Antiracist Pedagogy in White Spaces: An Exploration of Antiracist White Teachers and Their Commitment to Create Antiracist Classrooms

A Dissertation submitted to the faculty of San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
In
Educational Leadership

by
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Certification of Approval

I certify that I have read Antiracist Pedagogy in White Spaces: An Exploration of Antiracist White Teachers and Their Commitment to Create Antiracist Classrooms by Michelle Suzanne Hammons, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership at San Francisco State University.

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Abstract

This dissertation describes an inquiry into Montessori-based white teachers’ practices of disrupting white identity formation in the classroom through their antiracist stance. The findings within ultimately demonstrate the necessity for white teachers to grow in their understanding and practice of antiracism. Such growth is meaningful because of the role schools play in systematic white supremacy and racism. Together, the evidence and analysis add to the conversation of antiracist work and produce suggestions for deepening and expanding the potential for such growth in white teachers. In this qualitative study, evidence was collected through focus groups and phenomenological interviews with self-described antiracist white teachers who worked in schools with a student population with white students as the majority subgroup, with other subgroups providing less than 20% of the population. Using qualitative inquiry, the data provide insight into how teachers intentionally create their classroom design and how they make changes countering the hegemony through which traditional educational environments are constructed. Participant perspectives are at the heart of this study. Participants shared their hope to apply a Montessori tenet of providing experiences for the child on the subconscious and the conscious level. The teachers expressed how they have examined themselves and examined their Montessori training to uncover ways they can make changes toward being less Anglo-European centered. The data collected and conversations shared are relatable even to teachers outside of Montessori and demonstrate to white teachers with a desire to be committed to antiracism they are not alone and there are ways to make even subtle changes in their classrooms impacting the children they guide.
Preface

“You’ve got to be taught
To hate and fear,
You’ve got to be taught
From year to year,
It’s got to be drummed
In your dear little ear
You’ve got to be carefully taught.

You’ve got to be taught before it’s too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate,
You’ve got to be carefully taught!”

“You’ve got to be carefully taught!”
—South Pacific by Richard Roberts

I recognized early on in my life I had been taught differently from my white peers. My mother used toys, Christmas figurines, and experiences, as well as the individuals who filled our lives and who my parents valued in their lives to teach me about diversity. More specifically, through her actions, she created a world for me that might not have existed in the reality of the time; she did not want my world to be siloed in whiteness. She took my all-white Fisher Price neighborhood and painted half of the figures brown, so it would be integrated. Fisher Price did not have any Black or Brown people in their neighborhood until the mid-1970s. When there was a choice of seeing the Black Santa or white Santa, I saw the Black Santa. Both of my parents taught in predominately Black schools in Cincinnati. My mother hosted dinners for students from the classroom once a month at our home, and my father always invited students for Superbowl Sunday. It did not go unnoticed in our neighborhood when my family welcomed these students
of color in our home on a regular basis, as this was not a typical occurrence in a predominately white middle-class neighborhood in the 1970s, and to be honest, might still not be in the 2020s.

My father’s best friend was his supervisor who happened to be African American. My father was a school-level administrator and Mr. Fields was the assistant superintendent. Our families often had dinner together at each other’s houses. My mother, at the same time, became close friends with a family who had recently immigrated from Korea. In addition to regular times to spend time together, they were always with us for holiday meals. From the time I was 9, our holiday dinners included bulgogi, japchae, and mandu. These experiences allowed me to be aware of and to respect cultures differing from the suburban, white, experience I was surrounded by and in which I lived. Recently, I had the chance to tell her about the work I am doing and my research. Her response was to quote the lyrics to the song in the introduction, “You Have to Be Carefully Taught.”

My parents were actively involved in a social discourse of equity. Gee (1989) referred to discourse as a combination of actions, words, and mannerisms demonstrating identity in a group. In the late 1960s and 1970s, people did not use the term antiracism. My parents might have referred to the Civil Rights movement, but mainly they lived and acted through the idea every person is equally human and equally deserving of respect. Their friendships, their careers, their choices, and their lives were a daily model for me of this message.

I acquired this internalized belief in the equality of all people before I was old enough to even comprehend what that meant. Montessori (1949/1972) referred to the period of development between the ages of 0–6 years as the absorbent mind, in which experiences enter a
child’s developing mind without filters or barriers. Gee (1989) referred to this as acquisition, stating:

A process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models . . . without formal teaching. It happens in natural settings which are meaningful and functional in the sense that the acquirers know that they need to acquire something in order to function and they in fact want to so function. (p. 20)

Gee compared it to learning a first language. That was how the ideas and concepts of racial and social justice were given to me.

The home environment is in many ways the first classroom, but it is not the only classroom. As an educator, I look to the schools and classrooms where children spend most of their time each day. What might be possible if educators provided these experiences and modeled these behaviors for students? If my mother could positively impact how I developed my racial identity by intentionally providing me with a life that was not exclusively “white,” and by modeling through her actions, then what would happen if similar intentionality and modeling were to take place throughout other white spaces, specifically schools and classrooms.
Acknowledgements

I must begin by thanking my parents Bill Hammons and Bonnie Crawford Hammons for providing me with a rich childhood, and for helping me develop an open heart and open mind. I do not know who I would be if it was not for them rooting me in their belief in equity and justice as well as bringing Montessori education into my young world.

Thank you to my family and friends who have been patient with me these past years. Thank you for allowing me to take up a far different pandemic hobby than baking bread, by working toward my doctorate. I hope to find a way to make up for all the meals, movies, conversations, and trips soon. Most of all, thank you for your support, encouragement, and willingness to celebrate this with me!

I have deep gratitude to the participants who gave up their time and allowed themselves to be vulnerable in conversations. Your time and truth will hopefully give other teachers the knowledge that they are not alone in their desire to create antiracist classrooms and learning environments.

I send respect and appreciation to my dissertation committee—Trevor, Nicole, and Kim. Thank you for your time, your experience, and mostly for pushing me when I needed pushing. Thank you so much for being on this journey with me.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation was an inquiry into white teachers’ practices of disrupting white identity formation in the classroom through their antiracist stance. The findings ultimately demonstrated the necessity for white teachers to grow in their understanding and practice of antiracism. Such growth is meaningful because of the role schools play in systematic white supremacy and racism.

Specifically, this study provides findings based on research into white teachers who consider themselves antiracist. The evidence gathered, and the analysis of this evidence, adds to the conversation of antiracist work and provides suggestions for what more can be done to deepen and spread the potential for such growth in white teachers. The hope is for this study’s findings and discussions to provide support for white educators implementing antiracism pedagogy and practice in their classes.

This research was also a personal quest to express the connection between how we educate children, the nonverbal messages we send to them every day, and the onus I believe exists on white educators for antiracism in our work. Additionally, as a Montessori educator for over 30 years, I know Montessori intended for students to learn from both direct and indirect lessons in the classroom. I know Montessori teachers are taught to look at everything they do as a form of modeling for their students and to remove anything from their classroom distracting from the lessons they want conveyed. This leads them to be highly analytical with every aspect of their classroom. I believe the qualities of Montessori education lend themselves to this work and so I can provide research into two areas I am passionate about and demonstrate how they are intertwined.
Michael and Bartoli (2023) paraphrased James Baldwin when he explained “Racism is a White person’s problem . . . and it won’t change until White people see that and do something about it” (p. 30). This quote expresses the underlying premise of this work—white people and, in this case, white educators must own the social reproduction of racism through schools is our problem and we need to do something about it. White teachers in schools servicing a predominantly white student population are in exactly the position to “do something about it” (Michael & Bartoli, 2023, p. 30).

As a white educator who identifies as an ally and antiracist, I have a responsibility to be a tool of this disruption and the subsequent reimagined identity development. However, as a public Montessori educator who is a white woman working in a predominately white school, I struggled for an extended time about how my commitment to antiracism and creating culturally conscious environments could be brought into this space. Literature has addressed the difficulty or resistance of some white teachers to confront racism in both them and the system of which they are a part, but not as much research has focused on what white teachers have done.

I started my career teaching in a school of 98% African American students. It was a Montessori magnet program intended to help with desegregation but certainly started as segregated. My students and I navigated many conversations about race, even though they were a class of 3–6-year-old children. I am sure I made many mistakes during those years and learned

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1 Throughout this dissertation I will alternate between capitalizing or not capitalizing the term “white” as it is applied to people of predominantly Anglo-European decent. The literature is mixed on how the term white is presented. One goal of this study is to find ways to honor all groups of people and not to hold whiteness as the standard. During certain points in the writing, it felt by capitalizing the word, I was giving it a level of importance. At the same time, not to capitalize it, if I am capitalizing Black, or the term People of Color, seemed to again, assign a hierarchy to the terms.
many lessons. As I have reflected on my experience, I know there are things I would have done differently, but there are also things I learned that I have continued to use in my position as principal.

As a white teacher in a predominately African American school, it would have been naïve of me to ignore race. I shared previously how I engaged in discussions of race to varying degrees with the 3-year-old students I taught from my first day in that classroom. These students, even if they could not always express how, knew they were Black. They discussed race. On my first day teaching, I stepped out of the classroom only to hear one of my students ask another, “Where’d that white girl go?” This was just the first of many statements from the innocence of these students, who at a young age were very aware of race. The children in this classroom ranged in ages 3–6. There was the day when I pulled my long hair into a handheld ponytail and a young girl said, “Oh Ms. Hammons when you do that you look like a white girl,” to which the boy next to her nudged her and said, “She is a white girl.” I overheard a Black student tell one of the few Latinx students not to touch a puzzle because it “burned white people’s hands.” I promptly picked up the piece and dropped it, acting as though I was burned, and the Black student laughed. I smiled and said, “That was pretty silly right?” He nodded, and we moved on. One student was asked by his friend, whose mother was white, to come to his house to play. The Black student said he could not because he was not allowed to go to white people’s houses. I told him, “But you are always asking to come home with me,” to which he responded, “You aren’t white.” As we walked down the hall, I curiously asked him to tell me who was Black and who was white. The people he knew and was comfortable with were Black. The people he did not
know, regardless of how we might define their race, were white. That was quite the evidence for race being a mere construct.

Moving to a school where most students were white put me in a relatively unknown position. I found myself questioning what could happen to ensure equity in that space. Of course, 20 years ago, the term antiracist was not used in educational circles as a way of being. We discussed multicultural education or other “more palatable” language with those who might not be ready to address how institutional racism affected their schools, classrooms, or pedagogy. Often, it has been considered controversial to bring this work into these white spaces. However, in the Montessori world, there has been an underlying commitment to the concepts of social justice and equity that runs throughout Montessori’s (1948/1992) research. Working in the Montessori community for this inquiry showed how commitment has been put into action.

**Problem Statement**

California and the United States have operated in a society created through the myth of racial differences (Stevenson, 2014). This society, founded on this concept of white supremacy, has simultaneously created the educational system children are educated within and has been reproduced through the same educational system (Apple, 2004; Lewis, 2001). This system reinforces and plays a key role in the development of white racial identity in students, and for the purposes of this research, specifically in white students. In turn, these students absorb the culture of this society through the educational system and then continue to promote the systems, which in turn, continues the racist practice. To dismantle this continuous cycle, antiracist educators must begin by disrupting the development of white racial identity through schools. This process
involves having teachers committed to the practice of antiracist pedagogy to carry out the work of decentering whiteness.

As my mother was a primary influence on my identity development, there has been plenty of evidence teachers, especially those in early childhood and elementary classrooms, can impact their students in the development of their identity consciousness (Vittrup, 2016). Teachers can work to reinforce the supremacy of whiteness myth, or they can work to be conscious of where it lies in their curriculum, instruction, and classroom culture (Lawrence & Tatum, 1998). Once they are aware of such bias, they can work to make changes not reinforcing it. States, districts, and even campus-level administration can bring programs into their schools, but the teachers implement these programs.

The ability to decenter whiteness in schools is complicated. In schools with a low percentage of white students, teachers often receive professional development to help them become culturally competent, to build on the community and involve the community in the school, and to find ways to honor the cultures of the students (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014). However, in predominantly white schools, one may ask how educators conduct the task of decentering whiteness when whiteness is the culture and the community.

In 2018–2019, over 78% of white students attend schools that are at least 50% white, despite only 47% of students in public schools in the United States being white (Schaeffer, 2021). People who live and work in homogeneous spaces with less exposure to diverse populations retain implicit bias more than those connected to diverse populations (Selvanathan et al., 2018). Students who live in neighborhoods or districts with predominantly white schools are limited in their understanding and connection to communities of color (Hagerman, 2014; Lewis,
Despite the ruling mandated segregation is illegal, communities have continued to have segregated schools. For example, California public schools do not have forced segregation. However, due to how attendance zones have been drawn and the ability for some more affluent neighborhoods to create their districts, even in larger districts have resulted in de-facto segregation, such as in Piedmont, California (Educational Data Partnership, 2023).

In Walnut Creek, California, a group of parents attempted to secede from the larger school district to create a smaller, whiter, school district for their neighborhood children. This group advanced their goal to hearings at the county and the state level, where it was denied. However, in the process, they became a part of a Newsweek article on resegregation (Nazaryan, 2017). Lewis (2001) stated, “White suburbs . . . are a creation of the racial order in the United States they are not the result of an accidental process, but of deliberate private and public policies and practices” (p. 796). California public schools have served a population with 77.1% students of color; yet, there are schools and even districts serving student populations over 40%–60% White (Educational Data Partnership, 2023).

Isolation in neighborhoods and schools is only part of the problem in implementing antiracist pedagogy and methods in predominantly white schools. Often, articles and studies have pointed to why white teachers have struggled with antiracist pedagogy or avoided culturally responsive teaching (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014). Also, most articles have focused on transformative school leadership and teaching, which is directed at transforming schools serving higher populations of students of color (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). These are both valid perspectives. However, despite theories discussing the educational system’s role in reproducing society, not as much work has been done regarding how school environments could be used to
disrupt the system from within predominantly white spaces. Thus, the study I conducted focused on teachers committed to doing the work of antiracism in elementary classrooms where most children were white.

**Purpose**

Michael and Bartoli (2023) stated, “Racism is a white people’s problem, and it won’t change until they do something about it” (p. 30). This dissertation was not primarily a description of the problem, which has been extensively established. Rather, the purpose of this study was to explore how white teachers are doing something about it. This study explored what a classroom environment honoring all cultures might be like, what it would be for white teachers modeled the respect for all peoples and cultures, how white teachers could take on challenging conversations or race, and how white teachers de-center whiteness intentionally centering all cultures through lessons, books and pictures in the classroom, and curriculum on all contributors to history and content and not merely focusing on Anglo-European context. This explored how Montessori educators can make sure to honor other cultures in a Montessori classroom through our historical timelines to ensure there are congruent histories of African, Asian, European history discussed, and when we discuss the stories in math, we give credit to the various mathematical minds who have contributed to the practice. This research explored whether the development of a white racial identity based on the supremacy of whiteness could be disrupted and if instead, a white racial identity could develop honoring, respecting, and celebrating all peoples and cultures equally (Tatum, 2017). The research will reflect on the teachers who take on the white spaces and create spaces that represent all member of our community and contribute
to our society and history and teachers who are moving their classrooms away from tenets of white supremacist culture such as perfection, and competition.

Through my research, I examined what it means to be a white antiracist teacher and how that impacts their work as educators. This study was focused on the self-identified antiracist, white Montessori teachers who are working to create intentional classroom spaces decentering Anglo-European culture and instead centering and celebrating all cultures. The research investigated and identified the path leading the participants to become committed to antiracism. I also delved into how they embodied commitment through their classrooms and teaching. Most importantly, I explored what these teachers hoped their students gained from exposure to antiracism pedagogy.

Research Questions

Current literature has suggested it is difficult (Reinke et al., 2021) and, even in some regions, risky to do antiracist work. However, white teachers are committed to antiracist pedagogy and doing antiracist work in classrooms. These teachers’ commitments were developed or cultivated through a variety of experiences, encounters, and processes. They have assessed and changed things to implement antiracism in their classrooms. There is a reason they want their students to experience a culture of antiracism in their classrooms. The question I asked in this dissertation, then, was both about the development of this stance and its manifestation. Thus, the research question in this study had three connected parts:

- How do white teachers committed to antiracism develop their personal antiracist stance?
• How do white teachers who are committed to antiracist practice, manifest that practice in their classroom?
• What impact do white antiracist teachers hope to have on students?

This study could not, of course, answer this question for all white, antiracist teachers. Rather, it has addressed to a subset who served as participants in the study. The selection process, self-identifications, meanings, and limitations of this group of participants are described in the dissertation.

Conceptual Framework

I planned this research question as a way of understanding a key conceptual issue. A cycle of societal reproduction has been taking place in schools (see Figure 1). The school culture, academic lessons, and even training of teachers has been based on upholding whiteness as the standard (Apple, 2004; Vittrup, 2016; Yasso, 2005; Yu, 2012). This has led to continued white racial identity development (Dore et al., 2018; Escayg, 2019), which then has led back to sustaining a society culture supporting the supremacy of whiteness (Lewis, 2004). If educators instead provide children with school cultures, academic lessons, and teachers trained in antiracist pedagogy, they can disrupt this cycle.
Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Model


Chapter 2: Literature Review

Terminology

Throughout this paper, there are references to certain terms around the concept of whiteness. Defining these terms for the purpose of this work allows for the study to be read without terminology distracting from the work and the research being presented.

Whiteness

When one starts to research “whiteness” through search engines, a plethora of sources seek to define what it means. Merriam-Webster (2023) provided the simplest definition: “The quality or state of being white.” However, this definition does not encompass the construct of race currently used. McWhorter (2005) provided an in-depth discussion of how the concept of whiteness has evolved. McWhorter discussed how whiteness was not named but was still considered the norm or standard for society. In fact, whiteness was not studied until the 1980s and 1990s. Prior, it was the norm through which “other races” were studied (McWhorter, 2005, p. 53). For purposes of this study, whiteness was used to convey the culture of Anglo-Europeans that is often the basis for societal norms and rarely questioned as the norm. Whiteness was used as a manner supporting the idea that how society works is the way society should work rather than questioning if it is working well.

White Supremacy Culture

Okun (1999) defined white supremacy as:

The widespread ideology baked into the beliefs, values, norms, and standards of our groups (many if not most of them), our communities, our towns our states, our nation
teaching us both overtly and covertly that whiteness holds value, whiteness is value.

(para. 12)

To be clear, white supremacy culture does not mean showing up in Klan’s gowns and has not used been interchangeably with white nationalism. For this study, white supremacy culture was defined as the concept that the society in which people live embodies the discursive assumption white Anglo-European culture is superior to other cultures, histories, and traditions (Apple, 2004, 2019; Yasso, 2005). The expectations and societal behaviors associated with whiteness are the standard to measure all cultures against. However, because it is discursive, this assumption is not necessarily expressed through hate speech or direct behavior, and it is more often experienced without any acknowledgment of the myth of the supremacy of whiteness. Also, for the purposes of this study, the term “white supremacy culture” interchanges with “culture that supports the supremacy of whiteness.” This terminology is constructed based on the work of Okun (1999).

**White Racial Identity**

Tatum (2017) referred to Helms’s (1990) work with white racial identity and the levels of development with that identity. However, for the purposes of this study, white racial identity is the unquestioned acceptance whiteness is the norm or standard and the remaining ways of being are “other.” This concept of white racial identity is not limited to white students, as students of color by way of societal acclimation might also work from framing whiteness in the norm.

**Literature Review**

This review of the literature is presented in four subparts to provide a context for how the theoretical framework fits together and to provide an understanding of Montessori’s (1948/1989) philosophy of learning and constructing knowledge, and how it links to both the conceptual
framework for my research and the theoretical. First, this chapter explores Montessori’s developmental work on how childcare workers associate ideas to construct their knowledge and how it is foundational in seeing the connection between teacher’s intentional antiracist work in the classroom and its impact on students. Then, I provide the context for the connection between white racial identity development in children and the reproduction and maintenance of white supremacist culture in the greater society. Thirdly, I examine the literature demonstrating the connection between schools as a tool of cultural reproduction and how that leads to this white racial identity development. Understanding the connection between school and the development of white racial identity is central to seeing how teachers must disrupt this process. Lastly, the connection between literature addressing what often gets in the way of using education to disrupt whiteness and where educators need to look for ways to increase antiracist work moving forward is discussed.

Each of these areas of focus was key to developing the research question, methodology, and, ultimately, the analytical framework for this study. Unsurprisingly, they are also all theoretical areas important to moving forward to dismantle the racist system, of which people are a part. If educators can understand some of the ways in which white identity both supports and is supported by the white supremacy culture and how education can often be the catalyst for this cocreated cycle, then educators can see how the same tool of education is used to disrupt the cycle.

Montessori Philosophy and Pedagogy in Context of Social Reproduction Theory

This section provides an explanation about how the educational philosophy and pedagogy of Montessori has contributed to the educational literature discussion and explains why this
concept was important to the current study’s findings. This research study discussed intentionality as a crucial characteristic of antiracist pedagogy regarding how classroom environments reflect antiracism in their design and content. This was also supported through Montessori’s (1949/1972, 1949/1989, 1948/1995) work.

Montessori wrote several books and gave a multitude of speeches that have since become printed documents. However, I focused on two sources on in my explanation of why Montessori education provides a rich educational platform for the work of disrupting white racial identity from being the norm through which children experience their world. In the 1940s, after living through two world wars, Montessori (1949/1972) wrote *To Educate the Human Potential* and *Education and Peace*. These two books centered on how the child could change the world, if educators changed education for the child. These books also tied to the period in which Gramsci (2012) discussed as the replication of society’s economic framework, looked at schools as being instruments of this replication, and examined the hidden curriculum through which this replication was accomplished. In fact, Montessori and Gramsci were contemporaries of each other. Although Gramsci was a bit younger and died earlier, they were both Italians who were of age when Mussolini rose to power and they both spoke against the educational system of the time.

In *Education and Peace*, Montessori (1949/1972) said, “An education capable of saving humanity is no small undertaking; it involves the spiritual development of man, the enhancement of his value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to understand the times in which they live” (p. 30). Montessori (1949/1972, 1949/1989, 1948/1995) believed education had to be developed to provide not just academic knowledge but also the spiritual or morality of the
Duckworth (2006) stated, “She [Montessori] argues that if education truly could develop ethically and socially conscious men and women, whose moral sense had been developed as fully as their ability to read and write, mankind could begin hoping for a more peaceful world” (p. 40).

Montessori did not discuss, as people might today, a concept of antiracism; in her time, she promoted women’s rights and children’s rights and fought for changes against the status quo (Baligadoo, 2020). In fact, her pedagogy promoting independent thought that considered the whole child was seen as a threat in fascist regimes such as Italy and Germany during the late 1930s and 1940s. Baligadoo (2020) stated, “Both in Berlin and Vienna, the effigy of Montessori was burned over a pyre of her books” (p. 157).

In addition to her emphasis on peace education, Montessori’s guidance for teaching in the classroom was founded on providing a classroom allowing for children to construct their learning, foster independence, and develop critical reasoning skills (Duckworth, 2006). These qualities were echoed by Freire in his belief that “independence and confidence are both crucial for helping students develop the ability to think critically and act with moral courage to work for social change” (Duckworth, 2006, p. 40).

The connection between Montessori (1949/1989) and Freire (2000) returns to Gramsci’s (2012) idea of schools as tools of economic reproduction. Freire referred to traditional education as using the banking concept. Freire (2000) completed this connection between a banking concept of schools and schools producing citizens who do not work for change but simply accept the world as it is by stating:
The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (p. 73)

Montessori (1949/1989, 1949/1972) would have agreed with Freire’s statement and therefore created a methodology that did not center the adult or “banker.” In Freire’s model, the adult is a guide but not the fountain of knowledge; the child is provided experiences through which to create knowledge. The teacher provides lessons and guidance, and the child then works out for themselves how these lessons can be applied. This construction of critical thinking is crucial to being able to create an identity seeing whiteness as part but not the totality of society.

**Role of Montessori Education in Antiracist Pedagogy**

Montessori’s (1949/1989) view focused on how the educational environment is designed to lead to the development of the whole child, not strictly academics or cognitive growth. The Montessori curriculum provides both direct and indirect lessons through each piece of equipment in the classroom. One of the overarching indirect lessons shows there is more than one way to solve any problem. This concept helps students to transfer understanding from tangible problems, such as using multiple ways to solve a math problem, to intangible problems, such as personal disagreements or philosophical differences between people. One could consider this a more innocuous leveled agenda than the hidden curriculum discussed by Gorski (2016) or Apple (2004).
I have viewed Montessori pedagogy as innately designed to support antiracist work due to Montessori’s (1949/1989) work with the developing brain. Through this work, I have seen potential to tie these indirect lessons to deeper matter. Montessori discussed the three mental factors crucial to learning. The first of which, rarely discussed in traditional pedagogical instruction, is the subconscious. This aspect of teaching goes deeper than the traditional use of scaffolding or presenting prior knowledge and connecting it to a current lesson. Montessori, building upon the psychological findings of her time, theorized because every experience a child has is stored in their subconscious, it can be used to cement concepts or learning. She called the deep subconscious storing these experiences the MNEME. The mneme stores one’s experiences, some of which come through as memory, but others stay in the subconscious. She used the example of giving a child a list of syllables to repeat and then asking them to share them a few days later. The child most likely cannot repeat them exactly, but it takes them less time to memorize them again because they are stored. My favorite example of this concept is a lesson in the Montessori preprimary environment (aged 3–6 years). Students have two puzzles—the binomial and trinomial cubes. Each of the pieces of the puzzle represents part of the correlating binomial or trinomial equations (see Figure 2). Montessori (1949/1989) did not expect 3–6-year-olds to do algebra; however, educators provide students with these concepts that become a part of their mneme.
Montessori (1949/1989) clarified it is not the actual memory of the experience in the mneme; however, the mneme includes traces of them, which she referred to as engrams. Montessori (1949/1989) stated, “The subconscious is full of these engrams, by which the intellect grows much more than by conscious memory” (p. 13).

Montessori (1949/1989) then discussed problems potentially presented to the conscious mind are often solved in the subconscious when people do not even realize they are still working on them. She built again on the research of her time to discuss the Elan Vitale, which pushed the
brain forward to solve problems even when the problems were consciously laid aside. The Elan Vitale is the “vital factor” (p. 14) carrying an action to completion.

Montessori (1949/1989) presented the engrams and Elan Vitale drove the third mental factor—the association of ideas through this process. When a teacher provides alternative experiences that do not fit into the hegemony through which white children are raised, I believe a process takes place changing how their racial identity is formed. Even without a constructed curriculum designed to encourage children to be antiracist, a Montessori teacher can prepare the classroom environment to discuss the historical significance of all peoples; provide books on the daily lives of all people in a noncomparative way; and have celebrations, pictures, and lessons that promote equality of all peoples. Children in the environment bring these concepts into their subconscious. As they are presented with ideas promoting hegemony of whiteness as the center of reality, these classroom experiences present a disruption in the child’s subconscious that brings the experiences forward to their consciousness as they become adults.

**Acknowledging the Cycle: White Supremacy Culture to White Racial Identity to Inherently Racist Systems**

**Whiteness/Critical Whiteness Theory.** To discuss whiteness or white racial identity, it is necessary to explore critical whiteness theory (Applebaum, 2005) and the hegemony (Apple, 2004) that encompasses both society and its institutions. Much of the literature on the concept of whiteness or white racial identity has stemmed from the broad field known as critical race theory that was developed in the legal field through the work of Derrick Bell but has since been used to analyze other societal structures like education (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In this framework, a useful comparison can be made between white society in the contemporary United States and the
wizard in the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, who asks everyone to not look behind the curtain. This idea shows the white race as the expert in diverting attention away from whiteness by conveying racial identity as only applying to “other” groups. McWhorter (2005) stated:

> According to Whiteness Studies theorists, the white race functions not so much as a race, one among many, as, at times at least, the race- the real human race- and, at other times, no race, simply the healthy, mature norm of human existence as opposed to all those other groups who are somehow off-white, off-trace, more or less deviant. (p. 534)

McWhorter (2005) referenced Michel Foucault in looking at race being based in power. The concept of race—of racial hierarchies—was created to benefit those instrumental in creating it—Anglo-Europeans. Foucault (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002), in his discussion discourse analysis, viewed the individual as created through discourse, therefore, allowing for the idea of whiteness as created by a type of discourse of whiteness. Lewis (2004) stated, in a society built on racial identities, all people “are racialized, including whites. Because all social actors are racialized, at some level they must live and perform or ‘do race.’” (p. 626). Social actors is simply the term for all people who interact in society and thus are involved in racialized behavior. Gee (1989) referred to this concept again as the discourse of communicating their group membership in a racial group. Lewis then explained, like DiAngelo (2018), most white people live in mostly white settings and do not experience a difference; they are able to “do race” without it being a conscious act. Apple (2004, 2019) stated whiteness is all around people and is like the water they swim in as a society. As McWhorter (2005) explained, whiteness creates and

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2 Foucault’s work in critical whiteness allowed me to connect him with discourse analysis. As I was analyzing the data, it became evident of the importance of including discourse in my findings.
is created by the culture that is promoted as the dominant culture in the society—the culture creating the systems by which society operates. Whiteness can only be explained through what it is not. This makes it difficult to define exactly what whiteness and what constitutes white racial identity. Yasso (2005) discussed cultural capital that can lead people to start developing a sense of seeing what is valued in global majority cultures differing from white culture.

The idea of whiteness is centered more on the individual versus group, which is also discussed by DiAngelo (2018). The idea of the individual being responsible for their life without considering other factors—to pull oneself up by their bootstraps, so to speak (Vittrup, 2016). These are concepts emphasized and valued in white culture and valued in schools as well (Yasso, 2005). The individual rather than society is held responsible for success or failure. This deflects from any possible societal causes as being why people succeed or fail. People could even consider “success” is subjective. Once people can start to define what whiteness is or how it hides in plain sight, they can see the connections between this identity and its reinforcement through white supremacy culture leading to racism.

Pope-Davis and Ottavi (1994) studied the connection between white racial identity and racism. They conducted an experiment using White Racial Identity Attitude Scales (Helms & Carter, 1990). Pope-Davis and Ottavi (1994) stated, “White Americans, contrary to the experiences of most ethnic groups are seldom called on to assess their own attitudes about being White” (p. 293). In discussing the need for the study, they also discussed the fact researchers have often examined attitude on race, but it was done mostly with Black Americans. McWhorter (2005) explained this phenomenon of a lack of research on white people and what it meant to be white because it was the standard—it was what was so why would people need to analyze it.
These studies became more prominent in the 1990s—to emphasize this point, no one considered studying whiteness until the 1990s because it was still considered the standard by which to study “other” cultures. One of the interesting findings was the white men in their study had a harder time defining what whiteness was and had more racist attitudes, whereas women who were more able to define whiteness, seemingly had fewer racist attitudes. Pope and Davis suggested because women have faced gender discrimination, they have more experience with the concept. Regardless, this study does indicate racial identity development and white supremacist, or racist attitudes are connected.

**Development of Racial Identity and Moving From Ingroup/Outgroup to Racism.**

Since the 1990s, educators have recognized children have racialized identities (Escayg, 2019). However, the discussions of racial identity or even race itself have often left the idea of white racial identity out of the equation (Lewis, 2004). As Lewis (2004) stated, “Racialized others (Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and so forth) are in many ways thought to “have race’ in a way whites deny of themselves” (p. 628). Racializing everyone but those who are white, makes it so much easier to dismiss white racial identity supporting a system of white supremacy. If white racial identity does not exist, then it cannot be to blame. Studies with young children have reflected scholars’ interest in how racial identity and bias are formed (Dore et al., 2018). In Escayg’s (2019) study, they referred to a study including Canadian children and determined at what age children developed a sense of “in-group” and “out-group” identity and preference and when preference started to lead to bias (Aboud, 2003). Although even in that study, children were still not referred to as racist; researchers used terms like bias or preference. This is another criticism of where people are in confronting where and when racism starts (Escayg, 2019), as if bias or
preferences somehow are not connected to racism, or these attitudes do not lead to racism or racist beliefs because they are children.

Aboud (2003) initially began with a theory suggesting children’s views of in-group and out-group were not reciprocal or dependent upon each other. She wanted to see if there was a relationship between the identity of “in-group” and the development of bias. She worked with two schools for two different measures of this relationship. The first school was a predominantly White school with approximately 10% students of color. The second school was more diverse in student population. The age at which children started developing a sense of in- and out-groups was around age 4. She connected this concept with the children’s ability to understand conservation and classification and express thoughts of how things differed or why. Students who were taught through color blindness, which attempts to ignore difference rather than honor it, had less ability to rationalize difference tended to have more bias toward out-group members.

All students seemed to come to a tipping point around 5 years old when they started associating negative traits with out-groups (Aboud, 2003). Some students from both schools showed some reciprocity between positive views of in-group with negative views of out-group, but this was far less in the school with a more diverse student population. Aboud (2003) also pointed out despite fewer negative views toward out-groups in one school, they still exist to some extent, and once those appear, they are difficult to change. This finding demonstrates educators must reach children at younger ages to make change. One of the interesting points in this study was regarding innate response versus learned behavior. This study illustrates how humans can discern differences through an evolutionary sense of self-preservation, but how do
people ensure they prevent discernment from becoming bias when the time in evolutionary history would require them to fear differences has passed.

Aboud’s (2003) work was supported through the work of social-psychologists Hailey and Olson (2013). Hailey and Olson (2013) stated, “Race is a primary category of person-perception; it is activated automatically and without conscious control, as quickly as 200 milliseconds after perception, and attended to even in situations where it is irrelevant” (p. 3). Their work primarily examined the lack of connection between social psychologist and developmental psychologists discussing the development of these attitudes in young children and connecting them to studies on adults. Like Aboud (2003) and Dore et al. (2018), they looked at how children as young as 3 months can “distinguish faces on the basis of race” (p. 121). It seems logical if people know infants can discern features, there would be a continuous progression of studies throughout childhood, but studies have seemed to be more prevalent in dealing with children who are 4–5 and older (Hailey & Olson, 2013). Although, as a former early childhood teacher, I think it is far easier to understand what a 4-year-old is thinking than a 1-year-old. When looking for often unnoticed examples of racism in culture, people can even examine the literature in which they use to support their case are examples of that racism as well. Throughout Hailey and Olson’s (2013) study, they referenced ‘high-status’ and ‘low-status’ groups. I understand they were attempting to not identify by race; however, it is still terminology working from power dynamic, which in truth does go back to the original discussion of race being connected to power.

An interesting dynamic in the process of in-group and out-group preference shows up in middle childhood, age 6–10 (Aboud, 2003; Hailey & Olson, 2013). White children tend to reduce their explicit bias of outgroup members, but children of other races begin to show larger
explicit bias of outgroup around the same age. The implicit bias for white children does not become reduced. Hailey and Olson (2013) discussed white children demonstrate the same levels of implicit bias as adults whereas children from other racial groups demonstrate almost no implicit bias against other groups and in fact often show bias toward other groups.

These articles and studies demonstrated a connection between white racial identity and the white supremist culture in which we live. Children start this racial identity development very early in childhood as simply classifying same and different or in-group/out-group (Aboud, 2003). Similarly, white racial identity connects to racism in the study by Pope-Davis and Ottavi (1994). So, my exploration of the research moved on to how schools and the educational system are designed to be a tool for social reproduction and how that connects to the development of white racial identity.

**Predominantly White Schools as Conduits for Social Reproduction and White Racial Identity Development**

**White Spaces Foster Reproduction of Bias and Racism.** The idea of schools being the conduit for social reproduction is not new (Apple, 2019). Social-reproduction theorists, such as Bowles and Gintis (1976), theorized society’s economic aspects have been replicated through a hidden curriculum in schools—the entirety of injustices in society have been replicated in schools, including racism. People can learn about society through studying educational research. The field of social sciences teaches people about themselves and society. Therefore, sociology is another discipline in which research might lead to additional hypotheses on how individuals develop and replicate the systems in place. Sociology research on racial identity development allowed for my supposition of the cyclical relationship between social reproduction taking place
through white racial identity development. This research also proved white racial identity is
developed through schools. As Lewis (2001) stated:

> The structures of the community, the school, its practices, and curricular policies help to
reproduce the current status quo. Both directly and indirectly, it reproduces social
inequality through fostering or enabling color-blind ideology to operate unchallenged and
by allowing whites, therefore, to continue to see themselves as racially neutral, outside
the racial hierarchy, deserving of their success and not responsible for the exclusion of
others. (p. 803)

The work of sociologist Lewis (2001) confirmed this connection; school is a source of racial
development for white children. More specifically, white children develop their racial identity in
predominately white spaces such as predominately white schools. We, as educators, must
acknowledge the interconnectedness of racial development and social institutions such as
schools. Lewis’s work reinforced my direction but was not so much a “how-to” as a “this is a
place to start.” However, Matias (2016) clearly stated this connection:

> White communities, those who claim to “not see race’ in their pedagogy, regardless of
good intentions, these teachers-in-denial are either unknowingly or knowingly,
disseminating the dominance of whiteness ideology and emotionality. That is, similar to
Gramsci’s (2012) concept of “hidden curriculum of capitalism” that maintains capitalism
by structurally producing the haves and have-nots, there is a hidden curriculum of
whiteness being taught to students, of Color and White alike. (p. 7)

Hazelbaker and Mistry (2022) discussed how white children’s “ethnic-racial identity” is
“inextricably intertwined within social structures” (p. 3). They further explained schools
reinforce the master narrative of white supremacy and colorblindness through the lack of emphasis on People of Color in curriculum and the colorblindness that teachers claim to work from. There is a silence that is complicit from white adults regarding race. In fact, Hazelbaker and Mistry (2022) stated, “A lack of explicit socialization about race allows white children to accommodate the master narrative . . . into their personal narrative” (p. 3). In Hazelbaker and Mistry’s study, the children reflected their ideas of colorblindness came from their teachers and parents. Even when studying about racism, they were still told by teachers that “race does not matter” (Hazelbaker & Mistry, 2022, p. 3). Hazelbaker and Mistry clearly communicated connection directly from the children that the adults in their lives reinforced these concepts. Hazelbaker and Mistry (2022) stated, “For white children to move away from colorblindness and develop and alternative narrative of antiracism, intervention is needed at multiple levels” (p. 10).

Why Antiracist Teachers Are Needed

After determining when children develop or start to develop a racial identity, it is clear schools are instrumental in that process. Antiracism work in schools is essential and central to the work this study examined. This section explores multiple influences impacting how antiracist work is or is not occurring currently in schools.

Research on the Lack of Antiracism Work Among White Teachers

What factors are needed for teachers to be antiracist educators? Many theorists would say the first step is for the teachers to work to overcome bias in themselves (Matias & Mackey, 2016). This work is not easy, and studies have shown resistance (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014; Nash & Miller, 2015). Even when confronted with evidence of their personal bias, most teachers do not accept it. White educators can be conduits of antiracist teaching if they are prepared to be and
if they have opportunities to practice doing so. Clark and Zygmunt (2014) began from the standpoint stating experiential learning can lead to behavioral change in a more profound way than reading articles or having discussions about implicit bias with preservice teachers. They sought to prove by providing teachers with the opportunity to face their implicit bias, the teachers are motivated to do self-work to combat this bias and, therefore, improve their teaching for students of color. However, Clark and Zygmunt (2014) found the teachers who took the assessment on bias did not agree with the evaluation they took and 59% simply either “disregarded or disbelieved” the results (p. 152).

Although Clark and Zygmunt’s (2014) initial premise was an experience showing their hidden bias would provide teachers with the desire to grow and confront their personal biases, they concluded this type of experience could not stand alone. An experience designed to bring about personal change must be accompanied by guidance and discussion of the accurate measure of such experience. Without the opportunity to process the results and discuss them, the results intended to promote self-reflection, instead could reinforce bias. Prior to Clark and Zygmunt’s (2014) study, Lawrence and Tatum (1998) were optimistic about their approach. They studied with teachers who were confronted with ideas about white privilege and the term antiracism moving along the six identity statuses Helms (1990) used to explain how white people understand and process racial issues. Given appropriate training for teachers, or a basis to begin with self-reflection, teachers can move along toward working to remove their own bias, informing their teaching.

Nash and Miller (2015) took a different approach with the early childhood teachers Nash worked with in her study. Nash worked with teachers who interacted with students in a
predominately Black school who had tested high in reading ability. Nash also taught these adult learners, and they would have conversations and experiences to build from their work to confront bias. Nevertheless, as conversations became more race-centered, “many began to manifest Whiteness” (Nash & Miller, 2015, p. 196) by deflecting. They also expressed a deficit view of children in the school where they were doing the work, finding reasons for behaviors due to poor family structure (Nash & Miller, 2015). What seemed to disrupt this was being exposed to counter-narratives of people of color and reading about cultural language and patterns (Nash & Miller, 2015). Although one can look at the research on teacher education and preparation and read about the responses or lack thereof from teachers, it is important to examine the preparation itself.

How many teacher education programs or school districts providing professional development move into providing antiracist training? Reinke et al. (2021) asked that question. They discussed the importance of how teachers are provided with this education. Are teachers given the information and experiences necessary to disrupt, as antiracism would suggest? Reinke et al. suggested antiracism is active and intended to break the cycle. They cited Gorski (2016) and discussed how too often programs provided not only fall short of providing antiracist pedagogy, but they are also “equity detours” (p. 1) and can accentuate racism and inequity. The training and antibias work with educators cannot be one-time occurrences. Reinke et al. explained there needs to be ongoing support. The goal is to move white teachers along the statuses Helms (1990) theorized move white people toward being antiracist.
Experience With Diversity

Preparing the teacher is one factor in ensuring schools are disrupting the cycle of racism; the following works demonstrate exposure to a variety of races and cultures promotes a less biased view. However, this exposure must be meaningful (Losinski et al., 2019).

Losinski et al. (2019) mostly focused on the impact of racial bias, harassment, and disproportionate levels of discipline had on students in middle and high school, while they also looked at preventing harassment and bullying behaviors. Losinski et al. (2019) found connection and “intergroup contact” (p. 2723) can decrease prejudice. The bulk of Losinski et al.’s study was connected to social-emotional learning programs and their impact on schools. I found the section that moved away from the predesigned programs and talked about real intentionality in a school by creating opportunities for students to be in diverse groupings to be the most significant. Intentionally seeing a problem and tending to it in an organic structure provided results. Like the children in Losinski et al.’s study, Nash and Miller (2015) found adult learners who were connected differently, not just when working as a teacher but in more of a shared experience started to move the needle away from bias.

These articles suggest one way to disrupt the connection between White racial identity and racism is through shared experiences with peers who are people of color. However, many White children live in neighborhoods and attend schools in predominately White spaces. How do educators provide those experiences, and what if we cannot? Lewis (2001) discussed these questions in her study of a school in a suburban district. Lewis’s approach took on the political and social constructs by creating predominately White spaces where children develop White
racial identity void of any real connection or experience with communities of color. Lewis discussed decades and centuries of rules and laws.

Lewis (2001) connected social reproduction and critical Whiteness through her discussion of the larger societal construct and ways Whiteness has manipulated the systems to continuously reproduce itself regardless of attempts at racial justice or equity. When schools were ordered to desegregate, White people moved away from cities where there were more communities of color. This allowed the schools in these White communities to continue reproducing the White-centered world they knew. Lewis stated the facts of the circumstances under which schools have remained segregated despite laws against it. In these schools and districts, teachers who want to bring antiracist work into their classrooms are often working against the message sent from parents as well (Hagerman, 2014).

Taking what Lewis (2004) stated regarding the environment and what Losinski et al. (2019) found, educators must find ways to provide experiences in white spaces for children to develop an understanding of the history, contributions, and values of People of Color existing alongside of whiteness but may not be reflected in it. Reinke et al. (2021) addressed this area as well. They discussed practical ways to incorporate race and racism into the curriculum through science, math, history, and literature.

**Antiracist Leadership**

Schools and school leadership are also critical to disrupting the social reproduction of racism and injustice. Research has shown school leadership is committed to the work of equity can be transformative (Shields, 2014). Leadership can choose to create space for change through their schools (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011) and in their school communities (Losinski et al.,
If we antiracist educators are going to transform the educational system into a tool of disruption, we need transformational leadership, more specifically, critical transformative leadership for social justice providing support to teachers and school communities (Shields, 2014). Either phrasing of the term has been linked to the concept educational leaders must be focused on change transformative for their school and the community it encompasses. Moreover, the transformative process must be centered on antiracism. In her article on transformative leadership, Shields (2014) stated eight tenets of transformative leadership. The two most central to this discussion are having a “mandate to effect deep and equitable change” and the “moral courage” to stand firm (Shields, 2014, p. 333).

Literature has shown over 80% of principals and over 90% of superintendents in the public-school system in the United States were White at the time of this study (Tate, 2019). These numbers suggest a starting point for white leaders would be to begin by examining why there is a disproportionate number of white educational leaders. When we white educators recognize the significance, we can move toward understanding the responsibility it holds. Leaders need to work to understand “what guides and what grounds” them (Shields, 2014, p. 337). White leaders can seek ways to use their positionality in the system to enact change. White leaders can work to bring others into their vision (Stosich, 2017). Being committed to this vision may be easy for leaders as individuals. However, it cannot be accomplished without engaging others in the environment.

From the literature, there are crucial components for schools to do the antiracist work essential in disrupting the cycle of white racial development. Teachers must have opportunities to do self-work (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014; Lawrence & Tatum, 1998; Vittrup, 2016); leadership
must support the teachers in this work (Shields, 2014; Stosich, 2017; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011); and teachers, even in predominately white spaces, must ensure their classrooms, curriculum, and lessons provide opportunities for valuing all cultures and for exploring the contributions of all cultures (Losinski et al., 2019; Reinke et al., 2021).

**Summary**

This study was primarily concerned with how white teachers become committed to antiracism and incorporate it in their pedagogy and their classroom environments. The literature in this chapter ties my methodology to an understanding of the need for antiracist pedagogy and the need to illuminate antiracist teacher attitudes and behaviors.

Throughout this chapter, I explored literature speaking to why it is crucial for white teachers to take on the work of antiracism and white children to be taught through that lens. Kendi (2019), author of the book *How to Be an Antiracist* defined an antiracist as “one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea” and a racist as “one who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea” (p. 13). In her Mindshift article, Schwartz (2019) connected Kendi’s discussion of the importance of being an Antiracist and how that plays out in education. Schwartz shared how in her interview with Kendi, he compared racism to his cancer diagnosis, in that one cannot cure cancer by ignoring it and assuming it will all be fine. One must address and treat the disease and sometimes the treatment is painful. This discussion brings out the critical nature of teachers taking on an antiracist identity and how that process manifests in education.

Throughout this chapter, literature demonstrated a connection between the development of white racial identity and the perpetuation of racism (Aboud, 2003; Hailey & Olson, 2013). As
Kendi (2019) described, teachers must be mindful of how they are supporting antiracist ideas or being complicit in the racism replicated through the educational system in society. By integrating these separate areas of theoretical framing, racialized identity development in children can be connected to the purpose of this study. The research has shown students start to develop negative bias by age 10. This finding demonstrated this age is the period to begin more direct work in this area to open the door to use schools as the venue to do antiracist work.

At the same time, studies demonstrated a reduction of bias and racist views and beliefs where there are diverse experiences and communities. Schools segregated and serving predominately white students are most often void of those experiences (Lewis, 2001). The challenge is to use the research to provide white teachers with the understanding and training they need to feel efficacious and to be committed to antiracist/antibias work (Nash & Miller, 2015; Reinke et al., 2021). Montessori schools are an ideal environment to explore this framework, which is one reason I selected Montessori teachers as a participant group for the study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The process of defining the methodology for this research was primarily guided by three main sources: (a) Creswell and Poth’s (2016) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*; (b) Seidman’s (2013), *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*; and (c) Hammersley and Atkinson’s (2019), *Ethnography Principles in Practice*. Other supportive works were consulted, but these three sources provided a more developed description of both the process of selecting a methodology and the methodologies themselves. To provide an understanding of the methodology chosen, it is necessary to provide the process involved in that determination. First, this chapter includes a brief discussion of guidance regarding how to choose a method. This section leads to exploring what the current research sought to examine and the questions posed to provide the data. Then, once the guidance narrows the methods, a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the methods to appropriately fit this research model is included. Lastly, this chapter includes a discussion about the method used and why.

Discussion of Methodologies

Determining a methodology for this research was not a clear-cut path. Researchers must become familiar with and differentiate between a plethora of qualitative inquiry methods (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Interviewing individuals (Seidman, 2013) or conducting focus groups (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013) are ways of gathering data; however, they are not methodologies in and of themselves, they are tools. Therefore, the exploration of methodology was crucial to see where this specific research project was centered. Creswell and Poth (2016) discussed all researchers bring with them assumptions as they begin the process of selecting a
methodology. Sometimes, these assumptions are about the problem to be studied but sometimes they are about gathering data and methods. As Creswell and Poth (2016) stated:

Sometimes these are deeply ingrained views about the types of problems that we need to study, what research questions to ask, or how we go about gathering data. These beliefs are instilled in us during our education all training through journal articles and book, through advice dispensed by our advisors, and through the scholarly communities we engage at our conferences and scholarly meetings. (p. 15)

Basically, often researchers use methods they have become most familiar with and assume their data gathering fits into that method (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Also, the research audience could disagree about the methodology if their experience brought them to a different perspective of the method. If a difference in how methodologies are viewed occurs between the reader and researcher, it can cause a block in one’s ability to understand the research completely. Therefore, it is crucial for the researcher to go through the process of choosing a methodology and how they are using the said methodology.

This current research began under the assumption interviews would be the best way to gather data and the research method would fit under phenomenology (Seidman, 2013). However, aspects of the phenomenological process did not hold as the data were collected. It also did not account for the use of focus groups. However, it also did not neatly fit with ethnography, as the researcher was not embedded in a group and the participants did not know each other prior to the focus groups (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). As Seidman (2013) shared from Locke (1989), “The adequacy of a research method depends on the purpose of the
research and the questions being asked” (p. 10). A deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between phenomenology and ethnography was needed.

The researcher must look first to both the theoretical framework on which their premise is built and questions they are attempting to answer through the data to begin to understand the research method they should use (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2016). In the case of the current study, the theoretical frameworks of social reproduction and critical whiteness fell within the five philosophical frames Creswell and Poth (2016) referred to as being suited for qualitative inquiry. In addition to the theoretical framework, the questions themselves were such they needed the participants to provide data. Based on the research questions, I could use observation or artifacts to support or negate the participants’ individual responses, but the individual answers were a necessity for the data to be valid. To understand an individual’s perspective on why they make choices and identify in specific ways, they need to be interviewed. Researchers engage in interviews when they have “interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2013, pp. 8–9).

The questions created to collect the data impact the method as well. The questions represent what the researcher is seeking to discover (Seidman, 2013). Initially, the driving two-part question for the research was: (a) What actions these teachers are undertaking in their classrooms to create antiracist space, and (b) what impact are they hoping their efforts in this work have on their students. However, the research also needed to explore the motivation driving these teachers to be antiracist educators (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). It was crucial to understand how they came to this identity and how that has impacted their instruction and relationships with colleagues and students. As previously discussed, the problem of practice
centered around how to disrupt the cycle of racism by reducing bias in white children as they are in the process of forming their racial identity. Bias can often turn into racism or, at a minimum, an unconscious perpetuation of institutional racism throughout our systems (Aboud, 2003).

Therefore, both understanding these teachers (i.e., the why) and the ways they have implemented antiracism into their classroom environments (i.e., the how) were crucial in this work (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). As a result, the research question evolved into a three-part question: (a) How did the participants develop their personal antiracist stance, (b) how does that manifest in their classroom, and (c) what impact do they hope to have on students? This research did not measure the impact or outcomes of antiracist work but rather, provided an exploration of antiracist pedagogy and how white teachers create antiracist spaces in their classrooms. These questions, why they are important, and how they developed could potentially fit both a phenomenon of doing antiracist work contained in a specific place (i.e., predominately white schools; Seidman, 2013), or they could examine the ways a group identifies and expresses their process and the actions they take on as would take place in ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Creswell and Poth’s (2016) research considered and eliminated various qualitative methods. It was clear the goal of the research was to answer questions and not to tell one cohesive story, so narrative inquiry was not appropriate. Data provided insight and themes emerged; there was no attempt in this research design to develop a unique theory about the motivation, beliefs, or actions of the participants, which eliminated pure grounded theory. The research was not intended to be a case study. As previously demonstrated, this process reduced the potential methods to ethnography and phenomenology.
Seidman (2013), in writing about the interviewing process, focused mainly on the phenomenological interview method. His work on why interviews matter and why they are used as research connected strongly with this study’s research design. He stated, “The primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution or process is through the experience of individual people” (Seidman, 2013, p. 9). According to his approach, there is a combination of “life-history interviewing and focused, in-depth interviewing informed by assumptions drawn from phenomenology” (Seidman, 2013, p. 14). Some of the subjects Seidman (2013) shared have been explored through phenomenological methodology in dissertations including “student teaching in urban schools, ESL teachers, the work of physical education teachers” (pp. 14–15) and other somewhat similar topics. Seidman also discussed four themes typically found in phenomenological interviewing. Table 1 exhibits areas in which the current research design adhered to these themes and where it did not.

Table 1

Comparison of Research Design and Phenomenology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type Description</th>
<th>First theme</th>
<th>Second theme</th>
<th>Third theme</th>
<th>Fourth theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temporal and transitory nature of human experience. “Human lives are bound by time and that human experience is fleeting” (Seidman, 2013, p. 14)</td>
<td>Whose understanding is it? Subjective understanding. “Participants’ point of view of their experience/strive to understand a person’s experience from their point of</td>
<td>Live experience as the foundation of phenomena. “Lived experience is what we experience as it happens but we can only get to what we experience</td>
<td>The emphasis on meaning and meaning in context. “The importance of making meaning of experience” (Seidman, 2013, p. 18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As is evidenced in the chart, the current research data gathering did not truly follow all four of Seidman’s (2013) phenomenological themes. Therefore, I needed to explore ethnography.

Ethnography’s roots are in anthropology, later used in sociological research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). These roots seemed to provide a connection between the method and the social reproduction theoretical framework. However, ethnography was influenced by other methods, including phenomenology, but it is a process of observing and watching a group of people most often by “participating overtly or covertly, people’s daily lives for an extended period of time” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, p. 3). Hammersley and Atkinson (2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>First theme</th>
<th>Second theme</th>
<th>Third theme</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alignment with</td>
<td>This theme does not seem to be a part of the current research and is one way in which the research method does not reflect phenomenology.</td>
<td>Each participant shared their individual thoughts and experiences that led to antiracist work.</td>
<td>They share the experience of being white teachers who believe in antiracist pedagogy in predominantly white schools.</td>
<td>The interviews and focus groups were designed to share each participant’s experiences and ideas with the other to explore what the experiences are for white teachers doing antiracist work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>current research design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
discussed five features of ethnography discussed in their book. Table 2 demonstrates the ways in which the data collection for this project connects to these features.
### Table 2

**Comparison of Research Design and Ethnography**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>First feature</th>
<th>Second feature</th>
<th>Third feature</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
<th>Fifth feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>“People’s actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts rather than solely under conditions created by the researcher as is the case with highly structured interviews.”</td>
<td>“Data are gathered from a range of sources, including documentary evident or various kinds, but participant observation and/or informed conversations are usually the main ones.”</td>
<td>“Data collection is, for the most part, relatively ‘unstructured’ in two senses. -it does not involve . . . a fixed and detailed research designed specified at the start. and the categories that are used for interpreting what people say are not build into the data collection process.”</td>
<td>“The focus is usually on a few cases, generally small-scale, perhaps a single setting or group of people.”</td>
<td>“The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, sources, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider, contexts.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alignment with current research design</strong></td>
<td>There were no observations in participants’ classrooms or environments. The researcher scheduled focus groups and interviews. The researcher designed the questions for each data set.</td>
<td>The data sets consisted of interviews and conversations within the focus group context. There were a few examples shared by participants of lessons and books.</td>
<td>This represents the analysis of the data in the current research. The analysis was the process through which categories were developed. This was not predetermined.</td>
<td>This is true of the current research design. There were only four participants.</td>
<td>This research was designed to explore how white teachers in predominately white schools put antiracism into practice and this seems to be in line with this feature.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the areas differing between the current research and the features Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) assigned to ethnography, there were aspects of ethnography they described that were closer aligned with the intent and drive behind the research itself. This research was focused on the work and identification of white, antiracist teachers in specific settings. This research focused on the experiences of a group of participants with a similar identity in keeping with a broader description of ethnography. Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) discussed:

They (ethnographers) begin with an interest in some particular area of social life, type of situation, group of people, or topic. . . . The task is to investigate some aspects of the lives of people, what they do, how they view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves. (p. 4)

Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) explained how ethnography differs from various other methods including discourse analysis. The methodology did not use discourse analysis in this research; their mention of it in this context suggested Gee’s (1989) work, which did give greater credence to the idea these participants did indeed form a group or a culture. Gee (1989) described discourse “as an identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act and talk to as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (p. 18). Nothing in this process indicated the discourse a person presents is not truly who they are, and, in fact, a person may be a member of multiple discourses due to their identity. The teachers in this study worked in an antiracist discourse using terms and expressing ideas using the language other members of an antiracist discourse understand.

Through the exploration of qualitative methods, it was determined this qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was ethnographic and should use a phenomenological
interview process (Seidman, 2013). Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) stated, “the label (ethnography) is not used in a standard fashion, it’s meaning can vary. A consequence is that there is considerable overlap in reference with other labels” (p. 1).

**Implementation of Methodology-Collecting Data**

The data were collected through focus groups and phenomenological interviews with self-described antiracist white teachers who worked in schools with a student population with white students as the majority subgroup, with other subgroups providing less than 20% of the population. The goal of this research was to find the connection between the “how and why” white teachers are committed to this work and how their work can be used to dismantle the racism in society and systems through the disruption of white racial identity through schools. Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) stated:

> It is a central assumption of ethnography that, in order to understand what people are doing and why, one must grasp the meanings involved: how people interpret and evaluate the situations they face, the objects and artefacts available to them and also how they see themselves. (p. 170)

Using quantitative inquiry, I anticipated the data would provide insight into how teachers intentionally created their classroom design and how they made changes countering the hegemony through which traditional educational environments are constructed. It was essential to tie their beliefs and intent to their actions. Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) stated, in ethnography, “an important feature is a concern with actions: with what people do and why” (p. 170). Teachers shared their hope to apply a Montessori tenet of providing experiences for the child on the subconscious and the conscious level. The teachers expressed how they have
examined themselves and examined their Montessori training to uncover ways they can make changes toward being less Anglo-European centered. The data collected and conversations shared were relatable even to teachers outside of Montessori and demonstrated to white teachers who have a desire to be committed to antiracism, they are not alone and there are ways to make even subtle changes in their classrooms impacting the children they guide.

Role of the Researcher

My identity is as a white, cisgendered female, raised in a middle-class home in which Christianity was practiced. Both of my parents had master’s degrees and were educators. This was one lens through which I experienced the world; but, as stated in the introduction, my parents did their best to widen that lens. However, regardless of how wide it might be, it cannot give me the perspective of a Person from the Global Majority.

My personal biases may have also impacted my interpretation of the participant data. As I delved further into research design and reflexivity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), one thing struck me about my positionality. Regarding the introduction of this study, I explained the impact and intention my childhood contained concerning racial identity and racism. I must acknowledge this background provided me with an advantage others who identify as white might not have. I have been fortunate to have experienced a world beyond whiteness from an early age. As DiAngelo (2018) discussed in White Fragility, this experience is not the norm. Her book assumed all white people have been removed from other races due to where they live, go to school, worship, and work. However, throughout my life, intentional decisions prevented me from living in a solely white world.
This “advantage” was not without its own hidden bias and limitations. At times, it put me in a position of often judging the motives and experiences of other white people. As such, I had to be mindful to not allow any preconceived ideas of individual backgrounds to cloud the data I collected. It was crucial as I was working with these teachers to remember I was also still in process. For a white person, the process of self-work is never completed. I must be constantly aware of not just what I am hearing but how I am hearing what is being said, in contrast to how a Person of the Global Majority might hear it. If a white woman talks about the energy this work takes, I must ask if I ensure the conversation acknowledges even the ability to talk about the energy it takes, or if needing to protect my energy to continue to do antiracist work is a mark of white privilege. To that point, I was extremely grateful for the vulnerability of the participants, but I had to recognize they might say things that might not be in keeping with the professed antiracist commitment each participant held. I spent time contemplating how to navigate those potential exchanges in a manner allowing for growth and acknowledge the vulnerability of willingness to participate in this research.

**Participants**

In the participant selection method for this study, I identified and studied a coherent group of individuals who could directly address the research question: “How did the participants develop their personal antiracist stance; how does that manifest in their classroom and what impact do they hope to have on students?” Ultimately, I decided to solicit candidates from Montessori classroom environments. The significance of the Montessori philosophy and pedagogy was discussed in Chapter 2 and served to demonstrate the importance of Montessori teachers being involved in this research.
Initially, I did not intend to limit the research to Montessori teachers. However, as the theoretical framework was analyzed and considering how aspects of the racism existing in the current system lie beneath the surface or the conscious level, a desire increased to explore how antiracist work could exist on that same level as true disruption. Montessori (1948/1989) philosophy contains theory of how learning interacts with the subconscious. Therefore, along with the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, it was crucial to explain how Montessori pedagogical philosophy addresses the aspect of instruction that happens at a level beneath the consciousness of what is directly taught and influences classroom design and culture. This explanation involved a discussion of Montessori pedagogy, and Montessori’s (1949/1989) writings on brain development and learning and how they tie into decentering whiteness and incorporating antiracist pedagogy for instruction and learning.

The focus on Montessori environments was threefold in this study. First, my experience of having been a public Montessori educator for over 30 years, and due to the emphasis placed on peace education and conflict resolution in the classroom, has led me to the belief that Montessori teachers are drawn to antiracist work. Montessori educators also have a shared belief that the only way to change society is through changing education and how children develop. As Montessori (1948/1995) said, “Children are the makers of men” (p. 4).

The second reason for focusing on Montessori teachers and their environments was due to the interest in how educators can create antibias classrooms providing “organic” opportunities to absorb a different narrative than the Anglo-European model, which is the tradition and serves to reinforce the white racial identity development in students (Lewis, 2001, 2004). In this context, the word “organic” is meant as naturally occurring, not a lesson or curriculum “add on”
pulled out of a box once a week and presented in isolation from the other curriculum. Organic antiracism is woven throughout the curriculum and the classroom environment through very purposeful experiences decentering whiteness; however, when decentering is not the focus, it is the indirect purpose.

This led to the third reason for the focus on Montessori teachers, discussed in Chapter 2—the emphasis in Montessori education on the development of the whole child. Montessori teachers or guides work on their social-emotional ability to see their community as global versus local, as well as the academics and cognitive aspects of development.

Montessori teachers have required training not only in academics but also in philosophy and child development based on Montessori’s (1949/1972, 1949/1989, 1948/1995) work. They learn the importance of direct and indirect purposes of lessons and the elements of a classroom environment. Teachers understand everything from the layout of the room to the organization of shelves to the books in the library provides the child with experiences they are not even aware they have. Thus, Montessori teachers have a useful framework for taking on the work of antiracism in the context of disrupting whiteness. This preparation does not make them typical teachers, necessarily. Rather, as posited at the beginning of this study, this approach provided a population that might have potential to model the kinds of work studied in this dissertation.

In the Montessori context, classrooms are prepared environments where the children can learn without having needless frustrations in their way. The shelves show the progression of the lessons without overtly stating that purpose. A child receives unspoken lessons or guidance in many ways. Therefore, it was an assumption in this study that these teachers understood how to
make those same types of changes to the environment to value and center a mixture of cultures, races, and experiences.

The participants sought out for this research had a minimum of 3–6 years in a Montessori classroom and held a Montessori teaching credential; ideally, they participated in self-reflective antiracist training, worked in a predominantly white school, and for this research specifically, identified as white. In Montessori, 3-year cycles are the full length of time a child is with their teacher. From the lens of a Montessori educator, that timing is used also to understand the cycle of the teacher’s experience in 3-year terms. Therefore, 3–6 years of experience would provide them with hopefully 1–2 full cycles in a classroom environment. The Montessori credential indicated they received the training discussed in the last chapter about the intention, design, and development of the child. Although I hold the opinion an opportunity to participate with trained professionals to self-examine hidden bias or to more deeply understand the existence of hegemony and a society based on white supremacy culture is essential to approach this work as a prepared teacher; however, participation in such training was not used as a restriction against participation for interested individuals. Teacher identity was important only because of the study’s focus on how white educators can approach antiracism in the classroom environment in a predominantly white school.

These demographics were also important because over 73% of all Montessori teachers identified as white (Zippia.com, 2022), whereas only 45%–47% of children in public Montessori schools identified as white (Debs, 2016). However, this percentage of white students was still above the California state average of 20% of white students enrolled in public schools (Educational Data Partnership, 2023).
Participant Selection and Recruitment

At the time of this study, there were 21 public Montessori schools in the state of California. Of these, 12 fit the school profile of over 40% white students and no other subgroup, which created more than 20% of the population. The goal of this study was to concentrate the data on California Montessori teachers, but that was simply not possible. Initial attempts at participant recruitment were through regional and national Montessori organizations, but the response was low. The 2 years prior to this study were difficult for teachers and many simply did not have the bandwidth to participate in anything outside of their current obligations.

Upon recognizing the need to expand the search for participants, the decision was made to post the link to the participation form on several different Montessori Facebook group pages. A simple Google Form contained a few questions to determine if the interested party fit the desired demographic for the participants. The post placed in these Facebook groups was as follows:

Fellow Montessori Educators,

I am working on my dissertation from San Francisco State University and my focus is on how antiracist teachers working in schools serving a majority of white students, can disrupt the development of white racial identity as the norm. If you consider yourself an antiracist educator and you would like to learn and share with other antiracist Montessori educators through two, 1-hour focus groups, please complete this FORM. Identities of participants will be protected in the data and the work of the dissertation. However, participants will be interacting with others in the focus groups and within that space, there is a limit to the anonymity between participants. You will receive a $50 Amazon
Card for each of the two focus groups. Thank you in advance! My hope is to not have any other identifying information needed to use the data collected. If the participant pool is composed of all Montessori teachers, curriculum focus could be on specific Montessori lessons versus state standards to also help retain anonymity.

Despite having hundreds of members in some groups, my request resulted in 10 interested responders. Because there was no efficient method to understand who saw the post but chose not to respond, or why they chose not to respond, due to the nature of soliciting through Facebook Groups and personal connections, it was difficult to discern why there was not a larger pool of interested participants. It could be assumed the Facebook analytics did not post it in everyone’s feed, possibly it was intimidating for teachers to declare themselves “antiracist,” or the conversation might be controversial. However, it is not possible to truly know why there were not more respondents.

This process provided a list of 10 respondents; this list then reduced due to the criteria participants needed to meet. Only 7 of the 10 respondents identified as white. Of those seven, only six were Montessori-credentialed teachers, and only five taught at schools with the student demographic sought. Then once the initial request for availability was sent out, only four continued to engage. These four constituted the focus group interviews and two of the four were chosen to participate in the one-on-one interviews coinciding with the focus groups. There is a discussion of the process for choosing the two individuals more with the findings in Chapter 4. See Table 3 for the list of respondents to the request for participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Student demographic</th>
<th>Teach at a Montessori School</th>
<th>Teaching level</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Credentialed Montessori teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21+</td>
<td>Over 40% white students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Upper Elementary (9yr–12yr)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>Over 40% white students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Early Childhood (3yr–6yr)</td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>Over 40% white students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lower Elementary (6yr–9yr)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11–20</td>
<td>Over 40% white students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Adolescent (12yr–15yr)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6–10</td>
<td>Over 40% white students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lower Elementary (6yr–9yr)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>11–20</td>
<td>Over 50% BIPOC students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lower Elementary (6yr–9yr)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>Over 40% white students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Specials (ages 2–12)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>21+</td>
<td>Over 40% white students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Early Childhood (3yr–6yr)</td>
<td>Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish ancestry</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>Over 40% white students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Early Childhood (3yr–6yr)</td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11–20</td>
<td>Over 40% white students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Early Childhood (3yr–6yr)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The four participants who emerged through the vetting process all identified as white and taught in schools with over 40% white students and with no other singular student identity over 20% of the population (e.g., their schools did not have a percentage of African American students or Hispanic students over 20%). These participants all taught for over 3 years and were either currently credentialed or recently completed their Montessori credentialing program. Two of the participants were from California public Montessori schools; two were from other states. Neither of the non-California participants worked in states where critical race theory was challenged, so this should not have presented any additional risks for any of the educators involved.

The identity of the teachers was known to each other because they met in focus groups on Zoom on camera. All participants were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement for work in the focus groups (i.e., not sharing out identifiable information about each other outside of the group setting). However, once they had met and the teachers started to know each other, they requested to be connected so they could also collaborate on ideas outside of group time.

**Data Collection**

A combination of focus groups and personal interviews provided data for this study and created support for the teachers in doing this work. Focus groups were used in a variety of ways including propaganda and marketing; however, Freire used “study circles” as early as the 1970s, which were focus groups of teachers (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013) to answer questions and build community. Whereas this research study was initially seen simply as focus groups and the interviews involving teachers and their practices, it was a form of teacher research. The participants shared practices and learned from each other while providing me with data. As Xerri
(2018) stated regarding teacher research, “It enables practitioners to answer questions which might puzzle them, and in the process effect change” (p. 140).

As mentioned earlier, the origins of ethnography, and ways to conduct qualitative inquiry such as focus groups, are more connected to sociology versus psychology, which aligned with this study’s conceptual framework based on the sociological theories of social reproduction and critical whiteness theory (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Social reproduction was one of the two theories combined to form the framework for this study. To take this connection further, Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) discussed how educational research is usually based on quantitative research, which is closely related to psychology. The difference between a psychological perspective and a sociological perspective is psychology approaches the problem as based on the individual, potentially then coming from a deficit perspective; whereas sociology approaches problems as stemming from the society in which individuals are impacted by society, and therefore the cause is not found from the individual (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). The alignment between methodology and theoretical framework is instrumental in the research design and method chosen (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The focus groups for this research followed the participants identified for the study through several data collection methods. The interviews were one-to-one conversations conducted with a subset of the focus group. The focus group met for two sessions, separated by 3 months, and the interviews consisted of three sessions of less than 1 hour over a period of 2 months. The timing of these interviews was strategic for teachers to provide the greatest potential for them to move forward. Three of the four participants worked at public Montessori schools. Again, Montessori and, even more specifically, public Montessori schools were not the
anticipated participant pool for this research. Due to the nature of Montessori education, explained in earlier sections, these teachers made a compatible group for the goals of this research.

**Data Analysis**

The final analysis of the data was presented in a combination of data from focus groups and individual interviews. The data were presented initially as reflections from the focus groups and interviews. The discussion then explores the findings more deeply by responding to the primary research question.

The first part of the data analysis process occurred during data collection. Both the interviews and focus groups began with established questions. Then, as the group moved through the conversations, I reflected upon the participants’ answers to create follow-up questions to probe further when necessary. There was effort to ensure my experience or response as the researcher did not influence the participants (Seidman, 2013). It was often difficult to refrain from sharing when they were sharing openly about the subject matter.

I wanted to explore the “why” and “how” involved with the participants’ actions in antiracist pedagogy (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). This led to the creation of separate sections for certain questions and analysis. As the data were coded and reevaluated, I realized there was more information than the research questions sought (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Seidman, 2013). In addition to giving answers to the three-part inquiry, topics also surfaced more than once and needed to be discussed. Therefore, that data are provided in a separate section.

The combination of focus groups and phenomenological interviews gave a greater depth of understanding (Seidman, 2013). The focus group data concentrated on the “how” and the
phenomenological interviews on the “why.” Both the “how” and the “why” are essential in ethnographic inquiry (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The three-interview format gave more depth as well (Seidman, 2013). Xerri (2018) discussed how participants might feel less vulnerable or open up more in interviews or through conversations. Participants who opted to be part of the individual interviews were willing to share more outside of the larger group. The intent was to allow space for vulnerability and openness which an individual interview would allow.

During all interviews, I made audio recordings, and then application Otter.ai transcribed those recordings. Once a transcript was ready, I reviewed the audio and text version, and corrected the text portion by returning to the recordings and reading the text while listening to the recording of the focus group or interview. Seidman (2013) discussed the importance of the transcript and its accuracy: “A detailed and careful transcript that recreates the verbal and nonverbal material of the interview can be of great benefit to a researcher who may be studying the transcript months after the interview occurred” (p. 119).

After correcting the transcript for accuracy of the response, I read back through the first analysis of the data transcripts again and pre-coded by highlighting and circling phrases central to their responses (Saldaña, 2016). After returning to the audio recording and the written transcripts, I created data memos (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Seidman, 2013). The first part of each memo included a summary of the observations during the data collection and the second part was a chart where responses are in a chart separated by question and each individual response. See Table 4 for a brief example of these memos. These memos helped in the process of creating questions to ask the subgroup in the phenomenological interviews.
Table 4

*Sample Data Memo With Coding (Focus Group 1)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Participant 1 | Well, it’s an active stance. So, there’s nothing passive about it. I can’t just claim that as an identity, it has to have systems and practices in place for me to create collective consciousness and nurture that not just in myself but in students and in my teaching peers. | Active stance  
Systems and practices in place  
Collective consciousness  
Nurture that in students and peers  
Bringing “racism” to the forefront.  
Acknowledging it  
Discussing it  
Not being afraid |

| Participant 2 | So, I guess my definition is, or my, my approach is, first I just need to look a lot at myself in my life. Like my actions, my thoughts, and then in my class, I try to be aware of that. I mean, I agree with everything that was said already and add that when I’m record keeping, I’m keeping track of a lot more than just like I gave these many lessons to these many kids. It’s like, who am I giving lessons to, but also who’s participating in class discussions, who’s participating and things like going out? Who’s taking on leadership roles, who’s being listened to like, whose voices are always? Who’s answering all the questions first, and taking up a lot of oxygen? And then I try to approach that from an antiracist one. | Self-reflection  
Look at myself  
My actions  
Who’s participating  
Who am I giving lessons to?  
Who is taking up oxygen?  
Who is participating? |

| Participant 4 | For me, it feels like always bringing it to the forefront never, never letting it be quiet. Acknowledging it, discussing it. But not being afraid of it. I can’t. | Bringing “racism” to the forefront.  
Acknowledging it  
Discussing it  
Not being afraid |

*Note. Context for focus group: Participants and interviewer met on Zoom. There were few expectations for this first meeting. The participants had not met, and I did not know how they*
would interact. However, they flowed together well and seemed to be thoughtful of other participants answers to build upon for their responses when appropriate. As the interviewer, I asked, “Share how you define ‘antiracist teacher’ and pedagogy for yourself. What I am asking about is your identity as self-proclaimed antiracist teachers. What does that mean to you?”

Next, the process of coding began using a combination of categorizing and using in vivo coding with the highlighted sections (Saldaña, 2016; Seidman, 2013). My goal was to have similar sets of data from each participant to move into the second round of coding (Saldaña, 2016). Then, for the second round of coding, I returned to the initial codes to make connections between all the participants’ responses to guide the conclusions learned from this data (Saldaña, 2016) and to determine if there were consistent themes. As stated by Hammersley and Atkinson (2019), “Data must be treated as materials to think with, to facilitate the production of new ideas” (p. 167). As a result, I created coding spreadsheets designed slightly differently for each of the two focus groups.

With the large part of the data categorized by the interview questions, I reviewed the data again to create categories based on the overarching research questions and to look for any additional themes presented through the conversations. Throughout this process, the replaying of the recorded sessions was a crucial step. Listening to the participants voices while reading their words allowed me to put the appropriate intonation to the expressed thoughts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Coding was also a bit burdensome. It was often difficult to determine how to choose the suitable short phrase or words germane to the whole statement. The participants’ answers were rarely concise, and their full responses were often crucial to understanding their
point. They also gave examples of events or interactions to explain their responses, and though interesting, they were not easily summarized for coding.

Subquestions and Schedule Design

When working with educators, it is crucial to work around their schedules and calendars. In the data gathering, I help two sessions for the focus groups. During these times, teachers were most likely to be open and comfortable discussing what they were currently doing and learning additional ideas to implement from each other. In October, teachers have usually settled into their classes and can be more relaxed without the pressure of the start of the year. However, October is also close enough to the start of the year they could share ideas in time for implementation throughout the year.

The second round of the focus group was held in January. This time is another starting point in which new ideas could be shared, and the participants were able to share what was working in their classrooms. These timings, combined with working with a group of educators, also helped to support the work through group sharing ideas and thoughts, successes, and challenges. The questions can be found both in Chapter 4 and in Appendix A.

Limitations, Validity, Triangulation

I am confident the data gathered from these teachers could provide insight and inspiration to other teachers seeking to take on the mantle of antiracism. However, there is always a need to address the limitations and validity of the findings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Seidman, 2013). Most importantly, having only four participants was a concern. Due to the sample size, there cannot be a guarantee these participants were a true sampling from Montessori schools across the country or they represented all white, antiracist educators. These teachers are a sample
set representing individual experiences and stories. This research sought to investigate the phenomenological experiences and choices of teachers committed to antiracist practice and willing to be vulnerable to grow in their pedagogy and determination. These teachers fit this model.

As one measure of validity, I used the concept of triangulation, according to Carter et al.’s (2014) four types of triangulations. These include using multiple data sources and investigator triangulation, which involves more than one researcher. Using both focus groups and individual interviews to collect data provided multiple responses. The phenomenologically formatted interviews served to support the responses individuals provided during the focus groups (Seidman, 2013). I did not have an additional interviewer gathering data, but I provided all the data to a peer for her review so she could provide her perspective. I used her responses to check against my interpretation of the participants responses.

Earlier in this chapter, I reflected on my role and positionality as the researcher. As a white, cisgender, female, I shared those aspects of my identity with my participants. It was essential I brought in a peer to review my work who shared certain defining characteristics with the participants and myself but who also had a slightly different lens. This peer was also a Montessori educator with her EdD who had public Montessori administrative experience and engaged in training administrators and teachers in antiracist practice. She also identified as African American, so she had a different lens through which to read the data. I asked her to see if I had missed any subtle attitudes or if our reflections on the data would be the same. I wanted to ensure my racial lens did not miss something due to my own blind spots. Once the task of
correcting the transcripts was completed, they were sent to the participants to review for accuracy. There were no corrections suggested by the participants.

**Summary**

The goal of this research was to promote awareness of what it means to be an antiracist teacher and to encourage more white teachers to take on this identity. As reflected upon in this chapter, the percentage of teachers who are white in public schools, and specifically in this case Montessori public schools, makes it crucial for more white teachers to learn how to be antiracist and to understand the need for them to take on this type of work in their classrooms. For society to change, the education of children must change. Montessori (1949/1995) stated, “If salvation and help are to come, it is from the child, for the child is the constructor of man, and so of society” (p. 4).

The process of soliciting participants may not have produced as many candidates as anticipated, but the candidates who were selected represented different regions of the country and different experiences that brought them to the work of antiracism. The data collection and analysis process followed qualitative methodologies yielding significant results. As a result of the data collected from the interviews and focus groups, I believe the findings discussed in the next chapter are valid and representative of other white teachers doing the work of antiracism.
Chapter 4: Findings

Laying the Foundation

This study was designed to explore the impetus and actions of self-identified antiracist white teachers and to discover how their pedagogy decenters whiteness in their classrooms. The questions guiding this research were:

- How do white teachers committed to antiracism develop their personal antiracist stance?
- How do white teachers who are committed to antiracist practice, manifest that practice in their classroom?
- What impact do white antiracist teachers hope to have on students?

In exploring the literature in Chapter 2, I sought to identify how this study moves beyond articles and studies seeking to contend white teachers are not doing antiracist work (Vittrup, 2016; Yu, 2012). I also positioned this study as a response to a lack of research regarding how antiracist pedagogy is carried out in schools serving predominately white populations. As stated previously in this study, if schools are a tool for reproducing society and, as part of that process, providing an atmosphere aiding in the development of white racial identity, then antiracist pedagogy must be used to disrupt that process in these white spaces (Lewis, 2004). Through the work of white teachers creating antiracist spaces who work to center Anglo-European culture and other tenets of whiteness people start to break the racial contract promoting the supremacy of whiteness and continuing the cycle of racism (Leonardo, 2013).

As one of the participants in this study commented, being antiracist as a white person in the United States is a process of “re-learning” and “pulling back the curtain.” All the participants
in this study understood they were all still in the process of re-learning and understanding how white racial identity is tied to the white supremacy culture it has created, and as a result, their own positionality in that process. Each of them came to this place through their own path. Some recognized the role race played for them from an early age, some had this awakening during their college education, and some started down this path during their career by experiencing training that led them to new perspectives. However, they were open and vulnerable and truly desired society and culture to be different. They were not afraid of pushing boundaries parents or others may have to move forward with the work of antiracism.

The research question for this study was originally designed as a two-part query: (a) what actions are they, the participants, undertaking in their classrooms to create antiracist space, and (b) what impact are they hoping this has on their students? However, as stated in Chapter 3, this question evolved during the study to include a third element. Each of the participants had a somewhat different path to identifying themselves as antiracist educators. It became important to understand those pathways. Therefore, the data were based on incorporating that path and the research questions became: (a) how did the participants develop their personal antiracist stance, (b) how does that manifest in their classroom, and (c) what impact do they hope to have on students? The bulk of the questions were designed to elicit specific details about curriculum, classroom design, and other ways these educators were intentionally creating antiracist environments. Through additional inquiry, they discussed their personal drive to bring an antiracist lens into their classrooms. Although understanding whether their path to antiracism impacted their level of commitment to that work was a valid direction for study, it was not in the scope of this study.
The findings related to the questions can be summarized or put into bullet points; but their commitments come through in the participants’ words and phrasing. When explaining their path to identifying as antiracist, they all indicated there was an event or an experience that opened their eyes and allowed them to see through the hegemony around them. In determining who they were in the light of this awakening, they felt working toward equity and understanding was really a central part of who they are. They have taken this work with them wherever they go and have intentionally taken this approach into their classrooms. In these spaces, they were critical of curriculum, so they looked through a lens of antiracism to ensure what they were teaching did not replicate the current white supremacy culture. They created lessons and had hard conversations. They wanted their students to be people who did not embody the continuation of a racist society, they want them to have a voice and to use it, and to be better people. Their words gave the power to these findings.

**Format for the Discussion of the Findings**

Both by design and as the study organically unfolded, I sought inspiration from Montessori methods in collecting and analyzing the data and presenting my findings. This choice was perhaps natural given my and the study participants’ background.

First, Montessori methods inspired my research methodology. As described, I collected data through two focus groups in which all four participants took part. I subsequently selected two participants with whom I conducted a series of three further phenomenological interviews. A Montessori lesson starts with the larger concept to spark the learner’s imagination and then begins to focus on the smaller, more distinct concept. Even more pertinently, Montessori methods inspired process toward findings in this study and hence shaped the structure of this
chapter. In Montessori education, lessons typically come with both a direct and indirect aim. One could call this a direct lesson and indirect lesson. Because this research was done with a group of Montessori educators, it was only fitting the data provided both direct findings and a set of associated implications I labeled indirect findings. Direct findings were the findings directly connected to the research questions. Indirect findings were emergent themes only tangentially connected to the research question, but that came across so often in the data they could not be ignored. Therefore, I present my findings in the same order—big picture and then more specific data. The discussion in this chapter begins with observations of the research process and participant interactions meant to help the reader understand the context from which they merged. As part of this process, I spent some time discussing the ways in which I negotiated the meanings of key terms with the participants.

The chapter then moves explicitly to findings. I begin by discussing the data sets as if they are one whole before breaking them down by individual sampling. Here, I explicitly address the findings in connection with the questions posed. These findings are divided by each component of the question and demonstrate how these teachers developed as antiracist educators, what impacts this has had on their classrooms and pedagogy, and how they hope this impacts their students. The section on the impact in their classrooms and pedagogy gives examples of what is often alluded to in the more generalized overview of the data collection.

Finally, after I explore the findings directly related to the research question, I discuss the themes I labeled as indirect findings, which developed outside of the formal research question.
Big Picture: Researcher Observations of the Participants and the Process

As discussed in the methods chapter, my research process involved documenting conversations and interactions with the participants. The narrative that follows helps the reader understand the genesis and context of the data informing the findings of the study. In the following section, I use the narrative of my study design to also begin to surface the phenomenological experiences of each of my participants, as preparation to identify shared patterns arising from the data. I also share vital concepts informing those patterns.

My approach to both focus group sessions and interviews was ethnographic. Overall, throughout both collection methods, I felt the participants were authentic in their desire to answer the questions they had experience with or felt comfortable answering. As I listened to each session again after it was completed, I recognized the conversations among the group often resulted in unfinished statements because participants would eagerly jump in or over each other. As the moderator and interviewer, I should perhaps have intervened more when this was happening, as the way a focus group is handled can have an influence on the data collected (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). However, given my role as a participant–observer, I felt some reticence to assert myself too much.

I also sought to conduct some discursive analysis. I believe also, due to our being on Zoom, similar to being in a room together, participants communicated elements with facial expressions or changes in tone not noticed when reading the transcripts. I tried to make note of those additional forms of discourse (Gee, 1989). From the position of observer and interviewer, it appeared all four participants were eager to learn from each other and to share with each other
during the focus group sessions. I was able to observe a sense of a growing connection and they
also found and built from similar experiences to express their responses.

In the phenomenological interviews, there was of course not the same opportunity to
build from other participants; however, at times, I shared thoughts and experiences as the
interviewer. At times, this appeared to help provide a clearer understanding of what I was trying
to ascertain through my questions, but at times, it might have influenced their responses more
than I intended.

Focus Groups

After selecting the volunteers who fit the demographic criteria I had set for this research,
we met on Zoom. All participants were on camera, except one who joined by phone. I was not
sure what to expect from the group being together for the first time. However, they flowed
together well and seemed to be thoughtful of each other’s answers to build upon for their
responses when appropriate.

I prepared questions for both focus groups, but I realized quickly their conversation
became somewhat unstructured. At first, when I was looking at their responses, I could not
determine how to bring together summaries of their responses and match them to the questions I
had intended to ask. During a reread through the transcript, I realized I often reworded or slightly
changed the question after I had stated it originally. Sometimes, I also added a question quite
different from the initial question and the answers were more aligned with the second.

Also, upon a second reading of the responses, I had brushed off one response regarding
culturally relevant classrooms and did not want to include the response in my coding. The
participant had brought up children not knowing the true origins of Easter from a Christian
perspective. At first, because this statement was more an example of centering the majority
culture rather than exploring other cultures, this response was appropriate as the question asked
how they worked to make a classroom of predominately white Christian students, culturally
relevant. Her response was not addressing diversity, it was about the culture of her students.

I felt broad swaths of responses were relevant, yet not specific. It was difficult to
determine how to pick out the phrase or sentence representing their position. I went back and
forth between using descriptive coding and in vivo coding to try and capture the essence of the
answer.

The second focus group was 3 months after the first. I had hoped the focus group held in
January would be the third in a series. However, due to timing, I needed to limit my data
gathering window. The participants in this group were the same four teachers from the first
memo. Three one-on-one interviews had also occurred. The original intent of having multiple
focus groups was to speak to teachers as the year progressed to see what actions or thoughts, they
were experiencing regarding their work in antiracist pedagogy. However, after reviewing the first
focus group, I determined I also needed to confirm how I was conducting this focus group and
there was more structure to the questioning and progress.

To provide structure, I sent the participants an article and a link to a website. The article
was about the banality of racism in education (Valant, 2020) and the website was
www.whitesupremacyculture.info. This website was brought to my attention through a training
with the organization Embracing Equity. The website included a list of characteristics of white
supremacy culture. The intention was for the participants to have common reference points to
discuss. As we started, I did not get the impression all four had read the articles beforehand the articles, so I suggested they pull up the site on white supremacy for the discussion.

The group seemed more comfortable with talking and all four participants had agreed to share their personal information with each other so they could communicate outside of the focus groups. One of the four reached out to share some things happening in her environment she wanted to share with others. As a point of observation regarding my interviewing style, it was still a struggle for me to not share too much and overly influence the thoughts or responses they would provide.

**Phenomenological Interviews**

The following sections contain data from the series of interviews I conducted with individual participants. These interviews were held with two of the four candidates. They took place via Zoom and were conducted between the two focus group meetings.

**Participant 1³**

Participant 1 discussed identifying as a white cisgender female in a heteronormative relationship. She was a mother and her identity as a mother tied closely with her path to being an antiracist and an antiracist educator. Participant 1 shared she was raised in a rather conservative family. She always felt like the outlier due to her opinions and views. in this interview and in the focus group, she stated she felt being antiracist and bringing that lens to her life and her classroom was a “moral imperative.” She discussed the curtain being pulled back on society,

³ The use of “Participant” versus a pseudonym was chosen to limit any influence associated with a specific name from being felt by the reader. Names are personal and can bring with them emotion or connection that could interact with what is being said.
which happened around two influential periods of time—college and later with the birth of her
son. She worked for changes to society because she wanted everyone to be able to share the
world in which she wanted for her children to grow up. She recognized she had an opportunity to
make choices and to expose her children to opportunities not all mothers have, and she wanted to
make sure she used whatever privilege her positionality provided to ensure other children also
had those choices and opportunities.

Participant 1 recognized her positionality is a tool and felt the only positive use for
privilege is to ensure others have it as well. She talked about how other white people have at
times used their physical bodies which are granted some privileges, to physically stand in
between those who might not and threats to their humanity. She also discussed recognizing how
to approach her positionality has been a journey.

With her classroom and her approach, she offered she was sure she has made mistakes
but felt it is crucial to not stop moving forward or keeping silent on topics such a racism. She
knew as a white woman she will never completely understand what people of color experience or
even completely understand the impacts of her positionality. However, she felt silence
communicates complicity with the status quo, which is not acceptable, as she said, “neutrality is
not a thing.” She was mindful all students have been represented and given space to share their
identities in the classroom, which has tangibly impacted her teaching. She has also worked to
keep in mind who is taking up the most space in the classroom conversations.

As we were completing the interview time, she wanted to make the point it is crucial to
do antiracist work in collaboration with others doing the work as well. People need to have
partners who keep each other focused and who help them remember the complexities. As a white
educator, it is too easy to get comfortable and having others in this work with them helps them to see other perspectives. She recognized she might miss something in her practice others could call out and being open to hearing this is essential. There is personal inner work, but the work cannot be done alone.

I interviewed Participant 1 approximately 1 month after the first focus group. We spoke for approximately 30 minutes. The goal was to keep the one-on-one interviews shorter. We met on Zoom. Although they were listed as Participant 1 and Participant 2 based on their enlistment in the study, I was able to schedule the interview with Participant 2 first. I kept their identification the same for the focus groups and interviews so I could compare their individual responses throughout the data collection. I wanted to ask similar questions of Participant 1 as I did of Participant 2 during our one-on-one session. The intent was to create comparative responses and see if there were patterns or similarities in the data.

The second interview with Participant 1 was intended to focus on the idea of schools replicating society and how that pertains to racism. The initial questions were directed to that concept, and we discussed what the participant saw as some examples of how this process is manifested in the school system. She discussed obvious ways such as discipline and curriculum.

The participant and I then discussed how she worked against continuing to societal racism in her classrooms and what that looked like. She shared examples both in her classroom and in her experiences as a parent with children in schools. It was difficult to determine what to code and include from this interview, and what was less crucial to conveying her thoughts and work. The stories were ways she could demonstrate choices, yet to reflect on them in totality could distract from the more direct responses.
I also found myself being far more drawn into conversation as opposed to keeping the conversation strictly as an interview. In this interview, as at other times in this process, I was confused by some responses. I was torn as I read through the transcript about whether I should reengage with the participants for clarification. In this interview, the participant discussed school discipline and said the intent of school discipline might not be to replicate societal “isms,” but discipline can and often does replicate those systems. I would have argued indeed it is the intent of the systems in our society. I was concerned if I asked her what she meant if it would then lead her to an answer. I wanted her honest opinion to ensure I was representing her responses, not what I thought I heard or want to hear.

In this third interview, similar with Participant 2, I wanted to focus more on the implementation of antiracism in the classroom and what the students experience. As we progressed through the interview, I wondered how aware the teachers were of everything they do to either decenter whiteness or intentionally plan for opportunities to work toward antiracism with their students. Many of the opportunities in which they directly interacted with the students were conscious; however, there is an intentional aspect the students may never know was happening, but they benefit from nonetheless.

One of the vital takeaways from this interview went beyond looking for representative literature—when purchasing materials, Participant 1 had thoughts about to purchasing materials made by a teacher of color. Thus, one of the perspectives did not always come from a white teacher in even the items they used in the classroom which otherwise might have nothing to do with race.
**Participant 2**

Participant 2 was a white, cisgender female, and she was married. She revealed in this conversation her ancestry went back far into the timeline of when the United States was colonized. Her family had been in this country so long she did not identify with any specific Anglo-European culture such as German or Italian. She grew up in desegregated schools and had many friends who were of the Global Majority. She was also married to an immigrant to the United States who identified as a person of color. She credited her early life experiences in shaping her current views of race. She did not feel she had the typical childhood of other white children who perhaps lived and went to school in more white neighborhoods.

Participant 2 discussed seeking out ways to learn more about antiracism work and how to work inwardly on biases she may hold. She had sources of information she shared easily which helped her in this process. Through a combination of experiences and intentional work, she discussed how she recognized the privilege she experienced in most places she inhabited and at the same time, the difficulty her positionality could present when working with families of color. She has been received both as an outsider and as an ally in various situations, and recognized this was partly outside of her control due to who she presents as.

When discussing the antiracist lens through which she interacts in the classroom, she used examples of both curriculum and teachable moments to demonstrate what that looks and feels like. She used recess behaviors to discuss mob-mentality and the teaching of history as tools to bring discussions into her classroom she felt were necessary to expand her students’ perceptions and experiences.
Participant 2’s journey as an antiracist educator provided her with experiences of leaders who supported and promoted training for staff in a meaningful way and those who said the words but did not carry through with the actions of working to create antiracist educational spaces. She was fortunate to be trained through a school with committed leadership who allowed her to participate in structured, meaningful training she could use to work inwardly and prepare for working outwardly in her classroom. She offered to bring that type of work to her present situation, but it has been met with disinterest from administration. Her district has even invested in training but not applied follow through to give the training any ability to take foot in classrooms or schools. Though this situation was frustrating to her, she was determined to create space for her growth and the application of antiracism in the classroom she created with her students.

Participant 2 exhibited having done a good amount of “self-work” to move to a place of engaging in an almost automatic way with students to help them think differently and to not just accept the status quo, even if it benefits them. She has seen schools successfully implement antiracist pedagogy through consistent training and commitment to have staff truly work on themselves to provide classrooms not simply replicating the society, and where teachers learn to reflect and recognize their biases. Her insight was inspiring to me as the interviewer. She worked from her own perspective through an interest for doing that work, which is intrinsic. She was not compensated for the work, forced to read the books, or complete the training. She was deeply committed but at the same time, she recognized she was still a work in progress regardless of how much work she has done. No one can be complacent about this work.
During our first interview, the conversation did not focus solely on her classroom, but rather was an examination of who Participant 2 was as an antiracist educator. I struggled to find the focus because we discussed a variety of examples, but when examined as a whole, the interview was really about who she was.

My second interview with Participant 2 was only 30 minutes long but provided insight about her experience. We discussed training, impediments to successfully implementing antiracist pedagogy in schools, and how Montessori is compatible with providing space for decentering whiteness through its approach to creating a classroom learning environment.

In the third interview with Participant 2, I aimed to get to a more granular, applicable level of how she enacted antiracist pedagogy in the classroom. We spoke again for approximately 30 minutes and discussed different areas and content lending themselves to this work. We also discussed how she found opportunities for unplanned lessons. I then asked to her think about the classroom environment itself and she intentionally created space helping to decenter whiteness on a level the students may not see as intentional. As mentioned before, Participant 2 constantly continued her self-work. Even as she was retelling a story about a lesson in class, she paused and stated there was something she had not quite figured out how to handle in her classroom regarding problematic material. Her recognition of being a “work in progress” would seem to lend itself to being committed to a pedagogy not stuck in the continuation of everything as it has always been. Participant 2 was very open and shared personal stories of her lessons and her classrooms. She also shared more resources other teachers can research to do more of this work on their own.
**Codifying Key Concepts**

In the process of collecting information about the research questions, it became necessary to ask about how the participants defined or approached the ideas of antiracism, their positionality and identity as white-cisgender-women, and the concept of decentering whiteness. Thus, codifying terms became part of the analysis and findings process.

At this point, I began an ultimately successful search for a conceptual definition of the term antiracist. Kendi (2019) started his book, *How to be an Antiracist*, with definitions of both a racist and an antiracist. According to Kendi (2019), an antiracist is “one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea” (p. 13). Kendi then defined racism and racist policy. They discussed how policies are never neutral, rather racist or antiracist. Understanding participants may or may not have read Kendi’s work, I wanted to use his framing to explore their self-definitions as antiracists.

**Antiracist**

I asked the participants, because they defined themselves as antiracist, what antiracist meant to them. They collectively created a concept of antiracism as an active stance requiring systems and practices to be in place. It was a collective consciousness of bringing racism to the forefront by not fearing acknowledging and discussing it. Most importantly, it required self-reflection by looking at oneself and one’s actions. As a teacher, antiracism is about asking who is participating in class, who is receiving lessons, who is being called on, and who is being called out.
Positionality

The participants’ explanation of their positionality was not uniform in how they approached meaning. Therefore, it is better to provide samples from their words than to attempt to compile their answers into one concise response. It was also important for me as the interviewer to not interpret their understanding of what it means to have white racial identity while working on being antiracist. For example, Participant 2 said:

Like a white person in America, kind of like swimming, like, that’s just normal. I’m just like the norm. I don’t see myself like I do now. But obviously, like, you know, growing up, it’s like, you don’t have to see yourself as other. And so then you can use yourself as like the standard of like, let’s say culture, or expectations, or even like language. . . . I just had to constantly remind myself that like a person interacting with me is not just interacting with me. I’m like, I have to remember that I represent something else. And look like some people who’ve been really horrible. And that’s always like, a hard thing to reckon with when you’re coming to terms with what your what you look like. . . . Because I’m a white teacher and I have so much power. Like I’m the only teacher in the room. Right? So even an offhanded comment has a lot of weight and also no comment has a lot of weight. And so, whenever I speak, I just try to remember that.

Participant 1 said:

My positionality means because of because of the ways that my identity is multi layered. Like I have to be very, very conscious of the privilege that I walk around, cloaked in all the time and like, you know, like, I represent whiteness, right? Like it or not. And the other thing that my co teacher and I have talked quite a bit about, because she doesn’t
identify as white is like, if I get tired, I have, because of my privilege because of the way I identify. And because of the way I look in society, I have a pass to tap out. And I can’t do that, like morally and ethically, I feel like I can’t do that. And at this, and I’ve had to kind of learn how to reframe, like my fatigue in this work as like, this is what people experience all day, every day, from the moment they are born in our society. This is a point of empathy for me. And so, it’s not about hurting, like it’s not about struggling within myself, but it’s about realizing how systemic it is.

Participant 4 said:

I feel like my teaching partner, and I’ve had this discussion as well. Because my teaching partner’s (positionality is different from mine)*. And so, she deals with this, like, it’s her life. And like (the other participant) said, like, I get to feel life without that. And so like, I can’t just let it go. Like, I have to learn how to embrace it at all times, and also live through it and not want to tap out.

Taking these thoughts further, I asked the participants to discuss how their understanding of their positionality related to their work in a predominately white environment. I asked them if, as white teachers in a predominately white environment in which they felt free, if they felt they had more responsibility or if they felt there more difficulty bringing antiracism work into that environment. There was a consensus this work needs support and coconspirators. It is crucial for administration and other staff to be on the same page for this work. Most participants felt as though they worked in a supportive environment including all those components. One participant shared they were in a self-selected group both in this work and in seeking spaces where they felt supported to do it. Participant 4 said:
I feel like I don’t have a choice. I would be not being myself if I didn’t talk about this, if I
didn’t bring it up if we didn’t have these discussions. And like [Participant 1] said, like
being in a place where we have these systems in place, I know that I’m not going to have,
I’m not doing this alone. The . . . you know, the administration, the other teachers, most
of the families see this and see the need for it. And I feel like as a teacher, as a white
teacher, it is my job, and my personal necessity to keep to continue teaching and not let it
go.

Participant 1 responded to Participant 4 by saying, “And it’s a moral imperative.” Participant 2
then shared:

I just come to work knowing that I’m gonna get in trouble, it’s gonna be for the right
thing and then that’s okay. I look at my classroom, I look at it on paper, and I try to look
at society. And I try to say, Am I just duplicating or replicating the inequities in societies?
But that’s like, what I also need to do is change outcomes for my kids, according to what
a person could predict on paper for them based on their identity.

**Decentering Whiteness**

Later in this chapter, there is deeper discussion of what the participants actively did in
their classrooms because of their antiracist perspective. However, in the first focus group, I
wanted to establish a basis for what decentering whiteness looked like to them. The term and
concept of decentering whiteness arose in tandem with the concept of whiteness studies
(Hitchcock & Flint, 1997). As early as 1997, at least two articles addressed the need for
decentering whiteness (Hitchcock & Flint, 1997; McLaren, 1997). Hitchcock and Flint discussed
not so much replacing whiteness but moving whiteness to the margins with other cultures. The
participants in the current study looked at decentering whiteness through the lens of Montessori training and curriculum strands.

The participants reflected on the curriculum they were provided through their training and where changes needed to be made. They referenced to how educators teach history and science. They reflected on how materials need to be changed as they portray some cultures as more advanced than others and continue cultural stereotypes. For example, through a study of the fundamental needs of man, posters depict Caucasian people wearing modern clothing, but any other group is in presumed traditional clothing for specific sectors of a society in a culture. One participant expressed how the lessons and curriculum in these areas need to be updated. She said, “Here we are with this amazing gift, and we can’t, we’re not learning to spread it, without spreading our whiteness with it, and it’s shameful.” However, when we discussed how their classrooms can incorporate antiracism, they shared this could be accomplished through Montessori pedagogy and philosophy.

**Findings-Direct (Research Question Focused)**

In this second part of my discussion, I focused on patterns arising from cross analyzing the focus groups and interviews. In this way, I moved from a phenomenological narrative to analytical categories with meaning beyond individual experience. I explored findings connecting those participants responses to each of the three sections of the research enquiry:

- How do white teachers committed to antiracism develop their personal antiracist stance?
- How do white teachers who are committed to antiracist practice, manifest that practice in their classroom?
What impact do white antiracist teachers hope to have on students?

How White Teachers Committed to Antiracism Develop Their Personal Antiracist Stance

Three of the four participants were aware of the idea of white supremacy culture and its impact on their lives for many years. All four participants completed formal training provided through their schools, and personally, to explore their personal biases and to identify more closely white privilege and white supremacy culture. However, having been presented with the reality that society and systems are founded based on white supremacy does not automatically lead someone to the desire to be an antiracist educator or to intentionally create classroom environments disrupting this process. As one of the participants expressed in an interview, if people are forced to participate in training and to explore bias in themselves, a true transformation may not take place (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014). During the individual interviews we explored why these teachers had regarding doing antiracist work.

Participant 1 was raised in a relatively conservative family and described herself as the “black sheep” of the family. She recalled always being “shushed” at family dinners when she broached topics such as equity or politics. Despite describing herself as always having had a nature that “loved the underdog and always had a sense fairness and justice,” she started to develop her ability to apply this perspective to exploring racial dynamics while in college studying global systems and colonialism. She had never really heard some of the concepts regarding colonization that were introduced through those classes. Through this new perspective, she started to recognize more of how this played out in society. When she became a mother in 2005, her recognition developed and deepened this connection and desire for her child to inherit a more just world. She said:
Parenting was really a pivotal shift for me. [You] no longer have the luxury of choice of living for yourself all the time. Trying to make decisions for another human being that were going to support that human being growth and realizing my extreme privilege of being able to make those kinds of decisions and understanding as I was making those decisions there are people in this world who never even get to make this decision, it’s not even an option for them. So, taking that decision making, very seriously and really, in trying to honor that if I could, if I [could] make those decisions for my kids, I want other people to be able to make those decisions for their kids. So, what can I do in service to the world so that other people can make those decisions for their children?

When she reflected on the time prior to having children, she shared with honesty and vulnerability she did not always act accordingly with the feelings she had of fairness and justice. She did not feel she was empowered to be that person. In fact, as a child growing up, she was told to not be that person. Motherhood brought that person to the forefront for her.

One foundational part of working toward equity and the work of antiracism is understanding one’s own positionality. For Participant 1, she felt her whiteness brought an “onus of responsibility to stay engaged.” She recognized as a white woman, she had ability to “tap out;” yet, for People of the Global Majority, taking a break from living in a society not built to serve you is not possible. She said, “Living in that dichotomy, I’ve tried to figure out how I can continually stay engaged and continually be in a place of service and action without burning myself out so that I can continue to stay engaged.” She felt to do this, it was crucial for her to “be humble, [and to] be willing to make mistakes, and be willing to stay engaged.” With this knowledge, her desire was to continue in this work through joy. She shared, “The hardest part for
me is like to do it with joy instead of getting overwhelmed or depressed about it. It has to come from a place of hope.”

One of the ways in which Participant 1 discussed her positionality seemed to resemble the concept of being the “white savior;” however, in exploring her intent, it seemed to be closer to this idea of how far the commitment to making a difference and speaking truth to power she believed one must go in the work of creating a more just society, because the truth is, we are not there yet. She described an incident she watched on the news that demonstrated this to her. During a hearing for police officers involved in yet another fatal shooting of a young, Black man, the victim’s brother was walking around the courtyard visibly upset and two older non-Black women walked with him, in front and in back. These women were demonstrating they recognized the likelihood of anyone seeing them as a threat was minimal and they could put their bodies between this man and those who might feel threatened by his anger, so additional tragedy could be prevented. Participant 1 shared this because ultimately, she felt “bodies [were] on the line.” Participant 1 stated:

When I think about my work with my children, when I think about who I am in my neighborhood, when I think about sitting down with my extended family for dinner, I think about that. Like, my body is on the line. You know, and I am here to amplify, I am here to correct, I am here to connect, and that’s my job. You know I was born into the body, so that’s what I have to do with the body that I was given.

Participant 1’s conversation communicated her commitment to antiracism and at the same time acknowledged this was not a short-term learning process. She discussed identifying as antiracist has required a process of unlearning. It has been about examining everything she has
known. Through recognition as an educator, she can prevent another generation from having to “have the curtain pulled back.” Hopefully, the window is clear for them, and they will not develop the same white racial identity to actually believe—even if only because it is the “norm”—in the white supremacy inherent in the culture. These new students will be a generation successfully centering all cultures and not stuck with whiteness as the standard.

The lived experience of Participant 2 was quite different from Participant 1. She grew up going to a school where she was in the minority and her childhood friendships reflected that. Unlike the white experience shared in DiAngelo’s (2018) *White Fragility*, in which most white people do not have to confront or acknowledge race, Participant 2 shared she and her friends acknowledged differences at early ages. They might not have spoken about race, but they all knew they were “a different color,” went home to different areas, ate different foods, listened to different music, and went to different churches. Participant 2 said, “That was all interesting and fun to us because we loved each other.” She realized her childhood was a formative experience and she understood early on race was a thing. I appreciated her words when she expressed, “Who you love when you’re little has a lot to do with who you love when you’re older.”

As she progressed into adulthood, her choices resulted in experiences that continued to put her in positions of being in a group where, as a white woman, she was in the minority situation. However, she also felt working in public schools, she was complicit in the continuation of the racist system. Even if she did not have a typical white lived experience, she was still ultimately part of the system reproducing whiteness, even in schools that served communities of color. She eventually left the traditional public school system to teach at a private Montessori school where she received both her Montessori training and began her formal training to explore
her personal biases and work toward development of her antiracist identification. Teaching at the
private school was her first assignment where she found herself working with a population of
students who were predominately white. After her time at school, she continued to work in
Montessori education, but she returned to the public sector and served at school with
predominantly Black and Brown populations. Considering over 80% (Educational Data
Partnership, 2023) of public-school teachers were white at the time of this study, it was not
surprising Participant 1 worked in schools with larger percentages of children of color. However,
her early life experiences would not be considered a typical white experience.

Perhaps these experiences or Participant 2’s innate qualities resulted in her development
of an antiracist identity. Regardless, this identity plays into her understanding of her
positionality. Though her identity was white, her she did not identify her family background with
a specific white culture such as British or German. She did not have cultural connection as such.
Living in the United States as a white citizen, Participant 2 stated:

My face is seen as the norm. I only have to complicate and observe what is not normal if I
choose to. When I say it’s an option for me to see inequalities and micro aggressions,
it’s just, it’s not something I have to see. I realized that where I go and, in most spaces, I
just get more of a benefit of the doubt. People . . . they’re not threatened by me.

Though she did not consider herself to hold much power in society as a teacher, she also
recognized if she wanted to speak or share, she was usually given the floor. She said:

There’s just a certain amount of like, white privilege and like voice and power that come
when I talk that I’m aware of. But again, the awareness, I realized is a choice. I just
happened to be interested in the topic, to be in spaces where I’m not the only white
woman and then I read a lot of books about it. So, I just kind of make sure that it’s something top of mind, the fact that I’m white.

Participant 2 was made aware of race at a young age and was aware of the structure of racism in this country and the way in which race plays out in the United States. She has taken personal steps to work against that structure in her personal life. School first provided her with official training to examine her bias; however, she was personally committed to going beyond training and taking both the parent version of the same training and then later commit to taking the 80-hour course to be able to lead the training. Participant 1 evolved into this work through life events at an older age. She took her awareness and turned it toward making change in society for her children, but also recognized it needed to be for all children.

Both women (i.e., Participants 1 and 2) discussed their critical lens toward whiteness was a choice, but it did not come across as that when they were speaking. They expressed they had a choice to not be aware of injustices they did not feel firsthand. However, listening to their life choices and the way their antiracist commitment has grown in their life, it seemed to be more than a choice, it seemed to be part of their nature. Perhaps expressing their commitment as a choice made it less daunting or perhaps was their way of acknowledging their limited personal impact versus the impact for People of the Global Majority, for whom it was and is never a choice to experience the impacts of living in the white supremist culture.

The same was true for the remainder of the participants. Although they did not participate in the one-on-one interviews, they were able to share about their paths to this work. One participant remembered being awakened by reading *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* by McIntosh (1989) in college. The other participant was brought into this work through antibias
training at their school. They also might have expressed it was a choice, as they did not share experiences prior to when they were aware of the impact of white supremacy culture on their lives and on others. Yet, like both Participants 1 and 2, Participants 3 and 4 also had a choice to use the information and training provided to them or ignore it. They both were compelled to use it and to work on themselves and then how they approached their work.

The participants also acknowledged the work and process of antiracism is a journey and not a destination, and the path is continuous. Sometimes, one finds themselves turned around for a moment and they must recenter and self-reflect. Constantly remembering one’s humanity and propensity to make mistakes is critical, but it is also critical to not let those mistakes stop one from reflecting, making change, and trying again. As Participant 1 shared, “Make mistakes, but stay engaged.” Expecting perfection is a tenet of the whiteness and white supremacist culture (Okun, 1999) they are working to decenter.

**How White Teachers Committed to Antiracist Practice Manifest That Practice in Their Classrooms**

As a Montessorian, I believe one must teach these types of lessons organically, so they are absorbed into a student’s subconscious. Gee (1989) referred to this process as acquisition by stating, “Acquisition is a process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models . . . without a process of formal teaching. It happens in natural settings which are meaningful” (p. 20). If children are to be “native speakers” in the discourse of antiracism, Gee might argue it is better for them to acquire it through the modeling of others and the environment than to be directly taught the concepts. I hoped to hear the participants speak of their work using this term. At times, I found myself attempting to lead them to this conclusion. Although the ways they
implemented antiracist ideas or the ways they decentered whiteness may have fallen into this category, they did not necessarily describe it in these terms.

Additionally, during the first focus group, and even the subsequent one-on-one interviews, I realized the answers participants provided were great but disorganized in their presentation. As mentioned previously, I provided the participants with an article (Okun, 1999) on the characteristics of white supremacy culture for the second focus group as an attempt to organize what they were doing to decenter these in their classrooms. The findings in this section are presented both in narrative and chart form.

**Intentionality Through the Antiracist Lens**

In Montessori (1949/1972, 1949/1989, 1948/1995) education, one of the most important roles for teachers (or guides) is to design a classroom (i.e., environment) allowing the students to move through the curriculum and to work without artificial barriers. Barriers might be in the form of too many distractions on the walls or shelves or unorganized shelves not designed with scope and sequence in mind. Classroom shelves hold the materials children use to explore the concepts they have been taught, so those must be organized and without clutter. Pencils should always be sharpened, paper should always be ready to be used, and the classroom organization should be apparent for the children to use independently. This process is very intentional, and the teacher must take various elements into account to do it successfully. Inevitably, the classroom also reflects the teachers and students and shows what they value.

This intentionality was one of the important components I hoped to find in my data gathering. For this purpose, I asked the participants what elements they kept in mind when designing their room or what should be available for students to experience a classroom not
consistently centering whiteness. I asked Participant 1 what questions she asked herself before bringing items into the classroom. She said she first looked to the recommendation of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) educators she knew and trusted. Then, if they did not recommend a material or a book, she examined it for problematic portions and asked herself if there were problematic issues that could be discussed in a fruitful way. However, she admitted she was not sure she always understood how a 6-, 7-, or 8-year-old brain processes their experiences. She was still learning how that worked. However, there were some nonnegotiable choices for her. For example, when looking to bring in books featuring People of the Global Majority, she prioritized books by authors from the group depicted and the artists who helped create it. Even when she looked at sources such as “Teachers Pay Teachers,” she looked for items made by teachers with a different positionality than she. She hoped this helped when the materials did not come from the same white perspective. She made sure students had books and pictures reflective of all peoples.

Participant 2 also shared these thoughts on how she designed the basic classroom. She used wall space to share crafts and items from across the world. In her reading area, she made sure her pictures of people reading had a variety of representation. She also had an area where a flag, which was required in many schools, was accompanied by a piece of artwork looking like a flag in which the words of the Declaration of Independence (1776) alternated with Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech (see Figure 3). She wanted these words to hold equal importance.
All four participants shared the idea of ensuring books, pictures, and other images in the classroom were representative of a multitude of ethnicities and cultures. They wanted to ensure even if the student population consisted of predominantly white students, the environment reflected the larger societal and global population.

Language and conversation as discourse are core to bringing antiracist work into the classroom (Gee, 1989). One participant discussed inclusionary language. Language including all family types was one example of this inclusion. She discussed how she rarely used the terms “parents,” “mom,” or “dad,” when referencing these roles; she said, “your grown-ups.” Participants shared several examples about how conversations evolve in the classroom and can lead to discussions of race/racism or other “isms.” Conversations when there is a teachable moment can be instrumental in allowing even young children to look at a situation differently or
at the very least open their eyes to where prejudice or white supremacy lurks in books and curriculum. Participant 2 shared how she was reading a book with her students she had not previewed. It was a children’s book that discussed children of the world and depicted children in various countries. Most of the representation was culturally appropriate until they came to a picture of a child from Africa. Participant 2 said:

I was reading a book to my students and every page is a different culture around the world and they’re just like little this is a children’s book, little vignettes. There’s a child from Yugoslavia, there’s a child from China, Japan, there’s one from Alaska, and then we turn the page, and it’s a child from Africa, and he’s just wearing like a loincloth and he’s in a hut, and every single other student, . . . [is in] regular clothes at their computer, you know, they’re in a skyscraper in Tokyo or whatever. It’s just like, the life of children. I mean, my jaw hit the floor and so we just stopped, and we just talked about it. We had a really fruitful conversation, I kept turning the pages, and I was like, when do you think these children lived? Because if it was a history book, that would be one thing. And then I turned the pages back, and I was like, When do you think this child lived? And then their jaw just drops, too, because of this just stark nature of this children’s book. And then we talked about if you’re a child reading this book, why would you question the author’s intent? You know, you’re not trained up to read books and think, maybe this author’s got some issues, or like, maybe this book isn’t 100% true. Most of the time in school, we don’t tell children the things we’re reading them and showing them are problematic. So, if your teacher is reading it to you, you might think there’s clearly nothing wrong with this picture. And so, then we even talked about, what if you are a
member of the people represented by the pictures? What if I turned the page and you’re from Yugoslavia? Or what if I turn the page, and you’re an Alaskan Inuit, and then I turn the page, and you’re from Africa. What if this is your culture? And they were just, I wouldn’t like that at all. Would you go home and tell your parents how you felt about, the book you listened to? So, we just really dissected the whole thing.

She described how she shared with her students sometimes when people read books, they are upsetting. She took this lesson and then discussed the problem with always being presented with these types of images and allowed this lesson to become the prompt to watch a Ted Talk video, “The Danger of a Single Story” by Adichie (2009). She then discussed the video with her class. Conversations that may be unplanned but arise from a shared book are equally important to have with younger children.

Conversations become teachable moments. Another participant shared she was reading a book during Black History Month; it was a beautifully illustrated book by an African American illustrator. The pictures were deep colors and images. One child commented on liking a specific page and the colors in the page. However, the images were of enslaved people on ship being brought over from Africa. The teacher shared with the child, sometimes images are not what people think, and they discussed the image at which they were looking. She wanted to make sure she did not leave the child not understanding what was happening or shy away from reality. One of the teachers working with older children used the calendar to begin small conversations about various holidays not only centered around Anglo-European or the traditional U.S. holidays, but also each holiday celebrated and in an equitable way as those with which students might be more familiar. She was also mindful to ask children who might celebrate holidays other children might
not be familiar with celebrating, to share how their family celebrates. This may seem like a small gesture, but it is one way to enlarge the students’ view of day-to-day life as well.

Curriculum Areas Through the Antiracist Lens

All the participants discussed other social-emotional aspects of their classroom culture they believed has helped students develop a more global world view of understanding and inclusion. However, they said there are also curriculum areas they reviewed and changed as necessary. Several are centered in the Montessori cultural subjects. These subjects include science (i.e., botany, biology), history, and geography. However, lessons in these areas do connect to lessons in other areas, such as math and language when discussing history, numbers, and written language. Table 5 shows samples of lessons the participants updated since their training.

Table 5

Examples of Montessori Lessons Updated to Decenter Anglo European Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject area</th>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Update</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History/Science</td>
<td>Fundamental Needs</td>
<td>• One classroom does not use any charts they were provided and instead researches current pictures and images and presents them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• One teacher changed migration lesson to include discussion of how enslaved people were forced to migrate and why or why not that is included in a study of migration. Allow students to also discuss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Have students research and make the materials so that they are not needing to use any materials which might be problematic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Flags/Parts of the Flag</td>
<td>Move away from studying primarily European Flags and discuss colonization of continents and peoples included with the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject area</td>
<td>Lesson</td>
<td>Update</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Lessons</td>
<td>Story of Writing</td>
<td>Teacher moved away from slides/charts provided through training or Montessori companies to make her own which did a concurrent comparison of writing across cultures: China, Africa, Mesoamerica, Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State History/ National History</td>
<td>Study of Indigenous Peoples</td>
<td>Ensuring the impact of colonization is included. For example: Spanish missions in California. The teacher makes sure there is not a glossing over of the enslavement of indigenous peoples, or the other ways they were harmed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition Months</td>
<td>Black History Month Indigenous Peoples Month Women’s History Month</td>
<td>● Created timelines with 3-part cards for area such as Black History with includes the period of enslavement, civil rights, and numerous contributions of African Americans. ● Creating timelines of Women in Science. ● Creating work exploring the contributions of Indigenous peoples and not shying away from impacts of colonization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography/Culture</td>
<td>Continent Maps</td>
<td>Study from the perspective of Biome Maps. This brings the focus away from geo-politics and to a study of an area based on environmental differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology and Botany</td>
<td>Pigments and Melanin</td>
<td>Using these to study difference in shades and colors and then discussing there have been a lot of problems among humans based on biology and we need to learn to not replicate it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Disrupting White Supremacy Culture**

For the second focus group, as mentioned earlier, I hoped to provide more structure for the conversation. This group started by providing the participants with two articles. The group discussion centered on one article about characteristics of white supremacy (Okun, 1999). Before I progress and move into this discussion of white supremacy culture, I want to honor Okun and
her words in the article and on her website, so these characteristics are not used as a weapon. My desire to use them as a structure was so participants could reflect on how these might play out and what can be done to counter them, so students do not continue to create spaces holding onto these characteristics as the only way of “being.” Okun presented the article as one but certainly not the only view on whiteness and white supremacy culture.

For many of the characteristics Okun (1999) attributed to white supremacy culture, elements of Montessori pedagogy are already in place that move away from these characteristics. However, I wanted the participants to discuss those elements and other ways they were moving their classrooms away from observing and replicating these characteristics. See Table 6 for the ways in which the participants discussed the elements and ways to work against them in the classroom environment. One participant expressed in looking at this list, it struck her these characteristics perfectly described the traditional public school system. She went on to explain her time working in that system ironically, or perhaps intentionally, forced her to concentrate on delivering information to ensure Black and Brown children received what the system determined everyone should know, which again, the system felt would prepare them for success in the system—success in a system that is “patriarchal and white supremacist” and not built for them. Two participants expressed these types of concepts were why they left the traditional public schools and chose to become teachers in Montessori schools. They both currently taught at Montessori public schools.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Montessori classroom/pedagogy</th>
<th>Participant response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Aim to create safe spaces for children.</td>
<td>Create environment of joy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“One test of the correctness of educational procedure is the happiness of the child.” - Dr. Maria Montessori</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Right Way</td>
<td>Multiple materials used to teach single concept. Indirectly leading to the understanding of multiple solutions to problems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfectionism</td>
<td>Montessori education emphasizes process over product.</td>
<td>“Good enoughist”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help children learn mistakes are human.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FAIL-first attempt at learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Conflict</td>
<td>Peace education and conflict resolution practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism</td>
<td>Independence but community minded</td>
<td>Interdependence through independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom agreements for everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alone go fast, together go far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity over Quality</td>
<td>Quality and integrity of doing your best</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship of written word</td>
<td>Concepts are taught through a variety of didactic materials. Dr. Montessori had a strong belief learning is done primarily through your hands.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urgency</td>
<td>Along with process over product and quality vs product</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Characteristic Montessori classroom/pedagogy Participant response

- quantity, teachers (guides) are to provide the child the ability to explore the classroom environment and within their 3-year cycle, they will receive the academics they need. There is no need for everything within a year.

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**The Impact White Antiracist Teachers Hope to Have on Their Students**

Throughout their responses, participants supported the concept of disrupting traditional pedagogy and even disrupting alternative, yet Anglo European centered, pedagogy to create educational environments founded in antiracism that are crucial to disrupting the continuation of white supremacy culture. All the participants shared a desire to change how children experience the world. They did not want their students, regardless of demographics, to unknowingly continue the status quo through a white racial identity perpetrating white supremacy culture.

White students must be provided with experiences centering all cultures and valuing all cultures. They must also have planned and organically occurring conversations about race and racism. Researchers have spoken about the conversations U.S. BIPOC families have with their children about race start when they are young (Whitaker & Cudore, 2016). White children also need to have conversations about equity and experiences that work toward moving white supremacy culture from the center of everything they see and hear. My belief is providing opportunity to white children changes the trajectory of their accepting white supremacy culture as normal. These conversations explore how the participants hope their actions impact their students.
Regarding directly addressing issues of race and racism, Participant 1 stated clearly, “We have every obligation to these kids to be talking about those things, we have got to find ways to have (conversations) in developmentally appropriate ways.” Conversations about racism and the impact of living in a white supremacist culture not only impacts students of color, but also impacts everyone. Participant 1 felt it was important to build up the individual to support the community. In her words, she hoped her students left her classroom with “a sense of responsibility for one another, a sense of appreciation for one another, and a sense of their own agency in making things better for society.”

In a follow up to the focus group conversation, Participant 4 shared similar hopes as the others, stating:

I want my students to see that all people are equal, regardless of color, language, gender, disability, etc. There is no one dominant race, gender, etc. We are all one, and alone we are capable, but uniting each other and giving all the ability to be an equal part makes the community stronger.

Further and more directly, Participant 2 continuously reflected on her teaching and the intent of her antiracist work regarding replicating society. She asked herself:

Did I really change their life, did I really have an effect on the white kids, especially my white boys? Did I just reproduce a whole bunch of white men who are going to mansplain and walk all over this world like assholes, or did I make them think about how they behave differently? I mean that’s kind of my goal.

The continuation of comfort in the status quo would be accepting the racism accompanying it.
As a Montessori educator, I was trained that actions in the classroom as teachers are often more important than words. Children follow our example. As a teacher of young children, this is especially true. The way educators present a lesson for the students is how they repeat the lesson. The way educators move in the classroom and how we treat the materials is how we want the children to teach them. The participants, who were also all Montessori-trained, spoke to creating an environment they hoped impacted the way their students looked at life and interacted with others. They hoped their examples became a part of their student’s essence as well.

The participants were clear about the type of learning environment they were creating and what they wanted their students to experience so they could carry it forward. They were focused on understanding a world beyond one centered in whiteness. Combined with providing an environment that worked to counter some of the tenets of white supremacy cultures, this approach hopefully provided their students with a foundation of understanding there is not just one way to solve a problem, or only one right opinion. All the participants also discussed classrooms where they worked to “bring students in” and where the norm was to accept and see everyone. As Participant 4 shared:

I want all students to feel welcome and included in my classroom, and my hope is that they will take that with them in their journeys in the world. Show others that when we include everyone, lift up others and encourage, instead of demean, and degrade, that more can be done and in a caring and loving manner. They see worth and capability in all.

Participant 2 addressed her answer as an exploration of how a student might experience intent versus impact. Regarding part of her process of self-reflection, she said, “I look at my classroom. I look at it on paper and I try to look at society, and I try to say, am I just duplicating
or replicating the inequities in societies?” She understood academics are important, but she also believed nuanced lessons of acceptance and visibility were important. She wanted her students to be “seen, appreciated, and not ignored or simplified.” She wanted that to be what they expected from teachers. She also wanted her students to see her as a “person struggling and wrestling with these issues out loud.” She understood the power of expressing to students when learning can be uncomfortable, it is okay to be uncomfortable and to process information. She also wanted to demonstrate questioning intent of authors and books. She wanted them to know that was also okay.

All the participants spoke to direct actions such as lessons and conversations to help students experience and hopefully internalize antiracism. They also discussed more indirect actions such as classroom culture and environment. It is their hope these actions worked together to enable and empower their students to shed the limitations of white supremacy culture and take on the position of antiracism.

**Findings: Indirect (Additional Themes Not Sought by the Research Question)**

Through the process of analyzing the data and coding, repeated ideas and conversations developed into additional findings that were peripheral but not unrelated to the research question. I determined these themes by whether most participants discussed the concept and others agreed with the statements. The two additional themes are (a) strengths and weakness of Montessori pedagogy in antiracist work and (b) the connection between capitalism, white supremacy culture, and ableism (see Table 7).
Table 7

Sample of Conversation Demonstrating Indirect Connections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Participant 2</th>
<th>Participant 3</th>
<th>Participant 4</th>
<th>Second round coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As we move from</td>
<td>I think the whole way</td>
<td>I think something</td>
<td>You know, that got</td>
<td>Quantity vs quality</td>
<td>Quantity vs quality can be toxic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kind of that</td>
<td>we talk about work and work</td>
<td>about white supremacy culture</td>
<td>me thinking about like, as</td>
<td>Competition seeps in</td>
<td>Competition seeps in must be mindful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>initial reaction</td>
<td>cycles and what it means to be successful, and have a work plan</td>
<td>that you can’t separate in our country with capitalism is that we place a value on people based on how much they can produce. And so, for that reason, students who are below grade level, which is arbitrary concept, I think there’s like a fear base, if you like, take a public or just take a school, where you project into the future, like, how are they going to survive?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>and how we kind of internalized this concept or reflected upon it in our, in our work, when we go into our classrooms and our schools and our systems, Participant 2, you kind of started down this path, but what are the things that maybe you wouldn’t have first thought of</td>
<td>It is though because ableism is a huge part of white supremacy culture (Participant 3-That’s true yeah)</td>
<td>It is absolutely and you know, especially if we’re teaching a</td>
<td>Discussions of Neurodivergent students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Participant 2</th>
<th>Participant 3</th>
<th>Participant 4</th>
<th>Second round coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>as being part of this system</td>
<td>predominantly white schools one of the greatest divergences that we’re going to experience is neurodivergent children, you know, who are atypical and, and it’s going to be kids with disabilities, it’s not necessarily going to be brown and black kids. Right and so how, like let you know, like you’re saying, like everybody belongs in here, every brain belongs in here, every ability level belongs in here, right? Every cultural background belongs in here,</td>
<td>You know, like how could they? What are we going to do to make sure that they’re not on the streets or whatever, robbing backs or homeless? And I’m like, do you understand that this child is amazing? There’s so many things they can do, they will be fine. And if you keep telling them, they’re not fine, they might not be fine. And they might not be a millionaire, but they also might be a millionaire because a lot of dyslexic kids who are adults are</td>
<td>class. Like, she does her job every day. She does her job at the cleanup, she has her work that she’s doing. She is an integral part of the classroom. But year, the state doesn’t see her as that, like, well she needs to learn how to, you know, how to navigate the outside world. And like she’s doing that in her life as in a daily basis, but she also needs to learn how to navigate among her peers, as well as her peers need to learn to navigate with</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewer</td>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Second round coding</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>every ethnic identity belongs in here, we all belong in here, we all have something to contribute. That is how we, on a daily basis, explicitly practice antiracism and antibias in our classrooms</td>
<td>millionaires, because they are so flippin creative. So, I think that that white supremacist thinking and capitalism, the way it’s mixed up in our country is really like hand in glove. And we have to think about that too.</td>
<td>her. Watching it naturally happen in a classroom with different level kids, it’s like they see her worth, but in a typical classroom, she would be pushed off to the side,</td>
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This conversation suggested these Montessori teachers can be objective when analyzing the Montessori curriculum. This is essential to begin the work of creating antiracist classrooms. Also, by connecting capitalism and ableism, they demonstrated an understanding sometimes white supremacy culture appears or is supported by systems we are supposed to believe have nothing to do with whiteness.

Strengths and Weakness of Montessori Pedagogy in Antiracist Work

After almost 30 years as a Montessori educator, it has become increasingly difficult for me to see education through a different lens. I have an obvious bias toward Montessori pedagogy. Other researchers have explored the influence of colonizing overtones of Montessori education more deeply, which was not my intended purpose (Debs, 2016). Yet, the conversations with the participants made it impossible for me not to bring this conversation into this work. There are problematic aspects of the curriculum and training educators receive.

One specific problematic area of the curriculum is the cultural subject area, specifically the lesson called The Fundamental Needs of Man (Humans). This lesson works to discuss the universal needs people all have such as food, shelter, and clothing. It also goes on to include religion and defense. The participants discussed how the supplemental charts are often biased and inappropriate regarding how People of the Global Majority are pictured versus Anglo-European cultures. One participant was asked directly to prepare a lesson for one of these activities but spoke up and refused, explaining the material needed to be updated before it could be presented. Another participant was reading the book “Teaching White Supremacy” and found a history conveyed in that book. They stated:
Hierarchy of human beings, one on top that God created and others with different marks that showed that they were lower on the ladder and it was the exact same six groups as our poster of the different types of people around the world, which is not based on race but there is a white man in a suit, there’s a picture of an Indigenous man in a headdress, a picture of a Black man without a shirt on and so on. Montessori might be the nice version of that racist poster, teaching that there’s just different people fulfilling their needs around the world in different ways, but it also has like all of the (people of color) in traditional dress and the white people in modern clothing.

The participant who shared this also explained she had never used that poster. She had only ever used it in a discussion like those we had in the focus groups and interviews.

We also veered in a conversation about the operation of the Montessori elementary environment. The terms used for student follow up and individual exploration of materials are often called work or jobs. Students are given a work plan, and they meet with their teachers to determine how they are going to accomplish the work. One of the participants paused and contemplated the way in which this practice reflected capitalism. We continued the discussion regarding capitalism in its own section. However, this conversation suggested the language used in even a Montessori classroom has meaning and is important. One may wonder what the language sounds like to ask a student, “How much work are you doing? Or how many jobs have you done?” Gee (1989) discussed discourse in all its forms and the influence it holds for classrooms and interactions. One may wonder where the teacher’s membership in the discourse of antiracism interacts and conflicts with their membership in the discourse of Montessori
teachers. The way these situations resolve determine which discourse holds the influence in their classrooms.

One can work around these problematic materials in the classroom. Teachers can create their own materials that do not convey these messages. However, the other significant issue several of the participants shared was the lack of antibias and antiracist conversations or instruction in their Montessori training. The participants agreed antiracism or how to decenter the Anglo-European perspective was not a part of their Montessori training. This is a huge issue as 73% of Montessori teachers are white (Zippia.com, 2022) and if they are provided with courses on child development and philosophy, they also need to be prepared for the work by helping them to examine and acknowledge their own biases. As Montessori (1949/1995) stated in the *Absorbent Mind*:

> The real preparation for education is a study of one’s self. The training of the teacher who is to help life is something far more than the learning of ideas. It includes the training of character, it is a preparation of the spirit. (p. 132)

I need to note the American Montessori Society has made antibias and antiracist training a requirement for all their accredited teacher education programs. As of July 1, 2022, all teacher education programs must include a minimum of 12 hours of antibias and antiracist training (see Appendix for the statement from American Montessori Society on this update). For those teachers trained prior to this requirement, it was up to the individual training programs or instructors regarding how this was approached. There are also a growing number of organizations associated with Montessori offering this training for teachers and schools.
However, for an education created by a progressive educator for her time, it seems to be an incredibly late start.

Capitalism and Ablism

The conversation among the participants that began with a conversation about language in the Montessori environment continued and expanded upon this idea of capitalism and its connection to white supremacy culture. One participant said, “I think something about white supremacy culture that you can’t separate in our country with capitalism is that we place a value on people based on how much they can produce.” This statement led to a larger conversation about neurodiversity. Participant 1 contributed:

Ableism is a huge part of white supremacy culture. Especially if we are teaching a predominantly white schools one of the greatest divergences that we’re going to experience is neurodivergent children. . . . And so how we let them know, everybody belongs in here, every brain belongs in here, every ability level belongs in here, right? Every cultural background belongs in here, every ethnic identity belongs in here, we all belong in here, we all have something to contribute. The is how we on a daily basis explicitly practice antiracism and antibias in our classroom.

Summary

Initially I was concerned four participants would not be able to provide me with the data I was seeking. However, the hours and conversations produced data covering a variety of topics all tied back to antiracism, racism, and white supremacy culture. These four teachers, in different parts of the country with similar positionality as white, cisgender, women in heteronormative relationships, were all committed to antiracism in their classrooms. As the findings showed, they
saw through the hegemony of whiteness and the curtain was pulled back. They believed antiracist work in the classroom is a moral imperative and to be who they are, they must work toward antiracism. They agreed with the sentiment of James Baldwin stating it is their responsibility to do this work as white educators. The findings also provided examples of both lessons added and lessons changed to do the work of antiracism. The research also demonstrated what impact these teachers desired the work to have. They wanted their students to know their agency to bring about change, to do things differently than have been done, and at the end of it, to be good humans. All these women understood this work is never complete, and they constantly need to do work on themselves to do the work for their students.

Despite their different paths to identifying as antiracist, they have done the work to make changes in themselves, their classrooms, and their students. They agreed white supremacy culture must be combated and normalizing whiteness as the standard must be changed for there to be real change in society in terms of racism. Educational environments must be designed to lead to this change.
Chapter 5: Reflections, Recommendations, and Final Thoughts

In discussing the meanings, limitations, and significance of the findings of this study, it is worth returning first to the problem driving the research and the literature through which the problem was identified.

Reflections

Once again referring to *Our Problem Our Path* (Michael & Bartoli, 2023), the authors discussed the need for white people to take on antiracist work and to actively work against the racist system in which they live. They quoted James Baldwin when he expressed racism is a white people’s problem and white people need to fix it. This sentiment aligned with the thoughts and ideas inspiring the current research. If people want to change a society existing in the hegemony of white supremacy (Apple, 2004), they must ensure antiracist work happens in white spaces. People need to reconceptualize the idea of a white racial identity not including racial bias or include a belief in the supremacy of whiteness (Tatum, 2017). Tatum (2017) discussed Helms’s (1990) work discussing how this type of racial identity can be developed. Tatum (2017) stated, “There are two major developmental tasks in this process, the abandonment of individual racism and the recognition of and opposition to institutional and cultural racism” (p. 226).

Similarly, people can return to identifying the educational system as one of the tools of social reproduction put into place to ensure the status quo remains as such (Apple, 2019). The status quo in the United States has been a racialized system based on the supremacy of whiteness (Lewis, 2004). People must recognize whiteness is cloaked in the invisibility of hegemony (Apple, 2004) and bring it out and examine why something invisible yet always present is the measure against which other cultures, customs, and beliefs are gauged (Yasso, 2005). Educators...
must seek out where whiteness is hiding as the prevailing standard and ensure it is not held above other cultures or ways of being. They must recognize when lessons, books, and especially personal behavior uphold the myth that whiteness somehow is standard and make changes so students do not carry that belief forward. Educators must model embracing, respecting, and celebrating all humanity in all its ways and forms so the children in their classroom environments carry that forward. The teachers who participated in this study have been doing this work.

**Limitations of the Research**

From the outset, this study was focused on how and why white teachers who identify as antiracist practice antiracism in classrooms serving most white students. This study provided examples of these educators’ personal paths to antiracism and the impact to their pedagogy. The time spent with the participants and in conversation with them confirmed they were committed to taking on antiracist work personally and professionally. These teachers worked at a critical juncture in the development of white children’s negative white racial identity that leads to participating in the continuation of the myths of white supremacy and the racist systems those myths support. These teachers hope to bring a diverse mindset to these students. They want to provide an education valuing the contributions of all peoples and not limited to Anglo-European culture. These teachers want to break the cycle of an educational system promoting the idea of the supremacy of whiteness. This study was successful in learning about their personal path, how that has played out in their classrooms, and why they are committed to this work. It can serve as an example for others seeking to do the same work in their classrooms.
However, this study was not, and should not be, the definitive work on white antiracist teachers. It examined a glimpse of how antiracism is present in a white space, and only examined the commitment to antiracist pedagogy from four teachers and how they implemented pedagogy in their classrooms. This study did not go into the classrooms where these teachers worked to observe and gain firsthand knowledge of how these classrooms were different. As the researcher, I did not compare to see if students in these teachers’ classrooms developed their own antiracist stance. Thus, this study and its findings can play a part in the larger conversation of white antiracism work and the responsibility of white teachers to participate in that work. However, this research is only part of the conversation as it does not have all the answers or instructions on how antiracism work should be conducted.

Findings and Conclusion

The original research question for this study had three parts: (a) how did the participants develop their personal antiracist stance, (b) how does that manifest in their classroom, and (c) what impact do they hope to have on students? The data showed the path did not matter so much as what the participants did along the path and their personal openness to growth. Their openness to seeing sometimes uncomfortable truths both in society and in themselves was crucial. The timing in the participants’ lives when they started the path produced slightly different periods for arriving at the place of implementing antiracist work in their classrooms, but regardless of the timing, they were committed to doing the work.

Participants showed differences in how their classrooms operated, but they similarly understood changes needed to occur. They all wanted to create classroom environments that disrupted and did not replicate the system embracing white supremacy culture. None of them felt
this could be accomplished by simply giving “equity lessons” from a set curriculum; they wanted equity and diversity to be represented and foundational in every aspect of their classroom culture. And all the participants wanted the students who spent time in their classroom to embrace being good humans and being good to all humans. They demonstrated commitment, intentionality, and self-awareness in their responses and explanations.

As demonstrated by this research, antiracist work requires the following qualities: a combination of commitment, intentionality, and self-awareness as demonstrated through the conversations with the participants. The participating teachers in this study possessed all of these. Though their personal journeys started at different places and progressed at different paces, they were committed to the journey. Their commitment came through their stories of why this work was important to them and how they were willing to defend their antiracist work with parents, community, and even administration, if necessary. They all demonstrated a need to examine their classroom environments and the curriculum they were using through an intentionally antiracist lens. All expressed this practice could not work without doing the personal work to examine their own biases.

Participants commented more than once they recognized they could opt out of donning the title of antiracist and simply go about their lives due to their positionality as white women and overt racism might not impact their day-to-day activities. They stated this option was not acceptable and they were committed to staying engaged in the actions of being antiracist. They described the impetus for their commitment as a moral imperative.

Intentionality describes how these teachers approached creating their classroom environments. Everything from the pictures on the wall, the books in the class library, the lessons
they gave, and their personal attitudes and behaviors reflected intentionality. They examined the books in their classroom for appropriate representation of all peoples, and ensured the images provided were not stereotypes or victims, but humans represented respectfully. They examined the lessons provided through their Montessori training for bias to determine what messages they could be sending aside from the concept at hand. Some questions they used in this examination were as follows: Are humans portrayed with equity? Are all cultures honored? What is the perspective from which the information was being given? These participants also watched who they were calling on in the classroom both for positive and negative interactions by asking themselves the following questions: Were there students whose names were always being heard? Were there students quietly not being engaged? How were they reacting if a student’s reaction or behavior were unexpected from their perspective? Did they model what they wanted their students to absorb? All these questions and actions were implemented through intentionality.

Participant data showed without self-awareness and exploring and examining their personal bias and their positionality, the traits of commitment and intention would never have developed. Each participants had an experience, maybe early in life, in college, or in their professional career that demonstrated to them the way they had previously looked at the world was a bit askew. As one participant noted, the curtain had been pulled back and they saw they needed to learn more about what was really happening in society. This realization brought the need to examine their own values and beliefs. They reflected on how these values and beliefs impacted their actions, their interactions, and their outlook on society as a whole. They did work, they participated in diversity and equity training, they read books, and they were open to the work those sources required of them. Even when the work was uncomfortable, they did not quit.
They faced the discomfort and knew it produced growth. If they were not open to being fallible or to questioning the way life worked for them versus others, they would never be able to have a clear lens for intentionally examining the classrooms and their teaching. They had to be open to imperfections in themselves to be open to imperfections in curriculum and literature. They had to see how the educational system had taught them through an imperfect lens so they could see how to teach through an antiracist lens. The self-work was essential for this development.

Once the participants started on their path of growth as antiracist educators, their commitment, intentionality, and self-awareness guided their work. Through this process, they hoped to create classrooms positively influencing their students in developing a racial identity incorporating inclusion and acceptance and respect of all humanity.

Implications for Practice and Leadership

Practice

A white person does not recognize the need for antiracist work and their ability to embrace their role in one diversity training session. Tatum (2017) discussed a process most white people must go through to process and move forward into an antiracist mindset. Connecting with other white people doing this work is part of that process. White people need to connect with each other for a variety of reasons, including just knowing other white people have this commitment and simply not expecting People of Color to continue to guide them in this work. The way participants in this study connected was just one experience providing this connection to a limited degree. As such, one path forward would be for organizations to provide opportunities for white antiracist educators to connect and support each other in this work.
At the same time, educators cannot be in the business of building silos. White educators cannot and should not isolate themselves into white spaces. I am not suggesting segregation by advocating for white teachers to collaborate when growing in their antiracist practice. If white educators do not create a personal space including connections with all people, they will not create the world they claim to want to live in themselves. Growth and understanding come from experience and interaction (Hazelbaker & Mistry, 2022). Though there are certainly times for what might be referred to as “affinity group” work, there is a crucial need for conversations among all people on what an equitable society looks and feels like. Ultimately, all people who understand and see the need for antiracist work must partner for any real accomplished change.

Teacher training programs in both Montessori and traditional education must include work helping all teachers understand the water in which they are swimming (Tatum, 2017). Teachers must understand why the way education has been implemented has often caused harm and they must learn how to not continue that process. They need to learn how to examine their personal positionality and bias to ensure they see all their students in the light of potential and promise without a deficit lens when children present in a way to which the teacher is unaccustomed (Yasso, 2005). Training programs also need to provide discussion space to examine educational standards to uncover where whiteness is valued over other approaches, and to find ways to rectify this. Teachers need to have resources where they can get support without judgement to grow in their antiracist practice. They need to know how to look at all aspects of their classroom through the antiracist lens.

Montessori education was featured in this study, but this study does not imply only Montessori educators can benefit from the work of these participants. Commitment to antiracism
is not limited to Montessori teachers; neither is the ability to be intentional with classroom
design or the process of self-awareness. These Montessori teachers are examples of ways white
teachers in predominantly white schools are doing antiracist work, but how they are doing this
work can be adapted in any classroom where teachers are willing to do the work.

**Leadership**

Every one of the participants discussed the importance of the leaders at their school and
the level of support or lack thereof these leaders provided. Educational leaders hoping to create
school cultures focused on antiracism must focus on transformative change for their school and
the encompassing community. Shields (2014) discussed eight tenets of transformative leadership.
Two tenets stood out after speaking with the participants in this study: (a) leaders must have a
“mandate to effect deep equitable change” (p. 333) and (b) exhibit “moral courage” (p. 333).
Educators must have the belief and the strength to do what is right despite what might be easy.
Educators must know “what guides and what grounds” them (Shields, 2014, p. 337).

Leaders must also be able to bring others into their vision (Stosich, 2017). Imposing a
mandate of antiracism will not be successful. Educators must help others understand the
importance and the long-term implications for their students and the larger society.

**Implications for Future Research**

Due to the nature of this study and the data within, various areas of research could branch
from it. Researchers might look at the participants and/or the methodology they used in their
teaching. Research could be done on topics only highlighted in this study such as leadership or
teacher training programs. With more time and experience, research might also see the impact
(positive or negative) on the students in classrooms of teachers who identify as antiracist.
The participants for this study were a small group. However, research with a larger group of participants would allow for greater depth in the study. The study could have been categorized by the age and grade of the students with whom the teachers work or by how long participants have been teaching to determine differences in approach or understanding. Further research might benefit from a comparison between Montessori antiracist educators and traditional antiracist educators (traditional being a term used to describe non-Montessori pedagogy, not a statement on the teachers’ behavior). A longer-term study could create peer working groups and compare the teachers’ comfort levels with discussions of race or implementing antiracist pedagogy from start to end of the study. It would also be interesting to return to these specific participants in 5 years to see where they are in their antiracist work and to determine if they have remained engaged.

Leadership is another potential area of study. With the ever-increasing focus on scores and testing, area school-level leaders can prioritize building and supporting an antiracist culture. Research could study alternative forms of school leadership such as teachers as leaders driving curriculum and culture and how they impact antiracist work on campuses.

Implementation of antiracist and antibias training in teacher training programs would be productive for encouraging the programs to develop strong courses in this area. If research could demonstrate improved efficacy in antiracist work with teachers who have received training, perhaps it would motivate more programs to include this training in a meaningful way. This would, of course, depend upon the goal of these antiracist and antibias programs to succeed. Teacher training, including antiracist and antibias training, is part of the larger systematic
problem in reproducing society (Sleeter, 2017). The training centers themselves would need to examine their true purpose and make changes as necessary.

Important potential research in relation to the work of this study is with students. Research centering on children is far more nuanced. Protections must be put in place. If the students in classrooms where teachers identified as antiracist showed positive influences, it could indicate a path forward in the work of creating a more equitable society. Some questions could entail a pre- and post-assessment of racial attitudes in the students, or the questions could focus on how the students interpreted the teacher’s actions and classroom culture. This type of future research could give a greater insight as to any impact antiracist work in schools can have.

Finally, returning to Gee’s (1989) discussion of discourse, one of his points gave me pause in assigning a discourse to white teachers’ antiracism identity. This point was the idea discourses “are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure” (Gee, 1989, p. 19). He expressed those with the “fewest conflicts with their other discourses” (Gee, 1989, p. 19) are empowered through criticism of one of the discourses. Literature professors use literary criticism as a way of moving ahead in their academic careers because they have less conflicts with “the other discourses of white, middle-class men than it did with those of women, men were empowered by it. Women were not” (Gee, 1989, p. 19). One may wonder if there are ways in which, as white middle-class women, they are blind to how a discourse of antiracism might still empower them. Sleeter (2017) stated, “Whites advance interests of people of color only when they converge with and advance White interests” (p. 157). The concept of how ideas of discourse and typical actions of white people impacts the success and positive impact of white antiracist teachers requires more research to explore.
Final Reflections

It is essential to acknowledge the ongoing personal work takes to be an antiracist. As a cisgendered, white female I must embrace self-awareness and constant reassessment of personal bias required in being antiracist. I cannot rest upon my laurels. There is no level of completion. Though I must acknowledge and reflect when someone brings to my attention an action, a statement, or a protocol I invoked has created harm, most importantly, I must listen and make changes. I do not feel the lessons from my childhood or the process of inquiry I have undertaken for this research has made me an expert on antiracism. I am a work in progress and always will be, and it is critical this is front and center in my mind and work for there to be any chance at making change.

As for how antiracist pedagogy can be most effective, I feel strongly it cannot be presented as a formatted curriculum in which lessons are presented once a week in a systematic way (Losinski et al., 2019; Nash & Miller, 2015). It must be presented organically. As a child of the “Just Say No” generation, I do not believe prescribed, boxed curriculums work for teaching social emotional skills. I was a teenager when Nancy Reagan (1986) promoted the campaign to combat drug abuse, with the solution being offered to “just say no.” Drug abuse and accompanying problems have not gone away simply because we taught children either to say no or to “D.A.R.E.” The same could be said of teaching children to be kind by writing tickets letting them know a kindness was noticed or keeping track of their interactions so they can see how many times they are kind. These classroom experiences intended to make internal changes must absolutely be designed to be intrinsically enforced. We cannot praise someone into being a good person.
Lastly, I am left with questions about how antiracism can best be promoted. I found myself contemplating whether racism is ingrained in the system or ingrained in people. There is a system set up for society and it has traditionally benefitted the descendants of those who created it. But is the system itself the problem or is it the ways in which it can be subjective and dependent upon humanity to do the right and equitable thing leading the system to resulting in racism? Lewis et al. (2019) asked “How do you make sense of a society founded on the principals of justice and liberty for all, which has since its founding formally and informally disenfranchised large swaths of the population?” (p. 30). People can even look to the words they have been taught upon which this country was founded. The Declaration of Independence (1776) stated:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Those words sound great if and only if one sees “men” as all humanity. The truth is, I do not have the answer. As shown in the literature supporting this study, and in the discussions with the participants, the system and the individuals participating in the system are intentionally intertwined. Disrupting the connection between racism in the system and in oneself is only one part of the process to start to heal as a society. People will only experience this transformation when humans learn to love, accept, and recognize the whole of humanity in all its forms, shades, and diversity.
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Appendix

The originally proposed questions follow:

Focus Group

October Driving Questions:

How do you define antiracist pedagogy or teaching?

What would be your first steps in preparing for this work?

Check for understanding of positionality. Provide either 1–2 articles or book to guide their work.

(This could be provided in May so that they could have some opportunity to familiarize themselves with the concepts in the articles. I have not yet chosen which ones to use.

January Driving Questions:

What does “de-centering” whiteness mean or look like in your environment?

Do you need specific materials? Books?

What level of support do you have?

What are your biggest successes?

What are your biggest challenges?

What are the next steps for you and your work?

Individual Interviews:

These questions are relatively generic, but my hope is that by not starting with difficult questions, answers might reveal more vulnerability.

October:
What is your “why” for this work?

What does it mean to have a white racial identity?

How has your whiteness served you in your job or presented obstacles to your work?

What do you anticipate as your largest challenges?

**December/January:**

Do you feel prepared for comments from parents/administration/co-workers if they see things in your classroom that seem to have a specific intent towards antiracism?

Are you prepared to face pushback? What do you anticipate the pushback looking like or feeling like?

How is your classroom going to differ from previously?

What are your

**February:**

How are you feeling?

Do you hear or see differences in your students?

What has the classroom felt like and looked like?

What do you feel is most important to share about this experience in your classroom? With yourself and your personal path?