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WALKING THE TALK: MY JOURNEY BECOMING AN ANTI-RACIST EDUCATOR

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this teacher inquiry is to observe how my beliefs of becoming an anti-racist teacher transform from theory to action. I further explore how living those beliefs not only affects me and my teaching of English Language Arts, but how that teaching affects my students. This research is relevant for high school practitioners and administrators as they begin to acknowledge and explore how to better educate their staff in order to serve all students in an equitable way.

While working to become an anti-racist teacher, I record my own personal journey and share my victories and failures. I also created a unit teaching diverse young adult literature books about race through book clubs and then ending in a whole class novel reading of *A Raisin in the Sun*. I hypothesized that I could use these books to facilitate conversation and introduce anti-racist pedagogy to my students. I discovered that anti-racist teaching is an ongoing process, and that student responses vary based on multiple factors.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

I am a teacher, learner, and citizen. Because of this, all of my decisions are informed by some intersection of these parts of my identity. My parents have told me that I have been a teacher my entire life. I think this is a bit of a stretch, but I know that my childhood consisted of planning and leading many activities with my siblings and playing school when I could trick them into complying. Much like my childhood self, I now spend my days leading and learning from students at State College Area High School. I teach 9<sup>th</sup> grade as an intern in the Professional Development School, a partnership between Penn State and State College Area School District. Through this experience, I learned that I easily can and should be a learner my whole life, which aligns with my belief that teachers should learn with their students. Lastly, and most importantly, I am a citizen. I lean heavily on the feminist theoretical position that “the personal is political”. My day to day life and personal decisions happen within a system, and that system is controlled by the people who are in power. Thus, the vacuum in which I consider my personal life existing is not all that personal at all.

I start my paper in this way because these beliefs lead to why I am committed to becoming an anti-racist educator. My personal study has been a long work in progress. I have broken down the steps into multiple processes, which have shaped who I am as an educator today.



## **Before**

As I mentioned before, life-long learning is incredibly important to me. I would like to believe this curiosity has followed me my whole life. I am sure that this is why I became a teacher. I wanted a career that was always growing and changing. Every year, I have the opportunity to grow and learn more with my students. I am also fortunate to have these beliefs echoed in my Professional Development School program and in the State College High School English Department. I am always encouraged to look at new resources and grow my beliefs.

As a child, I always liked school. I appreciated the routine, organization, and, honestly, loved buying school supplies. I also truly appreciate learning new things. This appreciation followed me to high school. I moved to a small, private school in Wheeling, West Virginia my freshman year. This was definitely new to me. It was a military school that was founded in 1814, when West Virginia was still Virginia. Eventually, it was turned into a prep school. At the time, I don't think I had any real frustrations with it, but this is when I started to notice systems and how they dictate our actions and what we believe. I didn't really know what to do with this revelation, and I don't think I could have articulated that thought as a 15-year-old. I knew I was frustrated with some of the actions we had to do as a school, and the way that people within the school acted. Tradition was at the forefront, and it guided every decision that was made. Many of the students in my class had been enrolled there from 5<sup>th</sup> grade, so they were used to the routine. When I asked why we did a certain activity, it was always met with, "That's what we have always done." I thought this was frustrating, but I didn't really push it. I accepted the answer and moved on.

Another part of my high school career that shaped my interests and beliefs now was the demographics of the high school. The school offered the opportunity for students to board there.

We even had a small population of international students. My school did absolutely nothing to address this, except for maybe a themed food day once and awhile. I was frustrated because at that point, I was just broadening my interests beyond what existed in front of me. To me, it seemed like there was an obvious divide between the students that boarded at the school (mostly international students) and the day students. There wasn't much of a sense of school community between the two. Another aspect of demographics that stood out to me was the privilege that students in the school have, again at the time I didn't have the tools to call it this. My parents are comfortably middle class, and in order to attend this school, I was given financial aid. Many of my peers drove BMWs and Range Rovers. I knew the first day of school that I would not fit in when I showed up in a "too-old" uniform skirt that fell below my knees. Regardless, because I felt isolated, picked on, and on the outside of my school community, because of something I couldn't control (the amount of money my family and I had), I was able to think about the school more critically and how it treated people that were not the majority, the rich, white kids whose parents went to the same school.

Because of my frustration with high school, I was excited to go to college. I was accepted to Penn State's honors college and decided to attend. I entered school wanting to teach English, but immediately became overwhelmed by all of the options Penn State offered. As I stated above, I want to learn forever, and I didn't want to box myself in. I took some Psychology courses and a class called Media and Democracy, which changed my academic trajectory. This course was a communications class, and it critiqued our society and talked about how humans' function in a capitalistic society that prioritizes consumerism. We also talked about the public sphere in a theoretical sense. I was hooked. I loved thinking about these things, and with my psychology interests, I could think about how humans behave in these systems and why. The

problem with this interest is that I had not chosen a career path. That caused me a lot of anxiety. I started to think again about the education space as a public sphere, and was introduced to a Paulo Friere reading about critical pedagogy. I then more seriously started to consider returning to my initial desire to be an educator. I could see myself teaching this critical process to my students because I believe the best and most successful people have the ability to consider and critique the systems of which they take part.

### **Awakening:**

As soon as I decided I wanted to teach, I decided to take as many extra classes as I could in the College of Education. I quickly fulfilled my requirements and kept looking for interesting classes. I was missing the critical aspect of some of my communications classes. At the time, I wasn't explicitly interested in social justice education or anti-racist teaching. I was still very much at the beginning of my journey, and quite frankly, I had no idea what these terms meant, let alone what they looked like in practice. In spring 2018, I discovered a class titled, "Perceptual Pedagogies". This class was cross listed as an African American Studies Class, Education Policy Class, and a Curriculum and Instruction class. In this class, we worked to identify the characteristics of the White Supremacist Patriarchy and dismantle it. Alongside of that, the syllabus states that, "Decolonized curricula, practices, and ideologies for emergent teachers are necessary to promote, stabilize, and push forward anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-ableist pedagogies. Such curricula, practices, and ideologies accommodate the complex academic and social needs of students from increasingly marginalized communities" (Staples, 2018). This was the first course I took at Penn State that made me consider my whiteness as a teacher and how

that could affect my students. At the time, I considered how this course could change how I view myself as a teacher. Reflecting now, I know it was the start of creating my beliefs as an educator. I spent that time learning as much as I could, and deciding which beliefs were essential to bring to my classroom. This course created an awareness in me that could not be ignored and must be brought to my classroom.

If “Perceptual Pedagogies” was the stirring of the awakening, my fellowship in the DC Social Justice Program was everything else. The teaching experience taught me so many things from critical pedagogy to what it means to be a white woman in the education field. The process was a mixture of learning the language, experiential learning, and questioning everything I know. Each class, I left questioning how my decisions affected others and thinking about how much more I needed to know if I wanted to be successful in the social justice space. I then went to DC and taught in the School Without Walls with two co-teachers. After each lesson, we were observed and critiqued and given feedback for how to improve. After teaching, we would go to class and continue to learn new topics. The course was hard. It made me question how I teach and if I should be an educator. It also made me realize that as a white person, I take up a lot of space. I don’t think about who I talk over or how my privilege affects others. It was a lot to process, and I am not sure if I will ever really be done processing. I just know that because of that experience, I started the summer determined that if I was going to teach, I was going to teach from an equity-focused stance. Although, I wasn’t quite sure what that looked like yet.

**Marinating:**

The summer after my fellowship was the time when I marinated in my beliefs. I needed time to recover from my DC fellowship. There was a lot that I learned, but there was also a lot that I questioned about myself and my abilities. I spent that summer rethinking my role as a white educator. I started thinking about race frequently. It shaped what I read, what I listened to, and how I viewed everything. My spring education had started to show the systemic effect of racism on People of Color, and that was something I could not ignore. I started to read more and more, think more and more, and have a new sense of awareness. I made the choice that I would teach, but I would also be an advocate for my students, regardless of the situation, and in my time in DC, I learned that the best advocate starts with a long, intrusive process of evaluating one's own identity.

**Living:**

In August 2018, I started my student teaching through the Professional Development School offered by the Penn State College of Education. I intern in the State College Area School District, co-teaching English 9 and Advanced English 9. Through the course of the year, I explore race, death and grieving, love, sexual assault, and other mature topics with my students. This is part of why I chose to be an ELA teacher. The depth of content and conversations that come from literature are energizing, provocative, and an opportunity to push beyond initial understanding of a situation. This creates the opportunity for critical thought, empathy, and reflection. As a pre-service teacher, I was interested in how my students would react to these topics and how I, as their teacher could make sure to approach them in a meaningful way. Part of

my teacher identity relies on encouraging my students to think critically about what they are reading and not shy away from the issues in the literature we read. Because of my belief in my students' capabilities and the chance to teach my students literature that offered a look into social inequities, I knew I have the opportunity to live the beliefs that I have grown through my coursework, fellowship, and private growth process.

Growing from my past experiences, I was determined that I would not lose the consciousness that I had begun to develop. I knew that I was starting work in a predominantly white school, so I was thinking about how I, as a white preservice teacher could still stay true to my beliefs while teaching in a school district so different from inner city DC. I had many fears that I would lose my footing in what I had developed or be submissive to others' beliefs. Before I could voice that fear, I was presented with an opportunity. My PDS program coordinator, Dr. Michelle Knotts, asked on the first day of inservice if anyone would be interested in facilitating professional development with her. This professional development was formed by a teacher's union in Philadelphia around "Building Anti-Racist White Educators" (BAR-WE). Immediately, I showed interest. My mentor teacher, Mrs. Danielle Ambrosia, was also committed to the idea. The three of us embarked on leading and participating in our own inquiry around this topic. From this professional development, the idea for my study around becoming an anti-racist educator was formed. Little did I know when I committed to taking on this project and forming my thesis around this topic, how timely it would be in the school district and in the United States.

## **Context of My Research Interest**

Because of my time reading and learning in the spring and summer, I entered my internship with these ideas. I knew I was working in a predominantly white institution, and wanted to live my beliefs in the classroom. I spent time over the summer reflecting on how I can continue to live my new-found beliefs. Being a young, white woman and also having gone through high school and college, I also know that without going out of my way, I was never challenged to consider my privilege or how I can affect others by my choices and actions. I know that this is valuable knowledge, and it has helped me become a more aware and mindful person. Because of this, I also wanted to make sure my students who are not marginalized also have the information and vocabulary to talk about their experiences in a way that would further help them understand the world and not belittle others. After some considering and reading, I found that anti-racist teaching would be a way for me to take this on. I lean on the foundational support of theory and work to transform theory to practice in my pedagogy.

## **Research Questions**

My driving research questions are: How do I, as a white preservice teacher, develop an anti-racist stance and engage in anti-racist pedagogies? Also, what does anti-racist teaching look like in practice, along with what impacts do an anti-racist practice have on my students?

The goal of this study is not to “change the world” or even change the minds of my students. Instead, the goal for me revolves around first, living my beliefs as an anti-racist educator. I have recorded and reflected on challenges, pitfalls and successes. I also do not plan

on changing my students' minds. What is most important to me is offering them a new perspective, and challenge them to see beyond the status quo and dominant narrative.

There is research on what theoretically, an anti-racist teacher is, but there are not many narrative pieces that describe the process that one goes to while attempting this. While my research is not the singular path of how one becomes an anti-racist educator, I hope that through this inquiry process of my own experience of becoming an anti-racist educator and implementing certain pedagogical moves can help serve as a guideline for other teachers. This research applies to both preservice and inservice teachers. My hope is that through this inquiry both groups can see the thought process and struggles of myself as a white educator moving to become anti-racist. I also hope that through my reflection and transparency, that those reading will also see the necessity of anti-racist teaching in the English Language Arts Classroom.

The rest of the paper is dedicated to my journey of becoming an anti-racist educator and how that impacted my students. To begin, I will review existing literature about the theories that brought me to this anti-racist stance, with particular attention to racial literacy critical pedagogy, and how those concepts can connect in an English Language Arts classroom. Following the literature review, I will describe my process of how I worked to become and be an anti-racist teacher. I collected data in order to systematically track my journey and understand better how this stance influenced both me and my students.



## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

The demographics in America are changing. Schools in particular have seen a shift in student demographics. “Between fall 2000 and fall 2015, the percentage of students enrolled in public schools who were white decreased from 61 to 49 percent. Black students also decreased from 17 to 15 percent. On the contrary, Hispanic students increased from 16 to 26 percent and Asian and Pacific Islander students increased from 4 to 5 percent” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). While the demographics in public schools are quickly shifting, the demographics of the teaching force remain stagnant. According to a report by the Department of Education, in the 2011-2012 school year, 82% of the teaching force was white educators (Department of Education, 2016). This is only a 5% decrease since 1987 compared to the 12% decrease in white students in public school in the past 15 years (Department of Education, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This information should be considered when thinking about student development and safety in schools, specifically students of color. “There is emotional damage done when young people can’t be themselves,” says Dena Simmons in her TED Talk, *How students of color confront the imposter syndrome* (Simmons, 2016). Because students are in an identity forming process in schools, it is especially important for them to feel supported and comfortable with who they are. Teachers are responsible for being mindful of all of their students, not just the students whose identities are the same as their own.

Because of the difference in student demographics to teacher demographics, it is necessary for teachers to consider their identities, their students’ identities, and how the

intersections affect each other. To become an anti-racist teacher, one must understand the ways in which race affects students. Thompson addresses this structural issue by stating, “In order to conceptualize gap analyses school districts and researchers must understand the differences between personal, institutional, and structural racism” (Thompson, Race, & Thompson, 2010). The balance of personal, institutional, and structural pressure that students of color face is why becoming an anti-racist teacher is necessary. This study addresses how I use anti-racist teaching to better educate my students on the effects that racism has on individuals, as well as creating a more equitable tool for educating all students. I also include my own victories, trials, and tribulations when becoming an anti-racist teacher, and how I transform the theory discussed in this literature review into my practice.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

Critical Pedagogy is a teaching approach that values and encourages students to think beyond the dominant narrative, to question the systems in which they are a part, and rely on their individual experiences to add insight and ultimately teach those around them, teachers and students. This approach stems from Critical Theory and evolved with Marxist Theory, ultimately being shaped by Paulo Freire, who is known as the father of Critical Pedagogy (Abraham & Universitet, 2014, pp. 2). The goal of critical pedagogy is acknowledging that teaching does not exist in a vacuum or neutral space. Teachers are people. Students are people, and each person makes decisions that affect those individual’s outside of themselves. Kincheloe (2008) recalls the political nature of critical pedagogy by writing, “Teaching is a political act—there’s no way around it. Freire argued that teachers should embrace this dimension of their work and position,

social, cultural, economic, political, and philosophical critiques of dominant power at the heart of the curriculum” (Kincheloe, 2008, pp. 165). Critical pedagogy is essential in preparing students to live and learn in the society in which we are apart. It requires them to consider their position in society (i.e. their life experiences, culture, and insights) can change how they view the world and work within a system (Brown & Sekimoto, 2017, pp. 19). If teachers do not rely on the wealth of knowledge of students, then how can a teacher make their lessons applicable and meaningful? Critical pedagogy demands that teachers construct knowledge with their students (Gorlewski, 2018; Kincheloe, 2008; Sarroub & Quadros, 2015).

Critical pedagogy is an essential in the English Language Arts classroom. The humanities by nature revolves around human experience and finding meaning in writing, speaking, and other creative means and analyzing how that relates to an individual, another piece of work, or the world. The meaning of all of these items depends not only on the teacher, but also on the learner. Gorlewski (2018) argues, “Teacher[s] will recognize that academic English is an arbitrary defined category that reflects and perpetuates existing hegemonic relations, and will center the language and thinking of students in creating learning experiences” (pp. 3). In critical pedagogy, it is the responsibility of the teacher to point out these hegemonic relations and challenge students to think beyond them.

Critical pedagogy is key in anti-racist teaching. In anti-racist teaching, the teacher must point out structural inequities that exist in society. Gorlewski agrees with this idea. She states that “Contemporary critical theory calls for an approach in which students and teachers consume and produce texts, construct meanings that reveal and reject oppression and moving society towards equity and justice (pp. 8). Anti-racist teaching demands that an educator works with the

students to acknowledge the oppression of certain racial groups and work to discuss, acknowledge, and dismantle these processes within themselves and the systems in which they are apart (Gorlewski, 2018; Lanas & Zembylas, 2015; Nieto, 2002). Because of this, critical pedagogy is a necessity for anti-racist teaching. Critical pedagogy also stresses that teachers and students acknowledge that schools are an institution that has functioned in a systematically inequitable way in the past, and arguably still function in this way. This creates a contradiction because these conversations are happening about schools within the school system (Nieto, 2002, pp. 37). This tension is part of what makes engaging in critical pedagogy and anti-racist teaching difficult. Most studies and past journal articles acknowledge this tension, but do not offer a narrative or thoughts on what this means from a practicing teacher's point of view instead of a theorist's perspective. My work will address my own personal work within the system, acknowledging and working to dismantle it with my students. This critical thought about power and systems originates with critical pedagogy and is essential in anti-racist teaching.

### **Racial Literacy**

As stated above, when using critical pedagogy, one main goal of the practice is to move students towards literacy. This means that they have the language and skills to critique and observe the structures around them in a critical sense. Kincheloe (2008) mentions the importance of literacy by saying, "As students become literate they are empowered to change themselves and to take action in the world. In this empowered literate state learners employ generative themes around which they can organize insurgent action" (pp. 167). Racial literacy is especially

important in anti-racist teaching. It is a necessity for teachers to work towards racial literacy in order to teach and lead conversations from an anti-racist stance.

The term racial literacy was first used by Lani Guinier, who was also the first woman of color to be tenured at the Harvard Law School. She argues that there was a paradigm shift from racial liberalism to racial literacy. Racial literacy according to her, “requires us to rethink race as an instrument of social geographic, and economic control of both whites and blacks. Racial literacy offers a more dynamic framework of looking at race in America” (2006, pp. 95).

Guinier sets up three parts of a framework that create a racially literate perspective. The first is that race is contextual. As put by Guinier, this means that “There is no one size fits all solution. It also understands that sometimes the answer cannot even be clear through thoughtful consideration or expert opinion. Instead racial literacy is an interactive process that uses race as a tool for diagnosis, feedback, and assessment” (Guinier, 2006, pp. 97). This statement means that race should be considered when considering (assessing), solving (diagnosis), and (reconsidering/reflecting) on how race is intertwined with each of the issues one is attempting to unravel. The second part of racial literacy is emphasizing how power relates to race. This is one reason why I classify racial literacy under the umbrella of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy asks that people consider how power affects decisions. To be racially literate, one must consider how race affects people on an individual level, but also demands that the institutional and environmental factors are not disregarded (Guinier, 2006, pp. 100). The institutional aspect in particular urges people to consider how power relates to these racial issues outside of oneself and 1-1 interactions. The third part of racial literacy defined by Guinier is focusing on the intersections at which race exists. It considers the relationship between race, class, geography, gender, and other variables of one’s identity (Guinier, 2006, pp. 93). People do not live in a

vacuum. Race is not the sole mechanism used to classify or define a person. Individuals are marginalized in many different ways, sometimes at the same time. This is important to consider when working towards becoming racially literate because this is one part in particular that sets this theoretical idea apart from others.

After Guinier defined racial literacy, the term was taken up by educators, some building on Guinier's definition and others using the term directly in the field of education. Rogers and Mosely discuss how racial literacy is an interactive process; They write that, "The process involves a lens to explore social and legal practices that examines how race relates to power and other parts of one's identity" (Rogers & Mosley, 2008, pp. 109). This adds depth to Guinier because it mentions the interactive process. This process includes thinking about one's identity, power and privilege related to that position, and then how that relates through a racial lens. This process is recursive and takes time. When one evaluates their identity because of the intrusiveness of the process, it must be done multiple times. The women go on to explain that "Racial literacy recognizes the tangible and intangible outcomes of race as a social construct and racism as a mechanism for powerful groups to maintain social, political, and economic advantage" (Rogers & Mosley, 2008, pp. 110). Again, their definition mentions the importance of understanding how power affects the social equilibrium and control how it is kept. This hierarchy must be mentioned in racial literacy. In terms of my research, the most important part of Rogers and Mosely's work is their observation that "Racial literacy is achieved in moment-to-moment interactions, which, in turn are shaped by institutions...becoming racially literate is an interaction process which includes support and challenge" (Rogers & Mosley, 2008, pp. 110). This finding relates to my research because I take their idea of moment-to-moment interactions

and apply that to my classroom. I monitor my students' interactions with the subject matter, each other, and myself as we work together to move towards racial literacy.

Racial literacy is an essential part of a classroom. According to Vetter and Hungerford-Kressor, "Developing racial literacy helps students think about the social, cultural, and political aspects of their experiences with a focus on race" (2014, pp. 84). This is essential in an English Language Arts classroom because the nature of the subject demands that students read, ponder, and discuss issues that are sometimes uncomfortable in nature. It is the responsibility of the educator to introduce and navigate how to have these conversations with their students so that they can be better prepared to be a part of society, arguably the main goal of education. Vetter and Hungerford-Kressor acknowledge that becoming racially literate is difficult. These authors suggest that "Teachers who continually engage in this subject matter are typically more confident in facilitating in their own classrooms because they are familiar with the characterization of race and racism" (2004, pp. 89). Not only do I agree with these women, but my research will also discuss how continually discussing and considering race will give one the linguistic tools needed to talk about race in a way that is not hurtful to those who have experienced marginalization and trauma for race related reasons.

Racial literacy is the corner stone of being an anti-racist educator. In order to understand, talk to one's students, and guide students through these issues, a teacher must take steps to understand the depths of how this social construct affects individual's lives. Teachers again must push beyond the surface level explanations of race and into the structural and systemic effects that racism has on people of color and our society. This starts with knowing the language to look for these inequities and then pushing to discuss them in order to build stamina and confidence in discussing and leading others to acknowledge the same. Anti-racist teachers must be racially

literate in order to push past the interpersonal effects of racism and into the structural and intersectional effects of racism, which are acknowledged by the researchers above.

### **Anti-Racist Teaching**

Anti-racist teaching is based in critical pedagogy and racial literacy. These ideas combined create anti-racist teaching. Anti-racism also has roots in Marxism and Critical Race Theory. The Marxist influence demands that anti-racism focus on how racism affects people's life conditions. Critical race theory argues that there are more factors than the life conditions affected by racism. It also demands the consideration of class formations and ideological differences (Bakan & Dua, 2014, pp. 5). Based on these roots, Bakan and Dua agree that anti-racism is a "theoretically informed political practice that can effectively challenge and overcome racism" (2014, pp. 6). They also argue that both Marxism and Critical Race Theory should have a role in influencing the decisions made in anti-racist theory. Bonnett expands upon the prefix "anti" in his definition of anti-racism by saying, "A minimal definition of anti-racism is that is refers to those forms of thought and/or practice that seek to confront, eradicate and/or ameliorate racism. Anti-racism implies the ability to identify a phenomenon—racism – and do something about it." Bonnett goes onto explain that there are six types of anti-racism: everyday anti-racism, multicultural anti-racism, psychological anti-racism, radical anti-racism, anti-Nazi and anti-Facist anti-racism, and the representative organization, which seeks to include and promote previously excluded races in organizations (Bonnett, 2000, pp. 7).

Mica Pollack builds on Bonnett's idea of everyday anti-racism and narrows her approach solely to the field of education. She states that everyday anti-racism includes four principles. The



four principles include: rejecting false notions of human difference, acknowledging lived experience shaped along racial lines, learning from diverse forms of knowledge and experience, and challenging systems of racial inequality. Pollock suggests that the main take away from her principles is that educators should be “treating people as race group members when such treatment harms them, and treating them as race group members when such treatment assists” (Pollack, 2006, pp. 9). This sounds counterintuitive at first glance, but Pollack is highlighting the complexity of being anti-racist. Race affects individuals’ day to day life, decisions, and opportunities. Being anti-racist is acknowledging that, and also, seeing an individual as a whole, race, other intersections of their identity, and their humanity. She also acknowledges that “The word anti-racism can have a negative cast because it implies that an educator is constantly fighting and reacting to racial inequalities, rather than struggling to equalize opportunity” (Pollack, 2006, pp. 10). Anti-racism goes beyond equalizing opportunities and moves towards equity teachers are expected to call racial issues by their names and deconstruct them with their students. It also calls for teachers to examine their privilege and ask students to think about the privilege that they have too. This goes back to critical pedagogy and racial literacy.

One necessary part of anti-racist education moving beyond looking at the individual effects of racism and also considering how systems and institutions affect the individuals’ ability to succeed (Kowal, Franklin, Paradies, & Kowal, 2019; Lynch, Swartz, & Isaacs, 2017; Pollack, 2006). Kishimoto states, “Anti-racist pedagogy is an organizing effort for institutional and social change that is much broader than teaching in the classroom” (2018, pp. 548). While addressing the effects of institutional racism, in order to be anti-racist teachers must realize that they too are racial beings and realize of how their identities affect others. Because of this, teachers need to reflect on their identities, privilege, institutional structures, and how that affects each of their

students. They then need to work to actively debunk racism and racist practices in their classroom, in the curriculum, and in the institution of education.

### **Anti-Racist Teaching in English Language Arts**

Pollack (2016) states, “The world of K-12 education contains infinitely complex race questions—and endlessly oversimplified race answers” (pp. 10). This problem specifically applies to the field of English Language Arts (ELA). Because of the nature of the subject, teachers not only teach the curriculum standards to their students, but the subject matter also lends itself to deeper conversations about the content of the literature and the happenings of the world. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the national professional organization of English educators, also acknowledge this. This past summer (July 2018), NCTE released a statement of Anti-Racism to Support Teaching and Learning. The statement recommends multiple suggestions that ELA teachers should take in their classroom and their professional organizations expects these teachers to uphold these practices. There are also suggestions for administrators encouraging them “to provide opportunities for professional development that affirm cultural diversity among all students” (National Council of Teachers of English Committee, 2018). The statement also calls for teachers to “actively identify and challenge individual or systemic acts of racism and other forms of discrimination and bigotry in educational institutions and within our profession, exposing such acts through external communications and publications and express strong declarations of solidarity with people of diverse human and cultural backgrounds to eradicate forms of racism, bias, and prejudice in spaces of teaching and learning” (National Council of Teachers of English Committee, 2018).

This step towards anti-racism is purposeful and important. Educators need to move towards anti-racist teaching, but as shown above, the steps towards doing so can be vague. Teachers may see that they need to be anti-racist, but the breakdown of how to do that is challenging. A recent issue of NCTE's *English Education* was focused on working through whiteness and white supremacy in the classroom. Because of the all-encompassing nature of English Language Arts, it is important that teachers are prepared. According to Berchini's research, "There is currently little context—in English and literacy education—that deals with how teachers "handle conflicts and disconnections about race that emerge from English curricular content and classroom discussions" (pp. 258). Berchini followed a white teacher into his classroom to study how he taught race and privilege in a predominantly white school. She came to two conclusions: this teacher's anti-racist approach was filled with failure and attempted to shift towards institutionalized racism, not just interpersonal (Berchini, 2019, pp. 255). We know that in order to be anti-racist, one must have both an individual and institutional approach, but the fact that this teacher's attempts to be anti-racist did not always work was an interesting discovery because it starts to hint at the failure that could possibly come with an anti-racist approach. Another journal in the same NCTE issue states that "Most antiracist work in education focuses on the relationship between white people and People of Color. But what if our antiracist efforts are being undermined because of what is going on among white people" (Kinloch, & Lensmire, 2019, pp. 116). This can be considered failure when teaching from an anti-racist stance. There is a need for white people specifically to learn how to talk about race. I also noticed this need, and through my inquiry attempt to equip all of my students, specifically my white students with the terms needed to talk about race in the classroom.

From this literature review, I found that anti-racist teaching is challenging; one must acknowledge the institutional and individual effects of racism, while not being afraid to face failure (Berchini, 2019; Kowal et al., 2019; Mosley, 2010; Pollack, 2006). Part of the challenge comes from the individual process of identity inquiry that is needed in order to start the process. Then, being anti-racist is a personal journey full of failures and victories. In this study, I will share my struggles, failures and victories being an anti-racist teacher and also explore some of my students' responses as I enacted anti-racism pedagogies in my classroom.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

#### **Context**

This study takes place in State College Area High School (State High), a public high school. It is located in a college town that is in the center of Pennsylvania. These communities of the university and the town coexist in one valley; they are so intertwined that the mascot for Penn State is a nittany lion and the mascot for State High is a little lion. The area can be described as a mixture between suburban and rural. 16.5% of the student body at State High is economically disadvantaged, and 10.5% of students are enrolled in Special Education services. Along with that, the school is not racially diverse. There are 2.4% African American/Black students, 3.49% Hispanic students, 5.08% Multi-Racial, 8.02% Asian, and 80.75% White students (State College Area School District, 2018). As I was entering the district with my focus on equity, I was unaware that the school district was renewing their focus on equity, as well. The district recently hired a Director of Equity and Inclusivity, and revised protocols to respond to incident reports (REACT), which focused on restorative justice as a method of restoration. I was fortunate that as I entered the district with my beliefs at the same time that the district was refocusing their lens on equity and inclusivity as well. Because of these measures, I felt encouraged to challenge myself as a teacher to grow in my anti-racist practice. Seeing the district's newly focused goals, I also felt supported to challenge all of my students to see race as a structural inequity, not just an interpersonal aggression.

All student participants in my study are in Advanced English 9 and English 9 at the State College Area High School (SCAHS). I teach a total of 77 students, who each filled out a permission form allowing me to use their work and responses in my research. Of those 77 students, 36 of them are in my Advanced English 9 course. At the advanced level, I teach 19 students who go by the pronoun she, 16 students who go by the pronoun he, and 1 student who goes by they. I have two students in the group that have a 504 plan. In my English 9 classes, I teach 41 students. I teach 13 students that go by she and 28 students that go by he. In my English 9 classes, 13 of my students have IEPs or 504 plans.

### **Question 1 Methods**

This study began when I started the school year in August 2018 and has been part of my work over the academic year. I focus on two main research questions: How do I, as a white preservice teacher, develop anti-racist an anti-racist stance? How does that affect my students and myself? Thus, I have approached this inquiry from two directions: first, I examined my own tensions and growth as an anti-racist educator; second, I explored the impact of this via unit development and teaching that unit with students. This research is teacher inquiry based. The goal of teacher inquiry is to improve the classroom, provide insight into teaching, and it is performed by an educator in their classroom (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014, pp. 15).

### ***Reflective Journal***

Most of the data I collected to explore this question comes from a reflective journal that I have kept about my wonderings, struggles, and solutions since the beginning of my student

teacher journey in August 2018. To track my growth and feelings around anti-racist practice, I lean on my journal as a tool.

To record my own growth as an anti-racist educator, I continually journal as a requirement of the program as a way to reflect on my practice and to make sense of my emerging beliefs and teaching identity. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey echo the importance of a reflective journal as a data source: “Journals provide teachers a tool for reflecting on their own thought processes and critical incidents in a classroom” (2014 pp. 57). I have written at least three journal entries a week for the entirety of the school year, and because I have been thinking about race for longer than that time, my journal offers a journey through my thinking on the topic. It is also where I share my personal struggles with anti-racist teaching and learning. Other focuses of my journals are both positive and negative instances that I have had with my students when talking about race. I also use my journal as a place to write quick notes of conversations I over hear my students having or reactions to other incidents in the classroom. I then wrote beyond the issue, normally trying to come a solution or further action step. Because my study does not only revolve around my students’ response to anti-racist practice, but also my own growth in the topic, my journal is important in collecting data surrounding my growth process and my struggles with being an anti-racist teacher.

I analyzed my journal by coding and memoing the responses. Coding is a method that breaks down a large volume of data by naming and sorting similar segments into similar groups. Memoing the expands on the categories and includes some small notes taken on the initial coding groups(Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014, pp. 60). I first narrowed my 60-page reflective journal to only the excerpts where I talk about systems, my anti-racist teaching, and reflecting on my anti-racist practice. I found multiple themes start to emerge. I talked a lot about systems,

feeling like I had failed, my silence, my whiteness, my appreciation for my mentor teacher, and my growth. I took these codes and sorted them into three bigger groups: Persistence, Failure, and Introspection. Each of these groups explores a few of the trends I found and how that relates to my anti-racist practice.

## **Question 2 Methods**

As I mentioned previously, there is also a student component to my work in order to show evidence of the effects of my anti-racist practice on my students. To explore my second research question, I developed and taught a unit of instruction engaging anti-racist themes.

### ***Unit Creation***

One of the expectations of being an intern in the Professional Development School is creating and teaching a unit. To truly “walk the talk” of being an anti-racist teacher, I decided to plan my unit around *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry’s 1957 play about the trials and tribulations that the Youngers, a Black family face living in the Southside of Chicago. The play focuses on different structural inequities that put pressure on the Youngers, such as the jobs they work and where they live. Ultimately, these factors lead to the struggle and inability to fulfill their dreams. When reading this play over the summer, I was awed by the depth of the intersections that Hansberry includes. Each issue is robust and shows different dimensions and tensions that the family has to overcome. I knew that this book would be the perfect opportunity to teach with an anti-racist lens.



Students were also expected to read a young adult literature book that included themes and characters that offered insights about contemporary racial and/or immigration issues. I chose to divide my students into book clubs and have them read different books. My English 9 students either read *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone or *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Keily. Both of these books were about Black boys who experienced police brutality and had to cope and process the effect that had on them and those around them. My advanced English 9 students were divided between those two books and *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi. *American Street* follows a young, Black girl named Faboila as she immigrates to the United States from Haiti to be with her three cousins and Aunt. While moving, her mother gets detained. The book is filled with her struggle to get her mother into the states and her fight to be accepted by her cousins in a new country. I planned for the students to read these books simultaneously in book club groups. Because the books were thematically tied, the students were able to discuss in their original book club groups and also work with people outside of their groups.

### ***Unit Content***

Because my unit revolved around race and my inquiry focused on becoming an anti-racist educator, I wanted to keep race conversations at the center of everything we did. I frequently scripted conversations that I would have with my students. Some of these scripted conversations included when I introduced the book, the terms, and when we had conversations around language uses, such as “the n-word.” The paramount part of my unit was meeting the SCASD curriculum standards, while putting race first. The first way I insured that was I divided my unit standards

into affective goals and literature goals. The affective goals were my own and the literature goals were the SCASD standards. The affective goals are as follows:

- To use *A Raisin in the Sun* and the +1 Text (*All American Boys*, *Dear Martin*, or *American Street*) to highlight systems of inequity and social constructs.
- To foster the development of empathy through the lived experience of individuals who live in those systems and understand how to identify and talk about inequity and social constructs exhibited through the texts.

The Literature Goals are tied to the PA State Standards. The goals are as follows:

- Students will identify and analyze the development of themes (specifically those revolving around social constructs and systems of oppression) (C.C.1.3.9-10.A)
- Students will be able to engage in discussion by being active, empathetic listeners and using the appropriate vocabulary. (CC.1.3.9-10.J,CC.1.5.9-10.A)
- Students will trace character development with special attention to how they navigate injustices.
- Students will be able to analyze theme, characterization, and symbols. (C.C.1.3.9-10.A, C.C.1.3.9-10.H)

After deciding the goals, I used the process of Backwards Design and a Understanding by Design template to plan the understandings that my students will walk away from the unit knowing. The understandings, or big picture ideas, are as follows:

- Students will understand that different identities than their own exist.
- Students will understand that the authors in this unit are writing in order to make claims about existing society (CC. 1.2.9-10H).
- Students will understand that a central theme drives a text.

- Students will be able to evaluate experiences of characters between the texts and with their own.
- Students will understand that characters develop based on circumstances and adversity.
- Students will be able to apply concepts from their +1 texts to *ARITS*.

In order to ensure that my students were meeting these standards and goals, I created a variety of formative assessments to measure their understanding. Most of the assessments were journal entries asking the students to compare/contrast characters to themselves, asking them to compare the plot points to situations that they have seen or experienced in real life, or applying or relating concepts from one of their books to another. They also frequently engaged in conversations around the topics in their book club groups or with other class members.

Alongside the goals and understandings of my unit, I also introduced a list of terms surrounding marginalized identities, specifically in the context of race. The terms that I taught my students were especially important in my data collection. I could easily note the times that they used the terms in the correct context in their writing and conversations. The terms were also approved by the administration in the past and used in all of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes. This decision was not mine, but it gave the faculty support if there was pushback while teaching students the terms. The terms include: implicit bias, social construct, race, racism, racist, marginalized group, majority group, Person of Color, privilege, prejudice, discrimination, systemic, marginalization, and intersectionality.

These terms worked as a concrete tool throughout my unit to measure my student's understanding of the content and the level at which they could engage. The first day of my unit, I introduced the terms. We had a conversation around many of them with real life examples. They then were expected to use the terms to talk about the book in their conversations and journals. I

tracked the ways that students used the terms correctly as a way to quantify their understanding of the topic.

Word	Definition
Implicit Bias	the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which can be both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control.
Social Construct	theory of formulated understandings of the world; these understandings form the basis for shared assumptions about reality.
Race	a social construct based on certain hereditary features, e.g. skin color, bone structure, hair texture, etc., that distinguish one human population from another
Racism	a system of advantage based on race (history of oppression)
Racist	An individual whose behaviors and beliefs assign lesser value to people of color. This can be on purpose or unintentional.
Minority Group	group in society that on the basis of physical or cultural traits receives fewer of society's life chances in proportion to their numbers
Majority Group	group in society that has the power over distribution of society's life chances and establishes standard for cultural behavior
Person of color	<p>term used by many to describe people in the United States who are not white in appearance, that is, who physically appear to be African/Black, Latino, Indian, East Asian, Asian, Pacific Islander; this is the appropriate term to use.</p> <p>Black: a societal term for persons of color, typically of African descent, but not always.</p> <p>African-American: an individual identifies as being a descendent from Africa, living in America. They may or may not have dark skin.</p>
Privilege	the advantages from birth given to people in the US and European Nations due to the systemic racism that exists
Prejudice	an emotion based on some fixed mental image of a group of people without being tested against reality
Discrimination	actions based on prejudice
Systemic	Racial inequality that is spread throughout rooted in a history of oppression, affecting society as a whole
Marginalization	Process of pushing specific group(s) of people to the edge of society by denying them an active voice, identity, or place within society. Marginalization is based on majority-group power.
Intersectionality	The interconnected nature of social categorizations/constructs as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

Figure 1: Student Term Sheet

### ***Case Study: Recording Student's Processing through Their Work***

I frequently analyze my student's work as a data collection strategy. Throughout my unit, I asked them to make connections between the two texts, their book club novel and *A Raisin in the Sun*, as well as make connections to the world. I also noted if students make connections that are timely and relevant. I also looked for trends in the language use and the terms that they are using. Also, if a student has a deeper understanding of a topic, they will be able to think about it outside of the text. By seeing the relationship of their texts to their lives, I knew that they are able to take a concept that they learned in the classroom and apply it to themselves. This also gave me more insight to the experience these students have thinking about race and relating it to themselves.

In student work, I also looked to see if the students are using the terms I introduced. Because of the complexity of the terms, if the students use them correctly, I can see the progression of mastery in the topic. After I introduced the terms, I told my students that it was important that they knew them in order to talk about the book. My mentor teacher and I told them that it is important to call the issues they are seeing what they were (i.e. discrimination, implicit bias, police brutality). There was never a grade-based incentive tied to learning the vocabulary, but they were encouraged to know the words in order to participate in book club discussions and class wide conversations. I observed how which vocabulary they used and if they chose to use language that had not been taught in order to add more depth to their papers, conversations, and responses.

Because of the many students that I teach, I chose to case study 9 students, gave them pseudonyms, and observed their work. Based on these noticings, I was able to divide my students

into 3 groups: Resistant Processors, Developing Processors, and Advanced Processors. I label my students as processors because I only asked them to process race and think about how it related to their life. In the chart below (Table 1), I show you the qualities of each processing group and which students are included.

<b>Overarching Research Question 2: How does my anti-racist stance affect my students?</b>		
<b>Student Pseudonym</b>	<b>Processing Group</b>	<b>Qualities of the Processing Group</b>
Sarah Isaac Jake	Resistant Processors	<i>Resistant processors show defensiveness and avoidance behavior when talking about race.</i>
Matt Luke Lily	Developing Processors	<i>Developing processors speak of action vaguely, use terms inconsistently, and allude to racial issues but do not explicitly address them.</i>
Jen Emma Leah	Advanced Processors	<i>Advanced processors notice systems, acknowledge the complexity of racial issues, and use the terms consistently and fearlessly.</i>

**Table 1: Processing Groups and Characteristics**

### ***Recording Student's Response of Vocabulary Through Survey***

Another way that I collected my data was through an end of unit survey (See Appendix A). When my students completed their final assessment for the unit, they had class time to complete an anonymous survey. I chose to make this survey anonymous because I wanted my students to share their honest opinions and not feel as though I had an expectation of what they

“should” say. The survey included questions about the terms, conversations, and real-life applications of what we talked about in class. Before giving the survey to my students, the survey was reviewed by a Penn State Professor and was approved by my mentor. Again, in this survey, I looked for an understanding of the terms. My students showed understandings of the terms, so again, I looked for similarities in patterns that they were using the terms in. More importantly, I ask my students about the applications of this unit to their life and also conversations from the class that they still remember or feel were valuable and why. Again, there were patterns with how they chose to use them and what terms they chose to use. These observations are especially important in my analysis because I looked for student learning and potential lasting impact that might indicate how the students will use this knowledge. I then use their responses to make claims about their ability to interact with the subject matter, and if that impacted them from my anti-racist stance.

In looking over all of the data sources- journal, student work, and survey, I used open coding techniques (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014, pp. 59). I color coded the data to identify and made note of emerging theme. I continued coding and memoing notes and speaking with my professors about patterns I was beginning to observe. As a result of this methodical analysis, I reflected on the emerging patterns to identify some conclusions about myself, the use of vocabulary, and how my students processed the content. In this next chapter I will unpack this analysis of the data and the conclusions to which I came.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Data Analysis**

This inquiry focuses on my becoming an antiracist educator and on the impact that has on my students. As I reported in the methods section, I analyzed data from my journal with a clear focus on myself, and I analyzed student surveys and student work to see look for emerging patterns to make claims about how my students were responding to the material and my anti-racist teaching. In this chapter, I report my findings by presenting claims, data, and analysis. First, I consider myself and how I developed my approaches for teaching from an anti-racist stance, and then I look at student data to make sense of how they responded to this pedagogical approach.

#### **Becoming an Anti-racist Educator**

This first section reports on data gathered from my journal, because that is where I took field notes and reflections while working toward becoming an anti-racist teacher. When I was combing my journal looking for themes and patterns for analysis, I was surprised by how cohesive it was. Although I wasn't calling myself an anti-racist teacher, I was still writing and thinking about race from my first inservice day to yesterday. I found that my journey to anti-racist teaching includes three overarching ideas: 1. Persistence 2. Introspection 3. Failure/Collaboration.



### ***Introspection***

I acknowledge that I am a white woman. I do not understand the trauma that People of Color have gone through and go through every day. Even when I talk about thinking through systemic racism, I cannot fully understand the effects because of my whiteness. My identity impacts what I am able to do, how I am perceived and what I can understand. Because I am a white woman taking up anti-racist teaching, I *must* consider my identity before walking into the classroom. Even more so, I must consider my identity before teaching from an anti-racist stance. Whiteness and privilege were themes that dominated my journal. Because of my past experience teaching social justice curriculum in D.C., I had already started this process. I will also admit that considering my identity will never truly stop. I believe this is part of what makes a good educator.

Because of my identity, I had a lot of apprehension around teaching from an anti-racist stance. In November, I wrote, “I feel intimidated by the topic I chose. How can I teach from an anti-racist stance when I am always becoming an anti-racist teacher? How do I plan for that? What if by doing this I am some being some sort of white woman trope? What if I come off as a white savior or someone who is “holier than thou.” I have a lot of fear and apprehension around getting started.” This fear and apprehension went away. I channeled that energy into educating myself more about what I was going to teach. Something that I am very aware of through professional development that I lead and my own beliefs is that it is not the job of People of Color to educate white people about race. That is not appropriate. White people need to do the work educating themselves on their privilege and the effects it has on themselves and others alone. I took this up throughout my inquiry and continue to do this. It is not without failure or

doubt. I dwell on both of those things, but more than that, I dwell on my own identity and that comes first. Because of this time spent, I am able to openly admit this to my students. This changes how we talk about race. I model the introspection process in front of them, so when we talk about identity and privilege, I have considered the questions so many times, that I can show them that process as well.

In order to grow as an anti-racist teacher, I discovered that anti-racist teaching cannot be accomplished without looking at race systemically, analyzing one's identity, and repeatedly checking one's privilege. Anti-racist teaching differs from other approaches of teaching race because it not only acknowledges the individual and interpersonal effects of race, but also the institutional (Kowal et al., 2019; Lynch et al., 2017; Pollack, 2006). This is to say that race is a systemic issue. When I was searching through my reflections, I notice that I frequently address the systematic effects of racism and how that interacts with another system, public education. I started to think about these systems on August 21, my first inservice day after making an observation on the racial breakdown of the administrative team of the school and the teachers who were being hired. I mention, "I will continue to observe these instances moving forward as I begin to work closer in this system." Throughout my unit, I was also sure to emphasize the systemic effects of racism. When my class and I discussed the American Dream and who can attain it, we talked about how systems play a part in these things. Another time that systems were an important part of the discussion is when we unpacked the implications of the n-word. We talked about how the word holds the weight of systemic oppression, because of slavery, and trauma. Again, without fully thinking through this systemic oppression first on my own, I would not have been able to explain it to my students.

## *Failure*

Another personal finding from my inquiry was that anti-racist teaching involves many failures and can be discouraging. Many of the entries I wrote in my journal during my unit were titled, “Falling Short” or “Internal Conflict” My falling short normally revolved around a moment of pushback when I stayed silent or felt like I did not say enough. I frequently would reflect after a lesson and write a sentence like, “This lesson could be stronger if I could have added how power differentials can cause trauma and highlight privilege” or mention that I felt like I was silent in a time of need.

My silence tended to be something I frequently was frustrated with. I have one particular instance that I want to highlight because it shows a time I felt like I did not do enough. I was in my English 9 classroom, and we were towards the beginning of the unit. I was showing my students three New York Times Op-Docs: “A Conversation About Growing up Black”, “A Conversation With White People on Race”, and “A Conversation With Police on Race.” These videos were applicable to our terms and the themes of our unit. I had one student, Jake, give verbal pushback in the classroom. He stated that, “He hated this unit, and we shouldn’t be talking about this in school.” Jake continued to argue that “We should not talk about these issues because we are giving them too much attention, and it is one sided. By not talking about these issues, they will go away.” He was very distressed. Another student asked him if he wanted a tic tac to cool him down. Through all of this, I was silent. I gave my white male student a space to vent, which looking back, I feel was inappropriate. I want my classroom to be a space where students can voice their opinions, but I do not want him to hurt the other students in the class with his ignorance and want to spew hate after watching videos on individuals’ experiences.

After the student had a chance to take a few breathes, I walked over to him and told him that if he disagrees, he can write about it in the Video Reaction assignment that they were working on in class. I quickly spoke to Danielle about what had happened, and she assured me that not engaging with him was the best choice, because this student is known to become more extreme when he is given attention. Regardless, silence in the face of a racial issue is a very white response. As an anti-racist teacher, I hold myself to a higher standard. That is a moment I feel like I failed my class and my anti-racist stance.

As I continued my anti-racist teaching, I noticed myself in this failure balance a lot. I wanted to push my students who were ready to move into deeper conversation, but not discourage the ones who were missing the mark or in the growth process. I wrote on January 8, 2019, “I want to get more into the implications of race in America, but I never know how far to go.” I never know how far to go, and I struggled with encouraging growth while reinforcing students to use the right terms without making them shut down or be embarrassed. One example of this in my classes was how my students struggled with using the term People of Color. As I stated in my methods, I introduced the terms to my students, and we then used them in our conversations and writing assignments. My students would sometimes say “Colored People”, which we explained was outdated and also rude to use today. Regardless, students would still use it in their writing and sometimes when speaking. Each time, I would cut them off and say, “People of Color.” I was sometimes met with a “What?” response or a hurt look, but this is important and something we set up as a requirement in our classroom. I know that as a student, it can be embarrassing to be cut off and told the right terms. That has happened to me before, but it is important and normally results in remembering the right words to use.

Through my anti-racist teaching, I had my mentor teacher, Danielle, working with me. Throughout my journal in times that I felt like I had failed, she was able to speak up in my silence or challenge me to do better. This leads me to believe that anti-racist teaching can be strengthened with an accountability partner. One example of this is when I was starting the conversation about the n-word in *A Raisin in the Sun*. I told students that they were not going to read the word. One sarcastically said, “Oh darn.” Before I could respond, Danielle said to him, “Well, not only is that an inappropriate comment, but that is also racist. So, we are going to move on.” There are multiple instances of how she was able to act and use her experience as a teacher in mitigating behavior that was unwelcomed. There were also days when it was difficult to know how deep into the subject matter I should get. Danielle and I were able to tag team because the reality is that anti-racist teaching is personal and can be exhausting.

I struggled with this juxtaposition especially towards the end of my unit. We had many schedule changes due to weather, and I was feeling pressure on timing. I also struggled with “When can my students handle some ideas and when can’t they?” Essentially, how deep into the subject matter should I be going. On February 6<sup>th</sup>, I wrote, “I have to admit that this is really hard for me sometimes...When should I take a step back and protect my sanity?” I continued to reflect that people of color experience this all of the time, and because I am a white woman, I have the privilege to be able to step back, but should I? I still don’t know the answer to this question, and I am sure there are differing opinions on the answer. I do know that this relates to my failure, my identity, and my ability to continue to persist through time when anti-racist teaching was exhausting and frustrating.

## *Persistence*

Persistence is important in anti-racist teaching because anti-racist teaching is like weight lifting, the more one does it the stronger they become. I started out my unit scripting conversations I wanted to have with my students frequently. I remember the night before I taught many lessons sitting in my room writing out what I wanted to say and my responses to hypothesized student pushback or other various responses. For example, on the first day I started teaching my unit, January 2, 2019, I wrote three pages of script for how I was going to introduce the terms to my students. In one excerpt from this introduction I state, “All of the books we are about to start reading are young adult literature books that have won awards and they are also about race. In order to really be able to talk about the text in meaningful, elevated ways we need to be on the same page for how we are going to talk about everything happening in the book.” The introduction of the terms was something I was nervous for, but as I continued to teach from an anti-racist stance in my classroom it became easier. I teach four blocks, so by the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> time, I wasn’t using my notes at all. This perseverance through uncomfortable moments for my students and sometimes myself grew me to be able to start to feel some pride and ease in my anti-racist teaching in the classroom.

As I shared in the previous section, there were many moments during my unit that I felt like I had failed. To counter that, there were also many moments where after those failures, I felt a lot of pride for myself or what my students were able to accomplish. For example, on January 25<sup>th</sup>, I wrote in my journal: “Today is a day I am living my beliefs... We talked about systemic issues of racism and intersectionality. MY STUDENTS TALK ABOUT INTERSECTIONALITY!” I remember this was a day when we pondered the question of who

can achieve the American Dream and how systems and identities can affect what people achieve. I know that this is pride because I explicitly say that I felt as though I was living my beliefs. I was also proud that they were using the term intersectionality correctly in context. The date of this journal entry is especially important to highlight. It was not until about half way into my unit that I started to feel this pride. Even after this quote there were many times that I thought that I had failed or not have been as successful in my anti-racist approach. Because of these feelings, persistence is needed in order to grow towards becoming anti-racist.

Another moment that shows growth is an entry that follows shortly after. On January 29<sup>th</sup>, we were doing a class read aloud of a part of the book that contained the n-word. Before the word was said, we, as a class, deconstructed the history of the term, how it is rooted in systemic racism and why we don't say it. We were also able to quickly talk about how language changes and the reclamation of hurtful language and the politics that goes into that. I wrote that "Overall I do not feel too rattled by the conversation...I did see one eye roll once, but honestly, I am starting to get used to it by now." I admit in this quote that I was not always comfortable with the body language of all of my students when I taught this unit. I was occasionally faced with challenges and eye rolls. I am also quite certain that because I am the teacher and the power dynamics that goes with that affects if I am challenged openly or whether students disagree internally but are silent. Regardless, this entry highlights the growth that I am working to become more comfortable with pushback and disagreement.

## **Impact on Students**

The previous section focused on myself and my becoming an anti-racist educator. This section focuses on interventions I took in my classroom practices, especially with the vocabulary, and how that impacted students is the focus of my two sub-questions. In these next two sections I shift my lens to focus on classroom practice and student responses, reporting on findings about student learning and impact on students.

### ***Responding to the Vocabulary***

As described in methods, I designed my unit from an anti-racist lens. One way for me to keep track of student growth is by their use of the terms that I gave them. This slice of data from my practice highlights students' learning and responses. The majority of data for these findings comes of unit survey. This was a place for me to look for trends in student responses. Many had an appreciation that there was a way for them to see a direct application to their life. I found that when using the vocabulary, my students were able to 1. See an application beyond the classroom, 2. Make personal connections, and 3. The importance of classroom context.

### ***Application Beyond the Classroom***

Based on my survey data, I noticed a trend that anti-racist teaching doesn't stay in the classroom. As mentioned in the methods section, I gave my students an open-ended survey at the



end of the unit. Students noticed and appreciated how they could use what they were learning outside of the classroom. Other students suggested that they felt as though they learned “the right way to talk about race.” One student mentioned, “I have never had a real conversation with a teacher in class, and this was a great change.” Another stated, “I have learned about systemic racism and can point out examples in real life now.” Another student said that “One connection they can make to real life is people of color not being treated fairly in some parts of life. For example police brutality or not hiring them for a job because of their skin color.” Another student reflected by saying, “I see a lot of police brutality and racism in the news and even our government. It sickens me to see this behavior normalized. The books do a good job of explaining situations from the point of view that not many people understand.” From these few examples, I notice that my students are picking up on not only the real-life application, but also the systemic effects of racism. One of my English 9 students ties racism to the ability to get jobs and to police brutality. Those are both systemic effects of racism. By the students highlighting this, it shows that they are seeing the broader effects of anti-racist teaching. Because it falls under the umbrella of critical pedagogy, it does not stay in the classroom. If done effectively, students will be able to apply to their own life and occurrences in the real world. One student highlighted this by saying, “That today we act like Racism is not a thing. I know that Racism was a thing before this class, but now I understand it more than before. Now I take into consideration how people feel around me.” This is important. The data in this section points to students understanding that racism still exists, the structures of it, and that understanding it creates empathy.

### *Personal Connections*

From the survey, I also found that my students chose vocabulary that was easiest for them to relate to their own life. The survey prompted students to choose three of the fourteen vocab words that they learned the most about. Of that list, 35 of 71 students chose implicit bias and 34 of 71 students chose privilege. My classes are majority white, upper-middle class students. I believe that the reason they chose that they learned the most about this vocabulary is because they could see it and relate it to their own life. When prompted to define implicit bias in their own words, one student stated, “Implicit bias is using stereotypes that affect our judgements and actions towards others. This applies to real life because we are constantly judging others. For example, most people believe that teens can be pretty lazy and are on their phones all the time. But that is just a stereotype. It is not true for all teens and it is not true all the time.” Another said, “Implicit Bias – (my own words) Implicit bias is a judgement you get from someone before you have met them properly. This could be on your attire, race, etc. It applies because some teachers and adults have made assumptions of things they think I partake in.” Both students when speaking about implicit bias related it to implicit bias that they faced in their own life. They both explain that they understand the term because they have experienced it personally or felt judged by adults.

My students also frequently talked about their privilege. As I stated in my own reflections, I modeled frequently on how to acknowledge privilege. My students were able to replicate this when talking about privilege, the second most used vocab word in the survey. One student reflected on a conversation we had in class about privilege by saying, “The conversation we had in class about privilege stick with me. It was interested to me to realize what privileges I

had based on the groups I was apart of. For example being white, being a woman, and being more educated than some kids around the world gives me advantages and disadvantages.”

Another said, “I have learned that it is important to recognize your own privilege. This is important because you may have been given an advantage and not even noticed it. I will be able to apply it to my life and ultimately be even more thankful for where I live and what I was born with.” My students were able to not only define privilege correctly, but also relate it to their own lives and identities. This shows that they are learning the vocabulary because they take it out of the context of the book and apply it correctly to themselves. They also are not afraid to acknowledge that they are privileged, and do not write in a defensive way about this, which can sometimes be a response when faced with their own privilege.

### *Classroom Context*

Lastly, my students learned the vocab that the I used the most in their classroom. Data for terms are a little bit different for each of my classes. Our conversations led us different places and different things were emphasized. None of my classes are ever the same. I teach many unique individuals, which makes each of my blocks different. Because of this difference, each of my discussions with my classes vary. Different contexts cause different words because students are different from each other. For example, in block 6, we talked a lot about intersectionality and how different facets of people’s identities changes their opportunities. In block 8, we talked about implicit bias and privilege the most. This is evident in the data for each class. The words Danielle and I used the most are the words that my students replicated most easily. I also never gave my students a grade from learning the vocabulary. There was no incentive to learn the

language beyond being able to participate in book club discussions. This shows that when students see how something can be directly applied to their life, they learn it. Learning vocabulary through real-life examples, full class processing and conversations, and writing as a form of processing were all strategies that led to my student's mastery of this vocabulary, and because I believe in following the lead of my students' thinking and wonderings, different class sections emphasized different vocabulary through this process.

### ***Processing the Learning***

Lastly, I analyzed my student's work and, as I described in my methods, selected a sample of students for closer analysis. I analyzed student work that students did from the beginning to the end of my unit to come to these conclusions. This final section focuses on how students process race through their work, thus highlighting my performance as an anti-racist teacher. Even more importantly, this analysis relates to how my anti-racist teaching directly affecting my students. Processing race is not always visible, but I use their work as reference because I created assignments where students can work through their thinking and what they are reading about. After careful consideration, I created three groups, based on the ways students chose to approach the material and talk about the subject matter: 1. Resistant Processors 2. Developing Processors 3. Advanced Processors. I decided to group them by their processing methods because I cannot say how they feel about race, but I do know that some are much more comfortable talking about and working with race than others.

*Resistant Processors*

Through my data analysis, I found that resistant processors show qualities of defensiveness and avoidance behavior when talking about race. I chose 3 students' work to analyze as resistant processors: Sarah, Isaac, and Jake, who were all white students. I chose each of these students because they showed an avoidance of the terms in their writing, a disregard for the material, and/or a moment arose in the unit when they publicly confronted me about the issue. There is a difference in how my two male students processed over how Sarah processed. Both males showed growth towards the end of the unit. I do acknowledge the fact that this could be due to the fact that they want to get a good grade in the class, and some of that depends on their ability to engage in the material. Sarah was particularly interesting because she avoided the terms almost completely.

As stated, Sarah frequently avoided using racial terms which resulted in talking around the point of racial injustice. An example of her work is when she states that the main character of her book, "Justyce gets into trouble with a cop...and the cop assumes he is up to no good because of his looks." This student is normally a very eloquent writer who follows all of the directions. Instead of saying "Justyce is a victim of police brutality and was discriminated against because of the police officer's implicit bias." We gave that example many times to show that it was possible to use terms in work. She chose to avoid the terms. She also wrote her entire literature analysis essay without using a single term from the list described above. She showed signs of defensiveness in her writing when I showed the New York Times videos. In her reflection, she stated, "Dear Martin displays the cops as white, racist, and anger driven people who automatically assume something is wrong when they see a person of color. The video

basically states the opposite, that cops stop someone if they see something illegal regardless of their race.” Sarah continued to process in a different question by saying, “I hear all the time about cops hurting black people and most of the time they bring up why the cop had a reason to do what they did (such as the person had drugs on them, or they weren’t doing what the cop told them to do). Are there cases where a cop has acted in a racist way and hurt someone solely because of the color of their skin?” Here we see Sarah struggling through a colorblind stance of defending police without talking about implicit bias or acknowledging mistakes in the past. She is taking a colorblind approach even when her book, *Dear Martin*, gives an example of police wrongly profiling the main character, Justyce. She also states in this assignment that “A good cop doesn’t care about race.” This is dismissing the vocabulary because we work through how implicit bias makes it impossible to not see race. This highlights more defensiveness and her avoidance behavior of the claims.

Both Jake and Isaac showed defensiveness and avoidance behavior throughout the unit. Also, they both had moments of being aggressive towards the subject matter being taught or the books we were reading. Jake’s moment of defensiveness was recorded above. He openly discussed how he thought we shouldn’t teach race in the classroom and was off task when in book club groups. Isaac was more discrete in his pushback. It was in the form of eye rolls. Also, in our end of unit survey, I was able to isolate his responses because of his writing style and his comments to his friend about the fact that the survey was anonymous. In his response to how the books we read relate to his life, he said, “Look I really can’t make any connection to these character that isn’t off topic... Continually trying to get me to find one is making me feel like an ass, and I don’t appreciate it.” In the survey question he was answering, I asked if there were any connections he could make from his book club book to his life. I wanted to give students the

chance to acknowledge that racism and police brutality are still happening today. His more covert form of aggression to my survey question highlights his defensiveness around his ability to connect to others. Isaac also stated in a bell ringer response, comparing the two main characters of his book, that “They both are a part of the POC minority and feel as though they have unjust disadvantage to whites.” First, “POC minority” is not a way to talk about people of color. We talk about how to use the term marginalized instead of minority. More frustrating, he chooses to use the language “feel as though” to talk about racial inequality. This is inaccurate and harmful. Jake and Isaac both said that they felt the book they read was boring. Jake went as far to call it “Meh” stating that “It ended with the protest and it was pretty boring and hard to sit through.” Both male students were more outspoken than Sarah in their processing and frustration with the unit, but all three shared they thought the books were overdone, they chose to avoid race or talk about it in a way that was avoidant or aggressive. They chose to resist the terms and anti-racist teaching, which was their choice.

### *Developing Processors*

Unlike resistant possessors, developing processors are a wide range of students. Most speak of action vaguely, use the terms inconsistently, and allude to race issues but do not explicitly address them. Most of my students would be in the developing processor section. These are students that were willing to engage in the material, but did not always know how. I looked at Matt, Luke, and Lily’s work to see these patterns. They are all white students. Each showed development over the course of the unit, hence the name, and there was a wide range in articulation levels. These students use the terms when prompted, but easily move past the real-

world approach unless reminded. For example, Lily was able to highlight in her bell ringer that “White people, especially of that time, do not really understand those struggles of an African American family in America. We as the reader start to understand them, empathize with them, and see the world thru their eyes...” But, when prompted to write her final essay, she talks broadly of identities, but never uses any terms or implications of them. Luke openly acknowledged racism existing and speaks about how he has friends that have experienced racism and says that it happens every single day. Throughout his work, he was not afraid to talk about what he saw and when he saw it. He was fearless in his ability to talk about his noticings throughout the unit, frequently observing and writing about qualities of whiteness. In his reflections of the conversations on race video, he states, “Even though there were these people not wanting to be the bad guy the stuff they said was still very broad and is what I could call, (not wanting to be rude of anything) being very white.” I love this reflection because he was the only one to talk about whiteness in the entire unit. The reason that he is still developing is because he does not see the ties between interpersonal racism and systemic racism. He also acknowledges interest in action but in a broad way. Matt did the most developing throughout the unit. He was always asking questions and was able to tie hardships that the characters were facing in the book to racism. His thesis of his literary analysis was, “Marginalized groups face significantly more difficulty in trying to achieve the American Dream because of racism.” This is a great thesis, and he explores the ideas throughout his paper. I include Matt as an example of a developing processor to show the range of the group. He is still in the developing group because he speaks of action passively and lacked confidence and outspokenness that my advanced processors had.



*Advanced Processors*

The data indicates that only a small subset of my students were advanced processors. Advanced Processors notice systems, acknowledge the complexity of racial issues, and use the terms consistently and fearlessly. The three advanced processors that I chose to study were Jen, Emma, and Leah. Jen and Emma are both white women in my block 6 class. Leah identifies as a person of color and is of Asian. On the first day of class, Leah was using the vocab. She responded to the New York Times video “A Conversations with White People About Race” and was immediately using vocab. She stated, “I feel like he doesn’t recognize his privilege at all.” And that she was surprised that white people wondered if they were racist. Coming into the unit, she had read two of the three book club books. The thesis of her literary analysis was “The ignorance that privilege creates catalyzes insensitivity, amplifying bigotry against the discriminated.” Leah’s thesis statement is incredibly complex. Her paper focused on highlight the ignorance caused by racial discrimination and how this privilege further harms people of color. Not only was her paper topic complex and included more vocabulary than the terms above, she included a real-world example explaining cultural appropriation. Leah was a model to the students in her classroom and by far the most advanced. She at times seemed frustrated with her book club group, who could not discuss at the same level. This resulted in her getting off task with her classmates. It could also be a way of her to protect herself from her classmates’ ignorance. When she was submitting work or answering questions, she always went above and beyond.

Jen and Emma were both strong performers in my 6<sup>th</sup> block class. What separated them from the rest of the class was their ability to fearlessly interact with the terms. Neither of them

stated that they had a background in social justice, but they were both strong presences in the class. Emma was immediately able to pick up on a complex tension that Manny, the best friend of the main character in *Dear Martin* felt. When talking about Manny, she states, “Physically, he’s a POC, but he hasn’t grown up with other POC. The might think he acts “too white”.” She went on to say that Manny was motivated by “societal norms that you have to act a certain way to be accepted.” She was very focused on the emotional effects of racism. Her thesis for her literary analysis also echoed this sentiment. Emma stated, “A person’s intersectionality and exposure to scarring events play a crucial role in how they react in a given situation, creating unnecessary trauma.” Again, this idea is much more sophisticated. She uses terms effortlessly and focuses on the complexity of emotional trauma on the people of color in the unit’s novels. Jen wrote on the first day back to school that one thing she wanted to do in English was “Write a passionate essay about human rights.” Her work stands out to me because she was always willing to verbally process her privilege in front of the class. She once admitted to the class that her privilege blinded her from understanding the decision that the Younger’s to move to Clybourne Park at the end of *A Raisin in the Sun*. She was also able to identify and write about the oppressed and the oppressors. She wrote in her Hero Artifact Project, “Justyce was able to recognize that even though the oppression of black people face is terrible, he would not wish that sense of powerlessness on anyone, even oppressors.” She was also creating theme ideas such as, “The way people react to systemic racism depends on their privilege and place in society.” The thesis for her literary analysis essay was, “The implicit bias against people of color destroys their hope of overcoming systemic racism, ultimately, not allowing for progression.” She again highlights systemic racism and is not afraid to take on the idea of destroyed hope or progression. My three advanced processors were leaders in each of their classes. Their high level of

processing demonstrated by these students was a model for other students. I believe they were role models and through their processing influenced other students to move from resistant to developing or to develop further, and they certainly pushed me to develop further in my anti-racist teaching.

Each student's place with where they are processing is simply an indicator of their responses and certainly understandable and legitimate given the diversity of my classes and students' opinions. These categories not judgements but more for me to measure how students responded to anti-racist teaching and observe their ability to work with the material. When teaching, I made it clear to my class that we respect each other's beliefs. As long as they are not harmful to anyone, we can address them in my classroom. My hope in teaching this unit and becoming an anti-racist teacher is to learn more about the practice and how I can improve; my main goal is not to change the minds of any of my students. My hope was only to create some more empathy for them and to give them the tools to talk about race with the most current terms and give them new perspectives to consider if they hadn't already.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

As you can see above, I found some trends and patterns when analyzing my data on my journey to becoming an anti-racist educator. In this section, I will reiterate the claims that I made about each finding and connect them to my practice and research. I also consider recommendations for teachers, and plans I have for moving forward from this inquiry.

### **Recommendations**

Becoming an anti-racist teacher is a process that does not happen overnight. I admit that I am still growing and changing every day. That also means my anti-racist practice grows and changes as well. Because of this, introspection is key in being an anti-racist educator. As I mentioned in this section of data-analysis, I was frequently journaling about my identity and how that could have changed how my students responded or how I approached a situation. Being a white woman, I think introspection into my identity was important. Because of my privilege, I didn't have to think about my race or repercussions until I was in college. I think that if this continues, it can be detrimental to students, specifically the 51% of students of color that attend U.S. Public Schools (National Center for Education Statistics). Based on how introspection strengthened my anti-racist practice, I would suggest that all teachers do the same. Some questions teachers could ask would be: What identity groups am I a part of? Do any of these groups have a history in oppression? Do I have any benefits from the groups in which I belong? How might my identity group affect my students? For example, I am a white woman.

Historically speaking, women have not always had rights in this country, but white women have been at the forefront of the first and second wave of feminism. I have many benefits from being a white woman, some of which include being in the majority group in the career. Being a white woman, I have a specific way of speaking and understanding the world through my privilege. I am blind to certain situations and experiences. Although I can sympathize, I cannot always empathize. This is key in how I approach students. I know that I need to listen to my students of color twice as much as I speak. To fully unpack my identity took time and practice, but it is necessary order to teach and understand their students (Dover et al., 2019, pp. 232). Even if these teachers are not anticipating teaching from an anti-racist stance, identity introspection is still important in being mindful for considering how one affects their students and their growth.

Persistence was also important in my personal anti-racist journey. I failed many times and even though I feel as though it strengthened my anti-racist stance, it was difficult. Like I shared above, there were many times that I fell silent at a time when I needed to advocate. This failure is comparable to Berchini's findings where she observed the teacher in her study failing frequently when getting started (2019, pp. 260). But with time, I became stronger in my stance. I knew this because I scripted less, spent less time thinking about eyerolls and other cues of disagreement from students, and shutting down behavior that was disrespectful or racist. Again, a huge part of my strength came from my mentor teacher, Danielle. This makes me think that in order to grow as an anti-racist teacher, there needs to be communities of support. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey also recommended the support of another educator or a community when teaching (2014, pp. 28). This suggestion was echoed throughout my practitioner research. One was that this is possible is through BAR-WE (Building Anti-Racist White Educators), a professional development that is run by a teacher's union in Philadelphia. Monthly, they provide readings and

encourage teachers to meet and discuss. BAR-WE has given me a space where I can learn with other teachers and have other allies to deconstruct my practice and decisions with. This community can also be helpful in encouraging persistence and holding teachers accountable. I recommend that other teachers find one or more people to work with as an anti-racist teacher. Regardless of if a teacher has decided to teach from an anti-racist stance, teaching communities are helpful in encouraging growth and reflective practice of educators.

I also learned about how the decisions I made in my anti-racist teaching affected my students. One example of this was the vocabulary list that was distributed and how they responded at the end of the unit. I found that my students saw an application of the terms in real life and chose the terms that they could relate directly themselves. This makes me realize that even though I kept the application to real life activities in my unit to a minimum, students were making connections on their own. My students have the ability to connect more texts to their life; they just need the space and opportunity to do it. Because I am working as the person in power in a system, I was careful not to tell students what to think or believe, but many of them were still connecting real life situations to police and police brutality. They also chose terms they could see directly in their life. I introduced privilege and implicit bias as things that all humans have, just in different quantities. Surprisingly, I did not get much pushback from this definition, and even my students that did not love the unit, were able to use the term implicit bias. Because of this, I would recommend approaching terms that could be controversial in a way that is not condemning. Although privilege can blind people from others' situations, it is not a student's fault for having privilege. Because I framed it outside of their control, there was no defensiveness or a need for "proving oneself." Also, when teaching the terms, I included many personal anecdotes and times I noticed my own privilege. This could have made my students

more comfortable and model how to make these connections themselves. An implication of this could be that my students learned words more that I used in context as their teacher. Without realizing my pedagogical choice, I was modeling the use of specific terms in each classroom. Modeling has been proven to increase student understanding and their ability to try the task independently (Rosenshine, 2012, pp. 15). For example, in my 6<sup>th</sup> block class, we had more opportunities to talk about intersectionality, and this showed in the results of their end of unit survey. When I was going over the data, I felt as though the terms chosen were a mirror being held up to my teaching, and what we as a class focused on was what my students emphasized in their personal results. I love to think of myself as a consistent teacher, but because of the different humans that exist in each of my classes, none of my classes are ever truly the same. I had to meet some classes where they were with the maturity level and the attention span that they had. Not all of them were as interested in the social issues of the book, and that is okay. I can't ever force my students to care about something; I can only suggest something is important and give them the opportunity to think about why it matters and how it affects them. That is the basis of teaching from behind. Going off of this difference of each class, some of my classes were more fearful when talking about race than others. Some of my consistently high performing students were surprisingly quiet during the duration of the unit. Other students were more engaged. If I could do it again, I think I would try to talk to those students one-on-one to inquire into their fear and to give them some encouragement.

When thinking about the processing of the vocabulary and content, I was able to group my students into 3 distinct groups: resistant, developing, and advanced. Each group has different qualities. I would like to specify that I don't see this groups as existing alone, but it is more of a spectrum that students move on. This depends on many things. Some days, my resistant students

were developing and other days my advanced processors were developing. When faced with new or a different pattern of thoughts, students need time to process and grow. There are also many outside circumstances that relate to how my students grasp this information. This ranges from home life and parent's perspective to the amount of sleep they have or other circumstances that happened in their school day. This always reminds me to meet my students where they are. This is something that teachers are reminded to do day to day that also particularly important for anti-racist teaching. I recommend that teachers do this regardless of their pedagogical stance, but also applies to anti-racist teaching. Students have good days and bad days whether it be socially, emotionally, and academically. It is our job as teachers to support them, and encourage them to move up the spectrum in processing, regardless of the content.

### **Moving Forward: A Continuous State of Becoming**

This inquiry has left me feeling energized and ready to continue my research. First, I am looking forward to the opportunity of continuing to explore these research questions with my future students. I have a few ideas of how I can strengthen my data collection, such as giving an initial survey just asking students how much they think about race, privilege, and implicit bias before talking about certain situations. I also want to give my students more of an opportunity to interact with the subject matter we are seeing in the books in real life. This is critical pedagogy in action. I am disappointed because of the many snow days, delays, and other schedule changes that I encountered in January and February during my unit. It taught me how to be flexible with my planning and preparation, but it shortened the length of the time I had with my students, affecting the depth of conversations and other activities I wanted to do with my class.



Another significant implication that I take from this inquiry is my awareness that the way I talk about race matters. I was fortunate to have only a small amount of pushback from students and no pushback from parents. Based on my readings and even teaching at State High, I know that is not always the case. One reason I think this is the case is because I never put the terms up for debate. The terms were approved by the principal of the high school, and they were found on the U.S. Census website and other government sites. I also introduce the terms as an academic challenge. I tell them we are going to study social constructs and their effects on society. Most of my students rise to the occasion because they are smart, curious humans. I think that defensiveness can arise when terms are not introduced in a decisive way. Scripting and reflecting on each term were key for me in my delivery. I also reflected on how a defensive student could respond and tried to work through that before I walked into the classroom. If I had been challenged by a parent, I am sure that would be something additional to report in this paper. I also think the possibility of pushback increases the amount of fear I have about teaching with an anti-racist stance. I feel certain I will be challenged at some point, and that will probably turn into a new wondering.

This inquiry has given me a few ideas to expand my research outside of my classroom. Similarly, to the ways I analyzed different groups and approaches to students processing, I think this approach could be useful for making sense of the ways educators approach equity pedagogies. I am involved in facilitating an anti-racist professional development at State College Area High School, and I notice similar groups in teachers. This also implicates that teachers, just like students can be taught how to talk about race in their classroom. I would argue that this is more important than teaching the students. Teachers are in the classroom and not equipped to lead students through these discussions and processing of literature they are reading or events

that happen in the world. This frequently leads to trauma for both the students in the classroom and teachers, who lose confidence and become fearful of talking about race with students again.

My hopes in continuing this work would be to work with both teachers and students. I know my journey to becoming an anti-racist teacher is nowhere near to ending; in accord with the key tenets of critical pedagogy, I am in a constant state of becoming. Even though I am no longer teaching a unit on race, I still work to live my beliefs everyday through conversations I have with students, confronting systems, and working with colleagues. This inquiry does not fix race, but it opened truthful respectful conversations around race and racism. It also encouraged my students to thoughtfully consider race and the implications that come when talking about their own identity and people who do not share the same parts of their identity. I have learned that anti-racist teaching is difficult, but through my data collection, I can see that it affects my students' behavior and how they will think and talk about race in the future. I also have personally become more confident in my ability to talk about race and lead others in those discussions. This practitioner inquiry will lead to more inquiries that I have when working with other students and inservice teachers when talking about race. These are all things I hope to consider in the future. My work with this topic will continue, and this inquiry has given me the chance to initially explore concepts I will revisit in the future.

## Appendix A

### Survey

1. Which title did you read for your book club?
  - a. *All American Boys*
  - b. *Dear Martin*
  - c. *American Street*
2. How would you rate this book on a scale of 1-5?
3. Why did you give that rating to the book for your book club?
4. How would you rate *A Raisin in the Sun* on a scale of 1-5?
5. Why did you give *A Raisin in the Sun* the rating you did?
6. What is one connection from these books you can make to your own life?
7. All of the terms from our unit are listed below. Please select three that you learned the most about.
8. Choose one term that you selected from above. Define it in your own words and describe how it applies to real life. Explain your answer in complete sentences.
9. What was one conversation from this unit that sticks with you? It might be something we discussed as a whole class, in your book club, or with a classmate. What topic did you discuss, and describe why you feel it was important. Explain your answer in complete sentences.
10. What is something you learned in this unit that you think you can apply outside of our English classroom? How will you apply it? Explain your answer in complete sentences.

## Appendix B

### Unit Plan in the Understanding by Design (UBD) Model

STAGE 1 – DESIRED RESULTS	
<p><b>Unit Title: + 1 Book Club and A Raisin in the Sun Unit Plan</b></p> <p><b>Affective Goals:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To use <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> and the +1 Text (<i>All American Boys</i>, <i>Dear Martin</i>, or <i>American Street</i>) to highlight systems of inequity and social constructs.</li> <li>To foster the development of empathy through the lived experience of individuals who live in those systems and understand how to identify and talk about inequity and social constructs exhibited through the texts.</li> </ul> <p><b>Literature Goals:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will identify and analyze the development of themes (specifically those revolving around social constructs and systems of oppression) (C.C.1.3.9-10.A)</li> <li>Students will be able to engage in discussion by being active, empathetic listeners and using the appropriate vocabulary. (CC.1.3.9-10.J,CC.1.5.9-10.A)</li> <li>Students will trace character development with special attention to how they navigate injustices.</li> <li>Students will be able to analyze theme, characterization, and symbols. (C.C.1.3.9-10.A, C.C.1.3.9-10.H)</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Understandings: (setting informs context) Big stuff EQs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will understand that different identities than their own exist.</li> <li>Students will understand that the authors in this unit are writing in order to make claims about existing society. (CC. 1.2.9-10H)</li> <li>Students will understand that a central theme drives a text.</li> <li>Students will be able to evaluate experiences of characters between the texts and with their own.</li> <li>Students will understand that characters develop based on circumstances and adversity</li> <li>Students will be able to apply concepts from their +1 texts to <i>ARITS</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Essential Questions: (edit and weed down)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What privilege do people have based on their identity?</li> <li>How does struggle help define who we are?</li> <li>How can the lived experiences of individuals reflect social inequities?</li> <li>How can fictional stories teach us about existing problems with society?</li> <li>How does age play a part in how people deal with social issues?</li> </ul>
<p>Students will know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will know the appropriate vocabulary to speak respectfully in an academic space about identities that are not theirs.</li> <li>Students will know different identities lead to different experiences.</li> <li>Students will identify and analyze theme within their YA Lit +1 and <i>ARitS</i></li> </ul>	<p>Students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will be able to express empathy and understanding of the text through journaling.</li> <li>Students will be able to identify the theme of the texts before reading half of the book.</li> <li>Students will be able to chart the progression of character development.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will know how to engage in discussion by being active, empathetic listeners and using academic vocabulary.</li> <li>• Students will know how to trace character development with special attention to how characters navigate injustices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will be able to write a claim, data, warrant paragraph about themes, character development, or symbols. (CC.1.5.9-10.D, CC.1.4.9-10.H)</li> </ul>
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STAGE 2 – ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE	
<p><b>Performance Tasks:</b></p> <p><b>Formative Assessments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Window or Mirror?</a> Journal This task helps students consider if the text is a window or a mirror through practicing literacy skills and using technology. Students will decide if the author, speaker, characters or content in a text reflect students’ lived experiences (mirror) or provide a window into the lived experiences of people whose identities differ from the students’</li> <li>• Looking at a current issues through the lens of different characters. This idea was taken from Michael Kay’s <i>Not Light But Fire</i>.</li> </ul> <p><b>Summative Assessments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Hero Assessment (Scasd Assessment): Completed after finishing +1 Text (<i>All American Boys, Dear Martin, or American Street</i>)</b></li> <li>• <b>Literary Analysis (Scasd Assessment): Completed after <i>ARITS</i> and students’ book club book.</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Other Evidence: Journals, Type 2s, Handouts, Discussions</b></p> <p>Small Journal Entries (Empathy Explorations) to reflect on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• readings</li> <li>• learnings</li> <li>• feelings</li> </ul> <p>Note-taking during book clubs via graphic organizer</p> <p>Discussions: Book clubs/Class-wide Check-ins/ TQE/ 4 corners</p> <p>Character Development Chart</p>
<p><b>Key Grading Criteria:</b></p>	
<p><b>Rubrics for both Summative Assessments</b></p>	

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**EDUCATION**

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**The Pennsylvania State University** **University Park, PA**  
**Schreyer Honors College** Class of 2019  
*Master of Education, Curriculum and Instruction*  
*Bachelor of Science, Secondary Education English and Media Literacy; Minor, Psychology*  
Honors Thesis: *Walking the Talk: My Journey towards Becoming an Anti-Racist Educator*

**TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

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**State College Area School District Professional Development School** **State College, PA**  
*Full-Year Intern* *August 2018 – present*

- Designed and instructed lessons in English 9 and Advanced English 9 classes
- Differentiated and designed an anti-racist unit
- Collaborated with English faculty and other district staff in in-service days, Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, and Individualized Education Plan (IEPs) to insure student growth and success
- Tutored students 1-1 in the Academic Center for Enrichment

**Adolescent Literacy Lab** **University Park, PA**  
*Research Assistant* *June 2018 – August 2018*

- Interviewed English Language Learning students and collected, transcribed, coded, and analyzed data from interviews, tests, and lessons.

**D.C. Social Justice Fellowship** **University Park, PA**  
*Fellow* *January 2018 – August 2018*

- Co-taught and developed social justice curriculum using critical pedagogy and experiential learning in Washington D.C. Public Schools

**Pittsburgh Botanic Garden** **Oakdale, PA**  
*Education Intern* *May 2017 – August 2017*

- Created field trip programs and led activities, night hikes, and school programs

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**Pennsylvania Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (PCTELA): Attendee** October 2018

**Penn State Diversity in Education Conference: Attendee** January 2019

**National Association of Professional Development Schools: Presenter** February 2019

- Co-presented session with mentor teacher and university faculty
- Presented honors thesis research in undergraduate poster session

**Building Anti-Racist White Educators (BAR-WE) Facilitator** August 2018 - June 2019

- Co-Facilitated this monthly reading and inquiry series for faculty and staff at SCAHS

**ACTIVITIES AND AWARDS**

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**Schreyer for Women** **State College, PA**  
*President* *March 2016 – present*

- Founded and maintained a service, career development, and community-based club for women within the honors college

**The Daily Collegian** **State College, PA**  
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- Followed the primary election and was published by *USA Today*

**Honors and Awards**

- Dean's List, Kahn Scholarship, Lois Berstler Scholarship, Hedgebeth Family Scholarship in Education, Academic Excellence Scholarship