This insight leads us back to how education is supposed to look and the enculturation and assimilation of students into White behavior norms (Yosso, 2002). Teacher 2's policing of student behavior that is outside the norm indicates how she

enforces White supremacy culture. Without thinking about the consequences, Teacher 2 reinforced White behavior norms. To her surprise, Teacher 2 was able to create a better relationship with her Latina student because she stopped policing their behavior. This is a crucial point that could have escalated into removing the student if the teacher felt threatened potentially resulting in a school to prison pipeline experience (Hammond, 2015). This cultural mismatch, if not examined, could lead to lifelong consequences for the student.

Through the study, I saw evidence of implicit biases having played out in Teacher 1's life, which helps to explain why overcoming racism is so difficult for him.

The summer I turned 13, my mom sent me on the Greyhound bus to visit my aunt. Along the very long bus trip, we stopped for a 2-hour layover in Seattle. Being from rural [state] and having almost zero experience with anything besides white supremacist culture, I felt very aware of the number of Black people who were in and around the Seattle bus station. My thirteen-year-old self was nervous and a little afraid. My only experience with non-white culture was limited almost exclusively to the local news and popular media. This didn't give me an accurate impression and so, as I waited for my bus, alone, I felt concerned for my safety and my possessions. However, the only interaction I remember was very positive -- an elderly Black man asked me where I was headed and answered my question about what I should do in order to find my bus. This experience remains high on my list of memories when it comes to my experience with race because I am disappointed by the way I felt at the time based on my lack of experience and exposure. I still feel guilty for having fear based in racist ideas and interpretations of the situation.

According to Okun, fear is at the center of racism. "White supremacy culture cultivates our fear of not belonging, or not being enough" (2021, p. 7). Fear disconnects us from ourselves, from each other, and makes us afraid of the unknown. Teacher 1's experience of racial fear still haunts him. He can see as an adult how racism informed his behaviors. He can see now that the media played a role in his racial fear and how his small town upbringing played a role. These influences if left unexamined will continue

to exert an influence in his life and in his classroom (Allen, 1999). That is the exact purpose of this intervention: To bring those unexamined biases to light through the reflective process (Bengtsson, 1995).

One strategy to overcome feelings of guilt and shame, used by progressives and liberals alike, is colorblindness (Delgado & Stefanicic, 2017). This can take the form of not noticing differences and wanting to treat everyone the same, but manifests as requiring students to assimilate into the dominant culture. In the long run, it harms BIMPOC students (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Through the reflection process, Teacher 2 was able to see how biased her assessments of her students that support a deficit perspective could be.

Nate (Hispanic) responded to a question on an assignment in a way that was confusing for me...Nate wrote, 'I think not, because u have no free will which makes it feel less connected.' His understanding of the question was different because he gave an opinion about whether the statement was true, which wasn't requested. I was mildly exasperated that Nate hadn't read the question carefully enough, but upon reflection I can appreciate being challenged in my assumption that China's connectivity is given. His response doesn't demonstrate a use of language that is different from many of his classmates; it tends to be unclear and imprecise in spelling and syntax. Nate has a brain that works differently than a lot of kids; he's often asking questions in class right before I'm about to address the topic, and it gets on my nerves. He can't read cues or doesn't understand some basic (what I think are basic) social norms. I am reflecting on Nate right now, and I think he does have deficits, related to written syntax. Nate's assets are an intense focus on needing to get a good grade, which is also a severe deficit at times :) His obsession with grades is the most heightened example that I have in my program from a student who isn't tuned in clearly to work and expectations, so I can't say how much it might be attributed to race. But I suspect it plays a role, perhaps culturally.

Teacher 2's questioning of her assumptions behind Nate's behavior is a starting point for her to create a culture of belonging. By reflecting on his behavior from multiple perspectives, acknowledging her frustration with his behavior, and questioning her reasoning through the reflective process, she now has a chance to change the social

dynamics within the classroom for that child (Bengtsson, 1995). And yet, in Week 8, she had difficulty naming her deficit perspectives of her students and did not feel that she grew much in that area throughout this process, a possible result of White fragility (Anderson, 2016; DiAngelo, 2018).

Through the reflection process, Teacher 2 made a significant equity pivot toward facilitating belonging in her classroom.

I have a stronger relationship with a few Latina students who I think have been more seen and felt empowered through some new practices. Just asking questions about their cultures. Showing interest. The tight group of Latina girls have also grown closer it seems, though that might just be through natural evolution of a school year.

...just being more intentional about things that I do. I like to think I'm a gentle person. But it's made me... more empathetic toward all of our students. All of our students.

Teacher 1's colorblindness was being broken down by the strong bonds his Latina students have in his classroom (Delgado & Stefanicic, 2017).

It is difficult for me to identify a time when one of my current students of color has demonstrated their knowledge differently than the white students. That being said, I find myself keenly aware of five female students I have who are all Hispanic/Latino students who identify openly as Mexican. Four of these students are cousins. The 5th is a family friend. One way they do school differently from the white students is that they stick together very closely.

The other students of color demonstrate knowledge pretty much in the same way as the white kids. I haven't really noticed anything different about this.

His acknowledgement of his students' cultures can now help him build curricula that supports their cultural identities (Allen, 1999; Hammond, 2015). Without this realization, he may not have been able to begin to see how Whiteness is centered within his classroom and how his stated intentions are overridden by implicit bias supporting White

behavioral norms and curriculum choices (McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016; Rubie-Davies, Hattie & Hamilton, 2006).

One way to combat the effects of racism and White supremacy culture is to create environments that are welcoming and where students feel they belong (Hammond, 2015). Belonging is a critical ingredient to learning because when the reticular activating system is activated in a positive way, instead of fight or flight, information acquisition is activated (Hammond, 2015). I focused on belonging as a significant construct within this intervention; as a mediating effect against racism (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013).

According to Teacher 2:

Belonging is to feel comfortable physically and emotionally in a space. It's to be able to sit and exist without having to perform, and to feel accepted by those around you for simply being who you are, all parts. That's what I always feel when I am most comfortable, in the spaces that I feel most that I belong in.

I asked each teacher to journal how they know their students feel they belong. Teacher 2 gave explicit behaviors she looks for but did not talk about if she checked with each student to see if they feel they belong. The oversight could be colorblindness, an assumption that if students are not saying anything then they feel they belong. She reportedly does check in with her students about their weekends and valorizes their experiences outside the classroom.

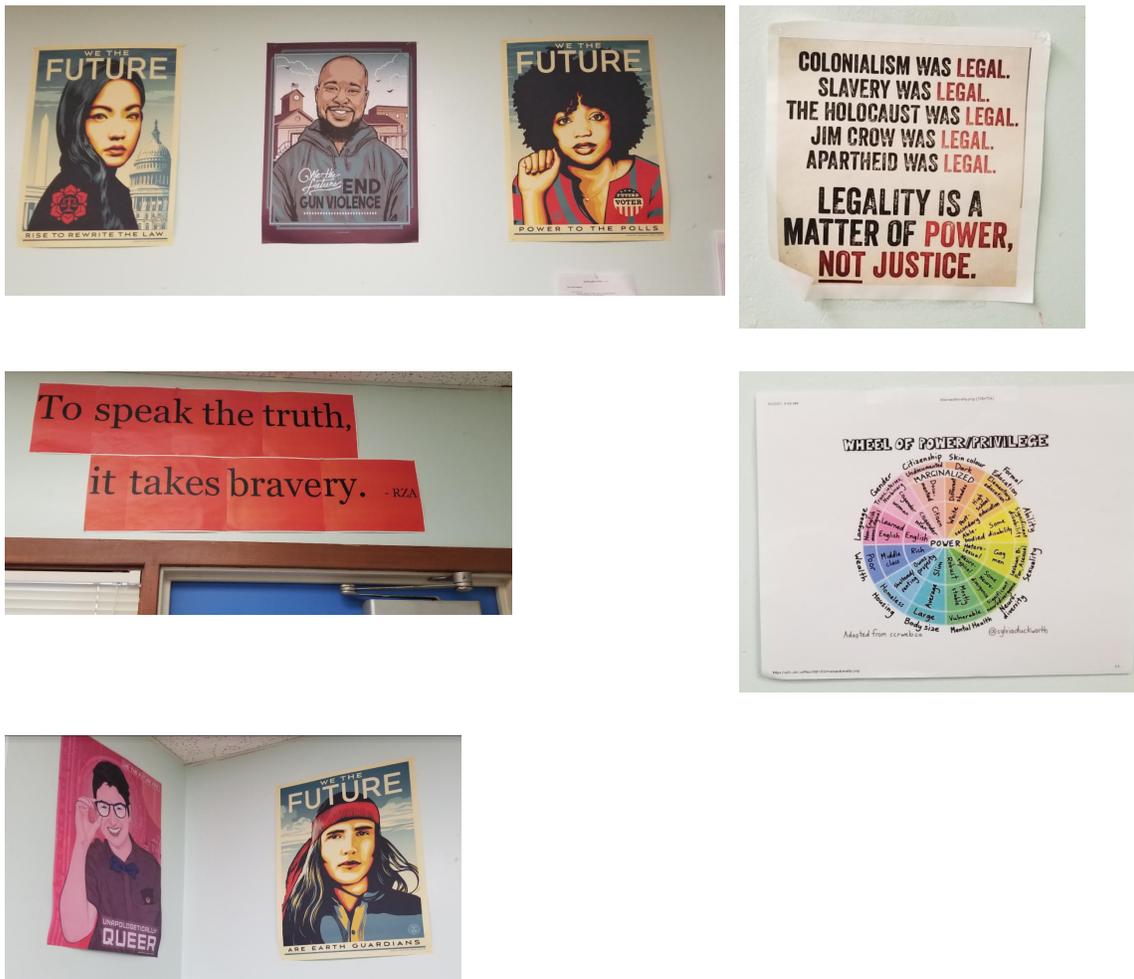
I like to show interest in the students' lives by asking after their weekends and following up later. Hmm... I have a strong belief in the inherent idea that all kids deserve to take up space, which is a belief that all teachers should have... I also have a strong belief that all students' home lives and cultures should be centered as the norm, so I try to outwardly valorize things that are different from my experience. ...Besides in conversation I don't do a very good job of facilitating belonging in my class.

Teacher 1 thinks his students feel comfortable "and like they belong in my classroom. That being said, I might be wrong and not realize it." He reportedly "work[s]

really hard to create a sense of belonging for all of my students. In addition to my own words affirming different identities, I keep in my classroom things such as these [see Figure 2].”

**Figure 2**

*Photos from Teacher 1's Classroom*



In addition, Teacher 1 reported he asked his students to define belonging. The exercise yielded important information for him. He also described a strategy for supporting belonging in his lessons.

It's hard to define...you are supposed to be there right, and that people recognize you and respect you and care about you was the message I got from them.

In class recently...we analyzed the coverage in an attempt to identify the bias present in each news outlet's reporting. We also read the recent guidance from the [state] Dept of Ed regarding the affirmation of identities. This discussion led to the opportunity for me to explain that I will proudly display and discuss these symbols in an effort to affirm each of my students' identities. A cool thing happened! One male 7th grader decided to explain that he is bisexual and that I am the only adult he has shared this with and that he knows that this wouldn't go well at home. I felt honored that he trusted me enough to share this very personal information.

Teacher 1 created an environment where a student was able to feel he belonged because the relationship was built over time with consistent interaction and built on caring behaviors (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). These are important ingredients in creating a social environment where students feel they belong and that supports academic success (Hammond, 2015). This teacher has demonstrated that he can create a welcoming environment for a LGBTQ student, but can he do it for his BIMPOC students?

I asked about valorization within Teacher 3's classroom.

I've watched him, and you know he's kind of an odd bird and real quirky and doesn't talk like that's what I was told. Up until this point, for whatever reason, something has struck with him, and he is now like, just a chatterbox and, like, people are like craving to be with him where before like you've never see him interacting with people at recess or lunch or whatever and he's just now this like wandering person and, like, it's like he's getting what he needs like that social peace and that academics are falling in line because of it.

Teacher 3 clearly connects belonging with academic success within her classroom (Hammond, 2015; Montessori, 2007). It is the hallmark of a Montessori classroom. What she does to valorize her students is to "just truly being able to be who they are and show

up like a kid.” In that expansiveness, her classroom culture has allowed her students to blossom.

Teacher 2 gave two examples of how she demands her Latina students be part of the dominant culture:

One. I continually ask Camila (Latina) to please stop combing her hair and/or curling her eyelashes in class. I can’t tell why I do this; in general she doesn’t pay attention in class but chats with her neighbor (also Latina) so I tell myself it’s to help her focus on the instruction, but I have a concern that I might just be continuing my white cultural standards for classroom norms. Why should I care if she combs her hair in class?? Two. I constantly ask Camila and Alexa to please pay attention while I’m instructing the class in math (not always related to combing hair/curling eyelashes). I suspect that part of this is asking them to conform to the dominant culture.

This reflection process has brought forward how Teacher 2 requires her students to act White within her classroom. She does not account for the collective learning that could be happening with her Latina students (Hammond, 2015). The ability to see the collective approach to education – that being students supporting each other in the learning process by talking to each other – would allow Teacher 2 to understand the behaviors in the classroom instead of trying to change them. Instead, she approaches education from an individualist mindset where students are supposed to work alone. Because she stopped calling out one of the students Teacher 2 has created better relationships with her Latina students and may find her way to understanding how collective education works within her classroom (Hammond, 2015).

### ***Discoveries about Oneself***

#### **Teacher 1’s journey through the *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience*.**

The intervention reportedly supported Teacher 1’s growth as a teacher on the journey toward equitable teaching strategies. He became aware of unexamined

assumptions about his students and leaned into leaning about how to decenter Whiteness within his classroom.

Yes, absolutely, totally a good thing. I wish the other two teachers [with whom he works] would have done it too so that we can offer talk about the stuff. Maybe they would have kept me more on track. We're all a kind of holding each other accountable. I know that I felt that a little bit of that accountability, just by the fact that [the other teacher] was also doing this. And, it was nice to talk to her about what she was thinking and, and she said did you read that one article yet and you know I think you're going to really like reading *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. It was just nice to have somebody to talk about it...and accountability to keep going."

Q: On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with this intervention?

A: "I give this intervention a 10 out of 10. I think it is very effective and has been eye-opening for me. I give my own participation in it a lower grade. I know I could have done better in terms of keeping up with the reading and completing the reflections in a timely manner. This has really caused me to rethink how much I actually prioritize this work versus how much I think I prioritize it. I could always do better and I want to do better.

Q: Would you recommend this type of intervention to other teachers? If yes, why? If no, why not?

A: I would recommend this intervention to other teachers. I believe that this tool does a great job of getting a teacher to consider aspects of their teaching practice which they may never consider. However, I think that doing this work is going to take time, and a commitment, so the intention that comes with committing to the time required is necessary to actually be affected by (and begin to implement changes which may occur in thinking and practice) this work.

I thought the pace was fine, I got bogged down and I don't know, just stuff coming up, beginning of the year was way more going on than I expected it was going to be.

Teacher 1 also acknowledged his White male privilege (McIntosh, 1997). This is an opportunity for him to go deeper into understanding how he brings his Whiteness into the classroom each day and his (McLaren, 1997b).

...this process has caused me to examine my own privilege and behavior simply when it comes to completing this work in a timely manner.... However, I began to realize that in asking for extra time or assuming that we could reschedule our

closing discussion (due to things that came up), that I de-prioritized the Work. I realized that my expectation that you would ‘be patient with me’ or ‘let me reschedule’ was steeped in my White-male privilege of just expecting others to work around MY needs. I don’t like this realization, but I think it probably informs the fact that I didn’t keep up or that I was comfortable ‘asking for an extension’ or a reschedule. This has been a big learner for me.”

### **Teacher 2’s journey through the *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience*.**

Teacher 2’ journey through this process helped her identify assumptions about her BIMPOC in who they were as individuals and what their behaviors meant in the classroom. She was able to question her need for control within her classroom based on her students’ actions. And she began to build authentic relationships with her Latina students. By identifying her White normed behavioral and language expectations she was able to create a classroom that supported belonging in the classroom ultimately a more successful learning environment (Hammond, 2015, Alim & Paris, 2012).

“This journey has been great for me in providing things for me to think about in my everyday teaching life to help students feel a stronger sense of belonging, and valorization in simply who they are and what they have that is unique. I have loved the case studies/stories highlighted in the reading especially. The reflection questions were at times a struggle, both because I wanted to respond with care but didn’t give myself enough time to, and because I often felt ill equipped to use certain language correctly, or fully understand how to respond to questions.

Q: In your own words, how have you been changed, if at all? What new insights do you have, if any?

A: It put things through a culturally sustaining pedagogy lens now. I am starting to ask myself, “Does this celebrate their culture?” “Does this help them feel like they have something to contribute?” And I have a deeper understanding of how deeply White-centered our school can be, and a stronger voice in my head questioning whether what I’m teaching or doing centers whiteness. And a better understanding of why that’s so harmful.”

The intervention played to her strengths and also gave her the experience she needed in order to do the work of decolonizing her thinking (McKown & Weinstein,

2008). “I’ve contemplated many of your questions I realize they’re just like making me excited, I, I just love the format of reading. I love I could totally continue with, with just someone curating useful readings and continuing to feed them to me.” She also reported the reading and journaling experience was enlightening on several levels including developing a “stronger sense of belonging, and valorization in simply who they are and what they have that is unique.” She increased her ability to see her Latino students as assets through the readings, especially the reading on radiolinguistics that demonstrated the bilingual student’s knowledge in both English and Spanish (Rosa & Flores, 2012). Through that reading, Teacher 2 began to question ““Why do we think language needs to be a certain way?” Why can’t we let it just be what it is? And celebrate students for how amazingly adaptive they are and creative.”

Learning in partnership with another teacher was a key ingredient to her growth. She needed support to understand specific terms and relied on her fellow teacher to explain concepts about culture

[The intervention] was harder, it took more time than just the intake of information. So, it was great though, and it was especially fun to have someone to collaborate a little bit with [the other teacher].

Overall, Teacher 2 reported the intervention was supportive of moving her from a deficit to an additive perspective of her students because of the case studies that helped her “pay attention to ways that I’ve learned to teach and to exist and to center whiteness.” The journaling aspect of the intervention forced her to put into words the concepts she was learning throughout the week. This solidified her learning and made it more concrete through the process of reading, reflecting, and then writing her observations. She

commented, “the journaling was also really great, it's important to force me to like put words to what I'm thinking and doing and why I'm doing it.”

I have, especially appreciated the weekly reading. I think that I've been able to chat with the other teacher throughout the process. I am the kind of person who works really well. I mentioned the other teacher because we have different perspectives about this one. For me the most useful part was just the reading and having that in my brain throughout the whole week.

Q: Would you recommend this type of intervention to other teachers?

A: YES. Absolutely yes. The weekly readings in particular were all such a powerful way to end my weekend. I would have these examples of strong teachers, of positive student experiences, and of what not to do that equipped me with the energy and ability to be a better leader for my students.

### **Teacher 3's journey through the *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience***

While Teacher 3 had a rocky start to the intervention through her inability to journal, she was able to complete the readings and make several connections in her teaching to student valorization. Teacher 3 had mixed feelings about the intervention. “It was really hard...like super paralyzing. But on the flip side. Like, I feel stronger, which I think is the goal anyway, is to come out, feeling better...”

She reported that her confidence grew throughout the process through the readings and the reflection process. Although she did not journal her answers, during the final interview, she reported that she reflected on her answers. Her increased confidence showed up in her curriculum planning by not centering Whiteness and in her ability to hold conversations about how Native Americans were slaughtered. Her ability to create these equity movements demonstrates her ability to push back against White supremacy culture within her classroom (Allen, 1999).

## **Effectiveness of the Intervention and Answering Research Q2**

RQ 2: What are the benefits and drawbacks to using this self-reflective instrument?

Slowing participants down to reflect on their beliefs, language, and actions helped create equity pivots—changed behaviors to support BIMPOC students—in the classroom of each of the teachers (Kahneman, 2011). The *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience* is an awareness building tool that has some evidence of success demonstrated by these participants. Linking specifically curated readings to journaling questions to evidence collection within the classroom enabled participants to move from a superficial understanding of how race works in their classrooms to a more nuanced perspective. The process to decolonize teacher thinking requires deep reflection, quiet contemplation, and an awareness of the biases they hold about their students. To that end, this intervention was effective.

Throughout the process, participants developed deeper compassion for BIMPOC students, enhanced their understanding and relationships with their BIMPOC students and examined if culturally sustaining materials were available in their rooms. Each of these actions, facilitated by the journaling process enabled teachers to make equity pivots within their teaching.

Teacher 1 described his largest equity pivots within his teaching by identifying the assumptions he still holds about his students even though he has been on his equity journey for years. He felt “shell shocked” in this realization, which speaks to the success of the intervention and to the difficulty of decolonizing teacher thinking. This realization

contained Teacher 1's ability to create student experiences more equitable within his classroom because of his change in assumptions (Wald, 2014).

He also made the distinction between decentering Whiteness in his classroom versus centering non-dominant culture, especially for his students in his class. There is a difference because in decentering Whiteness, behavioral norms and beliefs about students and curriculum development examine what is "standard" and "normal" to disrupt the status quo (Okun, 2021).

"...when I'm thinking about centering, I don't think I've been doing that. So, I'm trying to do that more now and figure out how to do that because I feel so much of the information and content that I need to deliver the way I understand it already is from the white perspective. That's what I got as the messages.

Teacher 2's behavior changes were identified as becoming more intentional in her teaching and relationship building. She explained,

I have in the past eight weeks gotten gradually more intentional about certain things that I do. I, for example, I'm hanging flags in my classroom for students that represent their hometown cultures, a lot of kids feel very connected to Mexico, Cuba, and El Salvador. It's amazing. It makes them feel so good to see, 'Oh you recognize me.' I forget 13-year-olds how good it feels when [they] haven't been recognized before.

It's expanded my understanding of the power that I have as a teacher. I think mostly, it's built my empathy for students, and expanded my understanding of what each student needs to feel valorized. I have new eyes for my Latine students who come to school and are asked to integrate into a different culture. I've been able to offer more options to students for different assignments, with the understanding that one size does not fit all. I've been more... gentle as a teacher, stepping aside from language of being in charge, to language of being with and working aside the kids. For example, in the syllabus I just wrote for our next cycle of classes, under 'expectations' I took out the words "you need to" and included the words "let's consider..." instead.

The teacher's next move could come through understating her Latino/a/e parents. (Yosso, 2002). By authentically engaging her Latino parents within her classroom, she would not

be tokenizing them, but rather building a collaborative learning environment that centers other cultures than just Whiteness.

I had never thought to do that before. I think it's a wonderful idea that could lead to some useful info, but I have trepidation about how to frame it to parents. That work will take a lot of preparation for me.

Q: How can you use parent knowledge and experiences to inform your Plan of Work and Study to ensure a multicultural experience for your students?

A: Especially in respect to anything that falls under Practical Life Skills, I see parent involvement and input as really valuable. Interestingly, Preparation for Adult Life will look differently in cultures that aren't the dominant white we often default to, which I hadn't considered before (I'm realizing that 'practical life skills' omits many actually functionally practical life skills). Asking parents about things like multi-generational homes and the skills required to participate in those (food, housekeeping, geriatric care and beyond). Asking parents about the importance and function of learning languages in a classroom setting in addition to their home settings might yield some interest in volunteering to facilitate language classes or forming some community support around hiring language teachers. Bringing in parent knowledge and experiences through conversation, through written surveys, through student/parent interviews etc. would widen our understanding of what is practical, and what's needed at home and what's needed in different cultures when kids move into adulthood."

A broad, new classroom experience could be created in this classroom just through the observations Teacher 2 has brought to the surface through this conversation. In the process, she could decenter Whiteness and build a culturally sustaining pedagogy within her teaching practice (Paris, 2012). When parent knowledge is engaged on their terms in service to their students, student academic performance improves (Yosso, 2002).

Because Teacher 3 did not complete the written journaling exercises, I have limited ability to comment on her potential behavior changes.

To answer research question 2 (What are the benefits and drawbacks to using this self-reflective instrument?), I used the Concerns Based Adoption Model as my guide to analyze the intervention focusing on participants' reported experiences moving through

the intervention. The Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) tenets of how change occurs within teaching pedagogy guided why I chose a weekly intervention instead of a bi-weekly intervention (2006, p. 5-6.)

1. Change is a process, not an event
2. Change is accomplished by individuals (not institutions)
3. Change is a highly personal experience
4. Change involves developmental growth
5. Change is best understood in operational terms
6. The focus of facilitation should be on individuals, innovations, and the context

Each participant reported they wanted more time to do the intervention.

Suggestions included lengthening the time between receiving the readings and reflections to two weeks instead of one week. I deeply considered making this a longer intervention at one point but chose to support their learning in a weekly cadence to build a habit of reading, reflecting, doing, and then journaling within their work context.

The beginning of the school year was reportedly a deterrent to allow for deep reflections. Each participant reported that starting later in the school year would have allowed for more reflection time and possibly deeper learning. I would argue that it was the perfect time because relationships are being built with students that would have a lasting effect throughout the school year. If teachers are unaware of their deficit thinking, BIMPOC student relationships could languish, and students could continue to receive harm through a lack of validation.

Self-paced learning relies on a learner's commitment to the process, something each of the participants brought to this process. The readings, reflection questions, and

activities of the *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience* rely upon an individual's ability to examine hard truths. Each reading and activity were chosen to address the various layers of racism within our culture which required an ability to sit with disturbing knowledge. The fact that the intervention caused bad dreams indicates some level of success because the level of discomfort was experienced in an unconscious manner where implicit bias also resides. Without some sort of pre/post psychological test, I cannot assess to what degree the intervention was a success. What I do know, is that each teacher reported having been changed by their experience with the intervention.

Teacher 2 reported how the intervention supported her learning.

The weekly readings in particular were all such a powerful way to end my weekend. I would have these examples of strong teachers, of positive student experiences, and of what not to do that equipped me with the energy and ability to be a better leader for my students.

Each participant reported that it was difficult to make the connection between beliefs, language, and action in the classroom. The shield of Whiteness can be extremely difficult to remove in oneself without reflection and interaction with others (Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei, & Jacoby-Senghor, 2016; Bengtson, 1995). When asked if Teacher 1 could identify if his language about his BIMPOC students changed, he reported "Do you mean about like how I discussed them or talk about those kids...I don't know how that has shifted. It's hard to say."

Using CBAM's Stages of Concerns as an analysis tool for teacher learning based on the expressions of concern teachers experience when learning new pedagogical strategies, the participants moved from awareness about cultural, systemic, intuitional, and personal racism, to acquiring new information about the different levels, and beginning to internalize the information in a personal way that was reflected in their

pedagogy (Hord, Rutherford, Huling & Hall, 2006). Each of the participants moved into the management stage of putting into practice things they have learned and are examining the consequences of their actions on their BIMPOC students. The next two steps in the Stages of Concern are collaboration with others to teach others what has been learned, and then refocusing, which is the adaptation of the newly acquired strategies to an even more effective pedagogy (Hord, Rutherford, Huling & Hall, 2006). These last two steps demonstrate the internalization of the learning. I did not see evidence of these steps.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

As a general assessment, the intervention was effective for building White teachers' awareness of the how Whiteness is centered in their classrooms. The intervention gave participants time to reflect which illuminated bias shortcomings as well as equity strengths, and they learned to begin to decenter Whiteness within their classrooms. Through their internal reflection, contemplation of the readings, and conversations with students, other teachers and myself, participants built their knowledge and created strategies to change or reinforce their behaviors.

#### **Attitudes and behaviors toward BIMPOC Students**

This study provides mixed evidence of the intervention's impact on changing teachers' attitudes and behaviors toward BIMPOC students. The study provides evidence that two of the three participating teachers changed their perceptions of their Latino/a/e students. One of them reported creating better relationships with her Latina students, while another reported discovering that he held assumptions about his Latino/a/e students which shocked him. The third teacher's engagement in the intervention was limited, and I found no evidence of a change in her attitude and behavior toward BIMPOC students.

These findings suggest that future iterations of the intervention should be created as a professional learning community intervention or at least as an intervention that requests participants to work in pairs. I take the third teacher's minimal movement as an indicator that in order to continue to decolonize one's thinking, it might be helpful to be working with others to give and receive feedback. The work of Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 together provided accountability, stability, and a way to process deeper reflections with a

trusted colleague, all important ingredients when decentering Whiteness in the classroom (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007).

The intervention also provided evidence to suggest that the work might be better received if it were paced throughout the entire school year and not concentrated in one 2-month period. This would enable teachers to continue their learning in a structured manner, building on each module. It takes a lifetime to move oneself past Whiteness as a fixed social category in order to create classrooms that are welcoming to all (McLaren, 1997a).

### **Curriculum Development**

The intervention had mixed results on curriculum development. One teacher, Teacher 3, reportedly brought decentering Whiteness curriculum development skills into the intervention. This could be a limitation of the intervention. If a teacher is already on their equity journey for some time, the intervention may have limited effectiveness in curriculum building, but may have an effect on the other three areas.

Teachers 1 and 2 both had moments of clarity for their future curriculum development process. Both indicated that they may reach out to their BIMPOC parents for curriculum support, thus empowering themselves as learners and empowering their students' parents as collaborators. This is a successful strategy to center BIMPOC cultures in the classroom (Yosso, 2002).

While Teacher 1 was worried about tokenizing his students in creating curriculum that centers their cultures, he will need to push past that fear to be willing to be humble to make mistakes. The fear of making mistakes can keep a practitioner limited throughout their entire career. Pushing through the fear is a critical next step for him (Singh, 2019).

Teacher 2 could deepen her practice of questioning the agenda behind the resources she uses in the classroom. This strategy attunes teachers to the colonizing, capitalistic, paternalist agendas of the resources used as teaching materials (Okun, 2021). Through this reflective practice and slowed thinking, she was able to bring forth her strategy and may be able to go deeper in the future to not just acknowledge Whiteness, but to actually decenter it in the resources she uses.

In the next iteration of the intervention, I would include curated content that addresses specifically how to ask the questions Teacher 2 is addressing when she chooses her resources. Going deeper by giving examples and curated readings would support continued growth in this area.

### **Curation of the Environment**

Positive results were reported in this area of the intervention. Two teachers found walking their rooms uncomfortable and reportedly began awakening to their privilege. This is an entry point into understanding how Whiteness is centered within the classroom. If flags, artifacts, reading materials, maps, and musical instruments from the cultures of students in the room are not present, then it is difficult for the RAS to relax into a learning posture versus remaining in an alert posture (Hammond, 2015). One teacher, Teacher 3, did not complete the assignment, perhaps because it was so uncomfortable that she was unwilling to engage in the activity. I could not determine the reason why because she would not have a conversation about that aspect of the intervention.

Through this aspect of the intervention, Teacher 2 hung flags from her students' nations of origin and reported having better relationships with those students. Teacher 1 reported reaching out, after the intervention concluded, to his Latina students to help him

decorate the room. Both teachers demonstrated a willingness to move past what is “normal” in the classroom to creating something specific for the BIMPOC students.

In the next iteration of the intervention, I would include asking teachers for before and after intervention photos of their classrooms so they could document their growth, along with their students. This was one of the strongest areas of the intervention. I foresee little change in this area.

### **Development of the Social Environment**

The *Moses Journaling for Equity* experience is built on the premise that belonging is a core ingredient in a successful classroom environment (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). Fostering a sense of belonging for all students through the decentering of Whiteness will liberate White students as well as Black and Brown students (Okun, 2021). This is the goal the intervention supports and begins to bring to teachers’ attention.

Teachers 1 and 2 both realized how White normed behaviors are expected and not questioned in their classrooms. They had not thought about how acting *normal* was actually acting *White*. As a result, Teacher 2 began examining her behavior expectations, loosened up her policing and was then able to build better relationships with her Latina students. I would expect better academic outcomes for her Latina students in the future if she maintains these changes.

To reinforce this important aspect of the intervention, I would curate additional materials that support empathy in teachers and more case studies that support learning in nonconventional ways, such as using both English and Spanish in an oral report (Rosa & Flores, 2017).

## Credibility

Credibility speaks to the truth of the findings stated in this paper (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). From personal experience, I have discovered it is extremely difficult to step outside of myself to address racist beliefs, language, and behaviors because of all the reasons outlined earlier. The key to making change happen is to be in relationship with others who can provide critical feedback in a way that can be received and acted upon. The pair of teachers who participated in this intervention together reported that the conversations they had, the support they gave each other, and the accountability they each provided each other supported them on their learning journey throughout this process.

My relationship with each teacher played a role in this research. I was a motivation for each of the teachers to participate in the intervention. Teacher 1, who knew me from international presentations, then recruited Teacher 2 to participate. My long relationship with Teacher 3 inhibited her from completing the journaling. She explained:

It was paralyzing like I'd sit and look at those questions and I'm like, I like I couldn't type. There were times where I was just like, I can't answer this right now even though I've answered it here (motioning to her mind). I can't actually put it on the paper, electronic paper because it made it even more real. I got really stuck grappling with realizations and like my own judgment of myself that I couldn't put my thoughts on paper for you to read.

This is the teacher who also had nightmares. These revelations came at the end of the intervention during our last conversation. I was initially struck by the harm that I felt that the intervention may have caused. I felt guilty (centering White comfort) for causing

her “harm” (discomfort resulting in nightmares). It took a month of reflection, reading and conversations for me to unpack my White Supremacy Culture biases, acknowledge them and where they came from (family, media, culture, etc.), and then understand how to use an equity lens to excavate them and ultimately learn to lean into making White people uncomfortable so I can live in integrity doing equity work as my career.

Teacher 3’s experience of nightmares and the inability to complete the journaling prompts are examples of White fragility (Anderson, 2016; DiAngelo, 2018) and provide evidence of the potential impact of the intervention. According to DiAngelo “White fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 54). Guilt, anger, and avoidance are outcomes of White fragility. Teacher 3’s experience of nightmares and choice to avoid writing the journaling prompts are examples of guilt and avoidance from a White fragility definition.

Additionally, Teacher 3 named her ability to forget how and why specifically she hurt BIMPOC students in the past and named it as a reason why the intervention was difficult for her to complete. She knew she had done harmful things, but she could not remember the specific incidents and thus lost the chance to learn the lesson and to acknowledge her own racism. Equity trainer Lee Mun Wah (2013) writes about White numbness, which includes the ability to ignore BIMPOC pain, centered in White privilege. The ability to forget is a way to deflect one’s responsibilities for causing racialized harm. This may be also an example of unconscious bias playing out. Teacher 3 has worked diligently for three years to decolonize her curriculum but had difficulty decolonizing herself.

Have you ever done something to a student that was...counter to what you should be doing? And I was like, yes. I can't actually remember what it was because I interact so many times, but I also have the privilege of forgetting. So,...I know that I've made students really angry or...broken that trust, just a little, but I can't think of an example off the top of my head. But I know I've done it. And that was really frustrating because it's like, you should remember this...you should be able to just pull it up and be like I'll never do that again; now have I done it again? Maybe not. Maybe...it's just so internalized like don't do that again. But I couldn't, I couldn't come up with the concrete...here's an example for you.

Q: How would you characterize what that is?

A: It's just not a remembering. Yeah, not necessarily not remembering. Like, I remember the feeling of those interactions, but I don't necessarily remember, the reason for them. And so, I don't know if it stems from lack of understanding what I actually did or said, and how...I just saw the impact of it. Or if it was just...you interact a million times a day and that one interaction although significant to that kid was insignificant enough for me to forget it.

One important aspect of Lincoln and Guba's requirements that this study met is prolonged engagement (1985). For persistent participants, the intervention lasted 8 to 13 weeks allowing for interruptions, delays, and extended learning. The flexibility of the intervention allowed for varied experiences that produced positive outcomes for each.

### **Dependability**

Throughout the process I purposefully did not engage with the teachers during the intervention. I resisted the urge to ask them to go deeper within their reflections and to reach out to them to see how they were doing. I wanted this intervention to be replicable, so I followed my process with fidelity. I believe similar results can be attained without a personal relationship with the researcher and that deeper learning would come from participating in a professional learning community with several teachers going through the process at the same time.

To bring an additional perspective into the process of reporting these findings, I enlisted equity expert John Lenssen to review the manuscript. He did not have access to

the raw data. In the process, I was able to refine the findings and check my interpretations. Inclusion of a second reader with deep content knowledge adds to the trustworthiness of the findings and the way they are represented

### **Transferability**

Thick descriptions and verbatim reporting allow for transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I purposefully asked participants to provide stories that allowed for this type of data. The reflective journaling exercises along with the transcribed Zoom calls provided extensive data to report. I sent each participant weekly emails with their journaling questions and curated content. For future implementations, I intend to incorporate the use of a website so participants can access all materials in a central location. Moving to a web-based module-focused approach might increase the transferability of the intervention itself. Increasing the number of participants – and particularly the number of participants who complete the entire intervention – will provide additional data important to address the transferability of findings to different settings and participants. Each participant in the current study recommended that the intervention should be used in lower and upper grades, not just in middle school. Future research should examine the impact of the intervention at these different grade levels.

### **Confirmability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest using an audit trail and reflexivity as two means to establishing confirmability. The audit trail is extensively outlined earlier in the paper. I described all processes I used for both the intervention and the study, and all raw data are secured. Transcripts of the interviews were double-checked for accuracy, and all journal entries were retained in their entirety. Reflexivity is an important aspect of qualitative

research. As noted earlier, I took great care to note my biases and perspectives both before the study commenced and at numerous times during data collection and analysis.

### **Growth Opportunities**

Both the participants and I had multiple opportunities for growth on our equity journeys. Teacher 1 comes to mind based on his characterization of student art on his walls. He said, “I always put up art students make for me and I ask for their input. They are still trying to grasp the idea that I want this classroom to feel like THEIR classroom.” His ability to put the onus on his students for not creating their classroom could be indicative of a deficit mindset that holds his racism and “hegemonic systems” in place and that “fail[s] to place accountability with oppressive structures, policies, and practice within educational settings” (Davis & Museus, 2019, p. 1). The accountability for the lack of cultural icons in his room should be placed on him, not on his students.

When I asked him about his current ability to discuss present day racism, he said it is “touchy.” The next step in his evolution could be examining the difficulty of having those current day conversations about race and equity. From my own equity journey, I understand how touchy it is to raise questions about racism, yet if we are to break free from the social construction of race, we as educators must continue to lean into the discomfort of the entire topic all the time. I fully acknowledge that there were opportunities for me to go deeper into interrogating participants about their depth of reflections, assumptions about their students, and their racism. My discomfort with having difficult conversations must move toward me becoming a warm demander when faced with opportunities to go deeper into courageous conversations (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Singleton, 2014).

Teacher 2 leaned into the experience. Reading and reflecting were playing to her strengths. The journaling required her to put into words her learnings, so while it was difficult, it helped to connect her beliefs, intentions, and actions. Her increased awareness of the types of language she uses could be a gateway into actions within the classroom. While she intends to center the tenderness of her students, Hammond recommends using language in service to being a warm demander; by supporting students through a mix of “care and push” (2015, p. 98.)

“I’m also just more aware of how soft kids can be and how my language might impact them negatively when I don’t mean that.” This statement demonstrates a deepening compassion for her students. And, at the same time she understands that “I’m trying to promote through language and idea that what you have is good enough that we celebrate... attempting things, new things.” The second statement moves her from White privilege toward valorizing students for who they are.

Teacher 3 reported feeling more confident in speaking up about racism in her classroom. This is a significant benefit of the intervention. She was unable to identify if there were shifts from deficit to additive perspectives about her BIMPOC students because she only has one student of color this year. I believe that if the intervention was delivered with multimedia resources, this teacher could have received a better experience and thus a potentially deeper reflection opportunity for growth.

### **Threats to Validity**

Several threats to validity are present in this study. Some I was able to mitigate; others I was not. One threat is related to the flexibility of the middle school Montessori program. Maria Montessori provided a skeleton outline of the Third Plane, but no in-

depth lessons. Therefore, each middle school program will be different, limiting the generalizability of my findings. Rather than attempt to generalize to middle school Montessori programs in general, my analysis focused on the impact of the intervention on individual teachers.

### ***Incomplete Participation***

Although all three participants initially expressed excitement about participating in this study and completing the intervention, only Teacher 2 actually completed all parts of the intervention. Teacher 1 reported that he did not complete all the assigned readings, nor did he complete all of the journaling assignments within the timeframe in which they were assigned. When I attempted to schedule our debrief interview, he wrote, “I want to be open and honest and share with you that I don’t believe I am ready for our 1-hour debrief...I’m still a couple of weeks behind on the reading and journaling assignments.” Although he did eventually agree to the interview, he still had not completed all the reading assignments by the time we met for the interview. Thus, his data reflect only a partial dosage of the intervention. Teacher 3 completed even fewer of the assignments. She only completed 3 of the 8 journal entries. If I had not asked Teacher 3 to conduct the Zoom debrief, I do not believe she would have concluded the intervention to the degree that she did. In addition, as mentioned previously, Teacher 1 and 2 discussed the journal prompts and activities during the intervention. Their discussions were not part of the original planned intervention and thus should be considered an alteration to the intervention as it was intended to be experienced.

### *Instrumentation*

The online Google documents embedded within the intervention served as the primary source of data. These documents have a theoretical basis but have not previously been validated. Therefore, this is new ground. The instrument was administered using Google Docs and designed to provide weekly reading, writing, and thinking opportunities to uncover implicit and explicit bias, to slow down teacher thinking, and to provide a reflective opportunity to examine behaviors within the teacher-student relationship. I intended to have teachers engage in the intervention approximately two hours per week: up to 30 minutes of reading, up to 45 minutes of collecting evidence, and up to 45 minutes of reflection. Each participant said the readings took longer than expected.

Unfortunately, by using Google Docs and not an instrument like SurveyMonkey, I was unable to measure the length of time each participant spent with each set of journaling questions. The tradeoff I made was the ability for the participant to look back over time and to have access to their learning, whereas a survey instrument would not have allowed that ability. I could have built in a question explicitly asking how much time they took on the reading and reflection questions, but this is not something I had thought about doing in advance.

In designing the instrument, I also assumed it would be used by White teachers (based on demographics of the schools where the study was set). The questions were written from that perspective. Although the assumption that the intervention would be experienced by White teachers proved accurate in this pilot study, it is important to note that the intervention may need some modifications were it to be used with teachers from the BIMPOC community. No teachers of color participated in the study. In addition,

while implicit bias often parallels dominant culture themes (i.e., Whiteness), it is important to understand that self-reflection has limits, especially when the learning module is self-administered. The synergy between the readings and the self-reflection questions is where teachers should notice implicit and explicit bias within their classrooms. The intention was to have teachers focus on slow thinking as the act of self-reflection, with support from the readings, to help them uncover both implicit and explicit bias. Aronson's work on active self-reflection to unlearn racism and to build a new lens of seeing the world not through White privilege, supports this intention (2017).

### ***Researcher Bias***

How I drafted the teacher questions, selected the readings, and interpreted the data were informed by my personal experience, my biases, and my ability to think beyond myself. To help address this concern, I consulted with three people with deep experience in the Montessori philosophy (Susan Andree), cultural competency (John Lenssen), and research and teacher professional development (Julie Alonzo). With their advice, I believe I have stepped outside of myself to think like a middle school Montessori teacher without ever having been one. Although I taught in progressive private schools and have been a first grade and high school teacher, I am not a trained middle school Montessori teacher. I relied on my consulting experience with a public charter Montessori school, my teaching experience, and the expertise of Susan Andree to help me craft questions appropriate for middle school Montessori teachers. However, researcher bias remains a potential threat to the validity of this study.

My goal was to examine the data through the lens of teacher beliefs, language, and actions within the theoretical framework of valorization using culturally sustaining

pedagogy as the learning catalyst. I looked for evidence of increased self-knowledge, increased engagement with BIMPOC students, and increased centering of student cultures in the classroom. I acknowledge that it was possible not to find much change in teachers because of the short duration of the intervention and the limits of self-administering an intervention.

The use of a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework helped me to situate this study within the academy, our culture, and myself. I clearly state that the United States is a racial project, created by and for White superiority, and intent on reproducing the same structural outcomes as it has in the past (Thomas, 2009). Education is a racialized project that holds White supremacy in place (Ladson-Billings, 2005). To interrupt the status quo and to provide culturally sustaining learning opportunities for BIMPOC students, I must acknowledge the racial bias within the system and within myself as a researcher and as an educator. This is the epistemological premise upon which I base this research.

Although I thought developing a relationship with each teacher would be an advantage for each to go deeper, I discovered that it was a major barrier for Teacher 3 and a motivation for Teachers 1 and 2 to complete the intervention. I did not anticipate that I would be a motivating factor in their work. The results of this intervention, while encouraging for building self-awareness within teachers, does then demand that teachers be on their equity journey and want to do the hard work for themselves.

I limited my ability to engage teachers in deeper reflection because the intervention was limited to just reading and writing. If I had included poems, videos, podcasts, and other multimedia resources, Teacher 3 might have been able to participate more fully, to work around her dyslexia. This realization occurred to me after the

journaling had been concluded by the teachers but before our closing interview. My worship of the written word, one of the White Supremacy Culture characteristics, limited all of us in our exploration of our racism and limiting beliefs. This is also a crucial place where student counterstories, oral traditions, and collective reflections could have provided even deeper opportunities for decolonizing teacher perceptions of their students.

### ***Self-reporting***

The process of participating in a self-evaluation can be just as much if not more educational than the findings that can be uncovered (Patton, 2012). I had no control over the accuracy of the information the participating teachers provided each week. I relied solely on the participation of teachers, their willingness to do the readings, collect evidence, and deeply reflect on their experience. To mitigate this potential flaw, each week, I asked if teachers had questions about that week's work. In addition, I conducted the final interviews with participating teachers to further explore themes that emerged over the course of the self-paced intervention.

### ***Racial Fear***

Whole books have been written about White rage and White fragility (Anderson, 2016; DiAngelo, 2018). This work taps into deeply held racial constructs that may not be conscious. One participant indicated that she stopped responding to the journal questions because of bad dreams and the fear of appearing racist in her writing. This is an example of how powerful social constructions of race can terrorize us as we move through decolonizing our thinking. Participants engaged with and actively struggled with building their personal awareness about cultural, systemic, institutional, and personal racism. They welcomed new information and began internalizing the information in new ways as

evidenced by their revised reflections of how they see their students and how they decenter Whiteness in their classrooms. The participants embraced their equity journey and demonstrated vulnerability to an extent. I supported their work by making clear that their thoughts, observations, and personal findings would not be attributed to them personally, and their anonymity would be preserved.

### *History*

This intervention was originally scheduled for an eight-week time period in the fall of 2021, which makes it subject to an unfathomable number of variables, many of which are related to the COVID-19 pandemic. To be accommodating to the inordinate amount of pressure teachers were feeling at this time, I made this intervention a self-paced process instead of insisting on deadlines. Other equity interventions, the closure or non-opening of schools due to COVID-19, and any number of personal issues interfered with the timely or successful completion of this intervention. When participants requested additional time, I extended the intervention to the beginning of December 2021.

### *Threats to External Validity*

This study was not designed to be generalizable beyond public charter Montessori middle schools. There is substantial difference between public and private Montessori programs, and every Montessori middle school program is different depending on its access to farms, gardens, and space. The study is not meant to be generalizable to other types of schools, such as public schools or Waldorf Schools, without substantial revisions. The sample size was small, three teachers, and is not representative of all public charter Montessori schools within the state, let alone within the country. Yet, through this process, I learned that a self-reflection process can facilitate opportunities for

teachers to create teaching pivots that center their BIMPOC students. The intervention would be a substantial benefit to teacher preparation programs and current teachers in the field (Smith, 2018). This was a pilot study and should be treated as such.

### **My Journey through the *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience***

From the time I conceived of this project in the Spring of 2019 to Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in December 2020 to data collection in the fall of 2021, Covid-19 happened. I went from being an equity consultant for local schools and districts in person, to consulting for national companies, non-profits and state and local governments via Zoom.

During this tumultuous time, in the summer of 2021, my personal equity journey included being called out for my own anti-blackness behavior in a professional setting. I had to reflect on the validity of the accusation, and I had to understand how I center White comfort in my work as an equity practitioner. This was devastating difficult work.

I sought out my therapist who is bi-racial, I met with two Black women therapists to help guide me through my work, and I reflected on my behavior in meetings and trainings with other equity trainers. I read Don Miguel Ruiz's *The Four Agreements* (1997), Desmond Tutu's *The Book of Forgiving* (2014) and Tara Brach's *Radical Acceptance: Embracing your life with the heart of a Buddha* (2003). I also dove deeper into Elena Aguilar's *Coaching for Equity: Conversations that Change Practice* (2020), Resmaa Menakem's *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies* (2017), and Anneliese A. Singh's *The Racial Healing Handbook: Practical Activities to Help You Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism and Engage in Collective Healing* (2019). I definitively know how difficult it is

to decolonize my thinking and to override my conscious and unconscious biases, and I have the upmost respect for people who chose to go down this path. It is not easy.

To decolonize my thinking, to become an anti-racist person, my process included talking, journaling, reflecting, learning, reading, watching videos, listening to podcasts and staring off into space for good amounts of time. The shame spiral that Brené Brown talks about is real (2018). I had to question my identity, my beliefs about myself, my abilities, my experiences, and whether I was worthy of being an equity consultant and researcher. I had to examine my privileges that include being raised by White parents on college campuses across the U.S. My non-biological father and stepfather were both White professors. I was an elite gymnast and springboard diver and traveled to regional and national meets. I have multiple degrees and a middle-class upbringing, and yet, with all this privilege I constantly battle against being treated as less-than and feeling like an imposter because of my race and gender.

Through this process I discovered that to decolonize my thinking, I had to:

1. radically accept my socialization as a racist being within a White supremacy culture,
2. process the trauma I have experienced for being a Black woman with some privilege,
3. identify where my ego is involved in holding onto racist beliefs about myself and others,
4. journal through the pain and discomfort of interrogating my unexamined assumptions, racism and gendering of others,

5. examine where my ego is involved in holding on to desired outcomes and ways of being that are harmful and extractive,
6. listen to my intuition through meditation and ceremony,
7. identify and excavate the negative, limiting agreements that I have about myself,
8. forgive myself, forgive perpetrators for their racist, misogynistic behaviors and ask forgiveness from those I have hurt,
9. determine who I am as a person without Whiteness,
10. unearth my definition of humanity by sitting in silence and contemplation,
11. connect my knowledge to my heart and soul by listening to what resonates,
12. revise and renew myself by using design thinking and Liberating Structures to define for myself what liberation, freedom, abundance thinking, reciprocity, community and collaboration mean to me so I can link my spiritual heart and my emotional heart with my mind.

This gift of feedback was given to me by a bi-racial Black gender queer person and an Asian-American woman in the summer of 2021, six months after my IRB approval. I am grateful for their honesty so I could discover this iterative process that allows me to bring a deeper analysis to my research and to my everyday behaviors in the goal of becoming an anti-racist person. It is a lifelong process of interrogation, acceptance, excavation, forgiveness, and reimagination. Thus, my making meaning of the intervention results has changed over the 8 to 13 weeks it took for participants to complete their work.

Through this process, I have discovered a great deal about myself that is pertinent to this study. I do center White comfort—the White person’s right to comfort and to not

feel discomfort—when I conduct my trainings, interviews, and research with White participants (Okun, 2021). I can sense people’s discomfort when discussing racism in both a general and personal sense. I push past the discomfort when speaking generally about racism, its impacts, the realities of it, and how it works. However, I personally get uncomfortable when I must call people in on their own racist behaviors and beliefs. I hate conflict. The way through this tendency of people pleasing is to lean into this self-knowledge and embrace the discomfort, conflict, and pain because they “are at the root of all growth and learning” (Okun, 2021, p. 25). I must experience my own discomfort while my participants experience their discomfort for some of the same and different reasons.

I have discovered that in using a CRT framework informed by the White supremacy culture characteristics, I can suggest concrete examples to help bring to light teachers’ racism while illuminating ways forward that are in service to BIMPOC students. This intervention can support teachers in decolonizing their thinking by helping them discover and examine their implicit biases, and then supporting them in changing their behaviors. The process of self-discovery I went through during this intervention is a blueprint for the type of work required to make real change within one’s life.

To unpack the meaning of my participants’ journal entries, I had to state my own biases through a reflexivity process (Thomas, 2009). This intervention was designed specifically for White teachers to slow their thinking and for them to reflect on their teaching practices, their identity, and their students. My operating assumption was that White Supremacy Culture (WSC) is at work in my life and in theirs all the time (Okun, 2021). Through the *Moses Journaling for Equity Experience*, I discovered I center White

comfort by talking about racism on a systemic level or in a theoretical way but hesitate to bring it down to a personal level by calling in or calling out interpersonal racism. Even in this process of analysis through a CRT lens, I feel deeply uncomfortable analyzing teacher behavior for the very fact that I will be pointing out their shortfalls on their equity journey.

I want to clarify an important point here. I believe White Supremacy Culture is bad, limiting, and oppressive and is the assimilation mechanism of capitalism. I do not believe White people are bad. There is a distinct difference. By separating the two, I was able to bring a more critical lens to this analysis and to my lived experience. I can understand the implicit bias operating within me, while not shaming myself for having those beliefs (more on this later). This understanding allows for an analysis of our behaviors that does not blame, shame, or guilt people for their behaviors. It helps to explain why things are and how to move beyond them to create an anti-racist world (Okun, 2021).

One of my operating assumptions was that teachers were unaware of their implicit bias as White saviors and that this bias is a motivating factor for them to become teachers. I lived this assumption for the first three years of my professional life. I taught at three different private schools with the thought in mind that I would be helping BIMPOC students access education to level the playing field. Instead, upon reflection, I was a tool to assimilate BIMPOC students into WSC. In the middle of my career, I quit my job as a communications director at a public school district for this very reason. It took me 40 years to see how I was supporting WSC even when my stated intentions were to develop culturally sustaining environments at schools and districts. This is implicit

bias in action. My stated intention is overridden by the implicit (unconscious) biases that shaped my beliefs about White people's right to comfort, my disdain for open conflict, and my deep need to please... all strategies that enabled me to advance throughout my career (Okun, 2021).

Another stated assumption was that White teachers, while they may be on their equity journey, do not actually know how to identify their implicit biases, sit with their racism, and then change their behaviors to decenter Whiteness in their classrooms. It is a lifelong journey, and the ability to do this work requires teachers to be in relationship deeply with themselves and with others in order to see how Whiteness shapes their assumptions, beliefs, and expectations of students. To unlearn our racial biases, we must be in relationship with BIMPOC colleagues and friends

I was operating under the assumption that schools are machines to assimilate students into the dominant culture (Montessori, 2008, Tatum, 1997). Black student racial identity is developed in opposition to Whiteness (Tatum, 1997). It is through the Montessori pedagogy of grace and courtesy, social-emotional learning curriculum in public schools, and subjective student discipline assessments that White Supremacy Culture continues to be held in place.

Using CRT to analyze teacher behaviors gave me a framework by which to disrupt implicit bias in teacher beliefs, actions, and behaviors so I could possibly bring about change within the teaching profession. When Teacher 1 was asked if he could identify when he asks BIMPOC students to act White, he said, "Unfortunately, while I'm unaware of a time I've directly asked students who are not part of the dominant culture to act like White students, I'm pretty sure that the everyday experience of these students

feels like being told to act like White students.” This is exactly why I used the CRT framework to inform this analysis and why counterstories are so important for both White teachers and White students to learn and understand.

### **The Next Iteration**

Ending racism within the multiple layers of our culture, systems, institutions, and personal interactions is my purpose for this work. I am in service to Black, Indigenous, Multi-racial, Latino/a/e, Asian, Pacific Islander, and immigrant and refugee students. I want to make their experiences in our schools as rewarding as possible. To that end, in the next iteration of this intervention to onboard a school, I will conduct a pre-post survey of students using the School Climate and School Identification-Student (SCASIM-St) measure (Lee, Reynolds, Subasic, Bromhead, Lin, Marinov & Smithson, 2017). This instrument combines constructs of both belonging and school climate in a 32-item survey and “it provides a ‘one-stop’ efficient, reliable and valid measure that captures the key constructs in the educational domain” (Lee et al., p. 104.) If student belonging and school climate do not change, then I will need to make changes to the intervention. Schools could also use changes in achievement scores, attendance, and school discipline rates as measures of different dimensions of success of the intervention.

The fact that none of the participants completed the intervention in complete compliance with how it was intended to be completed (an individual, reflective journaling experience informed by carefully curated readings and writing prompts) is, itself, useful in terms of providing information to inform future refinements of the intervention. Based on the experience of the three participants in this exploratory study, I plan to revise the intervention in the several ways. I would extend the study an additional

two sections to include resources, activities, and reflections on collaborative learning between teachers and on internalized teacher learning through the evolution of pedagogies (Hord, Rutherford, Huling & Hall, 2006). Curating resources, creating activities and reflections to be used three months and six months after the initial seven-week intervention would help to solidify the learning process throughout the entire year.

I also plan to develop specific questions that foster collaborative learning in a professional learning community setting to break down teaching silos and the rugged individualism that can permeate teaching cultures. By inviting classroom observation and conversation about race, racism, and biases, these things can begin to be illuminated and then broken down throughout the entire school culture. The beauty of professional learning communities is the ability to focus “more on learning and less on teaching” (Brown, Horn & King, 2018, p. 54). Another important aspect of PLCs is the emphasis on accountability and the need for vulnerability and collaboration within the learning setting (Hoaglund, Birkenfield & Box, 2014). These are all hallmark ingredients to decolonizing one’s thinking...the need for support and the requirement of vulnerability.

Teacher 2 reported the support received from a fellow teacher moving through the intervention.

... it took more time than just the intake of information. It was great though, and it was especially fun to have someone to collaborate a little bit with.... there were a few times I would be like, oh, and the journaling prompt, I don't know what this really means or ‘what is your definition of belonging?’ We chatted about what made you know, what makes you feel like you belong somewhere. Yeah. So, it was really helpful. I could run next door and have a chat.

I would also allow for the intervention to be carried out over 14 weeks, with two additional learning and reflection activities later in the year. This timeframe would allow for more time, a slower pace, and potentially better outcomes without feeling a sense of urgency (another aspect of White Supremacy Culture) that drives educators to distraction.

The experience of Teacher 3 provides a perfect example of the limitations of this intervention. I designed it with reading and reflecting in mind, without contemplating the potential barrier of dyslexia. To address this shortcoming, I would use stories, counterstories, narratives, videos, podcasts, poetry, plays, artwork, and music to bring forth similar content to the readings. I use a multi-media approach in my current equity trainings. I intend to bring this approach to this intervention as well.

Another aspect to this intervention that I would modify is how change is demonstrated. I would encourage teachers to record their spoken reflections and conversations if journaling is difficult. Future participants will be encouraged to embrace creativity within the learning process: In addition to, or in place of the journaling, they might write poetry, music, plays, or engage in other forms of expression through video or podcast recordings.

The intervention was designed with no assumption of knowledge, yet one of the teachers reported not knowing specific terms. This can be easily addressed with multiple resources located on a website to support the intervention. As a self-guided intervention, it is essential for participants to move at their own pace if they are completing the intervention on their own, or in concert with others in the PLC setting. Providing base-level resources for understanding is incumbent upon me as the curator of the content.

I asked Teacher 2 what was challenging. She reported, “It was challenging... trying to put into words a lot of my ideas and thoughts. My grasp of how to use certain words, or what was meant by certain phrases wasn’t always great. Things like “culture,” “multicultural experience,” “social justice,” and “identity” could be difficult for me. I think I have a working definition for those things, but when asked to practically speak to its experience in my classroom could be hard for me.”

Another suggestion for the next iteration is to offer training modules via Zoom. Teacher 2 suggested, “I’m just thinking on the spot here, some sort of more formal workshop with you or with someone whose work is similar to yours.” As an equity trainer, I could do this work easily, and working with school teams in this fashion can deepen teacher learning to even more robust levels to decolonize their school cultures.

When talking and thinking about education, I deeply believe that if we get equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging right, everything else will fall into place. In my opinion, there is no other intervention that is needed at this critical time in our country.

## APPENDIX A

*Moses Journaling for Equity Classroom Rubric: Amount and type of culturally responsive artifacts in a Montessori classroom*

Sch. A/ Classroom 1	W	L	B	A	N A	P I	M R	O C	CC	A H	LGB TQ+	Ability
<b>Books</b>												
Fiction												
Non-fiction												
Literature sets												
Encyclopedia												
<b>Posters</b>												
With people												
Without ppl												
Student created												
With ppl												
Without ppl												
<b>Artifacts</b>												
Math												
Baskets												
Figurines												
Musical expression												
Artistic expression												
Animals												
Plants												
Wall art												
Textiles												

*Key: W=White, L=Latino/a/e, B=Black/African American, A=Asian, NA=Native American, PI=Pacific Islander, MR=Multiracial, OC=Other Cultures, CC=Cross Cultural, AH=Ancient History, LGBTQA+= Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Ally*

## APPENDIX B

### *Moses Journaling for Equity Weekly Self-reflection Questions*

#### Filtering/Onboarding Survey Questions (Google Survey)

Welcome to the Moses Journaling for Equity experience. I deeply appreciate your willingness to participate in this 8-week reflective journaling process. Please complete this onboarding survey. In return, I will assign you a code that you will use each week when you submit your journaling questions. This will help us create a more confidential process.

Thank you again for your participation! This survey should take about 25 minutes to complete.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your race?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your age range?
5. Why do you want to participate in this study?
6. What is the highest level of education you have attained?
7. Do you have a teaching license? If yes, from what state?
8. Did you attend a conventional teacher preparation program? If yes, please list.
9. How many weeks was your Montessori middle school training program?
10. Are you a trained Montessori teacher? If yes, where did you receive your training? If no, where did you receive your training?
11. What year did you complete your Montessori training?
12. Are you currently teaching at a public charter Montessori school?

13. What are the number of years you have been teaching public charter Montessori middle school grades?
14. In what state is your school located?
15. Is your current school located in an urban, rural, or suburban environment?
16. Does your school have a farm or garden in which students work?
17. How does your school engage students in occupations? Please name those occupations and activities.
18. Have you had equity training? If you have, please describe the training you received and please list the provider(s).
19. What is your role at your current school?
20. What do you currently teach?
21. What are your current culturally responsive and equity focused pedagogical moves?
22. Is there an economics focus to your curriculum? If yes, briefly describe.
23. In what ways do you facilitate/integrate social justice into your curriculum?  
Please describe.
24. Do you use seminar or some other form of community building or dialogue process? If yes, please describe.
25. What is your discipline and resolution process?
26. How do you engage students in personal expression? Briefly describe.
27. How long has your school been in business?
28. How long have you been at your school?
29. What do you hope to learn in the journaling for equity process?

## Week 1: Teacher Identity (Individual Google Doc for each participant)

1. What is your racial identity?
2. What is your cultural identity?
3. What is your social identity? (The roles you play in your community.)
4. What are the demographics of your classroom? Name each student's race, culture, nation of origin, socioeconomic level, gender identity
5. Please tell me a story about how a Black, Indigenous, Multi-racial, Person of Color (BIMPOC) student demonstrated their knowledge differently than your White students. What did you observe? Was their language use different than other students? How did you feel when they were demonstrating their knowledge? Now, try to identify your assumptions about the student. Honestly reflect on the picture in your mind about the student. Do they have deficits? Do they have assets? How are they different than for your White students? Describe the differences.

## Week 2: Personal Experience with Belonging

1. Thinking back on your adolescent years, 12-18, describe a time when you felt valorized. Then, consider what it was about that experience that made it a valorizing experience.
2. Describe a time when you were excluded. (From a group, a class, an event...). How did that impact you? How does that impact you today?
3. Describe a time when you were learning something new and how engaged you were.

4. What groups do you belong to? How important are these groups to your personal identity?
5. Describe a time when you were not part of the dominant culture group. (For example, when were you the only woman at this event or when was your voice not heard?) How did it feel? What made you feel awkward? How did you navigate that experience?
6. How do you define belonging?
7. How do you make sure your students feel they belong? Provide evidence of the language you use and the actions you take to facilitate belonging in your classroom.

Week 3: Student Experiences with Belonging (Requires gathering student input)

1. What are all the different groups your students belong to? Please survey your students or have them create culture maps about the groups they belong to.
2. Choose one student who is not part of the dominant culture: What groups do they belong to, and how is this part of their identity? How do students express or show their belonging to these different groups?
3. Think about a time when a student in your classroom felt excluded. Describe the situation in detail from multiple sides. What were the classroom circumstances and classroom environment? What were the cultural or social factors at play? (Think class or race.) What assumptions are you making about those factors? How could your identity, language and actions contribute to the situation?

4. If you can, conduct a seminar about belonging with your students, or give an open-ended reflection question to respond to, and collect results. Summarize your take-aways.
5. When have you asked Black, Indigenous, Multi-racial, Latinx, Asian, or students not part of the dominant culture to act like White students? Name three times.
6. If you do not have students of color, when have you asked your White students to center other people's cultures in the classroom not just through Black history month?

#### Week 4: Belonging in the Physical Prepared Environment

1. What teaching materials are present in your environment that are connected to student identity? Use the rubric provided.
2. What decorations (aesthetic, not teaching materials) are present?
3. How is furniture arranged? Does it promote belonging?
4. Do students have the ability to decorate or influence what is on the walls?
5. Tell me a story about a time when you entered into a room and felt like you did not belong? What was on the walls? Were you able to relate to the art/posters on the walls? Were there artifacts representative of different cultures (this sports bar or some other culture)? How could the environment influence student belonging in your classroom?

#### Week 5: Belonging in the Social Prepared Environment

1. How are students learning to contribute via their own cultures? Describe three examples.

2. How much time do you spend facilitating creativity and personal expression with your students of color versus White students?
3. How much time do you spend facilitating creativity and personal expression with your able students versus your students who have 504s or IEPs?
4. What are the behavioral expectations you have for your students? How are they communicated?
5. What assumptions are those behaviors based upon? Where did those assumptions come from?
6. Are these assumptions different from your students' families' assumptions?
7. What activities do you create for students to develop their compassion for others?

Please describe two or three examples.

#### Week 6: Belonging in the Plan of Work and Study (i.e., in curriculum)

1. How are all of your students' cultures centered in daily activities?
2. How do students' cultures inform your plan of Work and Study?
3. Have you had a conversation with all of your students' parents to understand their cultures and experiences? If yes, what did you learn? If no, what is preventing you from doing that work?
4. How can you use parent knowledge and experiences to inform your Plan of Work and Study to ensure a multicultural experience for your students?
5. Observe and listen to your students. Are there cliques? Who is in and who is out? What are the characteristics of those in and out groups? Why do you think that is? Please tell me a story about how cliques work in your classroom.

6. Which students have a social network outside of school via Facetime, SnapChat, etc.?
7. How are you fostering social justice in your classroom?

Week 7/Synthesis: Putting All the Pieces Together, from reflection and observation to a theory of action

1. Please articulate your theory of belonging.
2. Please define characteristics and qualities that are evidence of belonging in students.
3. Please define characteristics and qualities that are evidence of exclusion/ alienation within your classroom.
4. Please describe your teaching pivots that will benefit BIMPOC students within your classroom.
5. How will you decenter Whiteness in your classroom?
6. What do you want to learn in the future?
7. How has this reflective practice changed your beliefs about race and culture, your descriptions about student abilities, and your teaching of students who are not part of the dominant culture?
8. Would you recommend this type of intervention to other teachers? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Week 8/Participant Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your journey through this process.
2. In your own words, how have you been changed? What new insights do you have?

3. What was challenging for you?
4. What new relationships have developed through this process?
5. To what degree were you able to do the readings?
6. Which readings impacted you the most?
7. How would you improve this intervention?

## APPENDIX C

### *Weekly Reading List*

(Individual articles and the book “*Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies*” were supplied to each participant)

Week 1	<p>Take Harvard Implicit Bias Test:  <a href="https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html">https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html</a></p> <p>McIntosh, P. (1997). White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women’s studies. In R. Delgado &amp; J. Stefanic (Eds.), <i>Critical White Students: Looking behind the mirror</i> (pp. 291–299). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.</p> <p>Margolin, L. (2015). Unpacking the invisible knapsack: The intervention of white privilege pedagogy. <i>Cogent Social Sciences, June</i>. doi: 10.1080/23311886.2015.1053183</p>
Week 2	<p>Wald, J. (2014). Can 'De-biasing' strategies help to reduce racial disparities in school discipline? <a href="http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Implicit-Bias_031214.pdf">http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Implicit-Bias_031214.pdf</a></p>
Week 3	<p>Alim, S. H. &amp; Paris, D. (2017). What is Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Why Does It Matter? D. Paris &amp; H. S. Alim (Eds.), <i>Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies</i> (pp. 1–21). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.</p>
Week 4	<p>D’Cruz, G. (2019). Measuring equity in Montessori communities. <i>MontessoriPublic.org</i>. (3)3, 1–2.</p> <p>Peters, D.L., (2019). Unpacking “diversity” in our lives and schools: An interview with Dr. Derrick Gay. <i>Montessori Life, (Spring)</i>, 41–44.</p> <p>Oesting T., &amp; Speed, A. (2019). Exploring diversity and inclusivity in Montessori (part 3). <i>Montessori Life, (Spring)</i>, 48–53.</p> <p>Christensen, O. (2019). Running in circles: Dilemmas, uncertainty, and freedom to cope. <i>Montessori Life, (Fall)</i>, 28–37.</p>
Week 5	<p>Bucholtz, M., Casillas, D. I., &amp; Lee, J. S. (2017). Language and Culture as Sustenance. D. Paris &amp; H. S. Alim (Eds.), <i>Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies</i> (pp. 43–59). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.</p>
Week 6	<p>San Pedro, T. J. (2017). “This Stuff Interests Me,” Re-center Indigenous Paradigms in Colonizing School Spaces. D. Paris &amp; H. S. Alim (Eds.), <i>Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies</i> (pp. 99–116). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.</p>
Week 7	<p>Rosa, J., &amp; Flores, N. (2017). “Do You Hear What I Hear? Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies. D. Paris &amp; H. S. Alim (Eds.), <i>Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies</i> (pp. 175–190). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.</p>

## APPENDIX D

### Sample Recruitment E-mail

Dear Ms. Feeley,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Oregon in the College of Education studying equity in educational leadership.

I would like to invite your middle school teachers to participate in my study this fall. My study is a reflective professional development intervention that lasts eight weeks focused on equity pivots in the classroom. (See attached institutional review board consent document).

I hope this request arrives in time for your planning of professional development this fall and that your team would consider this as a possibility.

Please contact me to continue our conversation so that I can answer all of your questions. If you have any concerns, please contact Susan Andree who is my mentor at Community Roots School in Silverton, OR. Her email is:

Thank you for your consideration,

Christine

Christine Moses, M.P.P.

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*Certified Women Business Enterprise (WBE),*

*Minority Business Enterprise (MBE),*

*Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), and*

*Emerging Small Business (ESB)*

*Washington State Certified Minority/Women Business Enterprise (MWBE) and*

*Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)*

*This e-mail and related attachments and any response may be subject to public disclosure under state law.*

## APPENDIX E

Resource for managing stress identified in IRB consent letter

### **CARING FOR YOURSELF IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULT WORK**

Our work can be overwhelming. Our challenge is to maintain our resilience so that we can keep doing the work with care, energy, and compassion.

#### **10 things to do each day**

1. Get enough sleep.
2. Get enough to eat.
3. Vary the work that you do.
4. Do some light exercise.
5. Do something pleasurable.
6. Focus on what you did well.
7. Learn from your mistakes.
8. Share a private joke.
9. Pray, meditate or relax.
10. Support a colleague.

**For More Information see your supervisor or visit [www.istss.org](http://www.istss.org),  
[www.proqol.org](http://www.proqol.org) and [www.compassionfatigue.org](http://www.compassionfatigue.org)**

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### **FOCUSING YOUR EMPATHY**

Your empathy for others helps you do your job. It is important to take good care of your feelings and thoughts by monitoring how you use them. The most resilient workers are those that know how to turn their feelings to work mode when they go on duty, but off-work mode when they go off duty. This is not denial; it is a coping strategy. It is a way they get maximum protection while working (feelings switched to work mode) and maximum support while resting (feelings switched off-work mode).

#### **How to become better at switching between Work and Off-Work Modes**

1. Make this a conscious process. Talk to yourself as you switch.
2. Use images that make you feel safe and protected (work-mode) or connected and cared for (non-work mode) to help you switch.
3. Develop rituals that help you switch as you start and stop work.
4. Breathe slowly and deeply to calm yourself when starting a tough job.

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