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Casey Z. Andrews

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UNDOING THE INTERNALIZED IMPACTS OF WHITE SUPREMACY:
ENVISIONING ANTI-RACIST CHANGE WITH WHITE TEACHERS AT A 6-12 URBAN
PILOT SCHOOL

by

CASEY Z. ANDREWS

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SYNTHESIS*
MASTER OF ARTS
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Advisor: Bobby Ricketts

Abstract: In order to best educate students, white teachers must engage in significant internal and interpersonal work in order to interrogate their own racial identity and develop a capacity for anti-racist pedagogy and practice. The need for white educators to do this work is challenged by the dominant system of white supremacy that dictates the structures of the American public school system; further, educators are limited by the racist rules and policies of the individual districts and institutions in which they work. Through intentional, explicit community building with white teachers, we can hope to begin to move towards anti-racist institutional change. This paper discusses the general frameworks needed to understand how white supremacy interacts and influences public education in the United States, and then moves into some initial thoughts on beginning to do relationally-focused, internal work with white public school teachers.

* The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.

Introduction: Locating Whiteness Internally and Externally

*Of course,
After that, what is inward, is absorbed.¹*
Terrance Hayes

It was the middle of my fifth-grade year, and Mrs. Willow² had just asked us to put our Reading-At-Home calendars out on our desks. As she walked slowly around the room, she paused to examine each student's paper. When she reached my desk, she leaned over me and wrinkled her reddened forehead. She picked up the calendar, inspecting it closer, squinting her beady blue eyes. "Casey! You did not read that whole book in three days!" Her shrill voice was so loud that the whole class stopped talking. My heart began pounding.

Quietly, I muttered, "Yes, I did."

"Then tell us what it's about. Go ahead, stand up and tell us." I slowly got out of my chair, my face flushing with embarrassment.

Mrs. Willow's behavior in this scene was typical for her, but it also mirrors larger behavioral patterns of white adults in the United States. Whiteness is socially constructed; white people develop a very real, lived set of values and beliefs that contribute to the structures and impacts of white supremacy.

Mrs. Willow's dysfunctional internal state caused her to frequently model anger and violence as her primary mode of existence. Young white people watch white adults' behaviors and are indoctrinated into believing that this way of being is both appropriate, and, worse, that it is necessary for survival. As a young white student, I watched my teacher demand my submission both through her tone and through her physical actions. Mrs. Willow's immediate

¹ Terrance Hayes, "American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin," in *American Sonnet for my Past and Future Assassin*. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2018), 15.

² Pseudonyms used throughout this paper for anonymity.

response to my presentation of my homework was to take a stance of anger and dominance. This violent stance is similar to that taken by the many white men responsible for shooting or attacking people of color; this is the same anger shown in videos of white women demanding that the police come to their home, the supermarket, or a cafe to remove a person of color from that space. Undoing the impacts of whiteness is impossible without addressing the source of these violent, disturbing impulses that live inside of white adults in the United States.

But my interaction with Mrs. Willow reveals a second function of white supremacy that is potentially more dangerous in its invisibility. The lasting resonance of this memory isn't because my teacher was angry at me, but because I was significantly upset by her assertion that I was not academically capable. Like most white children, I had been raised into believing that I was supposed to be worthy, valuable, and important. It is important here to note that the practice of valuing our young people is a necessary, healthy part of raising children, but is distinct from the act of giving our young people inherent value based on oppressive systems. When Mrs. Willow accused me of not reading the novel I had recorded on my calendar, she challenged what I had thought I knew: that my academic capacity and ability were obvious to any outside observer. I had internalized the messages that I had already learned about my intrinsic value as a white person and translated this into the way I carried myself as a student. In my interaction with Mrs. Willow, and in countless others, I learned unconsciously, like all white children, what it would mean and feel like to be white.

It is difficult for people to undo what we carry internally. This is compounded by the systems around us, which are intentionally constructed to blind us from seeing the ways we are impacted by oppressive structures. Researcher and psychologist Janet Helms argues that in America, white people subconsciously develop a sense (or lack thereof) of their racial identity.

Most white people, Helms argues, operate out of the stage of psychological development that they start in, Contact. In this initial stage, white people are largely unaware of the system of white supremacy and the impacts of racism; white people primarily live and operate in social circles with other white people, and they are only vicariously aware of people of color. As white people develop this sense of their racial identity, Helms describes a state she terms Disintegration, wherein a person cannot cognitively resolve the conflict of knowing that racism exists while knowing that they are white and, therefore, a participant in that system.³ This double bind usually results, Helms argues, in a Reintegration of the psyche that allows the person to return to moving through life with their implicitly and explicitly racist beliefs and behaviors. White people who are in either of these stages, Contact or Reintegration, are incapable of seeing the ways that structural racism plays out in American society; as such, they are both passive and active agents of white supremacy's aims.

Often, in conversations about race, systemic racism, and white supremacy, white people express confusion, defensiveness, anger, or sadness. Each of these emotional responses implies cognitive dissonance around how white supremacy impacts white people. In other words, white people fail to understand what exactly is at stake if we do not dismantle this system. The systems around us privilege whiteness, so like other advantaged groups, white people would prefer to remain ignorant to the ways these systems are harmful.

White supremacy takes away each white person's individual values, culture, and connections to community by reinforcing that the individual white person is valuable simply because of their whiteness. This is a great loss. When a person or group of people is allowed to feel valuable, worthy, and powerful based on a societally constructed system of oppression, their

³ Janet E. Helms, "Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development," *Black and White Racial Identity* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1993), 55-57.

identity is limited. White people are being cut off from our history, from our friends, colleagues, and family of color, and we are being cut off from ourselves. The perceived benefits of white supremacy, whether acknowledged, ignored, or subsumed, result in a collective and individual loss of humanity for white people. In moving towards anti-racist change, white people must find new modes of being, connecting, and seeing.

When a teacher, in particular, operates without acknowledging their participation in racist belief systems, it can have devastating consequences on young people. Educators like Mrs. Willow can do significant damage to the young people in their classrooms, though the consequences of their behaviors have drastically different results when the students have different racial identities. White students develop false beliefs about their importance and worth, as well as gaining toxic, violent patterns of thinking and being. This happens whether or not the white students are in majority white environments or have experiences that challenge their conceptions of whiteness. White supremacy is reinforced and reincarnated in each young white person whose educational journey is shaped by white adults like Mrs. Willow. Meanwhile, students of color who experience white teachers like Mrs. Willow are forced to undergo traumatic, violent interactions that impact their sense of self-worth and identity. This is reflected in multiple educational inequities for students of color, including, for example disproportionately high suspension/expulsion rates and disproportionately low identification for gifted and talented programs.

White teachers in America are some of the leading perpetrators of the impacts of structural racism. As a white teacher myself, I watch this reality unfold on a daily basis in small and big ways. The statistics cited in newspaper articles and documentaries about the school system are a lived reality in American public schools. Each year I see talented, creative young

people become demoralized and pushed out of the educational system. Each year I have difficult conversations with the bright-eyed twelfth grade students I teach who are disheartened by the inequitable college process. Each year at least one of my students has a conflict with one of my white colleagues that requires mediation. So each year I keep working at the same question: How will we undo this?

Defining Interrelated Systems of Oppression

*Racism is the double-edged sword that defines this nation's history. It is the social construct that allowed the United States to become one of the greatest countries in the world, it is also the part of this nation that has caused and continues to cause so much pain and suffering.*⁴

Undoing racism in ourselves and our schools requires building a common understanding of what race, racism, and oppression are. Yet before doing so, it feels necessary to acknowledge that these words land in the body as much as in the mind. As a result, when we attempt to define them, we inevitably reach points of tension. Author, poet, and activist Gloria Anzaldúa would argue that these conflicts reflect the impacts of oppressive systems that were set up early on in America and have been fortified ever since. In order to justify taking over another person's land and resources, European countries developed "logical" and "scientific" arguments about who was most deserving of power.⁵ Anzaldúa explains that through these efforts to center "objectivity" and scientific thinking, "Western culture made 'objects' of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing 'touch' with them. This dichotomy is the root of all

⁴ Ureña, Anthony, personal submission to author, *Critical Race Theory Final*, TechBoston Academy, May 15, 2018.

⁵ For a starting point to obtain a more comprehensive overview of this history, refer to *The Invention of the White Race*, Theodore W. Allen; *The History of White People*, Nell Irvin Painter; *Race in North America*, Audrey Smedley and Brian D. Smedley.

violence.”⁶ The assertion that this split is the “root of all violence,” at first, might feel similarly difficult to accept. Isn’t violence the root of violence?

A modality of separation is the core of any system where one group of people seeks to dominate or control another group of people. In efforts to colonize what is now “American” and “Mexican,” Spain and England, among other countries, created epistemologies centered on “science” and “logic.” In later iterations, this emphasis on “objective” thinking facilitated the wide acceptance of the pseudoscience behind eugenics, which continues to permeate scientific processes to this day. Through the construction of this objectivity, Western countries were also able to name which person or types of people were valuable or civilized, as well as which person or types of people were not. This perceived lack of value or intelligence was then (and is still) used to justify systematic violence against the people being controlled. At the root of any oppression is the belief that one group of people is superior and one is inferior; underneath this belief is what Anzaldúa describes, which is the Western assumption that it is possible to objectively identify, via science or logic, what quantifies superiority and inferiority.

Many of us learn these oppressive systems as passive recipients in our childhood. Books, teachers, movies, television shows, family members, and other societal sources teach us about who is worthy and intelligent and who is not. To illustrate this, I’ll use the popular children’s story *Curious George*, a beloved text that has since been made into both movies and television series. Originally published in 1941, *Curious George* tells the story of a man in a yellow hat who finds and takes home a monkey, George, who is from Africa.⁷ Underneath the plot points of this story are the same belief systems described by Anzaldúa. As the rescuer in the story, the man in the yellow hat is portrayed as justified in his actions because he carries a superior status while

⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa, “Entering Into the Serpent,” in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Book Company, 1987), 37.

⁷ H.A. Rey and Margret Rey, *Curious George*. (New York, NY: HMH Books for Young Readers, 1973).

George is perceived as inferior, ignorant, and childlike. This is the type of rational, objective thinking Anzaldúa describes. As a result of his

internalized beliefs, the man in the yellow hat can rationalize his choice to put George in a sack and carries him onto a boat (Figure 1). This children's story is a narrative of profound physical and psychological violence. Western belief systems that rely on objectification and rational thinking foster a dichotomy between inferior and superior people and things, leading



George was caught.

to whatever violence is necessary to maintain the status quo. And *Curious George* is only one example. It is just as easy to dissect ways that this shows up in our workplaces, homes, and schools on a daily basis. As we grow up, these beliefs infiltrate our ways of seeing the world and interacting with others.

Often, when people talk about oppression, the conversation concentrates on individual and interpersonal behaviors and interactions, which limits our understanding of the depth of these systems. Though *Curious George* is just one book, it reflects the structural nature of oppression, which is present in our ways of knowing and learning, in our emotional reactions, in our physical state, as well as in our rules, our policies, our legal systems, our institutional policies and practices. When conversations about inequity rely on simplistic definitions of discrimination or prejudice, they will always fail to acknowledge the larger cultural, historical and institutional collusions taking place. Additionally, the interrelation of separate forms of domination make it so that even if a single person aims to counteract the oppression a certain

group of people face in American society, it may be impossible to combat the larger structures causing that oppression.

The construction of race in the United States, to a large extent, has caused racism to become one of the most misunderstood, pernicious forms of oppression in the country. This is in large part what the categories of race were constructed to facilitate. The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond has developed through lengthy research their definition of race as a "specious classification of human beings, created by Europeans (whites), to assign human worth and social status using himself or white as the model for humanity and the height of human achievement, for the purpose of establishing and maintaining privilege and power."⁸ When we understand race not as a set of real scientific differences between people but as a politically, socially created set of false categories so that one group of people can maintain power, it is much easier to see the ways that racism has maintained its existence in the United States over the last four centuries. A government and economic system set up by white people who bought into white supremacy is bound to support the continued maintenance of that system.

Building on the understanding that race is a false system built for power, David Wellman proposes a definition of racism as "a system of advantage based on race."⁹ In many ways, Wellman's definition departs from conventional ways of talking and thinking about racism. Firstly, he challenges us to view race-based oppression as a system, rather than as a series of unrelated events or intentional choices. Second, when we understand race as a system of *advantage*, we can more clearly identify the ways that it functions. The internal consequences of race for white people are inextricably linked to the complex ways that race and racism operate

⁸ People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, "Definitions." (New Orleans, LA: The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, 2017).

⁹ David Wellman, "Introduction," in *Portraits of White Racism*. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993). 5.

systemically in America. In their scholarship, Rita Hardiman and Bailey Jackson identify four elements of social oppression¹⁰ that can be used to measure whether or not oppression exists in any society. Below, I've adapted those elements to show the structural ways that white supremacy operates in the United States:

- ❑ White people have the power to define and name reality; whiteness is viewed as normal, valuable, and attractive
- ❑ The harassment, exploitation, and marginalization of people of color is institutionalized and systematic. White people, individually, have to do nothing for this “business as usual” to continue.
- ❑ Psychological colonization of people of color was and is fostered through processes of socialization, first via the systematic rape, murder, and enslavement of people of color and now via media, education, and other social interactions.
- ❑ The culture, language, and history of people of color is consistently “misrepresented, discounted... eradicated”¹¹ and appropriated; American culture is white, the language is white, and the history is white.

Each of these systemic, institutional and interpersonal layers of racism requires individual white people to internalize belief systems, act out personal values, and to continue supporting the larger aims of white supremacy. Beliefs about value, inferiority, and superiority govern the ways each of us goes about our daily lives. It is precisely because racism is systemic that it is also internal.

Racism has been perpetuated and supported because of white supremacy's relationship with other forces of oppression. Author and professor bell hooks summarizes this intersecting mess of systems as the “white supremacist imperialist capitalist patriarchy.”¹² Marilyn Frye, a feminist scholar, explains further that the interrelation of these systems is oppressive because we are forced to live lives that are “confined and shaped by forces and barriers... [that] are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and

¹⁰ Rita Hardiman and Bailey W. Jackson, “Theoretical Foundations and Frameworks,” in *Conceptual Foundations for Social Justice Courses*, eds. Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin (New York: NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), 17. A full version of this framework is available in Appendix A.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² bell hooks, “Cultural Criticism & Transformation,” interview by Sut Jhally, *Media Education Foundation*, 1997, transcript, 7.

restrict or penalize motion in any direction.”¹³ Frye’s emphasis on the ways these forces are “not accidental” and are “systematically related” reinforces hooks’ description of American society.

When we talk about these large systems, though, it can feel difficult to identify what they have to do with our everyday lives, whether it is in the classroom or otherwise.

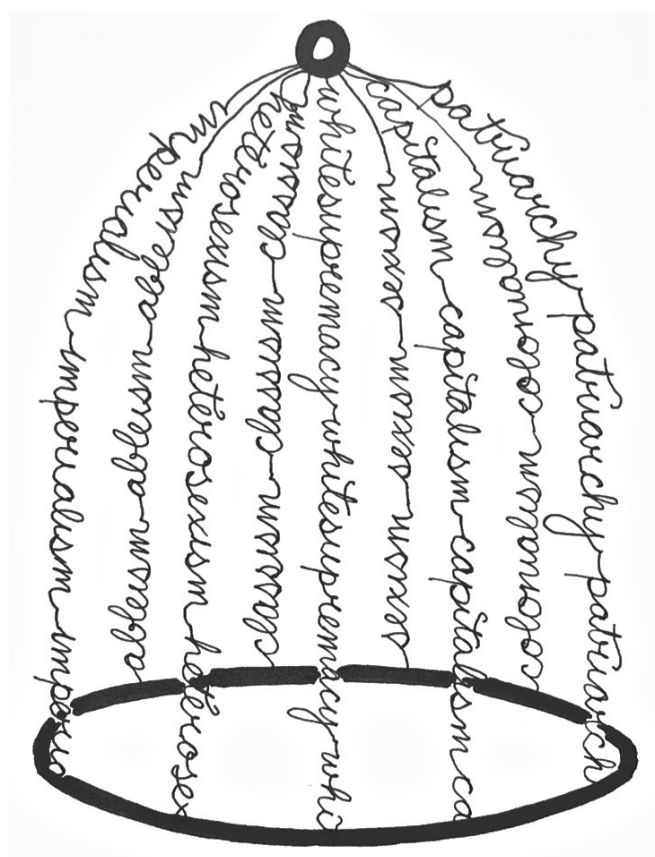
Yet each of these systems is mediating our lived experiences at the structural, institutional, interpersonal, and internal levels. These forces act on us and through us whether we are in a position of power or in a position of

marginalization. Marilyn Frye uses the helpful figure of a birdcage, Figure 2,¹⁴ to illustrate why it can be so difficult to see both the system and the individual impact simultaneously. She explains, “if you look very closely at just one wire in the [bird]cage, you cannot see the other wires...

One can study the elements of an oppressive structure with great care and some good will without seeing the structure as a whole.”¹⁵

When we take a microscopic or single-issue lens, it is impossible to undo the white

supremacist imperialist capitalist patriarchy, whether in ourselves or in the systems around us. If we zoom in on one wire in the birdcage, like “white supremacy,” it can become easy to ignore other intersecting factors, like class, gender, or sexual orientation, yet these factors have a



¹³ Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality*. (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983). 4.

¹⁴ Figure 2 is illustrated in larger format in Appendix B.

¹⁵ Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 18.

significant impact on the work that we do. For example, as a white woman, my experience in understanding race and racism is also shaped by my gendered behaviors as well as the perceptions that others have of me. When we can begin to take a systemic view and understand the ways that each structure of oppression impacts the others, we can then truly begin the work of undoing those systems. By understanding the specific location of our individual positions, we can more appropriately work towards justice with an awareness of our role in each system.

Balancing specific individual concerns with a critical systems lens requires careful analysis. In efforts to move towards equity, many people find themselves making incremental, small-scale changes and losing sight of any larger, intersectional lens. On the other side of the spectrum are large non-profit organizations, who sometimes take such a wide view of an issue that they become disconnected from the day-to-day logistics and concerns of their constituents. One effective suggestion for how to balance this tension comes from John A. Powell's legal scholarship, in which he posits using a "targeted universal strategy."¹⁶ Powell's argument is that institutions can make the most effective change when they target interventions for the needs of a marginal group, yet ensure that these interventions also support the needs of the dominant group. When we use a targeted universal strategy, we identify the specific people whose daily experience is being impacted most heavily by inequity in our institution. Then we design to address that need in a way that can ripple outwards to benefit all of the people in the community.

If I could return to my elementary school and work with Mrs. Willow to address the impacts of her internalized whiteness, I would need to bring with me my own understandings of how to look at race-based oppression in public schools. Instead of looking back, especially since I believe she has since retired, I want to look into the present. I currently work in a public school

¹⁶ John A. Powell, "Post-Racialism or Targeted Universalism," *Berkeley Law Scholarship Repository*, vol. 86, (2008): 802.

with a large number of white teachers. We are all stuck inside the birdcage, whether we know it or not. By beginning to examine white supremacy and oppression with my white colleagues using a clear, targeted framework, I hope to start intentionally disentangling the wires that surround us. We will leverage our relationships with our colleagues of color to build parallel systems aimed at undoing oppressive structures in our institution. Moving our institution in an anti-racist direction is urgent, vital work for ourselves, our students, and our communities. While I use my own personal context to describe what this work might look like, it is my hope that this kind of undertaking is feasible for white people in other schools, other educational spaces, and anywhere else that people are willing to take on the work of collectively disentangling the oppressive systems of American society.

The Impacts of White Teachers on Students: Exploring Interpersonal Consequences

*for my
love conquers hate, for im Henrietta's pain, for i require the rest of the video
for i am lazy, for im uneducated, for i was asking for it, for my body grew too
fast, for i am fast, for they should be eradicated, for you know the rest, you
perpetuate it.¹⁷*

TechBoston Academy (TBA) is a 6-12th grade pilot school in Dorchester, Massachusetts, serving almost 100% low-income students of color. TBA's faculty is more diverse than both the district and state averages, with about 60% white faculty and 40% faculty of color. That said, faculty of color are overrepresented in the guidance and discipline departments, so that it is likely that the teaching faculty is made up of about 70% white faculty and 30% faculty of color. Almost a third of students at TBA are recent immigrants to the United States and spend at least some of their educational career at TBA in a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) program. In addition, TBA serves a large population of students with special education diagnoses, including students

¹⁷ Raynise Charles, personal submission to author, *The Negro Spiritual*, TechBoston Academy, December 24, 2018.

with more severe needs who attend substantially separate programs within the school. On paper, TBA tends to look like a very successful school when compared to institutions with similar populations. On average, approximately 98% of students graduate from the high school in four years, and the majority of these are accepted into colleges or universities. In addition, an overwhelming percentage of TBA students pass the MCAS, a standardized test that is mandated for graduation from Massachusetts public schools. These successes have been recognized by Boston Public Schools in the form of a Level II designation, which is achieved by only a handful of middle- and high-schools in the city.

TBA is a pilot school, meaning it has a unique structure and innovative systems for learning. For example, this year the ninth grade is implementing STEAM Studios, a project-based learning and design-thinking curricular structure in collaboration with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In addition, all teachers are granted almost complete autonomy over their curriculum, and are encouraged to foster learning through innovative strategies and initiatives. TBA's pilot focus is technology, which means that in addition to traditional courses, most students also take a range of computer-based courses, including learning coding and graphic design.

TBA's school culture, despite all positive statistics to the contrary, remains limited by teachers' lack of awareness and/or acknowledgement of white supremacy and other oppressive systems. While this issue is present both for staff of color and white faculty, I will focus specifically here on my white colleagues. My rationale for this particular choice of focus is supported by critical race theorists Cheryl Matias and Robin DiAngelo, who examine educational institutions to explore why white people find it so difficult to see and address their own internalized racism as well as the larger institutional structures that reinforce white

supremacy. Matias and DiAngelo explain that the “antiracist (*sic*) project is to identify how (but not if) racism is manifesting — morphing and adapting — in any given context.”¹⁸ The “morphing” nature of white supremacy can make it difficult to see or identify; perhaps the most invisible and constantly shifting landscape of anti-racist work is what is happening internally for each individual person. Without examination, this inner world is often expressed most visibly during moments of conflict. At TBA, these conflicts happen on a daily basis in classrooms, staff meetings, and hallway interactions. White teachers at TBA must begin looking at our internalized feelings, thoughts, and beliefs.

In order to illustrate the often unseen impacts of white supremacy on our students, I have reconstructed three exchanges based on notes on conversations with young people at TBA. Matias and DiAngelo argue for “mak[ing] apparent what is often transparent or obscured... for Whiteness maintains its dominance in part through invisibility (Flax, 1998).” Through these exchanges, we can begin to look more clearly at the complicated relational ways that these students, among others, are impacted by the refusals of adults to address our own internal biases, as well as the ways that racism is present in our daily interactions. By locating our issues within these emotionally-charged, interpersonal examples, it is my belief that we can more deeply investigate the work at hand, rather than trying to examine data and statistics which facilitate less connection to our own human beliefs, feelings, and responses. In addition, as we develop a better understanding of the internal and interpersonal landscape of racism at TBA, we can begin illustrating wider systemic impacts and supporting other white people to do similar work in their own institutions.

¹⁸ Cheryl Matias and Robin DiAngelo, “Beyond the Face of Race: Emo-Cognitive Explorations of White Neurosis and Racial Cray-Cray,” in *Educational Foundations* (2013), 5.

Exchange #1: Aleah (Black female 12th grade student) and Mr. Thomas (White male math teacher) are in a study hall period. Aleah asks Mr. Thomas to purchase a t-shirt or sweatshirt for a fundraiser she is part of. The t-shirt in question has the words “Make America Great Again,” with “America Great Again” struck-through with a large red line. The shirt has additional font so that the text reads, “Make Reparations to Black and Indigenous People.”

Mr. Thomas says, “That shirt is stupid.”

Aleah: “Reparations are important! How can you say they are stupid?”

Mr. Thomas says, “You don’t need reparations. No offense, but it’s been 300 years since slavery. If you haven’t gotten it together, you’re lazy.”

Aleah skips his class for the next week.

Exchange #2: Arturo (Hispanic male 10th grade student) and Mrs. Fayette (White female English teacher) are in English class. Arturo is in a mainstream English class for the first time after having been only in substantially separate classes for a behavioral disability as well as a learning disability. It is two weeks into the school year, and already Arturo feels that Mrs. Fayette does not respect him.

Mrs. Fayette says, “Arturo, stop talking!”

Arturo continues talking to his friend.

Mrs. Fayette, loudly, “This is exactly why you belong in the behavioral program!”

The whole class hears. When Arturo yells back, discipline is called and he is physically removed from the classroom. Arturo serves a week long suspension for using threatening language towards a teacher.

Exchange #3: Delight (Hispanic gender non-binary¹⁹ 12th grade student) and Mr. Mathers (White male science teacher) are in class. Delight’s birth name, which they do not go by, is Talia. Mr. Mathers has been teaching Delight for several months of their junior year.

Mr. Mathers, “Good morning, Talia.”

Delight says, “I’d prefer if you could call me Delight.”

Mr. Mathers, “That’s not what your name is. I’ll continue calling you Talia.”

Delight reports this incident to the principal. Mr. Mathers continues using “Talia” to call on Delight in class.

Unfortunately, these exchanges are neither unique nor uncommon, although they are some of the more extreme interactions I can describe. It is the purpose of these examples to prompt uncomfortable feelings or reactions, including defensiveness. In the first example, an educator who is largely unaware of his class privilege, sexism, and racism, acts out his beliefs

¹⁹ Gender non-binary refers to a person who does not align with the traditionally held gender binary, in which people identify along a spectrum of masculinity--femininity as a “man” or “woman.” Delight, who identifies as “gender non-binary” uses “they/them” pronouns.

that his opinions are valid simply because they are his. In a later debrief, he admitted knowing almost nothing about reparations. Similarly, in the second exchange, a wealthy white female educator acted out her internalized beliefs about who is a “good” person, continuing the disenfranchisement of young men of color in special education. Finally, the third interaction shows what happens when white supremacy and cis-heterosexism collide in the classroom: Delight’s teacher was quite literally unable to see their identity. The intersecting systems of oppression around us never cease to impact our thoughts, our behaviors, and our interactions.

On a daily basis, students at TBA experience teachers who do not hear them, who disregard their heritage, who disrespect them and call them out. On a daily basis, teachers mispronounce student names, misgender students, and misidentify one student for another. On a daily basis, students are thrown out of class or yelled at by teachers who do not fully see their humanity. The larger impact of these interactions is a declining school culture where students, on the whole, express feeling uncared for and unvalued by their school community. The longer I am part of TBA’s faculty, the more disheartened I feel about our staff’s capacity to truly educate our students. Until we are able to collectively hold and unpack the persistent damage of white supremacy on our lived experiences, we won’t be able to take on the challenging work of moving towards anti-racist identity and practice.

Building Capacity for Collective Internal Change

Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.²⁰

²⁰ adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy*. (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017).

To begin growing our ability as white teachers to do less harm, we must build critical relationships with one another. I use the term critical here to imply both an analytical lens as well as a broader intention to hold one another accountable. White supremacy existed before any of us started teaching and it will probably exist when we leave the classroom for the last time. The multi-faceted ways that each white person has internalized the impacts of white supremacy make it so that our task is always shifting between visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, possible and impossible. As we build a collective of white teachers who are willing to take on this internal work, we must constantly question our beliefs, behaviors, and relational attitudes. At TBA, it is my hope that over the next school year I will initiate and guide a group of white colleagues who are invested in anti-racist initiatives through a collective process of learning and facilitating wider professional development. This communal undertaking will operate in tandem with initiatives from faculty of color, so that all teachers at our school will begin to engage with and/or be supported to process how white supremacy impacts our institution.

While much of this paper focuses on the work of white people in moving our institutions and ourselves towards more anti-racist positioning, it is vital that white people only do this work as part of a larger vision of a world where racism does not exist. White people are responsible for undoing the injustices of white supremacy, and we cannot do it without specific, reflexive accountability towards people of color. In addition, we must be extremely careful to only do work as white people that relates to our position as members of a society designed to continue reproducing white supremacy. As white faculty at TBA begin meeting with one another, processing with one another, and developing initiatives to bring more white people on board, we must be explicitly accountable to our colleagues of color. We can do this in several ways: 1) we can continue to listen deeply to the ways that our colleagues of color express their perspectives

on our institution and our interpersonal relationships; 2) we can work in parallel with colleagues of color, allowing their vision for anti-racist work to be centered and seen as viable; and 3) we can position ourselves as the lightning rod for pushback and resistance from our fellow white teachers, so that no person of color is blamed for the existence of anti-racist initiatives at our school.

As our collective of white teachers begins meeting and creating professional development for the other white faculty at TBA, we will collaboratively identify ways to begin undoing white supremacy as it manifests itself in our institution. There is no one way to make this happen in the right way. The shifting nature of anti-racist work, as described earlier by Matias and DiAngelo, means that what our group sees now as the most urgent area of need might later be something entirely different. The impacts on students we witnessed this year will be different with next year's group of young people. The colleagues that we work with this year might be replaced by other professionals in the fall. As a result, it is my intention to articulate key ways to *frame* our interactions, rather than searching for a series of rules about what those interactions should be. In Appendix C, I illustrate in more detail the core aspects of the framework that we will use to guide our anti-racist efforts at TBA in the coming school year. Despite the concrete appearance of this framework, I would also note that the structure itself is subject to change and shift as our understanding deepens and our capacity for change is strengthened. Briefly, the core aspects of our framework for collective anti-racist work are:

- Call-in culture²¹: leveraging relationships; being honest and accountable to one another
- Window of tolerance: remaining cognizant of one's internal state; communicating emotional needs

²¹ Calling in a person refers to the opposite idea as the common "calling out." In a meeting or other group setting, "calling in" describes the act of letting them know if they've said something hurtful or offensive in such a way as to hold them in relationship and support them to move towards a more healing or less offensive behavior or belief system.

- Non-hierarchical: working as a collective to problem-solve and plan; using dialogue to move our work forward
- Roles: using an intersectional analysis to understand our individual identities of privilege and marginalization; using these roles in our interactions with each other; making clear assignment/facilitation choices in regards to our roles
- Racism is the center: using racism as the framework through which we look at other systems of oppression

As we begin our meetings, we hope to be able to leverage collective experience to begin making the change that is so necessary for the well-being and long-term success of our colleagues, our students, and ourselves.

Visioning an Anti-Racist Future

*when the gates opened - when the gates opened
it was dusty, the ground hard, the wind hard,
the horizon long and far from us*

*when the gates closed
when the gates closed it was still daylight
with a red sun, part of the moon in the sky²²*

When Boston Public Schools replaced all of the windows at TechBoston Academy in 2018, I was excited for the change. The old windows had been covered in an opaque yellow film that diminished the view of the sky and let only a small haze of sunlight through. The new windows, steel-framed, which are just as large, reach from six feet up the wall all the way to the ceiling, maybe another twelve feet. The clear glass panes let in all the light. I'm constantly opening and closing the shades to adjust for the blinding rays.

In late December and early January, though, I walk into the classroom in the morning and it is almost completely dark. No light. The sky is gray or black. Sometimes I can still see the

²² Casey Andrews, "7 stanzas extending genesis," written in E block, Tuesday morning, December 2018, in response to a student created prompt based on Danez Smith's "Genesisy".

moon. These are my favorite mornings, because as students start filtering into the room for first period, sometime before eight o'clock, they seem to bring the light in. On cloudy days, brilliant reds and pinks flood through, coloring the desks, walls, whiteboard, floor. On sunny mornings, it's more diffused: a layer of warm light slowly rises, like we are being lifted out of deep water. We never turn the lights on. The natural light of who we are and what our space can be is enough.

TechBoston Academy was built in 1925 on stolen land.²³ Our school's structure, like most public schools, was arranged intentionally to assimilate non-land-owning, non-English-speaking, non-white-men into American culture until they are able to perform according to capitalist standards of production. Our institution bears the results of this historical and sociopolitical location. We bear the results. Our students bear the results. Our American inheritance is the loss of our humanity. For the sake of this humanity, we must continue to actively resist any system that tries to limit this brilliance.

As we begin anti-racist work at TBA, it is my hope that we can reimagine what our work as colleagues can look like, what it can feel like, and what it can produce on institutional and cultural scales. Our work across difference requires rendering visible the complex, intertwined systems of oppression that govern our beliefs, behaviors, and actions. As we do this work in community with one another, we can begin to imagine a new kind of teacher, a new kind of school, and a new kind of world. As one student this year wrote in her short story about a group of resistance fighters, "the reparation starts now."²⁴

²³ TechBoston Academy's building exists on land originally belonging to the Massa-adchu-es-et (Massachusetts) and Wampanoag tribes, who were pushed out and nearly eradicated by early settlers. For more on stolen native lands, go to: <https://native-land.ca/>.

²⁴ Grullon, Jovanna, personal submission to author, *DC-PC Short Story*, TechBoston Academy, December 25, 2018.

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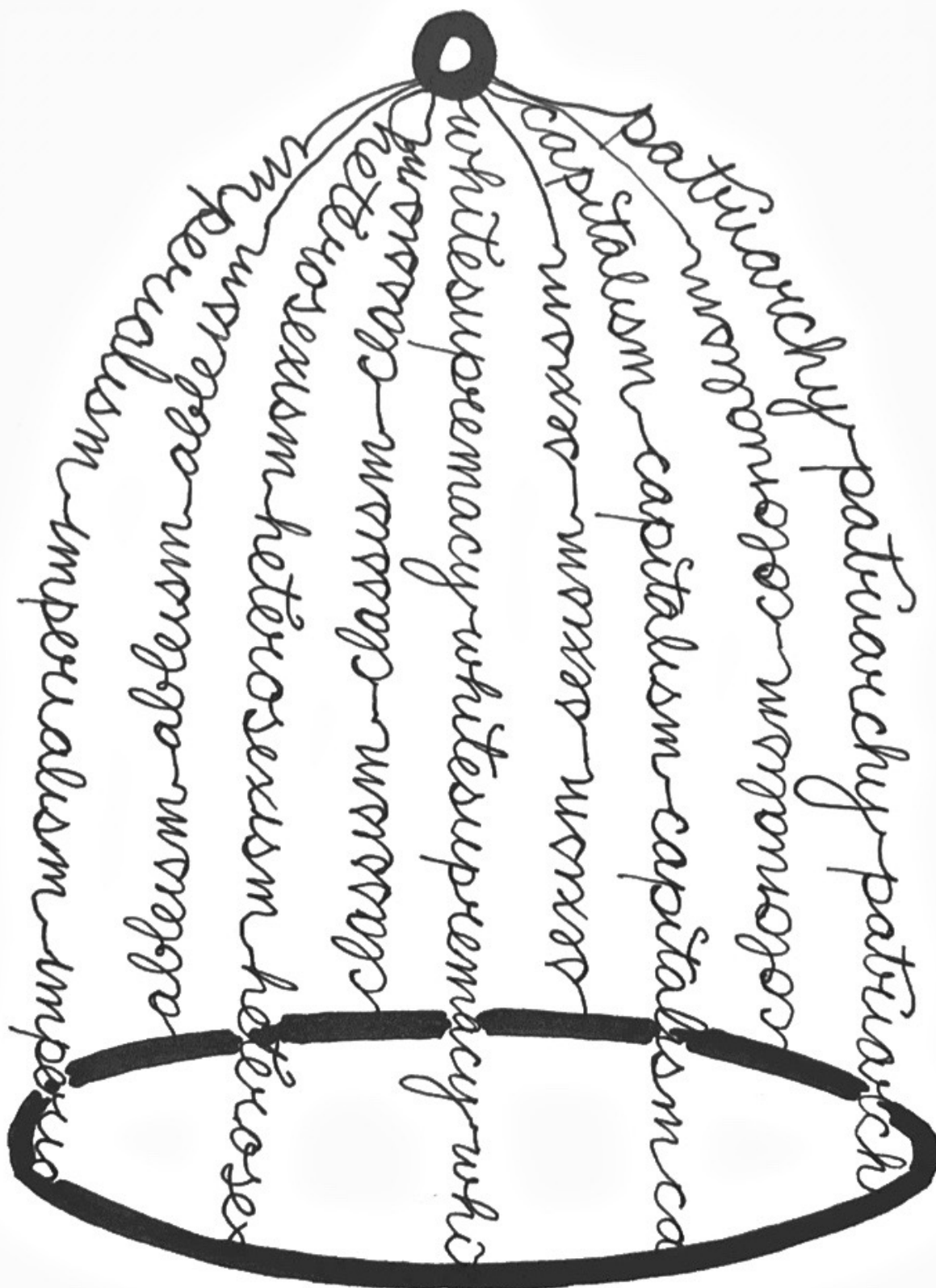
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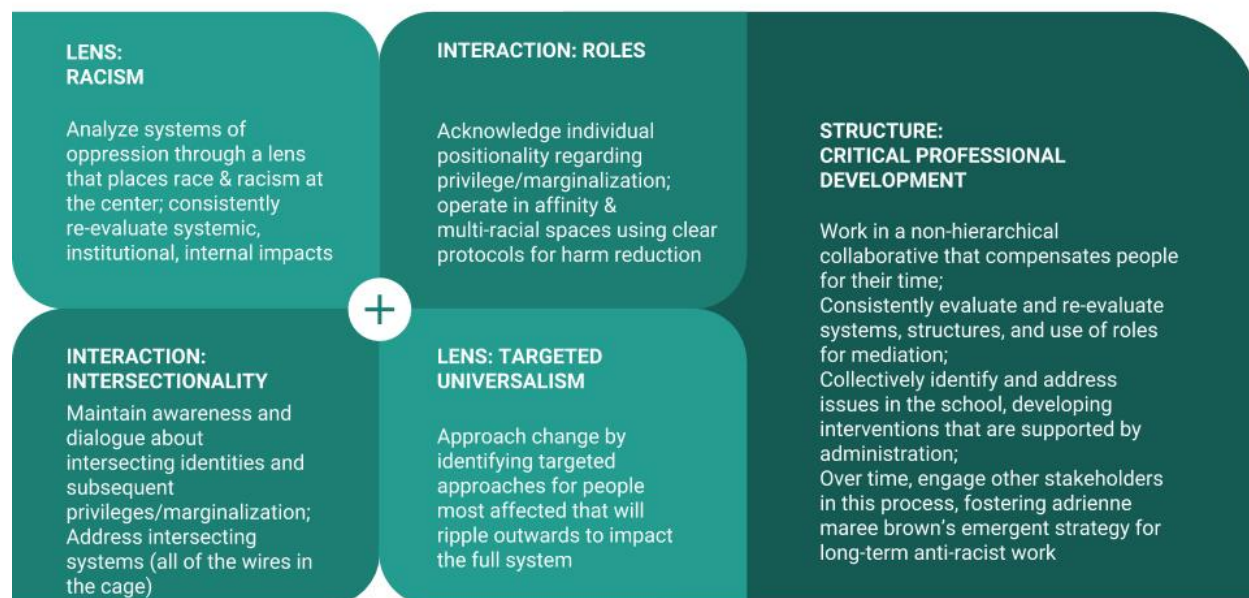
Appendix A - Rita Hardiman and Bailey W. Jackson's "Four Elements of Social Oppression"

- The agent group has the power to define and name reality and determine what is 'normal,' 'real,' or 'correct'
- Harassment, discrimination, exploitation, marginalization, and other forms of differential and unequal treatment are institutionalized and systematic... embedded in social structures over time.
- Psychological colonization of the target group occurs through socializing the oppressed to internalize their oppression and collude with the oppressor's ideology and social system...
- The target group's culture, language, and history is misrepresented, discounted, or eradicated and the dominant group's culture is imposed.

Appendix B - Marilyn Frye's Birdcage and Intersecting Systems of Oppression



Appendix C - Framework for Anti-Racist Collective at TechBoston Academy



**Undoing the Internalized Impacts of White Supremacy:
Curriculum Notes on Envisioning Anti-Racist Change with Teachers**

Casey Andrews

CCT 694

Advisor: Bobby Ricketts

2 June 2019

Through the creation of a critical professional development (CPD) anti-racist collective, it is my aim to begin moving TechBoston Academy (TBA) teachers towards more equitable practices in and out of the classroom. By documenting the initial and continuing work of the CPD collective, it will be possible to begin sharing our process, findings, and results with wider audiences. While the work we are undertaking is constantly shifting, it is important to present tangible actions that other educators might be able to take on.

The CPD anti-racist collective at TBA will meet monthly to develop our series of workshops for the coming school year. The collective is made up of people from a range of backgrounds who have expressed explicit commitment to bringing forth anti-racist change at our school. As our group facilitates professional development for the rest of faculty, it is our hope to cause a ripple effect of change in school culture, from the smallest interactions in the classroom to the larger policies that govern discipline procedures and course options.

By using the critical professional development model, we center four key ideas taken from Kohli et al.'s research on this kind of collaboration: cooperation, unity, cultural synthesis, and organization.²⁵ The CPD model relies on dialogical interaction between participants (cooperation, unity) with a critical lens towards the ways that people are impacted by larger societal structures (cultural synthesis). Finally, Kohli et al. remind us that it is also important to structure the time spent together (organization) and have different participants facilitate at different times. Through the minimization of traditional hierarchical practices, CPD can allow a group of teachers to move into creating professional development that is engaging, radical, and socially just.

²⁵ Kohli et al., "Critical Professional Development."

In our planning process and facilitation practices, we will use four key framings that will allow us to achieve the change we seek. The framings are broken into two categories; one is centered on our interactions with each other and our colleagues, while the other is focused on the lens through which we produce curriculum. These fit within the larger structure of CPD because they help us focus our efforts as a non-hierarchical collaborative, focusing on “community building” as “transformative intellectuals, who, in solidarity, have a political analysis and take action for social justice.”²⁶ Our solidarity is only possible if we are able to connect as individuals while maintaining our “political analysis.” While CPD provides a useful structure for *how* we will use our time together, it’s important for us to have unified definitions, analytical processes, and interpersonal agreements, so that *what* we produce is equally as powerful as our work together might be. Appendix A illustrates our framework.

Our group will agree to use the lens of critical race theory in our analysis of systems of oppression, which examines the relationships between race, racism, and power. This will challenge us to look carefully at ways that our daily interactions are shaped by these societal structures. Further, this forces us to remain honest about the ways that race and racism impact our internal beliefs and values. Without this lens, it would be easy to fall into tangential or superficial forms of anti-racist work (i.e. getting sidetracked into discussing ways that sexism plays out in our school without an analysis of how racism shapes our experiences of sex, gender identity, and relationships).

Centering race and racism also allows us to explicitly define our individual roles in the group in relation to our racial identities. The Racial Reconciliation and Healing Project explains that “People of Color and White People (*sic*) have very different roles in racial justice work... informed by the ways in which racism and oppression have been internalized within these two

²⁶ Kohli et al, “Critical Professional Development,” 22.

groups.”²⁷ Using roles demands that we sometimes use affinity work, where white people work with other white people on dismantling internalized white supremacy and superiority, just as POC work with other POC.²⁸ Further, even when we do cross-racial planning and facilitation, we can remain cognizant of our individual positions in relation to white supremacy, and use this heightened awareness to interact in ways that resist the oppressive systems that invisibly shape our relationships. Using roles will also be a central framing for our larger work with TBA faculty, and we will likely use affinity-based processing for the majority of our professional development facilitation.

Focusing on race and racism in our interactions and analysis doesn’t mean that we will ignore other systems of oppression; instead, we will use an intersectional framing to continuously interrogate ways that race and racism converge with sexism, homophobia, classism, etc. Intersectionality is often misinterpreted to mean that people with relative power and privilege can claim a position of marginalization. This is neither useful nor healthy for successful movement towards equity. Our collective will use intersectionality to mean that we can talk about and acknowledge multiple systems of oppression at the same time as a way of examining individual and group identity. For example, white women make up the majority of the public school teacher population, for a variety of historical and societal reasons. An intersectional analysis allows us to have as one smaller objective of our collective that the white women faculty in our group will address the particular ways that white female teachers must examine their positions in the classroom and the ways that their location at the intersection of a powerful group, white people, and an oppressed group, women, impacts their relationships with students.

²⁷ “Truth,” Racial Reconciliation & Healing Project, Accessed 4/6/2019, <http://www.racialrec.org/truth/>.

²⁸ Ibid.

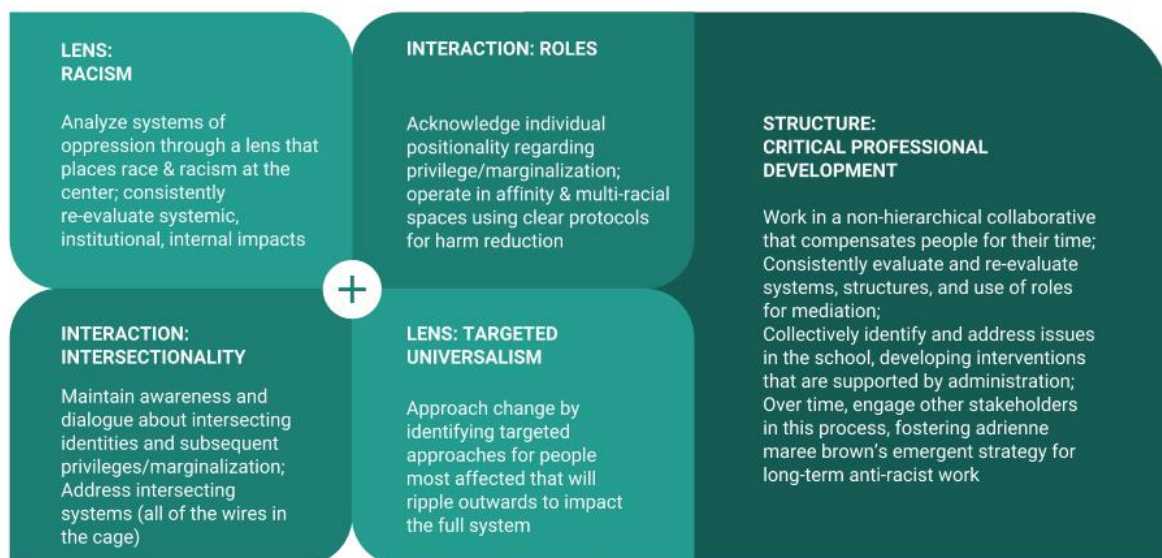
The first three framings are designed primarily to address how our group will interact and what kinds of change we aim to facilitate in a theoretical sense. The fourth framing, “targeted universalism,”²⁹ uses john a. powell’s legal scholarship as a way to approach our larger work in the school. powell suggests that we have alternatives to our traditional thinking about how to change our institutions. The “targeted universal strategy” that powell proposes “is inclusive of the needs of both the dominant and the marginal groups, but pays particular attention to the situation of the marginal group.”³⁰ As a collective, it will be critical for us to look for ways to address the “situation” of the people most marginalized and impacted within our school community. powell’s central argument is that by through this kind of targeted intervention, we can produce “universal” results.

In our first year as a collective, we will design three two-hour professional development sessions for the faculty at TBA. Our collective has decided to facilitate using affinity groups, which allow people of the same racial identity to meet together and process (Appendix B shows our planning notes). We will develop the curriculum for these affinity group over the summer of 2019, at which time I can more sufficiently document the key activities and facilitation processes that we will use. Until that time, because of the non-hierarchical nature of CPD, it is difficult to concretely establish what our collective will produce. In 2020, I plan to produce a larger write-up of our curricular choices and processes as our collective begins moving towards planning a second year of interventions.

²⁹ john a. powell, “Post-Racialism or Targeted Universalism,” *Berkeley Law Scholarship Repository*, vol. 86, (2008): 803.

³⁰ Ibid., 802-803.

Appendix A: Framing of the CPD Collective at TBA



Appendix B: Planning Notes from Initial Meeting / Planning Notes for Meeting 2

In Attendance: Casey, Claudette, Jamaal, Khelmon, McKenzie, Jordan, Jamari, Cris, Blake

Absent: Malcolm, Jillian, Lorna

- Introductions & Key Norms (10 minutes)
 - Introductions in Circle
 - Name, race/ethnicity, preferred pronouns, role at TBA
 - Brief overview of potential grant funding
 - *Can we add more people? If they are from a group that's underrepresented?*
 - Key Norms (handout in advance)
 - Racism as Lens // Intersectionality & Roles // Call-In Culture // Window of Tolerance
 - Any additional group norms we'd like to add?
 - *Can we name someone to be explicit note-taker and agenda documenter?*
 - *Jordan will be the note-taker next meeting, we will continue to decide each meeting*
 - *At the end of each meeting, can we start talking about the agenda for the next meeting*
- What Needs to Happen at TBA: Identifying Targeted Interventions (20 minutes)
 - Large papers on walls - what are issues we see at each of these levels? Take 7 minutes to walk around and add ideas:
 - Institutional policies + rules
 - *hiring:*
 - *diverse recruiter to get more diverse candidates*
 - *attending job fairs*
 - *being more intentional to hire qualified teachers of color*
 - *examine interview questions that we ask and create new questions for them*
 - *have a rotation of committee members by subject (so that each subject interviews for their content area)*
 - *schedule interviews better (not so rushed)*
 - *student and parents on the panel; having a diverse group of students reflecting a true student body*
 - *cultural representation in the curriculum*
 - *the syllabus - "how is this culturally relevant" and how are you going to teach it*
 - *training - some people may think they're doing it but aren't, how do we teach folks/model that*

- *peer observations*
- *implementing more cultural activities*
- *whole school teach-ins at each grade level*
- Teacher practices
 - *disagreements over terminology, i.e. reparations, racism, privilege*
 - *how do we have expectations over how we talk about these things to the entire school?*
 - *does this have to come from admin?*
 - *white/dominant culture blindness: need some clarity for these folks in particular*
 - *admin has to have clear DEFINITIONS and enforce those (admin-level must create this culture)// teachers would have to buy-in*
 - *peer to peer can't necessarily do anything about this*
 - *can we set that culture as teachers?*
- Student experience
 - *hierarchy of academics causes "one size fits all" and "mainstream as normal"*
 - *impacts SEI students, smalls, IEPs disproportionately*
 - *course selection*
 - *de-tracking - needs to prob be admin*
 - *what do students need to feel and be successful?*
 - *can we offer more advanced/rigorous courses but in a less hierarchical way?*
 - *push towards critical thinking in developing towards college/career*
 - *trauma-informed practices*
 - *support for teachers to integrate new practices*
 - *a lot of this load falls to teachers and that's not sustainable*
- School culture / other
 - *inconsistent approach to discipline*
 - *having our own discipline rulebook that we work on together and having a committee for that,*
 - *with students involved to help set the tone*
 - *roll that out to faculty*
 - *toxic masculinity and homophobic comments -*
 - *have better PD on that, possibly students & adults*
 - *panel to share student and adult experiences*

- *inconsistent approach to discipline is in large part because our teaching staff doesn't reflect our student body & identifying the ways that white privilege and implicit bias informs our practice and harms our students will help us approach student discipline in a more just way*
 - *this is white people work (and connects to the defining work)*
- Split into teams of 2-3 to work on individual posters. Synthesize ideas and identify 1-3 key points of possible intervention. For each, explain what makes this an appropriate targeted intervention. (Have handout explaining what makes a good targeted intervention).
- Overview of Schedule & PD Possible Plan (10 minutes)
 - Introduction to possible plan for PD --
 - 2 choose-your-own-workshops and 1 all staff at end of year
 - or 3 choose-your own workshops
 - or 3 all staff/workshop splits
 - or another format?
 - **Vote on structure for PD**
 - *AFFINITY GROUPS*
 - *theming or otherwise allowing for buy-in for the groups?*
 - *only small group for white people (what would the numbers have to be for this)*
 - *same groups whole time, build trust & community*
 - *safe affinity group space for POC could be a positive, safe space*
 - *do we want any opt-out option*
 - *large group needs to be #3, if we have one*
 - *can the most resistant people (white) be with admin?*
 - *ADMIN?*
- Post-mortem analysis on structure of PD (20 minutes)
 - If we get to the end of 2020 and our PD, like previous attempts, was horrible, what happened along the way? Brainstorm individually then discuss as a group, mapping on the board.
 - How do we use our remaining 4 hours with our large group to effectively to address these? Identify key targets and scheduling components, as well as how to leverage roles appropriately.

Meeting #2 [2 hours, May 28th 2019], Agenda & Rolling Notes

In Attendance: Casey, Claudette, Jamaal, Khelmon, McKenzie, Jordan, Cris, Blake, Jamari

Absent: Malcolm, Lorna, Jillian

Handouts from Meeting 1: [Key Framings](#), [PD Option Ideas](#)

AGENDA

1. **Introductions** & check-in question (which weather are you right now) [10 minutes]
2. **Next Meeting:** sometime during the last week of school - keep an eye out for an email!
 - a. June 17th or 18th (Khelmon might not be here)
3. **All Staff Roll Out Overview & Update from Admin Meeting** [10 minutes]
 - a. Update from Admin Meeting [5 minutes]
 - b. Proposed Items [3 minutes]
 - i. Clarifying who is creating the PD/what's happening
 - ii. How this is different from previous attempts
 - iii. Background of people who are facilitating the groups
 - iv. Presenting the model in terms of things that have actually worked in the past (CPD, affinity)
 - v. How would a person be able to support if they were interested? **They could come to our last meeting and give ideas/feedback.**
 - vi. **We will have a paper survey with Name, Racial Identity (with definitions)**
 - vii. Have an anonymous survey
 - c. Is there anyone besides Casey and Claudette who would like to help with presenting? [2 minutes]
 - i. Jamari, Cris
4. **Review proposed plan for PD** [20 minutes]
 - a. Affinity Groups
 - b. 3 times, 2 hours each
 - c. Question: Any all staff time on concluding day? Ask for a fourth day? (Admin sounds like they would oblige)
 - i. take a fourth 2 hour block
 - ii. We will hold off on deciding whether or not to do all staff
 - d. Question: Do we present the affinity groups in some themed way? Do we allow people to complete some kind of survey to help us create the groups?
 - i. This should be structured based on our objectives
 - ii. Balance between choice and making sure people are appropriate with their choices
 - iii. Theming it? But keeping it still clear around which racial identity a person has to be in that group

1. Have definitions for what each racial identity means

5. Objectives Brainstorm [10 minutes]

- a. Who will be willing to synthesize our answers and send to the group by Friday 5/31 for feedback? [2 minutes]
- b. Individual brainstorm - what are your top 3-5 priorities/objectives for our PD next year? Either hand write or email to the synthesizer. [8 minutes]

Create ways in which staff can hold each other accountable and bring each other in (within this setting and ideally within the school)

-a common definition of racism (and other terms related to inequity)

White people will unpack their explicit and implicit bias to provide a more equitable learning environment for youth in an urban setting.

-

White folks need to learn about white supremacy culture and their role in this

White folks need to learn how to hold each other in the process of identifying/unbraiding internalized white superiority

White people need to talk about their own inherent racial biases

Talking about these, recognizing you're not alone in these, is the only way to rid yourself of bias

White people need to understand their role in finding their voice as a white person in racial justice work

White people need to hold and break down their own guilt

Folks of color do NOT need to be present for these conversations

In fact, they really shouldn't be. More than enough damage has been done by doing this in mixed spaces

develop a stronger cohort of teachers who demand and space towards anti-racist institutional change, especially white faculty

- Be able to identify the ways in which racism (systemic, individual, etc.) and white supremacy functions in the district and in our school

- Identifying ways to resist those collectively as a school

POC- This space should be focused on healing. In this space we come together to heal with each other and also focus on the healing of our students.

The impact of white supremacy has created a lane inside the black community where it runs on autopilot. Here this group will work on addressing issues such as: colorism(light skin = beauty and dark skin = ugly), hair (what is good hair and not good hair). This group's end goal will be activities in our classroom where we can address interracial issues and work on healing from it. This group will work on, create and roll out these activities with students.

6. Post-Mortem [20 minutes]

- a. If we get to the end of 2020 and our PD, like previous attempts, was horrible, what happened along the way? Brainstorm individually then discuss as a group, mapping on the board.
 - i. People shut down

- ii. People aren't open from the beginning
 - iii. People misuse affinity groups as a place to complain rather than a place to really unpack
 - iv. Themed groups cause new bad feelings
 - v. People are absent and miss important things/can't get back on track
 - vi. People are just too stuck and can't move past their definitions - you can't change their mind
 - vii. People don't think this is important
 - viii. People gossip and violate privacy
 - ix. People get isolated from each other, don't see a common vision
 - x. Admin doesn't support a common definition
 - xi. We don't have a common definition
 - xii. We run out of time
 - xiii. No accountability so people don't follow through/take it seriously
 - xiv. Admin doesn't go to their assigned meeting
 - xv. We aren't planned so we facilitate the initial meeting badly, lose people after that
 - xvi. Too much could come up and people don't know what to do about it
 - xvii. People get offended
 - xviii. One person derails the meeting with their emotional reaction
 - xix. There's no room to repair relationships and they are damaged permanently
 - xx. The facilitator (white) is outnumbered by the group
 - xxi. New staff members are confused/thrown into it
- b. How do we use our remaining 2 hours with our large group to effectively to address these? Identify key targets and scheduling components, as well as how to leverage roles appropriately.
- i. Planning the groups:
 - 1. Are they themed?
 - 2. Who will facilitate? One or two people? What size?
 - ii. MAKE TEAMS to work on categories of possible issues and spend time brainstorming solutions, collecting resources/materials, and then sharing that back to the group
 - 1. Assign tasks to help deal with those/brainstorm solutions
 - 2. Prepare for worst case scenarios
 - 3. Start pulling together our common definitions and terminologies
 - 4. Make a folder of resources
 - iii. Plan summer meetings