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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

From Allies to Abolitionists: Developing an Abolitionist Consciousness and Anti-Racist Practices in White Teachers

by

Deonna Smith

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University

in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree

Doctor of Education

2022

From Allies to Abolitionists: Developing an Abolitionist Consciousness

and Anti-Racist Practices in White Teachers

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by

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This dissertation written by Deonna Smith, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

2/26/2022

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DEDICATIONS

This is dedicated to my mother and biggest cheerleader, my partner, and the village that it took to get me here.

Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

From Allies to Abolitionists: Developing Anti-Racist Practices
and an Abolitionist Mindset in White Teachers

by

Deonna Smith

This study sought to investigate the efficacy of a professional development designed to equip teachers with antiracist practices and support them in developing an abolitionist mindset. The study was designed for white teachers. Participants of the study engaged in a 6-week course grounded in a constructivist learning theory, TLT, and centered around the text, *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Love (2019). Participants also engaged with a variety of other texts and resources grounded in asset pedagogies. The sessions were participant-led and focused on cultivating the skills for antiracist teaching while cultivating a mindset grounded in abolition.

The data gathered through surveys and a focus group revealed that some design elements, such as continued reflection, affinity space, and building community before engaging in critical dialogue, were found to be highly effective. Stages of development emerged as teachers moved from leveraging culturally responsive practices, to engaging antiracist practices, to critiquing systems of oppression. As teachers deepened their understanding of abolition, they became more aware of the implications of systemic racism in education, and how educators can play an active role in dismantling it. The current study, along with the growing body of research on asset pedagogies, could provide a road map for what effective asset pedagogy professional development could look like.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. education system, by almost every metric, fails students of color. Students of color, especially Black boys, are less likely to graduate from high school, are funneled into the school to prison pipeline, have fewer advanced or college preparation courses, and have less access to higher education than their white counterparts (Baggett & Simmons, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The injustice extends past academics; Black and Latinx boys are more likely than their white counterparts to be disciplined by school police, be suspended, and be expelled (Love, 2019). Young Black women face similar prejudices; they are five times more likely than young white girls to be suspended or expelled and are more frequently kicked out of the classroom (Epstein et al., 2017). The racism that permeates society extends into classrooms.

Research strongly suggests discrepancies in achievement between white students and students of color are in some ways linked to their teachers' mindsets and practices (Milner, 2012; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Most teachers in the United States are white women (Baker, 2017). White teachers are more likely to hold deficit mindsets and unconscious biases against their students of color (Morin, 2015). These white women are not acting alone as malicious agents of racism; any analysis of the experience of students of color in education is remiss without a critical eye on the systemic nature of racism in the U.S. education system.

Teacher attitudes and prejudice are not operating alone; systemic racism plagues the American education system. In what Dr. Bettina Love calls the Educational Survival Complex (Love, 2019), schools chronically fail Black and Brown students, not by accident, but by design.

Mechanisms like standardized tests, character education, and "no-excuses" charter schools simultaneously create and sustain educational inequity. In the Educational Survival Complex, a select few students of color are meant to thrive, making the "achievement gap" a phenomenon that is designed into the education system, rather than an unfortunate side effect (Love, 2019).

In 2020, alongside the COVID-19 global pandemic (BBC News Staff, 2020), an overdue reckoning on race and social justice movement swept the world. In what is being called the largest social movement of all time (Buchanan & Bui, 2020), a network called Black Lives Matter mobilized the critique of state-sanctioned violence and extended the discussion of institutional racism beyond our criminal justice system. Aided by social media, a renewed interest in identifying systemic white supremacy and injustice reached education. Both scholars and activists called for a closer evaluation of the American education system. For decades, data have supported the claim that our schools are not supporting Black and Brown students, but now there is a deeper understanding and concern for the pervasive ways in which education actively sustains the oppression of students of color (EdWeek Research Center, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

In 2020, most careers that pay a "livable wage" require a bachelor's degree (Martin, 2019). According to the United Negro College Fund (United Negro College Fund [UNCF], 2018), this means more than 50% of Black and Latinx students will not be able to secure a job that pays a living wage. Not only is education ultimately failing most of its Black and Latinx students, but studies also show there are clear signs along the way. If a Black or Latinx boy is not reading at grade level by the fourth grade, it is unlikely he will ever recover and read on grade level (Hammond 2015; Love, 2019).

Indeed, this level of inequity is not solely attributed to a few teachers with biases. There are structural barriers to consider. A 2018 United Negro College Fund (UNCF) survey of the American education system uncovered some concerning trends: High schools with a majority of Black students are less likely to offer college-ready courses and when Black students do have access to these classes, they are underrepresented. These schools are also more likely to have novice teachers and poorly skilled staff. Schools with a majority of students of color spend around $733 less per pupil than schools with a white majority (UNCF, 2018).

The odds are low and the barriers are steep for Black and Brown students. However, research suggests highly skilled abolitionist teachers can mediate these challenges (Love, 2019). An abolitionist teacher is one who combines the tenets of other asset pedagogies like culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) with a commitment to advocacy and dismantling white supremacy in education. Abolitionist teachers know the importance of academic success, cultural competency, and social-political awareness, but also understand systemic racism is pervasive and the ultimate goal is abolition and transformation of the U.S. education system. The reality is most teachers do not fit this description. Several studies have found teachers often leave their credentialing programs lacking the skills to be abolitionist practitioners (Matias, 2016). A nationwide, 25-year study confirmed this finding (Baggett & Simmons, 2017). Researchers uncovered even when credentialing programs offer courses in "urban education" or a specific course tailored to students of color, they lack opportunities for teacher candidates to examine the complexity of racism, diversity, and equity (Baggett & Simmons, 2017). The lack of appropriate teacher training and development not only negatively impacts outcomes for Black and Brown students, but white teachers are also impacted by the lack of training. Under-trained teachers experience

frustration, lack of self-efficacy, and burnout in classrooms they are ill prepared to lead (Baker, 2017).

The recent resurgence in awareness of racial injustice in education brought teacher mindset, racist practices, and inequity in education to the forefront. The urgency around this work is evident. Developing teachers as abolitionist practitioners will build not only culturally sustaining classrooms but also schools. Teachers are not learning the breadth and depth of abolitionist work in their credentialing programs. Research and best practices have yet to provide a robust framework for developing abolitionist teachers.

Research Questions

To address the systemic issue of racism within the American education system, and to address the inequitable outcomes especially found among Black and Brown students, the study implemented an abolitionist teaching program, grounded in transformational learning, and designed for white teachers. This abolitionist teaching program offered current white teachers an opportunity to participate in professional development aimed at shifting teacher mindsets and actions to improve conditions for Black and Brown students. The Research Questions guiding this study were:

1. What impact does professional development, grounded in transformative learning, have on white teachers' ability to develop antiracist teaching practices?
2. What impact does a professional development grounded in transformative learning have on white teachers' ability to develop an abolitionist mindset?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to create an abolitionist teaching professional development (PD) course and explore the efficacy of this PD on shifting teachers' mindsets and ability to adopt culturally sustaining and abolitionist teaching practices. This study primarily sought to understand the transformation process necessary for teachers to adopt an abolitionist pedagogy. Abolitionist teaching cannot be synthesized into a list of "teacher moves" or best practices, but it is also not a passive mindset. Abolitionist pedagogy calls on teachers to change behaviors. Transformative learning suggests, through an intensive process, both mindsets and behaviors can change.

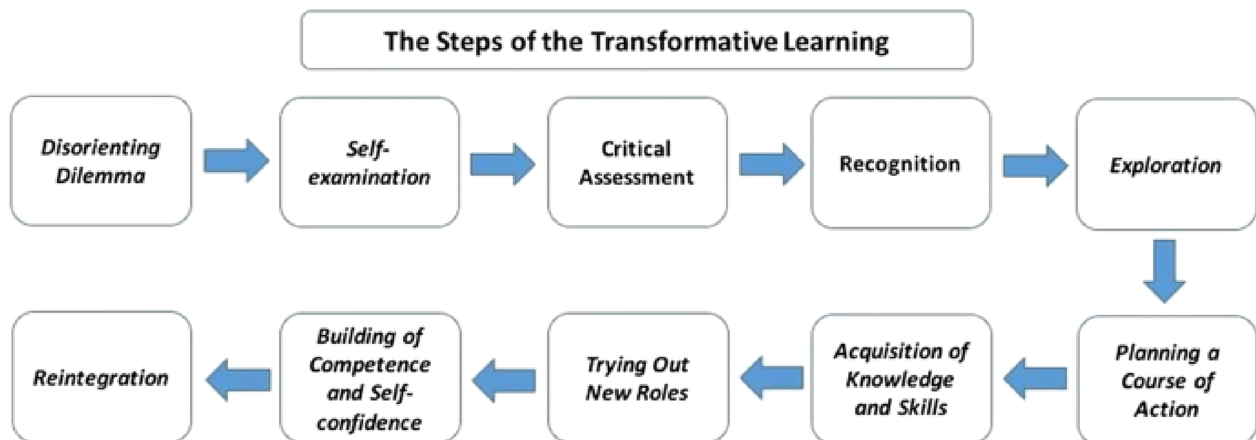
Theoretical Framework

To shift mindsets and transform teachers into abolitionist practitioners, adult learning theory is an informative place to start. Mezirow's (1978) understanding of adult learning, TLT, has become a cornerstone of andragogy. There are 10 stages in transformative learning, starting with adults facing a problem or challenge that forces them to think differently about the world, or a "disorienting dilemma." For example, the dilemma of systemic racism in education might force adults to think differently about outcomes for children based on race. This dilemma might encourage white teachers to think differently, naturally flowing into the stage of self-examination. In the "self-examination" stage, adults may feel shame or guilt about their role in perpetuating the dilemma. For instance, many white teachers are already experiencing shame or guilt about their white privilege (Milner, 2012). As adults work through this phase, a natural critique of previous assumptions occurs. Here, participants begin to question and rethink their previous understandings of society. Coupled with this stage is a crucial inclination to build

community. There is a realization that others have experienced the same alienation from previous beliefs or understandings. The adult learner then seeks new ways of being or actions that are more aligned with the new consciousness. A course of action, and a new pattern of behavior is then explored and established. Learners develop more skills and build their confidence around the new conceptualizations. Lastly, the new learning is integrated into their existing life and the broader context of their lived reality (Calleja, 2014). Building on these stages, the current study applied Mezirow's (1978) TLT to a professional development designed specifically for white teachers to adopt culturally sustaining and abolitionist teaching practices (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Steps of Transformative Learning



Note. Adapted from "The Development Of Transformative Learning Scale in Information And Communication Technology," by M. Yildirim,. and T. Yelken, 2019, *Technology, Knowledge and Learning, 25*(2), p. 989-1006, https://doi.org/10.1037/t82660-000, copyright 2019 by Springer Nature.

Research Design and Methodology

This study implemented a newly created professional development and used a pretest, posttest design to examine changes in mindsets and teaching behaviors among white teachers. This mixed-methods study included a readiness survey before the beginning of the course, and a

post-course survey to measure abolitionist teaching behaviors and mindset shifts. A focus group was also held at the end of the course. The design provided both quantitative and qualitative data about the effectiveness of the abolitionist teaching professional development from before to after the course, as well as measure the impact of the PD on teachers. The study was open to in-service classroom teachers in K–12 schools. Participants had to identify as white and have students of color in their classrooms.

The presurvey attempted to gauge participants' personal and professional readiness to engage with the antiracist and abolitionist content. The instrument focused on the teachers' comfort and openness to learning about issues of race and difficult discussions. Then, participants attended the abolitionist professional development, which was a series of six reflection-based professional development sessions, with the sixth session dedicated to gathering feedback from participants on the experience. The PD focused on the central text, *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Love (2019). Each session was designed to closely correspond to one or more stages of TLT as Mezirow (1978) described. Teachers took a survey after the course and participated in a focus group during the sixth session to provide a narrative of their experience and further contextualized the findings of the survey. The focus group discussion also gave participants an opportunity to be metacognitive about their experience of developing into abolitionist teachers. The questions also sought to understand teachers' self-efficacy, barriers they experienced in this work, and challenges teachers anticipated facing when implementing learning from the professional development and the changes in their teaching praxis.

Limitations

Although the study was robust and offered several data points, there were limitations to consider. Self-reported data were heavily relied on during data collection. Teachers were required to recount their own experiences with the implementation of antiracist practices. The scope of this project required a small sample size, and due to the COVID-19 global pandemic (BBC News Staff, 2020), recruitment was also initially a concern. This study sought to find connections between participants' learning from the professional development and their subsequent teaching behaviors; there was an assumption here that the professional development impacted participants' mindsets, which are connected to behaviors. Observation bias was also a concern because participants understood they were in a study to develop their capacity as abolitionist practitioners.

Key Terms

The term "abolitionist teaching" was used throughout this study to describe a pedagogical approach that synthesizes themes from culturally responsive teaching, culturally sustaining pedagogy, ethnic studies pedagogy, and other asset pedagogies. Although not yet heavily used in academic literature, Love (2019) used "abolitionist" to describe teachers who employ culturally responsive pedagogical practices, but also conceptualize themselves as advocates for educational justice. Abolitionist teachers understand teaching is inherently political and seek to identify and dismantle white supremacist practices in education. Abolitionist teaching builds on prior asset pedagogies and draws heavily from the tenets and ideological frameworks of its predecessors. Throughout the study, abolitionist teaching was used as the primary framework for the professional development content but other related asset pedagogies were heavily referenced as

well. “Asset pedagogies” is used throughout the study as an umbrella term to encompass abolitionist teaching and its predecessors.

In 2020, the Associated Press announced that it will not capitalize “white” (Bauder, 2020). The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and USA Today also do not capitalize “white” (Bauder, 2020). When capitalized, “white” has typically been associated with white supremacy groups and white nationalists. To delegitimize these organizations, “white” will remain lowercase in many publications (Zorn, 2020). It is worth noting that there are many scholars, both Black and white who disagree with the choice to not capitalize white. The capitalization of “white” perhaps provides an opportunity to highlight the fact that, despite whiteness being understood as the norm and therefore not worth naming, whiteness is a powerful tool of oppression and racial identity. To acknowledge the power of whiteness, and ultimately dismantle that power, some scholars have argued “white” should be capitalized (Painter, 2020). This study followed the conventions of major publications, such as *The New York Times* and *Associated Press* and used a minuscule “w” for white.

Both the terms “Black” and “Brown” were capitalized. Black was capitalized because it represented a group with a shared history, culture, and racial identity, similar to Asian or Indian. Brown was capitalized for similar reasons. This work drew heavily on the foundation created by Love (2019) in *We Want to Do More Than Survive*. In that text, both Black and Brown were capitalized.

The jargon and vernacular to describe of people of color has been constantly evolving. Some literature may include the terms “minority,” “people of color,” “historically underrepresented,” etc. Recently, the terms Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)

have also entered the common lexicon to describe persons who literature once commonly described as “minorities.” This work sought to use the term most appropriate whenever possible. Although the terms described the similar populations, they were not interchangeable in research. For example, BIPOC would include South Asian and East Asian peoples. To say that BIPOC students are underrepresented in college preparation classes would be inaccurate because South and East Asians are actually overrepresented (Shafer, 2017). It is more specific to say Black and Latinx students are underrepresented. At times an aggregate term was useful, because BIPOCs are underrepresented in the teacher workforce (Love, 2019). “Brown” will also be used within the scope of this work. It is used to describe not only Latinx people and students, but also Asian, Pacific Islander, Arab and Indigenous peoples. “Brown” was intentionally chosen in this work to align with the usage and terminology proposed in *We Want to Do More Than Survive* (Love, 2019). This study generally used the terminology presented by the researcher when describing conclusions found in other studies. In other contexts, the most accurate or descriptive term was used.

Significance

Abolitionist teaching has the potential to be a powerful tool in the fight to eliminate the achievement gap and begin to dismantle racism and injustice in the education system. Abolitionist teaching encompasses a broad and nuanced perspective on equity. Teachers are called to employ culturally sustaining practices while working to identify and end structural racism within their schools. The complexity of abolitionist teaching requires teachers not only develop antiracist mindsets but also allow that mindset to inform their actions (Love, 2019; Stovall, 2021).

This study joined a robust cadre of literature in the discipline of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy, building on the tradition of works that document the experience of Black and Brown students in education. Along with this tradition is the critical consciousness developing throughout our nation around institutionalized racism in education (EdWeek Research Center, 2020). The study provided a synthesized process necessary to transform teachers into abolitionist practitioners. The implications of the study can impact teacher preparation programs and can provide insight for districts seeking to train teachers.

Despite decades of reform, millions of dollars, and countless scholars calling for change, the U.S. education system is failing Black and Brown students. No conversation about social justice in education can ignore one of the most egregious and pervasive failures of education. Racial, ethnic, and linguistic discrepancies permeate almost every other educational justice issue. If teachers can be trained to respond to or to mitigate the impact of systemic racism on students by using antiracist and abolitionist teaching practices, then both students and teachers could reap the benefits.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter reviews relevant literature about the development of asset pedagogies and best practices in professional development (PD). Asset pedagogies refer to a philosophical approach to teaching that directly counters deficit thinking about students of color. One such asset pedagogy and the guiding framework for this study, abolitionist teaching, is a recent addition to the field and builds on the intellectual tradition of its predecessors. To provide context, a review of asset pedagogies will be discussed aligned to their timeline, including an in-depth discussion of abolitionist teaching. Next, TLT (Mezirow, 1978) is reviewed as the guiding framework for the PD, along with literature on effective qualities of professional development. For this dissertation, literature pertaining to PD that specifically equips teachers with skills within asset pedagogies is included.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Culturally relevant teaching (CRT) has existed as a concept for many years, and throughout its existence, various approaches and frameworks have been presented as extensions of CRT, most notably culturally responsive pedagogy, Ethnic Studies pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), and abolitionist teaching emerged. Together, this body of work represents asset pedagogies, which counter deficit thinking (California Department of Education, 2021) about students of color.

The racial and ethnic "mismatch" between teachers and students has been a consistent point of interest for scholars. As early as 1975, scholars were critically analyzing the impact of white teachers on Black, Indigenous, People of color (BIPOC) students (Kleinfeld, 1975). In a

seminal study in 1975, Kleinfeld discussed strategies that non-indigenous teachers should adopt to be more effective teachers of Alaska Native students. Findings of this study, coupled with other projects that specifically investigated the effective pedagogical practices for Black students, such as Ladson-Billings in 1994, ultimately became warm demander pedagogy as articulated by Ware (2006). This “warm demander” term describes pedagogy where teachers combine “personal warmth” with “active demanding” (Ware, 2006, p. 2). In both studies by Kleinfeld (1975) and by Ware (2006), there were teachers who did not prioritize creating personal or warm relationships with their students and instead opted for maintaining a professional distance. Conversely, there were teachers who allowed their close relationships with students to impact their expectations. These teachers adopted a “sentimentalist” mindset and lowered expectations for their students, which ultimately prohibited students from long-term academic success. The “warm demander,” on the other hand, did not allow paternalistic notions or pity to change their expectations of the students. Regardless of any racial disparity, these teachers cultivated meaningful relationships with students. The concept of “warm demanders” has become a cornerstone of culturally responsive teaching (Hammond, 2015).

Early iterations of culturally responsive teaching also focused on the importance of teaching cultural pluralism, including the experiences of people of color in the United States in the curriculum (Gay, 2000). Gay, who went on to become a central figure in the field, focused her early work on incorporating the Black experience in education and ethnic pluralism (Gay, 1972, 1979). Gay believed the disparity in the educational outcomes for students of color and white students were at least in part based on an incomplete understanding of history. Gay was a proponent of what one would potentially find in an ethnic studies class or during Black History

month—a centering of Black narratives and a complete and accurate representation of the Black experience in the United States.

Prior to 1995, the concept of CRT was primarily centered around isolated studies that focused on a specific context and/or population. In 1981, Au and Jordan used the term "culturally appropriate" to describe practices that referenced or incorporated native Hawaiian students' backgrounds into their learning experience. These practices centered around incorporating Hawaiian ancestral traditions and language in the academic experience of Native Hawaiian students. The term "culturally responsive" was applied in two subsequent studies in the early 1980s: Cazden and Leggett (1981) and Erickson and Mohatt (1982). Cazden and Leggett (1981) examined effective methods for teachers of linguistically diverse students and recommended ample opportunities for linguistically diverse students to speak and "multisensory" instruction. They also stressed the importance of recognizing the "invisible" culture that students experienced outside the classroom. Erickson and Mohatt (1982) examined best practices for Native American students by observing two teachers—one Indigenous and one white—and noting their teaching styles and pedagogical practices. Through analysis of live classes and recorded lessons they found several differences between the teachers. The Indigenous teacher maintained control of the classroom using more subtle approaches and was more inclined to work with students independently. The students in the Indigenous teacher's classroom also tended to perform better academically (Erickson & Mohatt, 1982). Both studies surfaced practices that ultimately informed CRT. The concept of culturally responsive teaching has been described by different names. For example, CRP became the most widely used term following Ladson-Billings's (1994) work. Her work extended the idea of CRT by combining the notions of

cultural pluralism (as suggested by Gay, 2000) and effective teaching methods, as studied by Cazden and Legett (1981) as well as Erickson and Mohatt (1982) for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Ladson-Billings (1995) called for a theory of CRP for students of color that developed students academically, nurtured and supported cultural competence, and developed a critical consciousness in students.

Building on earlier work, Ladson-Billings (1995) published a more comprehensive book—*The Dreamkeepers*. This book offered a series of vignettes, reviews of literature, and interviews with effective teachers of African American students. Billings also included her own personal experience and reflections on her time in education. In this text, Ladson-Billings shifted the discourse on the achievement of African American students. Instead of problematizing students, Ladson-Billings pushed educators to consider that perhaps it is the mindset and actions of teachers that impede student learning. By finding effective practitioners and studying their methods, Ladson-Billings demonstrated African American students could indeed succeed, but it was teachers' responsibility to expand their toolbox to include culturally relevant practices. In 2006, Ladson-Billings expanded on her work to conceptualize "education debt." The collective historical debt of centuries of racism, the economic debt of underfunding schools for decades, the sociopolitical debt of excluding people of color, and the moral debt created by the continuous refusal to allow justice for BIPOCs all convene in education debt. This reframed the "achievement gap" which problematizes students, and instead focused on the systemic forces at play (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

In 2000, Gay produced another cornerstone text in the field of CRP that shaped the theoretical framework for training in-service and preservice teachers. *Culturally Responsive*

Teaching: Theory Research and Practice reviewed the pedagogical approaches that are effective for Black and Brown students. Gay (2000) defined CRT as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective" (p. 31) for students of color. Building on existing scholarship and emphasizing a broad understanding of culture that extends past race and ethnicity, Gay (2000) included social class, religion, or the composition of family as additional aspects that impact students' culture and should thus be attended to by teachers. Gay's work was tailored to practitioners, focusing on a more specific critique and engagement of teaching praxis. Specifically, Gay (2000) highlighted the need for an asset-based mindset for teachers when thinking about students of color as well as a focus on instructional practices and instructional materials. Thus, according to Gay (2000), teachers applying the concepts of CRT would start with what their students already know and build upon their understanding of the world. Teachers would focus on leveraging student culture as an asset and focus on what students can do, as opposed to problematizing the fact that students come to school with culture.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain by Hammond (2015) took a distinct approach to the work. Hammond drew on the field of multicultural education and culturally responsive/relevant teaching, but also incorporated neuroscience and learning theory. Hammond's book arrived as the discourse around "growth mindset" was ubiquitous in the field of education due to Carol Dweck's (2010) book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, "Even geniuses work hard" (Dweck, 2010, p. 16), and a series of articles, conferences, and webinars, which pushed the conversation about fixed versus growth mindset into the forefront of educational discourse. The concept of having a fixed versus growth mindset is a popular belief in

education. Dweck (2010) argued that educators message intelligence the wrong way to children and instead of describing intelligence as fixed or an ascribed trait, intelligence should be described as an ability capable of improving with repeated exercise. This notion of improvement through effort is considered a growth mindset, meaning anyone can become more intelligent through effort. Hammond (2015) incorporated this theory heavily into her own take on CRT when she described the concepts of "dependent versus independent learners." These terms describe students who are either equipped to be independent, critical thinkers, or stuck as dependent learners who are only given access to low-level academic tasks. Research has documented Hammond's concept of dependent learners showing that dependent learners, and teachers who perpetuate their dependency, are prevalent in schools with Black and Brown students (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Jackson, 2010). Yet, culturally responsive teachers can help students build their intellective capacity, or the ability of the brain to process increasingly complex information more effectively (Ritchhart, 2002). Thus, Hammond (2015) integrated the concept of personal warmth (Gay, 2000), warm demanders (Ware, 2006) and conceptual knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1994), to articulate culturally responsive teaching, but her unique entry point from cognitive development and psychology makes culturally responsive teaching and the brain a marriage of neuroscience and culturally relevant teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is about just that: teaching. Although other frameworks and theories, including abolitionist teaching (AT) and CSP, specifically avoid "teacher moves," Hammond (2015) delved into the day-to-day experience of teachers and teaching. Hammond's ready for rigor framework is a tool to unpack what culturally responsive teaching looks like. The framework has four domains: (a) awareness, (b) learning partnerships, (c) information processing, and (d)

learning environment. Awareness relates to the teachers' understanding of their own positionality, their students' cultural lens, and their own cultural lens. In learning partnerships, teachers recognize the power of the student-teacher relationship. They also incorporate families in meaningful ways. The benefits of parent communication or parent involvement are well researched, but in the Ready for Rigor framework (Hammond, 2015), parents and families are in a mutual partnership with teachers. Next, information processing focuses primarily on building intellective capacity, where methods like cognitive routines and feedback are used to support learning. The last component is the learning environment. It is important for the learning environment to be safe, both socially and intellectually. These four essential components of the framework are undergirded by consistent affirmation, feedback, and validation. Taken together, culturally responsive teaching has a robust history focused on supporting the learning needs of students through strong and effective teaching.

From Culturally Relevant Pedagogy to Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Before distilling and presenting the pedagogical stance of CSP, in 2014, both Paris and Alim explored what they named "asset" pedagogies. For example, Alim et al. (2010) and Alim and Reyes (2011) highlighted Hip Hop education as the liberatory power of and rich linguistic history of Hip-Hop culture and urban communities. Alim and Reyes (2011) argued Hip Hop education leveraged students' community connections and investment in Hip Hop culture as opposed to problematizing these aspects of student life. Hip Hop education is not only used as a pedagogical approach, but also a means of artistic expression—a language used to express culture.

Similar to the work of Alim et al. (2010) and Alim and Reyes (2011), most of Paris's (2009) work sought to understand the implications of multilingual schools and students. Paris (2009) explored the use and validity of African American Language and Spanglish in educational spaces. Through several studies focused on interactions of students at diverse and multilingual schools, both students and teachers attested to the power of language (Paris, 2009, 2011). Students who expressed themselves in their native languages and subsequently had that usage validated by their teachers were more comfortable at school and experienced better academic outcomes (Paris, 2009, 2011). The notions of centering linguistic diversity and Hip-Hop education are heavily incorporated into Paris and Alim's (2017) joint project: CSP.

Through a series of "loving critiques" of culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogy, CSP emerged. In 2011, Alim compared the term cultural "relevance" or "responsiveness" to "tolerant." This critique asserts pedagogy that is responsive or relevant does not call for students' own cultural backgrounds or heritages to be maintained or sustained. In other words, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy do not go far enough to support cultural and linguistic plurality and dexterity (Paris, 2009). CSP is decidedly distanced from the "white gaze" or the assumption that any pedagogical practice must use whiteness as a starting point or goal. Paris and Alim (2017) invited educators to imagine the goal of teaching and learning as more than seeing how closely students of color perform white middle-class norms and values. Rather, a CSP seeks to honor, extend, and when necessary, problematize their heritage and community practices (Paris & Alim, 2017). Although previous articulations of CRP and CRT may have referenced the role of community, CSP explicitly names community-based organizations and community centered practices as part of education.

Alim’s (2011) work in Hip Hop pedagogies influenced his later contributions to CSP. In Hip Hop pedagogies, there is an explicit understanding that community practices can in fact perpetuate hegemonic ideas rooted in white supremacy (Alim, 2011). CSP takes on oppressive notions found in the communities it seeks to sustain. This nuance is another element that makes CSP stand out from its predecessors. Because CSP seeks to sustain culture as opposed to respond to or tolerate it, the problematic aspects of each culture must be addressed. The authors use Hip-Hop music as an example. Hip-Hop promotes homophobic, misogynistic, and, at times, racist discourses, but music is also a fundamental means of accessing and sustaining culture (Paris & Alim, 2017). CSP takes the sustaining and fundamental elements of students’ culture, while simultaneously giving them space to critique and reimagine harmful and oppressive cultural norms.

The Four Pillars Ethnic Studies Pedagogy

Ethnic Studies Pedagogy (ESP), like CSP, is an asset-based pedagogy that draws heavily on predecessors like CRP. Ethnic studies classes exist in many schools, but ESP is a distinct pedagogical approach that includes ethnic studies classes along with four other pillars: (a) decolonization, (b) CRP, (c) community engagement, and (d) racial identity development. Politics have often played a role in the availability of ethnic studies classes, which have been a contentious topic in education. For example, in May 2010, Arizona passed a controversial law that restricted school districts from offering ethnic studies classes (Cabrera et al., 2012). Ethnic studies classes had been popular in Arizona prior to the ban and focused on the Mexican American experience and their histories. Conversely, in 2010, the San Francisco Unified School District adopted a resolution to support ethnic studies in its schools (Tintiangco-Cubales et al.,

2014). Although course offerings have been varied in availability and fraught with political conflict, Ethnic Studies Pedagogy (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014) emerged as a way of teaching that aims to recover and reconstruct narratives, perspectives, epistemologies, and cultures of those who have been historically marginalized or neglected (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). The term Ethnic Studies pedagogy (ESP) was first introduced in a seminal survey of research by Tintiangco-Cubales et al. (2014). By studying the challenges of ethnic studies teachers, the authors developed four essential tenets of a pedagogy, grounded in ethnic studies, as opposed to incorporating ethnic studies as a component of another pedagogical approach. Those four tenets are: (a) decolonization, (b) CRP, (c) community engagement, and (d) racial identity development.

The first pillar presented in ESP (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014) is decolonization and elimination of racism. Decolonization calls on students and teachers to critique the traumatic and long history of colonization on Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. Most of the work centered around decolonization in ethnic studies roots back to Fanon in 1963, where he described decolonization as not only the physical removal of colonizing forces but also liberating the consciousness of the colonized people (Fanon, 1961). The decolonizing work also leans heavily on critical race theory (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Decolonized curriculum has shown to have positive impacts on academic outcomes for students of color. In a study of a social justice education program implemented in Tucson, Arizona, students who were exposed to decolonized curriculum graduated college with higher rates than their counterparts and had stronger academic performance in other subjects as well (Cabrera et al., 2012). In 2001, Strobel studied the impact of decolonized pedagogy on Filipino students and their journey to becoming activists. Strobel

found, by decolonizing curriculum, students developed a framework for understanding their own histories as Filipinos and internalized colonialism impacting their own racial identity development.

ESP also names culturally responsive teaching as a pillar (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). The authors unpacked culturally responsive teaching and presented three essential practices: (a) building upon students' perspectives and experiences, (b) creating caring academic environments, and (c) developing students' critical consciousness. These three components of culturally responsive teaching are synthesized in ESP by drawing on seminal works such as Gay (2000) and Ladson-Billings (1995). First, studies by Hefflin (2002) and Sleeter (2008) highlighted the power of building upon students' experiences. In both studies, teachers incorporated a cultural practice such as storytelling and saw higher engagement and academic achievement with BIPOC students. Second, the notion of developing critical consciousness contends that youth of color need to process both their identities and all the inequity in the world around them to fully engage in learning (Camangian, 2010). This includes the teacher's investment in creating a caring learning environment for students, impacting social-emotional, and academic outcomes. In a study by Howard (2001), students expressed the social-emotional impact of caring teachers. Students shared when teachers demonstrated care for their students the learning environment was more welcoming. The Black high school students who were surveyed explained they felt more comfortable in the environments where teachers were caring toward them, which let them participate more fully in learning (Howard, 2001) Similarly, Franquiz and Salazar (2004) conducted a 4-year study on teacher and student relationships, revealing students who felt their teachers were confident and cared for them, experienced more academic success.

The Chicano students in the study identified relationships with teachers as a critical element to their ability to build academic and emotional resilience (Franquiz & Salazar, 2004). Taken together, these three teaching practices comprise the tenet of culturally responsive teaching as a pillar of ESP.

The third pillar of ESP is community responsiveness. Community responsiveness calls on teachers and schools to prepare students to be leaders and advocates who address the concerns facing their communities. Through ethnic studies, students develop a critical consciousness and learn how to positively impact their communities. Community responsive pedagogy finds roots in the work of Freire (1970), who connected theory, practice, and reflection to address challenging social issues. In community responsive pedagogy, students build their capacity to reflect on and respond to their community's needs. ESP specifically highlights youth participatory action research (YPAR) as a means of community engagement. YPAR is particularly well aligned with the goals of ESP because YPAR decolonizes research by making students and members of the communities being studied the researcher as opposed to just the subjects (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). YPAR is a popular approach to research. In 2011, Akom developed a YPAR focused on researching race in African American students that built self-advocacy and critical consciousness. Avendano (2007) developed a similar model focused on the Filipino community and found the course strengthened students' sense of self-agency and academic engagement. Bridging the community and the classroom, community responsive pedagogy not only seeks to build investment and academic capacity, but also produce leaders ready to grapple with their community's strengths and weaknesses.

Racial identity development is the last pillar of ESP, distilled from the literature surveyed by Tintiangco-Cubales et al. (2014). Racial identity development is essential for white teachers and teachers of color who participate in ESP, although the issues they need to unpack are different (Tatum, 1992). Teachers of color can be powerful in Ethnic Studies classes. Teachers of color connect and build relationships with their students more often, positively impact learning (Achinstein et al. 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Being a person of color, however, is not enough to ensure a quality Ethnic Studies program. Teachers of color experience internalized racism and can intentionally or unintentionally uphold systemic racism in their classrooms, but when teachers participate in their own identity development, they are more impactful as Ethnic Studies teachers (Gomez et al., 2008; Kohli, 2013). White teachers must participate in identity development as well. In 2008, Sleeter found most white teachers entered the field of education with little cross-cultural knowledge and many unexamined stereotypes. Many other scholars have examined the impact of a lack of identity development for white teachers (Baker, 2017; Cann, 2015; Milner, 2012). Studies have asked different questions and examined different aspects of identity development but have found the critical consciousness of white teachers does impact their efficacy as teachers and the experience of their students. Thus, Ethnic Studies pedagogy extends the work of culturally responsive teaching and reaches beyond taking an ethnic studies course to include the teaching pillars of decolonization, CRP, community engagement, and racial identity development.

The Emergence of Abolitionist Teaching

In the book, *We Want to Do More Than Survive,* Love (2019) inserted the term "abolitionist teaching" into the conversation about culturally responsive pedagogy. Abolitionist

teachers are decidedly political. Love (2019) rejected the notion that teaching should be apolitical or operate without consideration of the context of the world outside the classroom. Rather teachers are instrumental in bringing about liberation for Black and Brown children inside and outside the classroom. Love (2019) identified education as one of the most powerful instruments in perpetuating white supremacy, meaning that teachers are either actively fighting for their students of color, or they are promoting white supremacy. The nature of the work is complex, and abolitionist teaching is not a list of strategies or a sheet of tips. Love (2019) was intentional about pushing “theory over gimmicks” (p. 124).

Although Love (2019) clarified there is no one way to be an Abolitionist Teacher, there are some fundamental theories and systems that abolitionist teachers need to understand. The Education Survival Complex forces Black and Brown children to merely survive. Schools actively reproduce the racist and oppressive structures students face in their daily lives, meaning when they come to school they are positioned to survive or “beat” oppressive odds, not thrive. Schools that perpetuate “beat the odds” mentalities and promote character education create false narratives of success and meritocracy for students. For example, by encouraging students to “beat the odds” without addressing the systemic and pervasive nature of “the odds,” students can falsely conclude that success or failure at school is solely personal responsibility. Character education that focuses on “grit” or “zest” for example, also lead students, particularly Black and Brown students, to internalize their own lack of success within a system that is designed to fail them.

To dismantle the educational survival complex, Love (2019) called for teachers to “Freedom Dream.” Drawing from Kelley’s (2002) book, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical*

Imagination, Love (2019) invited educators to explore change that goes beyond tweaking the system and to dream of what education could look like if it were truly equitable and abolitionist. Love (2019) suggested justice has yet to actualize in education because solutions continue to be bound to dysfunctional systems. As opposed to thinking about closing the "achievement gap" educators need to instead "Freedom Dream" and create a reality where educators are no longer measuring students of color against Eurocentric standards of achievement, drawing on the work of even earlier scholars such as Woodson (1933). The educational survival complex is perpetuated in part because educators have yet to fundamentally shift the goal and purpose of schooling. As it stands now, schools are primarily used to socialize students into white middle-class norms and behaviors and teach Black and Brown children their place in a white supremacist world. Focusing on representation in text, high expectations, or even dual language programs, does not go far enough to address the systemic racism in education. Knowing that systemic racism exists in education, teachers must be informed about how to change their practice and be abolitionist teachers. Equipping teachers with the skills to fight for educational justice requires a pedagogical framework that pushes teachers to not only learn and shift their mindsets, but also implement different practices in the classroom. Although abolitionist teaching is a relatively recent iteration of asset pedagogies, noted scholars such as Stovall (2021) and Ginwright (2020), along with Love (2019), are establishing abolitionist teaching as a prominent pedagogical practice.

Transformative Learning Theory

To equip teachers with new skills and to change teachers' mindsets, teachers must have an opportunity to unlearn old ways of pedagogy and relearn new ways of teaching. TLT is a

theory intended to be a comprehensive, idealized, and universal (Mezirow, 1991). Transformative learning has been incredibly influential in the field of andragogy since its initial introduction in 1978 (Calleja, 2014; Knowles et al., 1998; Mezirow &Taylor, 2009). Mezirow's (1978) original action study sought to understand the needs of women, who were resuming their education or returning to employment after an extended period of time out of higher education or the workforce. Mezirow was trying to understand factors that facilitated and impeded their progress. Studying these women, Mezirow initially identified 10 essential stages of transformative learning. Phase 1 is the "disorienting dilemma" where a learner is met with a challenge or situation that threatens their preexisting conceptualization of themselves of their worldview. Phase 2, self-examination, is characterized by the guilt and shame learners feel when grappling with their disorienting dilemma. In Phases 3 and 4, the learner critically assesses their assumptions and recognizes that others have shared the same experience in learning and development. In Phases 5 and 6, learners begin to explore other ways of being and understandings that are contradictory to their initial conceptualization and plan their course of action. In Phase 7, learners acquire the knowledge and skills for implementing their new plan. Phases 8 and 9 include trying on new roles and building confidence and competence in their new role and relationship. The last phase is when learners finally reintegrate their new learning into their life (Mezirow, 1978). In addition to the initial 10 phases, Mezirow (1991) expanded the model to include another phase where the learner renegotiates their existing relationships. This additional phase is central to a critical component of TLT. For transformative learning to take place, adults must interrogate their frames of reference, what Mezirow (1991) called "meaning schemes" (p. 224).

In TLT, whether the learner is aware of it or not, frames of reference become so ingrained that it can make learning that does not include critical reflection ineffective (Christie et al., 2015). Critical self-reflection is the means through which educators can reframe frames of reference and incorporate new learning (Mezirow, 1991). During critical reflection, educators transform interpretations, beliefs, points of view, and habits of mind (Mezirow, 1997). The "disorienting dilemma" is typically the catalyst for this critical reflection. The inclusion of critical reflection is considered to be the characteristic that distinguishes adult learning from child learning. Adult learners have to grapple with competing realties and the disorienting dilemma forces adults to critically reflect on a prior assumption, world view, or idea that was called into question by new information presented in the dilemma.

Mezirow (1991) repeatedly emphasized the constructivist nature of the theory, centering the role of autonomy and discourse in learning. Discourse highlights the social nature of TLT. Discourse is social in nature and involves participants engaging with new information. The learner will be able to make their own meaning out of the information, thus the importance of autonomy. Learners become autonomous, responsible, and critical thinkers when allowed to engage in discourse around their learning (Mezirow, 1997). TLT starts with the assumption everyone has a worldview based on their paradigm and experience. People begin to conflate how they see the world with how it should be because it is hard for people to change their point of view. Autonomy and discourse are therefore essential.

TLT (Mezirow, 1978) has been around for over 40 years and is not without critique. A principal critique has been the importance of context in the learning environment. Many studies and researchers have insisted Mezirow (1978) overlooked the importance of context in the

construction of the theory (Calleja, 2014; Clark & Wilson, 1991). In a comprehensive review of the literature and critiques of the theory, Calleja (2014) highlighted that several replication studies have illustrated the importance of the context of the learning. Both sociocultural factors, like historical events, and the relative power and agency of the learner, need to be considered to fully understand the efficacy of transformative learning.

Within the scope of this study, it is certainly true that the social-political context will impact participants. The political climate of the 2020 election (Buchanan & Bui, 2020) and uprisings following the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless others that were the victims of state-sanctioned violence impacted every aspect of culture and society in 2020 (Buchanan & Bui, 2020), including teaching and education. Teachers brought their reactions, feelings, and understandings about the world to the study, but that only enhanced their learning. The "disorienting dilemma" was an explosion of racial consciousness.

In addition to facing a dilemma, the relationship between student and teacher is central in adult learning. Taylor and Cranton (2013) provided a literature review, highlighting the central role of the relationship and the lack of consideration relationships are given in TLT (Mezirow, 1997). Taylor and Cranton (2013) argued the validity of the theory is called into question because it did not sufficiently weigh and emphasize the impact that a positive and trusting, or conversely negative and distrusting, relationship between a teacher and student can have on learning. Robertson (1997), through an analysis of TLT, focused on preparation of the facilitator in different learning environments throughout a dozen studies and found the theory does not sufficiently prepare the facilitator to manage the dynamics of teacher to pupil relationships. The importance of a trusting relationship is true also of any professional development where the

dynamics between facilitator and participants must be attended to. Ways to be mindful of the relational dynamics include allowing the teacher to opt-in to the learning, creating, and building community over time through intentional team building exercises, and finally establishing trust through openness to participating in the study and learning from each other (Robertson, 1997).

TLT specifically seeks to change minds and actions, making it uniquely appropriate for the challenge of turning teachers into abolitionist practitioners. A study in 2015 explored TLT's ability to impact elementary teachers' mindsets. Kawinkamolroj et al. (2015) used TLT to create a coaching sequence for teachers to move from a fixed mindset to a growth or flexible mindset. Building on the work of Carol Dweck (2006), a fixed mindset, in this case, referred to the assumptions of the elementary teacher and findings indicated these teachers grew in their understanding of growth mindset and indicated their growth would be reflected in their teaching practices. The focus on teacher mindsets was critical because the student experience is inevitably impacted by the teacher's mindset as well. For example, teachers who subscribe to fixed mindsets may create learning environments where students feel like their capacity and capability as learners is predetermined. As such, this study shows how TLT could be an effective approach for shifting mindsets among teachers to embrace abolitionist teaching.

Professional Development for Teachers

Effective teacher training and professional development are a concern for most, if not all, school leaders. Literature surrounding teacher preparation programs has consistently found pre-service teachers still need some form of development after leaving their credentialing programs (Baggett & Simmons, 2017; Hill-Jackson, 2007; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Several scholars have developed frameworks for effective professional development. In a review of over 100 articles

on professional development in 2011, Avalos highlighted best practices in professional development such as (a) allowing for reflection, (b) collaboration between schools and districts, (c) implementation of some form of coaching or mentorship, and (d) the importance of understanding the context each teacher is operating in. In 2017, a prominent scholar in the field, Darling-Hammond, collaborated with the Learning Policy Institute at Stanford University to create a definitive guide to effective teacher professional development. Their guide recommends practices similar to the findings by Avalos (2011). Specifically, findings indicated effective professional development is content focused, related to a specific domain or discipline within teaching. Collaboration and active learning are also critical in professional development. Other elements include coaching, feedback, the use of models, and some level of longevity; teachers do not learn as well when the development is not comprehensive and not repeated. The question of effective professional development is one that has plagued school leaders for decades; there is no shortage of literature on the subject. The scope of this project centered around professional development that is specifically focused on asset pedagogies.

Terms like culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and inclusive are distinct but express similar concepts and are often used interchangeably in the discussion around professional development. Regardless of the terminology chosen, there are a few trends that emerge with respect to what effective professional development looks like. Much of the literature on culturally responsive professional development emphasizes the "internal work" required by teachers. Culturally responsive and abolitionist teaching requires teachers to adopt a mindset that is congruent with their actions in the classroom. Understandably, isolating and describing the specific mindset shifts that are necessary to deem professional development as successful in this

area has been a popular topic in research. Many scholars pointed to indicators of success including understanding privilege, implicit biases, and positionality (Dewsbury & Brame, 2019; Gay, 2000; Goldenberg, 2014; Hammond, 2015; Killpack & Melon, 2016; Love, 2019; Paris, 2011; Prater & Devereaux, 2009). These are crucial steps for teachers in culturally responsive professional development. Professional development in culturally responsive teaching has to have some element of transformation because teachers are often confronting beliefs about children of color that are the result of years of socialization (Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

White privilege, unconscious bias, and positionality are three components that could be described as internal work. The concept of understanding and unpacking white privilege is an expansive topic, but as it relates to education, it is understood as an essential component of cultural awareness which is an integral part of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995), which many subsequent theories and frameworks use as a foundation for their work. Implicit bias refers to the associations and assumptions that are created outside of our conscious awareness (Fiarman, 2016). Often, these associations are based at least in part on racial stereotypes and impact both teachers and students (Fiarman, 2016; Morin, 2015). A grasp of positionality is rooted in the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). In 1989, Crenshaw coined the term to describe the ways in which different social and political identities such as race, gender, sexuality, interact to create different layers of privilege and oppression. The emphasis on internal work illustrates the distinct nature of professional development that is grounded in asset pedagogy.

Critical consciousness building, reflection, and dialogue repeatedly emerge as critical elements of professional development for culturally responsive teachers' experiences. Reflection is framed in different ways throughout the literature. Some studies used written reflection

(LaCroix & Kuehl, 2019), group reflection and conversation (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009) or a combination of both (Hammond, 2015). Most studies included some element of social interaction and group debrief, which closely aligns to the best practices on andragogy found in the TLT presented by Mezirow (1978). Even outside of culturally responsive teaching, communal learning and engagement have been highlighted as essential for any kind of teacher learning (Darling-Hammond, 2017). A few studies have focused on the nature and framing of the dialogue. Although teachers can be uncomfortable discussing issues of race and inequity (Baggett & Simmons, 2017), grounding conversations first in data created a more receptive environment. Both Bianchini et al. (2015) and Goldenberg (2014) suggested similar findings. Bianchini et al. (2015) specifically noted when the dialogue is guided by examples, such as vignettes and scenarios, and data, the conversation is richer and more effective. Using scenarios and vignettes takes the focus off the teacher and allows for an impersonal conversation. Bianchini et al. noted often this work is shut down by teacher defensiveness. As such, Bianchini et al. stressed the importance of including data and student testimony in professional development materials. The data decenter teachers in the conversation and again creates a lower stakes environment.

Critical consciousness is related to the concept of unpacking privilege, bias, and intersectionality but includes a critical understanding of socio-political contexts. Scholars such as Tatum and Love have both linked critical consciousness to CRP. For these scholars, what happens outside of the classroom is related to the work that happens inside the classroom. Not only do teachers need to be aware of the lived realities of their students, but they are also responsible for building the capacity of students to advocate for change (Love, 2019; Tatum,

1992). Many teachers enter the field with a lack of critical consciousness, and this mindset can be the most damaging for students of color (Castro-Atwater, 2008). Dialogue and reflection can be powerful tools in developing consciousness. In 2019, LaCroix and Kuehl presented a framework for reflection for preservice teachers that specifically focused on building critical consciousness through dialogue and reflection. In their exercises, teachers first reflected on their own positionality and understanding of the world, and then participated in guided conversations with other teachers to make meaning of their experiences and reflections.

The literature suggests several pitfalls to avoid and best practices to consider when developing a professional development course focused on equipping teachers with the skills to become culturally relevant practitioners. Approaching the work can be challenging because professional development often employs a deficit mindset that is criticized in pedagogies. Deficit mindsets start with the assumption the student is lacking and the teacher fills the deficit (Milner, 2012). Research has suggested deficit models of professional development are less effective for teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Howe & Stubbs, 1997). Just like students, teachers shut down when the instructor does not build upon their existing knowledge and strengths. Although it is true teachers sometimes lack the skills to be abolitionist practitioners, this research suggests professional development should still strive to build upon teachers' assets as opposed to focusing on deficits (Darling-Hammond, 1994). An asset-approach to professional development is in alignment with TLT, which builds on constructivist pedagogy, and also with Freirean conceptions of knowledge acquisition that center on asset-based instruction (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Thus, TLT may provide a strong foundation for professional development on abolitionist teaching. Further support for a structure grounded in TLT can be found in Van den Berg's 2017

study that specifically sought to understand how pre-service teachers implemented pedagogical practices learned in professional development. Ultimately Van den Berg (2017) stressed effective professional development is not defined by selecting the best materials, but rather by giving priority consideration to ensuring the meeting intellectually engages participants. Thus, constructivist methods and asset-based practices, as supported by the literature, indicate seminar-style discussions and intentional time for teachers to guide the flow of the discussion will yield a more successful and effective professional development experience.

After grappling with the more theoretical questions that surround professional development curriculum construction, more tactile and logistical questions arise. In 2001, a national sample of STEM teachers was used to investigate effective professional development components in programs focusing on equity. Garet et al. (2001) found active learning activities and group discussions, or debriefs of those activities, were particularly effective. Similarly, Timmons-Brown and Warner (2016) also found through their longitudinal, mixed methods study of participants who attended a conference on equity in Maryland, that networking and active learning were effective. Participants not only appreciated the opportunity to discuss challenging issues, but also generally learned from each other and built their vocabulary and frame of reference for work around CRP. Another instructional component that emerged as effective is the use of instructional videos to develop culturally relevant practices. A study of a cohort of teachers in Brooklyn yielded data demonstrating the efficacy of using instructional videos to develop skill but also to use data for reflection (Fullam, 2017). The study was centered around asset-based learning. Teachers watched videos of other teachers who were already implementing culturally responsive practices and then created their own videos and debriefed with peers. The

use of video was both engaging and prudent, and, by the end of the study, there was a bank of videos that could be used to train other staff as well.

A 2020 study conducted a literature review on over 500 articles that investigated equity focused on professional development for science teachers (Bancroft & Nyirenda, 2020). There were several findings and recommendations that surfaced, related specifically to developing equity-focused science teachers. Some conclusions were applicable to general professional development practices. Bancroft and Nyirenda (2020) suggested professional development curriculum should include follow-up sessions and operate longer than the standard 1-day schedule to which many schools currently adhere to. Teachers experienced a higher capacity for implementation and learning when there were multiple sessions and follow-up from professional development facilitators.

Toward an Abolitionist Teaching Professional Development

The literature on effective professional development, specifically for improving culturally responsive teaching practices, has significant implications for developing an Abolitionist Teaching PD. A survey of best practices in professional development in general and with a particular focus on CRP, yielded important data for curriculum developers and creators of professional development content. From an andragogical standpoint, starting with a framework that is asset-based is critical for teachers. Professional development must be crafted intentionally and include follow-p, not just one exposure to the material. Effective professional development is also structured around dialogue and discussion. Leveraging existing structures that have demonstrated efficacy with white teachers is essential. For example, dialogue, collaborative learning, and reflection (Avalos, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; LaCroix & Kuehl, 2019).

Despite countless studies and projects devoted to developing culturally responsive teachers, the so-called achievement gap persists. Abolitionist teaching as a concept is new, but its foundations are in culturally relevant pedagogy (Love, 2019). Because there is not yet literature on the efficacy of professional development and curriculum construction for abolitionist teaching, this study not only addresses a large gap in the literature, but also needed to draw on existing literature that outlined practices for similar pedagogical approaches like CRP.

Abolitionist teaching is the latest articulation in a long line of pedagogical theories that seek to inform instructional practices. Abolitionist teaching practices have the power to meet this moment in history, where the education system is reflecting some of the most tragic and systemic inequities seen in other institutions in this country. Abolitionist teaching requires teachers to not only adopt different mindsets around their students and the education system, but also translate that new learning into their daily teaching practices. Abolitionist teaching unfortunately inherits the same challenges of its predecessors: how do we ensure teachers implement these best practices? The literature would suggest a framework that meets the unique needs of adult learners and allows for not only learning, but transformation, could prove effective. This study begins to develop, synthesize, and test a curriculum that facilitates the acquisition of abolitionist teaching practices and helps teachers translate those practices into action. This not only fills a gap in the literature of abolitionist teaching, but also paves a path for teachers looking to become abolitionist practitioners.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to develop, implement, and test a professional development (PD) curriculum that supports white in-service teachers in their growth and transformation into abolitionist teachers. TLT suggests effective adult learning must include autonomy, reflection, and opportunities for collective learning and processing (Mezirow, 1978). The current study used TLT to help teachers become abolitionist practitioners. Abolitionist teaching is a specific subset of asset pedagogies. It builds on other frameworks like culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) that center social-political awareness, cultural competence, and academic success and adds advocacy and a commitment to dismantling white supremacy in education (Love, 2019). TLT is uniquely qualified to facilitate this transformation in teachers because it goes past giving teachers tools or frameworks, it seeks to also change worldviews, perceptions, and behaviors (Mezirow, 1978).

The PD took place over six sessions, grounded in the tenets of TLT. The contents were derived from the work of scholars and materials on asset pedagogies including abolitionist teaching, ethnic studies pedagogy, CRP, and CSP. The project sought to not only facilitate the transformation of teachers into abolitionist practitioners, but also investigate the efficacy of different components of professional developments such as affinity groups, reflection, and participant-led discussions. Teachers completed a readiness survey, submitted notes taken during the course, and participated in a focus group to gather data and answer the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. What impact does professional development, grounded in transformative learning, have on white teachers' ability to develop antiracist teaching practices?
2. What impact does a professional development grounded in transformative learning have on white teachers' ability to develop an abolitionist mindset?

Context

The context during which this study took place had significant implications for the work and the data. Teachers were asked to participate in the professional development sequence during a global pandemic. The COVID-19 global pandemic (BBC News Staff, 2020) resulted in many schools moving completely or partially to virtual instruction, meaning many teachers were working from for home during some, if not the entire school day. A reliance on video conferencing platforms emerged due to the pandemic and "Zoom Fatigue" and the general emotional toll of living through a global pandemic certainly impacted the teachers' experience and the overall structure of the study. Ideally, the professional development sessions would have been in person which would also help to create an intimate setting and help participants build trust. Because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the sessions were held entirely via Zoom.

In addition to COVID-19, and although racial injustice has existed in this country for centuries, a recent surge in awareness around police brutality and structural racism has culminated in what was dubbed the biggest social justice movement in history (Buchanan & Bui, 2020). Although the catalyst was the criminal justice system, it caused questions about other institutions as well. Although CRP has been a practice and consideration for several decades, the social-political context of the awakening to racial justice created a renewed critique of

institutionalized racism in education. The demographic mismatch between students and teachers, the "achievement" gap between Black and Brown students and white students, and disproportionate discipline rates are all symptoms of a system that was founded on racial injustice (Education for Liberation Network, 2021). As such, the project occurred during a time where teachers may be more aware of and interested in learning antiracist and abolitionist practices. This awareness however aligns with the sequencing of TLT. The surge of awareness served as the "Disorienting Dilemma" or the initial event which led teachers to seek out new learning in the first place (Mezirow, 1978).

Overview of Curriculum and Project

The professional development consisted of six 1-hour-long sessions via Zoom. The scope and sequence of the sessions was based on TLT (Mezirow, 1978). The sessions included critical dialogue and analysis centered on *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Love (2019). Other supporting works that participants engaged with were *Cultivating Genius* by Muhammad (2020), *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Hammond (2015), several other sources including podcasts, webinars, and scholarly articles under the umbrella of asset pedagogy. Along with discourse and reflection on the central text, participants also explored ways of implementing abolitionist teaching practices in the classroom and built a community with each other. Reading guides and other activities supplemented the sessions. Through theory, reflection, and action, participants were guided through a professional development experience intended to equip them with the skills to become abolitionist practitioners.

Sessions

The literature repeatedly recommended professional development as continued learning instead of an isolated event (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This requires follow-up sessions. As such, the sessions were semi structured and centered around the 10 stages of TLT (Mezirow, 1978). The sessions allowed for ample reflection and autonomy for participants, a best practice in professional development according to the literature (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Mezirow, 1978). The sessions followed a general structure of theory, reflection, and action. Participants were exposed to the theoretical material, content, or framework, then reflect and process the material as a group. Sessions concluded by exploring the implications the new learning had for their teaching practice. The course moved through the 10 stages of TLT and the central text, summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Antiracist Professional Development Course Curriculum

Session number		Theory stage	Pre-readings & activities	In-class activities	HW
1.	Intro to abolitionist teaching	TLT 1, 2	Chapters 1–2 text Reading guide 1	Icebreaker – Getting to know you Free write Discussion	Read Chap. 3 Complete Reading Guide 2
2.	Creating the container	TLT 3, 4, 5	Chap. 3 Reading guide *Listen:* "Teaching to Thrive" podcast (Love, 2021-present)	Free write Ready for rigor Framework (Hammond, 2015) Excerpts from warm demander pedagogy (Ware, 2006) Discussion	Read Chap. 4 Reading Guide 3
3.	Centering Black and Brown students	TLT 5,6,7	Chap. 4 *Listen:* Abolitionist Teaching & the Future of Our Schools	Free write Excerpts from (Paris & Alim, 2017) Discussion	Read chapters 5 & 6 Reading guide 4
4.	Frameworks for the work	TLT 5, 6, 7	Chaps. 5 & 6	Free write Excerpts from *Cultivating Genius* (Muhammad, 2019) How to be an antiracist educator (Simmons, 2019) Discussion	Read chapter 7 Reading guide 5
5.	Pulling it all together	TLT 8, 9, 10	Chap. 6	Free write Antiracist teaching standards discussion	
6.	Focus group		None	Postsurvey Final focus group Goodbyes!	

Note. Adapted from *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, by Z. Hammond, 2015. Corwin, copyright 2015 by Corwin; *We Want to do More Than Survive*, by B. Love, 2019. Beacon, copyright 2019 by Beacon; *Cultivating Genius,* by G. Muhammad, 2019, Scholastic, copyright 2019 by Scholastic; *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies* by D. Paris and H. Alim, 2014. Teacher College Press, copyright 2014 by Teacher College Press; "How to be Anti-racist," by D. Simmons, 2019, *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Design,* https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/how-to-be-an-antiracist-educator?fbclid=IwAR1tsIowEXRl-D6K64ZU3ej8bBcGT0OuRJFr4yENJu8A0kwbAMwGhsbtJec, copyright 2019 by Association for Supervision and Curriculum Design; and "Warm Demander Pedagogy," by F. Ware, 2006, *Urban Education, 41*(4), https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085906289710, copyright 2006 by SAGE Journals.

Despite the flexible nature of the course, sessions were all grounded in one central text: *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Love (2019). Love (2019) served as the central and foundational text because it is so far the most comprehensive text on abolitionist teaching. Participants read the book throughout the sessions and completed companion "reading guides" (see Appendix A). These guides served both as thought catchers for participants, but also created more opportunities for reflection and planning, which was helpful considering the relatively short timeline of the program. Other texts from the field of asset pedagogy were incorporated to correspond with different stages of TLT. In Session 2, teachers explored the "Warm Demander Chart" adapted from "Warm demander pedagogy: Culturally responsive teaching that supports a culture of achievement for African American Students" (Ware, 2006). Participants reflected on the "Ready for Rigor" framework as a part of Session 2 as well. "What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward" (Paris & Alim, 2017) was used in Session 3. During Session 5, participants focused on strategies they could apply in their classrooms. Although abolitionist teaching intentionally avoids tricks or gimmicks, it has been repeatedly suggested that teachers respond well to professional developments that clearly translates the learning into actionable steps (Baggett & Simmons, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Garet et al., 2001). There was a significant amount of processing and reading required during this course. To allow ample processing time, participants started each session with a 10-minute free write. Participants simply responded to the prompt "What resonated with you from the reading? What information are you struggling with?" as a processing question.

Sessions were recorded and reading guides were collected from participants. During the opening session, participants participated in community building activities to foster a sense of

trust within the group (see Appendix B). Team-building activities allowed participants to reflect on their own biases, assumptions, and root beliefs. The activities were intentionally cultivated and selected to ensure participants were comfortable and able to be honest and vulnerable with each other. During the final session, participants completed their surveys (see Appendix C) and participated in the closing focus group (see Appendix D).

Recruitment

To recruit teachers, a variety of methods were employed including snowball sampling through a convenience sample of principals and other leaders in education, who were contacted and asked to share information with teachers. Participants were also contacted through local teacher networking groups and social media. Local groups like AWARE-LA (AWARE-LA, 2019) and The People's Education Movement (The People's Education Movement, 2022), were used as recruitment pools. Recruitment during COVID-19 brought unique challenges. From these recruitment efforts, more than 20 teachers expressed interested in participating. One potential participant was not eligible for the study because they were not a classroom teacher. Other interested parties were ultimately not able to join the study due to the time commitment. Participants were hesitant to agree to join the study because additional strain during remote learning was placed on teachers and they wanted to fully commit to the course and engage deeply. However, the surge of awareness around the long history of institutional racism in the United States was a motivating factor for teachers to ultimately decide to participate.

A total of five participants ultimately signed up for the study and completed all six sessions. As part of the sign-up process, teachers were asked introduction questions about their demographics to ensure they met the criteria for the study, but they were also asked "why do you

want to participant in this professional development?" This question offered insight into their preparedness to engage in this work and served as an opportunity to gauge commitment. The course was 6 weeks; therefore, ensuring that there was minimal attrition was a priority. The scope of the course and the level of commitment necessary were clearly and repeatedly communicated to participants before they were enrolled to ensure participants who initially joined the study persisted through the 6 weeks.

Participants

Participants in the course were all white-identifying, in-service teachers in California. All participants identified as women and worked in public charter schools. These commonalities allowed for a strong affinity space where participants could share freely. The study specifically investigated the capacity of white teachers to adopt abolitionist practices. The gender of participants was not a controlled factor; however, all participants able and eligible to participate were women. Although being female was not a condition of the study, there is an overrepresentation of female teachers in the field of education (UNCF, 2018). Thus, it was not unusual for participants in this study to be predominately female. Each teacher worked in charter schools and was the lead teacher in their classrooms. The study was open to educators in a wide variety of classroom contexts, both classroom and single subject teachers participated. The variety of contexts was an intentional way to shed light of the distinct challenges that different grade levels may face in their journey to implement antiracist practices.

A total of five white females participated in all six of the course sessions (see Table 1). There were quite a few other similarities across participants, including all participants recalled growing up in predominantly white environments. Each participant was to some extent

motivated to participate due to the heightened awareness around racial injustice in the wake of the social justice movement that followed the murder of George Floyd in 2020 (Buchanan & Bui, 2020). All the women described a similar journey toward developing a critical consciousness and their own racial identity.

Table 1

Participant Profile

	No. of years teaching	Grade level	Race/ethnicity	Gender
Rachel	1	MS	White	Female
Janice	9	MS	White	Female
Emily	15+	MS	White	Female
Karen	15+	HS	White	Female
Susie	15+	Kindergarten	White	Female

Research Procedures

The research study used a pre–post design, gathering data before and after participation in the 6-week PD. The surveys were sent via email using the Qualtrics software. Participants received the readiness survey in advance of the first session. Participants had 2 weeks to complete the survey. At the end of the PD, artifacts were collected that included session materials such as the reading guides that were completed during the 6-week course. An ending survey was also made available to participants following the completion of the course. The post-survey gathered quantitative data to complement the data gathered in the focus group and artifacts from the sessions. The survey measured the abolitionist teaching behaviors that teachers developed during the course. In the last session, participants engaged in a focus group and took the post-survey independently. The survey contributed to further understanding of what makes professional development in abolitionist teaching effective and how much impact professional development has on teacher behaviors and beliefs. The focus group and artifact data contributed

to understanding the metacognitive process that teachers work through as they go through stages of TLT and build abolitionist teaching consciousness.

Surveys

Demographics

Participants took an entry survey before the course began. A demographics form (see Appendix E) was included and asked questions like how many years of teaching experience participants had at the time of the study, what grade and subjects they taught, their racial and ethnic background, and information about where they taught and some information about their school. Participants were also asked if they had participated in any antiracist PD recently. The form was part of the readiness survey participants took at the beginning of the course.

Readiness

The readiness survey (see Appendix E) measured participants' readiness to begin the work of abolitionist teaching. The survey was adapted from a readiness survey called the Cultural Responsiveness Readiness Scale (Ozudogru, 2018). The purpose of the survey was to measure participants' readiness to participate in culturally relevant teacher training, which is another asset pedagogy, meaning the survey could also be applied to abolitionist teaching. The adaptations were necessary because the survey was originally given to Turkish teachers, meaning that some of the questions were specific to Turkish students (see Appendix E). Other adjustments in syntax or wording were also made to prevent pretest interaction. There were two domains in the survey, (a) Professional Readiness, and (b) Personal Readiness. For example, items measuring participants' readiness include: "I am ready to teach in a class where there is cultural diversity" (Personal Readiness); "I think that students should be encouraged to give examples

specific to their own culture during the course of lessons" (Personal Readiness); and "I have taken courses on cultural diversity" (Professional Readiness). These were measured on a 4-point Likert scale from "not at all" to "very comfortable."

Social Justice Behaviors

A modified version of Social Justice Behavior Scale (Flood, 2019) was used as an exit survey for participants (see Appendix C). This allowed participants to also reflect on the efficacy of the course in developing these behaviors. The survey was created to assess social justice behaviors for principals and was developed through an extensive literature review followed by analysis using the Delphi Technique. The scale was developed among a sample of public-school leaders and the reliability of the categories ranged from .872 to .916. The survey created by Flood (2019) measured three domains: (a) self-focused, (b) school-specific, and (c) community engagement. These domains were particularly well suited to the scope of this study and were measured along a 5-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Because the survey was originally created for school leaders, items were modified for the teacher sample. Self-focused behaviors measured the mindset shifts that need to occur for our teachers. Some items in the self-focused behaviors included: (a) "I work to develop a reflective consciousness," and, (b) "I reflect on my own identity and bias and how it impacts my students." School-specific behaviors were used to gain insight into the daily practices of the teacher, for example: (a) "I empower BIPOC students through collaborative strategies," and (b) "I create a climate of belonging for all my students." Community engagement is a component of abolitionist teaching (Love, 2019) but is not always accounted for in other studies that focus on pedagogy. The survey selected for this study was unique in its inclusion of community engagement and captured

essential data. Some example questions included: (a) "I build trust with the community around my school," and (b) "I reflect on whether or not my school is reflecting its' community's values."

Some items from each category were modified to fit the scope of this project. For example, one item addressed the culture principals build within their staff, and this item was left out of the modified instrument. Other questions needed to be reworded to better address the context of the classroom. For example, the item "I have a vision for equity for my school" was reworded to read "I have a vision for equity in my classroom." An open-ended general feedback section was also added to the survey when participants took it at the end of the course. The purpose of this section was to provide a space for teachers to submit any feedback they had on both the course and their own professional learning.

Focus Groups

The final session of the PD course was a focus group. During the group, participants were asked to reflect on their experience of the learning materials and their development of abolitionist teaching practices. Questions sought to understand development of not only an abolitionist mindset, but also to what extent changes in mindset have led to changes in teacher behaviors (see Appendix B). The focus group served as processing time and an opportunity for teachers to be metacognitive about their own development, but also served as critical feedback on the course. Gathering feedback on what elements of the course were particularly helpful or relevant for teachers will also help to inform future iterations of the course, provide critical insight of adult learning, and contribute to the body of research on effective teacher professional development. Questions included: (a) Have you had opportunities to implement practices from

asset pedagogies (CRT, CRT-B, abolitionist teaching)? If so, what barriers did you experience?, (b) What experiences during this course were the most impactful in your development as an abolitionist teacher?, (c) What experiences were least impactful?, and (d) How do you see yourself using and applying what you've learned in this course to your work in the classroom? The focus group was also held over Zoom and recorded.

Analytical Plan

Focus group data were coded using a combination of inductive and deductive methods. Love (2019) did not present a rubric or criteria for abolitionist teaching; in fact, "gimmicks" and "tricks" are specifically avoided to ensure abolitionist teaching does not become yet another set of teacher tricks. Abolitionist teaching is part of a larger group of asset pedagogies, so leveraging other rubrics, in addition to the data gathered through inductive coding done through the interviews, was essential. Culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant teaching (CRT) present frameworks and rubrics that describe some elements of abolitionist teaching practice. These tools were coded frequency of abolitionist teaching behaviors. For example, Ladson-Billings (1994) established three essential tenets–academic achievement, cultural competence, and social-political awareness–to describe CRP, which were categories used in coding. Hammond (2015) presented the ideas of awareness, learning partnerships, information processing, and establishing a community of learners, which describe CRT.

Inductive coding was used to explore the teachers' experience of both the transformative learning trajectory and developing into abolitionist practitioners. Inductive coding methods were also used to gather data and information on emergent themes throughout the process with teachers as well. The artifact data included the reading guides, any artifacts and materials

completed during the course, and the open-ended feedback included in the exit survey. These data were analyzed using the same deductive and inductive methods used to code the focus group data, leaning on both CRT and CRP.

Survey data were analyzed descriptively to better understand participants' readiness, mindsets, and ability to engage in abolitionist teaching practices. Specifically, participants' readiness to engage in the course was assessed prior to the professional development. Participants' mindsets and abilities to engage in abolitionist teaching practices was measured after the professional development along with satisfaction indicators about the course.

Limitations

There were several limitations that were considered in this study. Data were exclusively self-reported, which was a limitation, and the fact that the questions were race related may have made participants even more sensitive. The sample size of this study was small and the course was only six sessions. The research suggests developing asset pedagogies requires continuous development and learning; as such, this study was only seeking to guide teachers through the initial learning but recognizes there will be further work to do. There was also a possibility that other learning and experiences interacted with the treatment. This was one of the first studies that sought to understand the development of abolitionist teaching practices in white teachers, meaning there was not significant research to build on for this study. Much of the course was developed from work done with other asset pedagogies. This study and course are in the iterative phase, meaning that findings may not need to be initially generalizable to still yield value in understanding whether intentional reading of texts and participation in a group series work to shift teacher mindsets and behaviors.

Conclusion

This study sought to add to the budding field of abolitionist teaching and contribute to the understanding of professional development. Intentionally studying white teachers provided an opportunity to gain insight into how white teachers can be developed into abolitionist practitioners. This is essential because of the overrepresentation of white teachers in field of education. Additionally, developing a deeper understanding of what effective professional development learning that leads to a change in behaviors and mindset will move the field of professional development forward. An understanding of how to develop teachers in asset pedagogies and change mindsets and behaviors could provide significant benefits for student outcomes and contribute to the work of ending educational injustice.

CHAPTER 4

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE

Background

This chapter provides a rich description of the professional development program, including a review of the theoretical underpinnings for creating the professional development program on abolitionist teaching. This section also provides an overview of the curriculum included in the professional development for each night of the 6-week program. A detailed description of each week's structure, content, thematic discussion, and takeaways are provided. Finally, this chapter concludes with a review of my approach to designing the professional development, including a review of my own positionality and approach as a facilitator of professional development.

The purpose of this study was to create an abolitionist teaching professional development course and explore the efficacy of this professional development on shifting teachers' mindsets, as well as their ability to adopt antiracist and abolitionist teaching practices. The study sought primarily to understand the transformation process necessary for white teachers to develop an abolitionist pedagogy. Abolitionist pedagogical shifts require teachers to approach their teaching practice differently and engage with their students from an asset-based lens. Abolitionist teaching cannot be synthesized into a list of "tips and tricks." In fact, it decidedly avoids prescribing specific "teacher moves" because the nature of the work requires a deeper understanding of the structures that inform educational inequity. The nature of the practice requires teachers to change their behaviors and their mindsets. Their actions must be informed by a mindset that is rooted in abolitionist teaching and antiracism.

The purpose was not just to create a professional development course, but to also gather insight into what effective professional development in asset pedagogies may look like. Different aspects and elements of professional development were examined to better discern the components of effective practices. Ultimately, the course became a 6-week professional development. Meetings were 1-hour long and occurred via Zoom. The course was centered around the text, *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Love (2019), but also engaged other texts in asset pedagogy and included other media like webinars and podcasts. The course was designed to incorporate the stages of transformational learning theory (TLT; Mezirow, 1978).

Professional Development Description

Theoretical Underpinnings for Professional Development

Abolitionist teaching is one of the later iterations of asset pedagogies and is found in the same ideological family as CRP and ethnic studies pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014). Love (2019), a prominent scholar in abolitionist teaching, explained that abolitionist teaching very much draws from its predecessors, but incorporates a specific and intentional focus on dismantling white supremacy and other systems of oppression in education. For Love, the baseline for abolitionist teachers is cultural responsiveness, implementing strategies that view their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds as assets. Abolitionist teachers strive to incorporate joy and ensure curricular materials represent their students and their stories. Abolition goes past the classroom, perhaps the significant distinction between abolitionist teaching and its predecessors is the explicit focus on dismantling systemic racism in education. Abolitionist teaching pushes teachers to consider more than just their classrooms, but the broader social and structural implications of oppression (Love, 2019). To

develop the mindset shifts and fundamental understandings required of a shift this comprehensive, a theoretical framework that supported not only learning but the transformation was required.

Mezirow's (1978) TLT is an appropriate theoretical framework to provide a foundation for developing a professional development course for adult learners. Mezirow's theory takes participants through multiple stages of learning. It is a constructivist framework, leaning heavily on reflection and critical dialogue. In Mezirow's theory, learners are taken through 10 stages of learning on their journey. In Stage 1, the learner is met with a disorienting dilemma that makes them question their worldview. In the current study, this is the surge of awareness and conversation around systemic racism following the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. Stage 2 is self-examination, where the learner begins to reflect on their own areas of growth. Stage 3 is a sense of alienation, typically from a community that socialized the learner into the previously held worldviews. In Stage 4, the learner finds a new community and relates to others grappling with the same experience. Stage 5 involves the learner exploring new options and new behaviors. In Stages 6 and 7, the learner is building new confidence in their new behaviors and planning a course of action. In Stages 8 and 9, the learner gains further knowledge to implement the new plans and begins to experiment with their new role. The last stage is reintegration, with their new learning and skills the learner steps back into their old context.

The 6-week professional development program aligned to the 10 stages of TLT and was crafted after extensive research into effective professional development for adults. Scholars like Darling-Hammond (2017) have contributed significantly to the body of knowledge about effective professional development in education. Across the literature on effective professional

development, it is clear that learners must participate in the learning, meaning the transactional banking model where the instructor holds all the knowledge, and the learner is solely a recipient, is ineffective (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This suggested a theory like TNT, which is constructivist in nature, was well suited to the course. Other best practices highlighted in research on effective professional development include opportunities for group discourse, reflection and continued exposure to the materials (Gay & Howard, 2000; Hammond, 2015; Howard, (2001); Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). These characteristics of effective professional development were considered in the creation of this 6-week program. The course moved through the 10 stages of TLT and the central text (see Figure 1).

Figure 2

Antiracist Professional Development Course Curriculum

Session Number	Theory Stage	Pre-Readings and Activities	In-Class Activities	HW
#1 Intro to Abolitionist Teaching	TLT 1, 2	Chapter 1-2 Text Reading Guide 1	Ice Breaker – Getting to know you Free Write Discussion	Read Chapter 3 Complete Reading Guide 2
#2 Creating the Container	TLT 3, 4, 5	Chapter 3 Reading Guide *Listen:* "Teaching to Thrive" Podcast (Love, 2021-present)	Free Write Ready for Rigor Framework (Hammond, 2015) Excerpts from Warm Demander Pedagogy (Ware, 2006) Discussion	Read Chapter 4 Reading Guide 3
#3 Centering Black and Brown Students	TLT 5, 6, 7	Chapter 4 *Listen:* Abolitionist Teaching and the Future of Our Schools	Free Write Excerpts from (Paris & Alim, 2017) Discussion	Read Chapters 5 and 6 Reading Guide 4
#4 Frameworks for the Work	TLT 5, 6, 7	Chapters 5 and 6	Free Write Excerpts from *Cultivating Genius* (Muhammad, 2019) How to be an antiracist educator (Simmons, 2019) Discussion	Read Chapter 7 Reading Guide 5
#5 Pulling It All Together	TLT 8, 9, 10	Chapter 6	Free Write Antiracist Teaching Standards Discussion	
#6 Focus Group		None	Post Survey Final Focus Group Goodbyes!	

Note. Adapted from *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, by Z. Hammond, 2015. Corwin, copyright 2015 by Corwin; *We Want to do More Than Survive*, by B. Love, 2019. Beacon, copyright Beacon; *Cultivating Genius,* by G. Muhammad, 2019. Scholastic, copyright 2019 by Scholastic; *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies* by D. Paris and H. Alim, 2014. Teacher College Press, copyright 2014 by Teacher College Press; "How to be anti-racist," by D. Simmons, 2019, *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Design.* https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/how-to-be-an-antiracist-educator?fbclid=IwAR1tsIowEXRl-D6K64ZU3ej8bBcGT0OuRJFr4yENJu8A0kwbAMwGhsbtJec; copyright 2019 by Association for Supervision and Curriculum Design, and "Warm Demander Pedagogy," by F. Ware, 2006, *Urban Education, 41*(4), https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085906289710, copyright 2006 by SAGE Journals.

Curricular Materials

Although the central focus of the training was on the text, *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Love (2019), other prominent scholars in the asset pedagogy space, including

Muhammad (2020), Jewell (2020), Hammond (2015), and Paris (2017) were all introduced to participants. Supplemental materials served several purposes. First, the course was open to teachers K–12, meaning participants had a wide variety of developmental stages and experiences to consider. Second, Love's work in 2019 is comprehensive but does not delve deep into quotidian experiences teachers may encounter, such as classroom management, literacy, language acquisition, and navigating state standards. Thus, the professional development program included a foundational text and several supplemental materials.

In addition to the central text, participants engaged with four additional books, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Hammond (2015), *Cultivating Genius* by Muhammad (2020), *This Book Is Anti-Racist* by Jewell (2020), and *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies* by Paris and Alim (2017). *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* gives the reader a more tactile approach to asset pedagogies in the classroom. Hammond (2015) presented the "Ready for Rigor" framework which helps teachers conceptualize what a culturally responsive classroom could look like. Hammond primarily focused on building on students' funds of knowledge and creating access points in the curriculum for student who are linguistically or culturally diverse (Hammond, 2015). Hammond's text paired well with Love (2019) because it provided some of the easily digestible tips and tricks Love (2019) did not include. Participants primarily engaged with this text in the third and fifth sessions. The "Ready for Rigor" framework was given as homework initially and then participants discussed how it could be implemented in their classrooms. The teachers were generally excited about the work and offered several suggestions for implementation. In our last session during the "next steps" planning, teachers again reviewed the framework and theorized how it may work well with the social justice standards.

Cultivating Genius by Muhammad (2020) provided participants with another framework, but was specifically focused on historically and culturally responsive literacy. Muhammad gave the reader four tenets to attend to during lesson planning: (a) identity, (b) skill-building, (c) intellect, and (d) criticality. This framework is specifically geared toward classroom teachers and is meant to be used as a lesson structure (Muhammad, 2020). Participants reviewed the framework for homework and then participated in a discussion during Session 5. Again, the focus was on investigating how the framework might work in tandem with the curriculum and materials that teachers were already using. Love (2019) and Muhammad's (2020) work are often cited together and complement each other. Participants used the framework to further conceptualize what abolitionist teaching in practice could look like.

Abolitionist teachers must understand antiracism on a personal level (Love, 2019). Jewell's *This Book Is Anti-Racist* (2020) is not only focused on education but instead offered an overview of systemic racism and systems of oppression in multiple institutions and throughout history. The book also offered reflective exercises and can be read as a kind of journal (Jewell, 2020). The book supported participants in their journey to build context and some historical background about systemic racism and oppression in the country. Participants read sections of the book throughout the course and specifically used the data and concise but thorough definitions and explanations as a common starting point throughout the session discussions.

In *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies,* Paris and Alim (2017) pushed readers to explore past simply finding ways to make a curriculum designed for white learners work for students of color. Instead, they argued the curriculum should sustain the exciting linguistic and cultural traditions of the student learners. For Paris and Alim, pedagogical practices that simply create

access points students of color in a white curriculum do not decenter whiteness. Instead, students' cultural and linguistic traditions should have a space in their academic experience. Ideally, students will even learn to lovingly critique the problematic elements of their cultures and lead the work make them more inclusive (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Professional Development Structure

The structure of the professional development program included weekly meetings for a total of 6 weeks. All meetings were held on Tuesday nights for 1 hour over Zoom. Prior to each session, participants read the assigned chapter of *We Want to Do More Than Survive* (Love, 2019) and reviewed the supplementary materials. For example, the supplemental material invited participants to listen to a podcast that featured Love as a host (Love, 2021-present). The hour was tightly packed, consisting of an opening free-write, followed by a directed review of the material, which often included supplemental material review, and then ended with processing discussion time. The first and last sessions were structured slightly differently. The first session included a welcome and introduction to the content and to each other, with an intentional community-building activity. Participants were asked to engage in a reflection activity. Participants created an imaginary house and each component of the house was related to some aspect of their identity. For example, the foundation of the house was their values. On the last night, there was an intentional conclusion to the professional development program. Participants were invited to share their concluding thoughts on the material and feedback on the program. We closed with feedback and next steps. Participants were given a chance to explain and expand upon concepts or thoughts they had shared in the closing survey.

Other than the first and last sessions, each session opened with a free-write about the assigned reading. Participants answered the same questions: (a) “What resonated with you from the reading?” and (b) “And what are you still struggling with?” The intention of the free-write was to capture the unfiltered thoughts and the metacognitive process teachers were experiencing while also grounding participants in the content for the next hour. Participants agreed the readings were complex, thought provoking, and dense; thus, allowing time for participants to process the readings via the free-write was helpful in that it provided time to process and articulate their thoughts before being called on to share. The free-write was scheduled for 5 minutes, after which participants were invited to share their thoughts and reflections. Sharing out was never mandatory, but on each night, everyone shared. The process of writing and sharing would sometimes last up to a quarter of the class time. While they were reading, participants were also given reading guides highlighting essential questions from the text and providing space for participants to write their notes and thoughts as they read. This helped participants during the discussion so they could easily reference their thoughts.

After the free write, students were invited to link their thoughts to the supplemental materials, if they had not naturally done so in the share out session after the free write. The supplemental materials included the additional articles, podcasts, webinars, or book chapters that supported the learning. Depending on how the material resonated, some nights there was a fruitful discussion focused on the supplemental materials, other nights we focused on the reading only. True to the constructivist paradigm, participants led the process of learning, thus creating flexibility from session to session. Across all sessions, scaffolded support was offered so that participants could unpack the reading, heavily relying on prompts and questions from the reading

guides to guide the conversation. Conversations were organic and flowed easily from one prompt to the next.

After engaging with the supplemental materials, the session moved toward closing. To conclude each session, participants had time to ask questions, respond to each other and share any lingering thoughts that they had about the material. Each session ended with reviewing the homework and answering follow-up questions. Finally, to assess the effectiveness of each night, participants were asked to share their reflections on the process and materials for each session.

Week 1: Community Building

The literature is clear that trust must be established early and clearly for professional developments to work. This is especially critical for professional development that aims to shift mindsets about teaching. Thus, the first meeting was dedicated to this task. Additionally, it was particularly critical to developing a sense of community because the course was held over Zoom. In an ideal scenario, the meeting would have been in person, complete with snacks and other gestures to help participants feel comfortable. The COVID-19 global pandemic made this impossible, so additional time at the first session was budgeted to compensate for the lack of in-person connection. Participants opened by sharing a little bit about themselves. The question was simple: “Please share what you teach, where, and why you decided to participate in the study?” The open-ended question about why folks decided to participate ended up being extremely helpful to the bonding process.

Group Norms. After getting to know each other, the group co-created norms and expectations for the discussion. Because conversations can get tense when talking about difference and identity, the literature suggested setting ground rules and expectations as helpful

for navigating difficult conversations. Participants were asked to co-construct those ground rules. Outside of the typical expectations like listening to each other and assuming best intentions, the norm of "Expect Discomfort" was named by one participant and quickly agreed on. That sentiment is echoed in the reading as well; Love (2019) suggested we have to be okay with white discomfort and "sit" with our mixed feelings about injustice as opposed to running from them. The enthusiasm about the opening activities and the collective norms established set the stage for a highly engaged energy from participants for the remaining meetings.

Week 2: Social-Emotional Learning

Prior to the second night, participants were asked to read the first two chapters of *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Love (2019) and listen to a podcast (Love, 2021-present) featuring antiracist teaching scholar Dena Simmons (Jones et. al., 2020) before class. The conversation on Night 2 revolved primarily around white supremacy and systems of oppression in social-emotional learning (SEL). The catalyst was a podcast produced by the Abolitionist Teaching Network that encouraged teachers to think more critically about the way we engage with social-emotional learning (Love, 2021- present). Participants grappled with the idea that current SEL frameworks and "best practices" may serve to further promote systems of oppression in education. As Simmons (2017) wrote, SEL is white supremacy with a hug. The premise of this concept is that although SEL appears to encourage educators to focus on their students' social and emotional adjustment, these practices often reinforce dominant white ideology of acceptable behavior and emotional expression, thus oppressing people of color further.

Week 3: Freedom Dreaming

Prior to the third class, participants were asked to read Chapters 3 and 4 of Love's (2019) text. On Night 3, participants discussed similar themes to the previous nights including their confusion about where white folks fit into abolitionist work. As they reflected on the homework, and the reading, the theme of "freedom dreaming" was intriguing and exciting for participants. Love introduced this concept in *We Want to Do More Than Survive* as a solution to the current systems of oppression. Freedom dreaming is the act of understanding the current circumstances do not allow for true liberation, but despite the reality, abolitionists dream and actively invest in building a world that, within the current constraints, seems unimaginable (Love, 2019). Additionally, participants watched a webinar that was assigned for homework, focused on abolitionist teaching, but specifically covered how the COVID-19 global pandemic could be something of a reset for education (Jones et al., 2020). Thus, this webinar provided a supplement to the reading that brought the current sociopolitical context into the professional development.

Week 4: School Tensions

Prior to Night 4, participants were asked to read Chapter 5 of the text. The conversation opened with responses to the typical discussion question: What are you struggling with from the reading? The concept of charter schools was a primary focus on this night and the book offers a nuanced and critical commentary on charter schools, suggesting they perhaps perpetuate harm in the same ways as public schools. The content assigned for Night 4 also dug into the state curriculum and educational materials. Participants engaged with Muhammad's (2020) *Cultivating Genius* and discussed the tension of following state curriculum considering Muhammad's framework. In the work, Muhammad shared a framework for critical literacy that

is deeply rooted in asset-based practices. The second supplemental text participants discussed was *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy* by Paris and Alim (2017). For these scholars, teachers should do more than just respond to their students' cultures; they must also find ways to sustain cultural values and practices. Taken together, these curricular materials stimulated a rich discussion on school tensions.

Week 5: Implementation

Prior to the fifth meeting, participants were asked to read the final chapter of the book and review the previous chapters. Participants engaged with the abolitionist teaching materials and the content was specifically focused on implementation. Specifically, participants reviewed the Learning for Justice Social Justice standards (Learning for Justice, 2018) and how to implement the standards in schools to guide equity work. The Learning for Justice Social Justice standards were written and produced by the organization Learning for Justice. The standards provide four domains of social justice learning: (a) identity, (b) action, (c) diversity, and (d) justice. The standards are designed for K–12 teachers and provide grade-level appropriate social justice benchmarks for students and sample scenarios.

Week 6: Program Feedback

The last night of the professional development program was reserved for a focus group conversation to gather insight and feedback about the program. In general, participants discussed the selected text, *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Love (2019) and various components of the course. Participants also provided feedback on the supplemental materials, especially the selected podcasts and videos of webinars.

Facilitation of the Professional Development

In addition to the creation of the professional development, I also facilitated the sessions. As such, it is important to review my positionality and approach to running each of the sessions. The sessions were designed to be affinity group spaces, yet I was the facilitator and creator of the course content. To prepare for my role as the facilitator and as a Black woman navigating an all-white space, I drew on best practices I have culminated through my professional and personal experience.

Positionality

Facilitating this professional development was not my first time in an all-white space, leading conversations about race. My practice started early. I am from a predominantly white city, and I went to predominantly white schools. More frequently than not, I was the only Black person in the classroom, and sometimes I was the only person of color. For my undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees, I attended predominantly white institutions or PWIs. It was not until the last year of my doctoral program that I had a Black teacher or professor. I never avoided complicated topics like race, class, or culture, so for my own survival, I had to understand how to hold space and navigate more than 400 years of systemic racism and misogynoir. I still have

learning to do, but I frame my skills as a set of best practices that have, so far, meant I have been able to have impactful and meaningful conversations.

My personal experiences as a Black woman navigating all-white spaces have also contributed to my professional experience as a facilitator. I worked as a teacher, coach, and administrator at predominately white schools. I used professional developments, critical dialogues, and coaching frameworks to engage in conversations about race and asset pedagogies. Through this work, I supported dozens of teachers in their journey in developing asset pedagogical practices.

I have had many conversations about race that have not gone well. There were countless instances where my intention of pushing white teachers to acknowledge their blind spots, and thereby become better educators, was not well received. It is easy for white fragility and shame to creep into conversations and derail outcomes. Teachers, in general, are highly scrutinized and can be rightfully sensitive to critique. Challenges aside, I came into this project with a toolbox of facilitation skills and critical mindsets that I hoped would make radical conversations possible.

Planting Seeds

When I communicate with white people about systemic racism, I have to be okay with planting seeds. You typically are not going to change someone's mind or long-held belief in one conversation. When I work with teachers, I have to know that I can tell them, show them, or guide them to an awareness of a specific form of oppression, but the reality is, they may not fully internalize that message until days, months, or years later. I have to communicate what I know and be okay with the outcome.

When it came to the design of the professional development because I was focused on planting seeds, I had to be mindful not to create too much content. There are scholars that have studied this work for decades, concluding that it is not practical to expect to give teachers everything they need to know in a 6-week course. I had to think critically and intentionally about what would be the right amount of material, what would allow participants to reflect on systemic racism in education and learn the history, but not become overwhelmed or feel disempowered.

Show, Don't Tell

Just like with students, the way to enduring understanding is rarely through lecture. I can tell everyone that America is not a meritocracy, but that does not mean they will believe me. It does not help to simply tell someone your truth and expect a shift, even if you have facts and data. The process has to include engaging someone in a conversation. You have to dialogue, see both sides, and genuinely show that you respect where they are coming from. Showing folks something through dialogue or story will always be more effective.

"Showing" was the foundation of the course design. I started by thinking about my own experiences. I went to a Montessori school for elementary, so I am used to thinking about learning experientially. I asked, what experiences would my teachers need? How can I decenter myself as much as possible? What does it mean to be participant-led?

Tone Matters

The unfortunate truth is that if you want to get things done as a Black woman you have to subject yourself to tone policing. I do not like or enjoy it, it is not fair, but it is the reality. Passion can be too easily conflated with anger, confidence can be arrogance, conviction can be

stubbornness. When I am navigating conversations about race, I have to be just as mindful about the delivery as the content.

The overall tone of the course was something that I spent quite a bit of time and energy on. What should it feel like for participants? There were many books, podcasts, videos, and articles I used, and it was critical that the tone of the materials were approachable. I knew if teachers felt attacked, less than, or if I was too direct in problematizing whiteness, I risked them shutting off. A "sweet spot" where teachers could understand that harm has been done and they are a part of that legacy of harm, without breeding shame, was my primary goal.

Rapport Is Key

It is critical that I make the people with whom I am talking feel comfortable. There are so many messages about Black women in the media, and no matter how progressive someone is, they are playing the background when they meet me. Will I be "sassy?" "articulate?" "combative?" My first order of business was putting them at ease. I know to make jokes, add personal details, and present myself in a very palatable way. It could be described as "code-switching." Whether right or wrong, I know when I'm in a space where oppression will be discussed, it is on me to create a container where people feel safe to share.

People feeling safe to share also means people may share things that are harmful. I have been in rooms when teachers have genuinely asked why Black people cannot get over slavery, or said they feel bad because Black parents are not involved in their kids' lives, and the list goes on. When anyone shares these problematic narratives, I cash in on the rapport that I have built. I have built a relationship with the person I am talking to, which means I can be honest and direct with them. I can tell them I understand that is what they have been taught and validate their

feelings, but also call them into a conversation. In these moments, I hold Maya Angelou's words close, "When you know better, do better." It is critical the other person understands their words or actions harm people, but also they can do better and work to repair the harm they have caused.

I could not leave my identity as a Black woman at the door when I entered the space as a facilitator, and participants could not leave their identity as white women. It was critical to engage my experiences and expertise as a facilitator to ensure that, despite the racial mismatch, the conversations and professional development were productive.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Background

This chapter presents the findings from this research project. Specifically, the chapter is organized into two sections. The first section presents data from participants about their experiences with the professional development. The second section of the chapter presents the findings outlined to address the research questions that guided this study:

1. What impact does professional development, grounded in transformative learning, have on white teachers' ability to develop antiracist teaching practices?
2. What impact does a professional development grounded in transformative learning have on white teachers' ability to develop an abolitionist mindset?

The findings address how teachers' mindsets shifted along with goals for changing their teaching practices.

Participant Demographics

To situate the findings, this section begins by providing the demographics of participants to illuminate their experiences with the professional development, along with shifts in mindset and teaching practices. Course participants were all female, white identifying teachers in the Los Angeles area. Each teacher worked in charter schools and was the lead teacher in their classrooms. The recruitment process specifically called for teachers who identified as white. A total of five white women participated in all six of the course sessions, described in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Profile

	# of Years Teaching	Grade Level	Race/Ethnicity	Gender
Rachel	1	MS	White	Female
Janice	9	MS	White	Female
Emily	15+	MS	White	Female
Karen	15+	HS	White	Female
Susie	15+	Kindergarten	White	Female

Rachel was a relatively new middle school science teacher at a charter school, with only 1 year of teaching experience. She described herself as open and "go with the flow" but wanted to learn more about abolitionist practice because of troubling patterns that she saw with her students. Through her emergency credentialing program to her current school, she was continuously confronted with students who, by the time they reached her high school science classroom, had had negative experiences with schools and learning based on their race. She was motivated to join the course because often resources were catered to the humanities and as a science teacher, she felt she needed additional support.

Janice was a middle school teacher at a charter network with a history of high student achievement and highly sought-after schools with long waiting lists. Janice was familiar with equity work in education. At her school and charter network, conversations about race were not only welcomed but they were also encouraged. She brought a strong theoretical understanding to the work, but the content of abolitionist teaching specifically was new for her. She had respect for her charter school organization but saw the systemic challenges and flaws. Janice was struggling with her own role in the work, and how to reconcile the expectation that charter schools are "high performing" but also "rooted in social justice."

Emily was another seasoned teacher. Emily taught middle school math at a public school and had been teaching for more than a decade. Emily was somewhat new to asset pedagogy work. By her own admission, conversations about race, inequity, and systems of power and oppression were severely frowned upon in her upbringing. Her conservative Christian background meant she did not question or face her white identity until she was an adult. Emily was socialized into the "colorblind" narrative and was eager to learn more. Emily was in the process of strengthening her capacity to respond to equity issues and speak up. Through her own admission, she was more reserved at her school but was hoping to build capacity through this course. Participation in the widespread activism in the spring of 2020 galvanized her to make the commitment and join the class.

Karen was a high school art teacher but also worked in the nonprofit sector. Karen was, by her own assertion, the most familiar with asset pedagogies and the work. She was also pursuing a graduate degree to learn more about social justice advocacy. Karen also was involved deeply in social justice community groups and teacher advocacy groups in the Los Angeles area. Her teaching background was primarily in high school, but she was reconsidering her place in the school setting.

Susie was a kindergarten teacher at a charter school in one of the many outlying suburbs of Los Angeles. The school has existed for decades and has a record of high academic achievement. With more than 15 years in the classroom, she was considered a veteran teacher. Most of her years in education were spent in the same school community. She had deep roots at the school. She was a founding teacher, and her daughter attended the school. She also was invested deeply in the extracurricular activities of the school. Susie was also a highly involved

parent. Her role as a mother deeply informed her participation and her worldview. She was committed to raising a white child intentionally and her investment in making the world a "more equitable place" was very much grounded in actively shaping the world her daughter would inherit. Being the only kindergarten teacher and only primary teacher was a challenge at times for Susie during the course.

Readiness

In addition to demographics, teachers were given a readiness survey and all participants were asked various questions to gauge their readiness to participate in the study. Participants were asked questions in two domains, professional and personal readiness, as outlined in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

Professional Readiness of Teachers

Readiness Question	Not at all	Somewhat	Ready or comfortable	Very ready or comfortable
I'm ready to learn about abolitionist practices.	0	0	0	5
I'm ready to teach in a culturally diverse classroom.	0	0	2	3
I have taken courses on diversity.	0	0	1	4
I would enjoy learning more about working with students from different cultures.	0	0	0	5

Table 3

Personal Readiness of Teachers

Readiness Question	Not at all	Somewhat	Ready or comfortable	Very ready or comfortable
I'm comfortable discussing race-related issues	0	0	1	4
I'm comfortable with culturally responsive teaching practices.	0	0	3	2
I think that students should be encouraged to give examples specific to their culture.	0	0	0	5
I'm comfortable sharing my experiences with teachers I do not know.	0	0	1	4
I am curious about the cultural values my students have.	0	0	0	5
I enjoy interacting with culturally different people.	0	0	0	5
I'm ready to consider and value my students' cultural beliefs when guiding their learning.	0	0	0	5

As seen in Tables 2 and 3, teachers indicated they were "very ready or comfortable" in regard to curiosity and willingness to invest in antiracist work. Teachers reported strong comfortability with interacting with other cultures and their students' backgrounds. This was reflected during the course. Teachers were excited and invested in the work and eager to participate. Teachers reported the lowest comfortability with culturally responsive teaching practices. This was taken into consideration in the development of the course. The fact that teachers felt they were not yet comfortable with the actual teaching practices was a factor in designing how much of the course would be dedicated to sharing best practices.

Weekly Course Meeting Findings

Week 1: Community Building

The goal for Week 1 was to create a container, a space where folks felt comfortable to share their honest thoughts and ideas. Community building was essential because of the barriers of not being in person and having to delve deep into issues in a short amount of time.

Getting to Know Each Other. During this first night of class, the teachers shared similar thoughts, concerns, and motivations for being there. Over Zoom, the hesitation, the nervousness, and uncertainty about what to expect created a sense of community. Participants started by engaging in an "ice breaker" activity that asked them to think about their root beliefs, backgrounds, and fears. Each participant was more than willing to share, not only descriptive details like where they worked, but more meaningful insights into how they developed their consciousness around race and their identity. There were no explicit questions about white identity or intersectionality, but all participants at one time or another during their share out expressed uneasiness about their whiteness. For example, Susie opened her share with: "As a white woman, I'm struggling to find where I fit in this work." A similar sentiment about feeling uncomfortable was expressed by Karen, who stated, "So much of that, I guess, just comes from being a white woman from a conservative family." Janice mentioned, "Sometimes I'm just nervous as a white lady to talk about this." There were no time limits given during that first share out. This was intentional to allow participants to feel comfortable talking about themselves and about the content. This first discussion took a large portion of the class.

Effectiveness. In assessing the effectiveness of night one of the professional development program, participants indicated the various components were highly effective. During the final meeting, every participant specifically mentioned they thought the ice breaker contributed positively to the course structure. Feedback from participants indicated the open-ended nature of the questions contributed to a fruitful conversation that perhaps would not have been possible if there was more structure. The agency in selecting the norms was also well received. Participants seemed to be more invested in the norms, referencing them throughout later conversations,

because they were cocreated. This is in line with literature suggesting creating a safe space, in the beginning, was essential (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Although all participants alluded to feeling comfortable, two participants mentioned they felt "safe" to share in the space.

Week 2: Social–Emotional Learning

The conversation on Night 2 focused on white supremacy and systems of oppression in social-emotional learning (SEL). This served as a troubling reminder for participants, who engaged with this content in meaningful ways. For example, Karen shared learning about the ways that schools misuse trauma-informed care, which extended into a thoughtful breakdown of the text. In the chapter, Love (2019) shared reasons why reform in schools has yet to be successful. Love argues that reform does not go far enough. Decades of education reform have not delivered the results that would see more equity in student outcomes. In reform measures, the focus has been to problematize the students, and figure out a way to fill deficits in student performance as opposed to perhaps reconsidering why the standards are designed in a way that makes so many students fail (Love, 2019). Hearing many of the measures that have long been understood as the solution were, in fact, the part of the problem was disorienting for some participants. If things like SEL, trauma-informed care, and charter school reforms like "grit" and zero tolerance were not the answer, what was? During the discussion, participants shared confusion and frustration. In fact, twice the sentiment of "what can we do?" surfaced. What was the role of white women then in education? What should they be doing?

Effectiveness. The inclusion of supplemental materials was well received. The podcast discussed during Night 2 was named as an impactful tool for learning for participants in the focus group. Taking a central text and putting it in conversation with other asset pedagogies and

other scholars in the field yielded further opportunities for learning and engagement for participants. For example, Susie reflected, “I keep going back to what [Dena] said in the podcast” as she situated her own reactions. Rachel referenced the learning as well and stated, “It’s just like Dr. Love said in the podcast.” The supplemental materials served to enhance the text, assist participants with their reflections, and allow a deeper dive into SEL, which is discussed in *We Want to Do More Than Survive* (Love, 2019), but not heavily featured. According to participants, SEL was a high-interest area, so an abolitionist analysis was helpful for considering their own implementation.

Week 3: Freedom Dreaming

On the third night of the class, students reflected on the theme of “freedom dreaming” and found this concept intriguing. Freedom dreaming is the act of understanding that the current circumstances do not allow for true liberation, but despite the reality abolitionists dream and actively invest in building a world that, within the current constraints, seems unimaginable (Kelley, 2002; Love, 2019). Several participants expressed excitement about the concept, which unapologetically dares to dismantle and deconstruct the current system. A particular concern for participants that was echoed by Love in the reading was standardized testing. The teachers felt vindicated to hear standardized testing had no place in an abolitionist vision of education. “It was just so good to hear her [Love] name that,” shared Susie.

Participants reflected on a webinar that was assigned for homework and shared what resonated with them from listening. The webinar was focused not only on abolitionist teaching but specifically discussed how the COVID-19 global pandemic could be something of a reset for education (Jones, et al., 2020). As students were at home and schools had to plan to reopen,

scholars on the panel called to reimagine schools and once and for all address the systemic nature of racism. This resonated with participants, particularly that schools could be built to see Blackness and Black excellence as the model as opposed to the ingrained white supremacy on which scholars would argue schools are founded. The idea was foreign but exciting for participants. Emily shared, "I just never thought about it like that, like, Black women can be the model."

Effectiveness. Participants were engaged during the third session and expressed an appreciation for the materials, particularly the webinar on reimagining education. In future iterations of the course, it may be helpful to provide additional resources that provide context and framing for some of the literature that Love (2019) references. For example, Kelley's (2002) work on "freedom dreaming" was a foundational concept that undergirds abolitionist teaching. A deep dive into this concept by engaging other literature might have allowed participants to dive deeper into Love's text. Balancing theoretical literature, pragmatic teaching skills, and time to process the new learning proved to be a continuous challenge.

Week 4: School Tensions

Prior to Night 4, participants were asked to read Chapter 5 of the text. Both Rachel and Susie highlighted the chapter on charter schools from *We Want to Do More Than Survive* (Love, 2019) and the insight that was shared as a challenge. The book offers a nuanced and critical commentary on charter schools, suggesting they perhaps perpetuate harm in the same ways as public schools. For Rachel, it was disorienting to hear a negative take on charter schools. She shared, "I feel like we are so used to seeing LAUSD [Los Angeles Unified School District] as the problem, but like we are doing a lot of the same things." The critique also challenged Susie, who

reflected, “I had to put it down and like, really think about that.” Charter schools sometimes position themselves as the solution to educational inequities, but Love’s (2019) take pushes the reader to reconsider that perspective with both data and narrative. Love wrote that charter schools have been used to syphon public funds away from public schools and become de facto segregated. Charters can be highly regarded even though less than half of charter schools outperform their local district competitors. Because of their relatively autonomy, charters push out Black students and redirect them to their underfunded district schools. Love specifically highlighted practices like zero tolerance policies and character development as problematic because they are steeped in white supremacy culture (Love, 2019). All participants were charter schoolteachers, so this topic was of high interest to them. Susie shared, “Honestly, I was hurt at first because we worked so hard for this, we fought for this school, and we believe in it and [Love] is saying that it was all for nothing.” This was an emotional conversation for participants, but it was a meaningful step in their learning process. Janice added, “I decided I had to just sort of, sit, sit with those hard feelings and realize that I’m being defensive and I need to just listen.”

The content assigned for Night 4 also dug into the state curriculum and participants engaged with Muhammad’s (2020) *Cultivating Genius*, which discussed the tension of following state curriculum if adopting a framework for critical literacy rooted in asset-based practices. Many participants were already familiar with this work and were excited to take a deeper dive calling the book a “game-changer.” During the discussion, participants strategized ways to implement the framework while grappling with tensions related to teachers being contracted to follow a scripted curriculum. A few participants shared they craft their own curriculum and were excited to incorporate some of what they learned in the text.

The second supplemental text participants discussed was *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy* (Paris & Alim, 2017). For these scholars, teachers should do more than just respond to their students' cultures; they must also find ways to sustain cultural values and practices. Rachel shared, "It's hard because we still have to teach the standards." Abiding by state standards and schoolwide expectations was the primary concern for teachers. Karen shared, "Parents want you to be teaching the standards" meaning not only did teachers have to grapple with following the standards and getting the blessing of school leaders, but they also had to deal with parents and families who may not be open to non-standards aligned materials

Effectiveness. Feedback from participants referenced some of the supporting materials as helpful components of the course. In future iterations, holding space for charter school teachers may be effective, depending on the composition of participants in the group. The emotional reaction to the critique of charter schools was disorienting for the teachers because they heavily invested in the narrative that charter schools were the "good" schools. To support the learning and unlearning that has to take place around this narrative, a deeper dive into Love's (2019) comments along with some additional framing materials, may support teachers on this journey and make the conversation during the session more fruitful. Moreover, tensions around doing the work of abolitionist teaching while working within a system of state standards and mandated curriculum were unpacked. Teachers spent a significant amount of time workshopping ideas and potential solutions with each other. Many of them made commitments to continue their own learning and understanding the standards and systems better so that they were more capable of finding ways to satisfy them without being tied to the specific curricular resources that they were given.

Week 5: Implementation

Prior to the fifth meeting, participants were asked to read the final chapter of the book and review the previous chapters. Participants engaged with the abolitionist teaching materials and the content was specifically focused on implementation. Before jumping into the content, participants were interested in unpacking some of the discourse in the news at the time. During the study, celebrated gymnast Simone Biles sparked a national conversation about mental health (Kallingal, 2021). Susie, in particular, was wrestling with the framing in the media of Biles' decision to step out of the 2020 Olympics. On a national scale, we were seeing the dehumanization of Black women that was highlighted in the text. Susie shared, "I was just so angry." Other participants reported similar feelings of frustration with the negative commentary on Biles' decision. They related the anti-Blackness they saw in the response to Biles' decision to the anti-Blackness discussed in Love's 2019 work.

After linking the readings to current events, the question of implementation of abolitionist teaching was a focus for the group discussion, with a focus on the Learning for Justice Social Justice standards (Learning for Justice, 2018) and the four domains of social justice learning: (a) identity, (b) action, (c) diversity, and (d) justice. Across participants, there was support for the standards and a desire to implement them in their teaching. Susie, Rachel, and Janice all expressed the importance of having supportive school leadership to engage in these practices. Susie shared, "I'm so grateful for our principal because she really cares about this work so teachers don't have to try and do it alone." Rachel explained that if a teacher is implementing these practices without the support of the school leader, parents and families may have concerns and not support the implementation. Janice, who worked at a school that was by

her account more open to the work, suggested the standards might "hold schools accountable." Overall, participants were open and excited to identify some "next steps" for implementing abolitionist teaching practices and share ideas with each other.

Effectiveness. The literature on professional development and adult learning is clear: teachers need to see how learning is applicable to their everyday lives. The focus on implementation and action steps was well-received during this session. In future iterations of the course significant time will be reserved for application of the learning and work time to ensure teachers feel they can readily find ways to bring their learning to their students.

Week 6: Program Feedback

The last night of the professional development program was reserved for a focus group conversation to gather insight and feedback about the program. In general, participants were vocal that the selected text, *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Love (2019) was very effective in their learning process and that the reading was one of their favorite components of the course. Participants also appreciated the supplemental materials, especially the selected podcasts and videos of webinars. Hearing the frameworks and concepts from Love herself "really made [participants] get it." Participants asked for more resources and frameworks to support their learning. Participants shared several times their appreciation for the class being composed of just white women. There was less "fear that you're going to say the wrong thing" and participants said it was nice to have an affinity space to unpack these issues. In general, participants were open to even longer courses, extending past the hour, and potentially more than six sessions. "I almost feel like we need 2 hours," reflected Janice.

Overall, the primary findings of the focus group as related to the course fell into two dominant themes. First, for the course to be most effective, it should be somewhat of an affinity space. Repeatedly the women expressed having only white women lowered their feelings of shame and embarrassment. "It's so nice to just have a space of white women processing," shared Rachel "I was able to speak up more than I would in another group," reflected Susie. In future iterations of the class, it will be similarly necessary to create an affinity space so that participants are comfortable and therefore more open to learning.

The second finding was that more time and depth would be appreciated. Participants left wanting to know more and go deeper into the work. Specifically, they wanted more learning time to unpack other elements of white supremacy culture and more time to debrief in groups. The course was intentionally limited to 1 hour to be mindful of teacher capacity, but participants regularly stayed past the hour mark and suggested 2 hours would be more appropriate.

Survey Findings

In addition to providing feedback on the content of each session via the focus group, teachers also answered a series of questions about abolitionist teaching practices and mindset. The instrument was adapted from a Social Justice Behaviors survey adapted from Flood (2019). There were three domains in the survey: (a) self-focused behaviors, (b) school-specific behaviors, and (c) community engagement. The survey also included additional items to gather general feedback on the course elements and design. As seen in Table 4, findings suggest the professional development effectively supported teachers in the development of antiracist practices and an abolitionist mindset. Specifically, teachers identified Love's 2019 text as the most influential element to support their learning. All participants said the course helped them

think critically about systemic racism in education. All participants also said they learned practices they could implement in their classroom and the program pushed them to think critically about their racial identity. A critical objective of the course based on the research question was to provide opportunities to develop antiracist teaching skills and an abolitionist mindset. The data show the course helped them develop antiracist classroom practices and developed their consciousness around abolitionist mindsets.

Table 4

Satisfaction With Course Elements and Abolitionist Teaching Behaviors

Survey statements	Not at all	Somewhat	Agree	Very Much So
Course Construction				
The course reading guides helped me process the content	0	0	1	4
The text selected was impactful and sparked discussion	0	0	0	5
The group dynamic was helpful for me to process my learning and ideas	0	0	0	5
The reading guides helped me process the course content	0	1	3	1
This course increased my capacity to implement anti-racist practices	0	0	2	3
This course equipped me with skills and strategies I can use in my classroom	0	1	1	2
Self-Focused Behaviors				
The course helped me understand that privilege operates on many levels and benefits members of dominant groups	0	0	0	5
This course allowed me to reflect on the implications of systemic racism in education	0	0	0	5
This course gave me opportunities to reflect on how my own identity and bias impact my students	0	0	1	4
The course helped me develop a reflective consciousness	0	0	1	4
School Specific Behaviors				
The course helped me learn how to empower my BIPOC students with collaborative strategies	0	0	2	3
The course helped me understand how to celebrate the diverse cultures and backgrounds in my classroom	0	0	0	5
The course helped me understand how to create a climate of belonging in my classroom	0	1	2	2
Community Engagement Behaviors				
The course helped me learn ways to build trust with the community outside my school	0	1	0	4
The course helped me reflect on whether or not our school reflects our community's values	0	0	2	3
The course helped me understand how to advocate for social justice problems in my community	0	0	2	3
The course helped me understand how to access the community cultural wealth to benefit my school	0	0	1	4

As seen in Table 4, participants' favorable experience of the course was clear, aligning to the qualitative data shared in the focus group. The course was designed to support teachers with their development of an abolitionist consciousness and develop antiracist teaching practices.

Although participants shared success with those outcomes, there were also many challenges shared and roadblocks articulated that participants had to contend with along the way, elaborated below in the discussion of shifting teacher mindsets and practices. Participants responded particularly well to the assigned text and the group dynamics.

Participants reported strong data for the self-focused behaviors. This reflects the focus on "internal work" and the multitude of reflective processes that were employed during the course including the free writes, reflection time, and the reflective prompts that invited teachers to engage with the course readings. Although the course materials interrogated different facets of education, all were in some way related to teachers reflecting on racism and oppression in education and/or privilege so strong data for those particular "self-focused" behaviors in not unexpected.

Participants shared they built their capacity to "understand how to celebrate the diverse cultures and backgrounds in their classrooms" in the school specific domain. Perhaps this finding is reflecting Love's centering of "joy" in *We Want to Do More Than Survive.* A central focus of abolitionist teaching is joy and Love dedicated a significant portion of her work to understanding the importance of joy (Love, 2019). Scores indicated an area of improvement for a future iteration of the course is to help teachers understand how to build a sense of belonging in their classrooms.

The data for community engagement behaviors were more varied for participants. Each teacher was coming from a different school and local community, meaning that perhaps the recommendations and strategies from texts were applicable to some participants but not others.

The two domains that focused more on implementation, "community engagement" and "school-specific," yielded a larger range of responses from teachers. This theme was also reflected in the qualitative data. For participants, there were several mindset shifts or "self-focused" behaviors that were unpacked and addressed during the course. The variety of responses in the implementation-oriented data perhaps speaks to the logistical and systemic barriers teachers experience when attempting to implement abolitionist practices and the need for continued development in this area.

Shifting Teacher Mindsets and Practices

Exploring the impact of the professional development programs on teacher mindsets about abolitionist teaching was an essential research question for this study. Through qualitative analysis of the discussions that occurred during class time, as well as teacher reflections and the focus group, a few patterns emerged. As the teachers described their process of mindset shifts, despite their many differences, it was clear they were grappling with similar experiences in their journey to adopt abolitionist practices. Overall findings suggested teachers' shifts in their mindset toward abolitionist teaching practices moved from a perspective of being white saviors to abolitionists, teachers entered the study with different levels of familiarity with the work but had a similar process and experienced similar stages along their journey to becoming abolitionist educators.

From White Saviors to Abolitionists

"Acknowledging is cute, but then what?"—Janice

On the third night of the course, Janice expressed this sentiment. With frustration, she was reflecting on her journey toward adopting an abolitionist mindset. Initially because of her

“basically all-white” upbringing, she thought of acknowledging privilege and systemic racism as the goal for allies. It was after entering the classroom that she developed a deeper understanding of the layers of whiteness that have to be unpacked and “unlearned” to begin to rebuild an abolitionist consciousness. But this was a process. Initially, she joined an emergency credentialing program and was, through her own admission, subscribing to “white savior” narratives. There were two other participants who were also Teach for America alumni, who had similar experiences. Susie talked about “cringing” at some of the choices and moves that she made in her early teaching days, trying to implement methods that were, at the time when she started teaching 25 years ago, best practices for students of color. For Janice, it was “so easy to focus on the surface stuff” so teachers in the study started with things like diversity and representation in classroom libraries, but as time went on, they became more critical of their role and responsibility in the classroom. Emily admitted that she “honestly didn’t think about race or being white” until she was teaching at a school with a Black and Brown majority student body. All participants shared that they did not feel equipped when leaving their credentialing programs to support the needs of their students of color. The learning was all done on the job. Throughout their early years of teaching, participants received some support but it “wasn’t enough.” Karen shared she “didn’t really know what [she] was doing.”

What seemed to follow the white savior phase was a deeper understanding of educational inequity and a desire to close the so-called “achievement gap.” Participants started to engage with frameworks like CRP and CRT. “I read Gloria Ladson Billings and I was like Woah!” Susie shared that with enthusiasm as she engaged with some asset pedagogies. All teachers shared their schools were for the most part supportive, but structural problems persisted. Janice specifically

mentioned the culture around standardized testing "We are doing all this good work but it's like how are your test scores?" Susie mentioned, "You, you know, try your best as a white woman" but a truly abolitionist consciousness, one that rejects white supremacy in education, and goes past cultural relevance or inclusion, was not yet developed. For Karen, she looked back on some of the earlier days of their career with "shame" knowing that she was not pushing past "easy" stuff that still "centered whiteness." Both Karen and Emily compared it to "white liberalism," and Karen shared:

> You don't actually address the real problem you just talk about it and make yourself feel better but you're not de-centering whiteness, whiteness is still totally the goal. Reading this book and that podcast really made me think about that.

Susie remarked, "But what about putting something on the line in the name of justice? I've been doing this for a long time and I'm still learning not to center myself." For Janice, the abolitionist mindset came when she started to divest from and decenter whiteness. She shared, "It's not enough to have just the books," referring to the movement for representation in the classroom. Abolitionist teaching and antiracist practices are not the same as culturally responsive or relevant pedagogical practices and were something of a deeper level of consciousness for participants. Ultimately, this consciousness led to an even bigger question. Rather than asking what the role is of white teachers in BIPOC schools, participants moved to asking: *Do* white teachers have a role in BIPOC schools? Karen shared, "Honestly, I am thinking about leaving the classroom. I don't know if I have a role in front of these Black kids as a white woman. There are so many people of color that could be in this role." Over her 25-year-long career, Susie had gone from thinking that she could "help minority students," to heavily

critiquing white savior mentalities in teaching. Karen started in an emergency credentialing program, which Love (2019) addressed as problematic, but now questions whether she should even be in a classroom. This journey and development were not easy for participants. "There's so much shame" shared Rachel? "I read [*We Want to Do More than Survive*, (Love, 2019)] and . . . I got defensive, but then I had to take a step back and be ok, why am I feeling this way?"

Through the data and reflections of participants, a few clear stages emerged. Participants all started off as open to the work. Participants also had well-meaning intentions but were not subscribing to asset pedagogies. Rather, white savior narratives or multiculturalism approaches were articulated as a common view of education among these teachers. Past this stage, at some point, participants engaged with antideficit works like Gloria Ladson-Billings' work on CRT or Zaretta Hammond and *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (CRTB; 2015). Participants reported that these strategies were helpful in their teaching practice. For example, Susie shared, "when my [principals] have been supportive it's been really great to actually use things like the Ready for Rigor framework." The practices CRT and CRTB are also part of abolitionist teaching; however, they do not encompass the entirety of the framework. Rather, abolitionist teaching requires a fundamental shift away from practices that center whiteness as opposed to building access points for BIPOC students to learn in a white-centered environment (Love, 2019).

Many participants referenced the events of spring 2020 as either a catalyst or timely reminder to engage with asset pedagogies more deeply. The public murder of unarmed Black man, George Floyd, by police in spring of 2020, led to protests across the nation, a resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement and the biggest social movement in U.S. history (Buchanan &

Bui, 2020). As such, participants had already experienced and developed a consciousness that exceeded the white savior mentality and invested in the narratives of cultural responsiveness and relevancy. Before adopting an abolitionist mindset, teachers shared primarily about diversifying classroom libraries, cultural holiday celebrations, and including overlooked figures of color in history. Through the 6-week curriculum, participants started to ask, "But what comes next?," indicating a shift in mindset toward abolitionist thinking.

An abolitionist consciousness was the last phase in their development. For Karen and Emily, the question was if they even had a place in the classroom. "At this point, I don't know how to be there and not cause harm," shared Karen, who felt that stepping away from the classroom and using her white privilege may be more helpful than teaching. Emily shared a similar perspective when she stated, "It feels hypocritical for me to do all this and still be at this all-Black school, maybe I need to be in Brentwood [a predominantly white community]." This last phase of their development was characterized by a critique of performative notions of antiracism and a commitment to de-centering whiteness and dismantling white supremacy in education.

Intentions Versus Implementation

"But is it feasible to do? Like freedom dreaming, that's where the rubber hits the feasibility road"—Rachel

Throughout the course, participants shared their experience with the "internal work" of abolitionist teaching, but also their very practical challenges with implementation of antiracist practices in their classrooms. Through the conversation, participants articulated there were, at times, a wide skill gap between wanting to strengthen their instructional practices and bringing in

abolitionist teaching, and seeing results and dividends in their classrooms. Many of the challenges stemmed from outside forces in their school environment and a need for further coaching and guidance around best practices.

In the second session Emily shared, “I love learning about all this stuff and I always go to these trainings but it’s not that simple when you’re there with the kids.” On the second night when teachers were talking about their previous experience with this work when Emily shared this reflection. Many other participants echoed this sentiment. Because all participants elected to join the course, they were at least, to a certain extent, willing to implement these practices, but the “how” was a different challenge. For Karen, it was challenging to know what practices were pushing forward antiracist work and which were not “Sometimes I don’t even know what’s working and what isn’t.”. Schools often use metrics to measure student success and growth, however these metrics do not necessarily measure the efficacy of antiracist practices. Susie shared her frustration with what felt like an intimidating amount of work to do, “It’s just like where do you even start?” Through reading *We Want to Do More Than Survive,* (Love, 2019) participants learned about the world of abolitionist teaching but the text did not necessarily give teachers a play-by-play of implementation. The supplemental materials were critical for the teachers as they conceptualized what the roll out would be for antiracist practices. “[Rachel] loved how [Hammond] laid it all out. It felt very tangible.” Rachel’s statement was met with nods of agreement.

Using the Social Justice Standards (Learning for Justice, 2018) was an exciting opportunity for participants. They shared their appreciation for the structure and the clear, concise nature of the document was reiterated by multiple participants during the focus group. In

the last session, participants all thought through implementation plans for using the social justice standards in the coming school year. Participants gave each other feedback on their plans and shared tips for each other. During the last session, participants also dove further into Muhammad's (2020) framework for historically and culturally responsive literacy. Participants found that reference, in conjunction with the other supplemental materials, helped provide more tangible steps for implementation. Another potential support that participants mentioned as helpful was further coaching and opportunities to continue the learning. Several of the feedback surveys asked for a second iteration of the course or a system or structure of support that would go through the school year as teachers test and tried implementing more antiracist practices. The challenges participants shared, however, did not end with just the content and the classroom.

"It's just so much easier when you have a supportive admin but then there's also the parents," Susie shared. Some participants worked at schools with long track records of supporting antiracist work through their own assertion; however, those same participants also mentioned this did not necessarily mean the implementation was simple at their school site. Later in the discussion we discussed the long journey to actualizing anti-racist work, Janice stated, "our organization is looked at as this great school, but we still have so much work to do." Janice shared her organization invested time and money into training teachers, but she faced resistance when attempting to implement antiracist practices into her classroom because her administration feared she was not focused enough on the materials that would be on state tests. Despite her intentions, she was still held accountable to state standards and testing expectations. Janice shared, "They'll say you're doing all this amazing work but then ask about your test scores." Another challenge participants voiced was their own colleagues. Susie shared, "Sometimes it's

easier with you guys [the other participants] than your own staff or family." If others on their staff were not equally invested in the work, it could be isolating or challenging to make progress alone. Participants also shared planning in grade-level teams or as a staff was not possible when there were coworkers who did not support antiracism.

Conclusion

The survey and the focus group findings yielded meaningful insight into how teachers can develop an abolitionist mindset and implement antiracist practices. In general, teachers received the professional development well and had positive feedback about the contents and construction of the course. Through qualitative analysis, two themes emerged. Teachers went through a progression of awareness and understanding that culminated in a developing abolitionist consciousness. Participants also articulated several external challenges that they faced when attempting to implement their newly learned practices. The findings can provide insight into further best practices in professional development and asset pedagogies when put in conversation with existing findings and theories in the literature, which are discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The current study evaluated a newly created professional development course that intended to support white teachers in their journey of developing an antiracist mindset and becoming abolitionist practitioners. The research questions for this study were:

1. What impact does professional development, grounded in transformative learning, have on white teachers' ability to develop antiracist teaching practices?
2. What impact does a professional development grounded in transformative learning have on white teachers' ability to develop an abolitionist mindset?

Five participants, who were all public charter classroom teachers in California and identified as white women, participated in a 6-week long professional development (PD) course, grounded in TLT (Mezirow, 1978). Each session was aligned to the stages of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978). Additionally, participants read the text, *We Want to Do More Than Survive* (Love, 2019), which was used as the basis of discussion each week. Participants focused on developing an abolitionist consciousness and antiracist teaching practices. Sessions followed a similar structure, an opening reflection question, discussion of the reading, the introduction of supplemental asset pedagogy materials, and an opportunity to wrap up and connect the learning to daily teaching practices. Overall, the course leaned on constructivist methods and relied heavily on participant engagement.

The evaluate the PD, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to determine if participants shifted mindsets and abolitionist teaching practices. In addition to pre/post survey

data, participants also filled out reading guides to track their thinking and development during the PD. At the end of the PD, teachers participated in a focus group to provide feedback on both the course and their journey in developing abolitionist mindsets and antiracist teaching practices.

Discussion of Findings

Overall, participants indicated the professional development was highly effective in helping teachers develop antiracist teaching practices, with all participants agreeing the PD helped them develop abolitionist mindsets. Additionally, teachers in the study expressed feeling under-prepared to support the diverse learners in their classrooms. Participants were eager to join the study in anticipation of filling self-described gaps in their professional skillset. This finding coincides with the literature on teacher preparation, which suggests teachers will need to develop their understandings of asset pedagogies after completing their preparation in teacher credentialing programs (Baggett & Simmons, 2017; Hill-Jackson, 2007). Asset pedagogies, such as antiracist teaching practices are critical because the literature rejects deficit mindsets that problematize the student's cultural backgrounds and promote deficit mindsets about student achievements (Bloom et al., 2015). Teachers with asset pedagogical practices are more effective; however, teachers have to learn this approach (Love, 2019). Professional development opportunities are clearly needed to help teachers develop these practices. Findings of the current study and the literature suggest although teachers may feel underprepared in general, further investment into asset pedagogy professional development could be meaningful and yield positive results for teachers and potentially their teaching practice.

Evaluating the Professional Development

The professional development was crafted based on best practices highlighted in the literature on professional development, specifically sessions on asset pedagogies. Professional development is well researched, but content that requires participants to grapple with issues such as white privilege and systemic racism can be particularly difficult for participants (Hammond, 2015; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Literature on effective professional development suggests characteristics of the PD should include reflection, affinity spaces, community building and be based on a constructivist pedagogical approach (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Howe & Stubbs, 1997). As such, the PD was designed to include these elements. Participants shared their appreciation for each of these elements in the ending focus group as well as general feedback for the course. Specific elements such as internal work, teacher choice, and constructivist pedagogy were all essential design characteristics of the PD that led to its success.

Reflection

Reflection and critical dialogue through interactive engagement strategies were reflected in both the study and the literature as best practices (LaCroix & Kuehl, 2019; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Participants were vocal about their appreciation for time to stop and think about systemic racism, abolition, and antiracism. Even when discussions were not directly related to the materials, participants were vocal about their appreciation of just time to stop and reflect. Participation was never required, but participants were always engaged in the discussion and highly participatory. There were several factors teachers said contributed to their ability to focus on the content, the course took place after their daily responsibilities in the classroom, teachers

had ample time to read the materials, and the content of the course was designed to be engaging and require active participation.

Affinity Spaces

An affinity spaces are safe spaces where people who share an identity gather in a safe space to discuss issues related to that identity (Bell, 2015). As noted in the findings, teachers, who all identified as white, shared that the PD provided an affinity space, which allowed them to have deeper, more robust, and candid conversations in our weekly debrief. Participants felt the affinity space allowed them to speak more candidly and ultimately lead to a more transformative learning experience. This aligns with the findings of TLT. Mezirow (1978) suggested honesty and candor are essential for transformation, and participants do not reach the level of honesty necessary without feeling comfortable in the learning setting. It is important to note, however, that the principal researcher for this project was not white, meaning it was only participants who identified as white women. Critiques of Mezirow's theory do question if the facilitator or researcher impacts the efficacy of the sessions (Avalos, 2011). In this study, participants did not mention the presence of the researcher as a concern. According to participants, this did not impact their feeling of "affinity space."

Community Building

All participants specifically noted the team builder at the beginning of the course was impactful and helpful for their learning. The camaraderie built between participants was essential for the nature of the work. Literature on professional development stresses sessions that include groups and allow for collegial support and learning tend to be more effective (Garet et al., 2001; Timmons-Brown & Warner, 2016). Toward the end of the course, participants were comfortable

enough with each other to give and receive feedback from each other and even exchange numbers and emails to continue growing together.

Constructivist Learning and Asset Mindsets

Mezirow's (1978) TLT credits its efficacy to the constructivist nature of the framework. Participants are not passive listeners in the learning process, but rather actively engaged and shaping the discussion and outcomes. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) cautioned against using a "banking model" where the teacher or instructor is the holder of all knowledge and information and is responsible for transferring it to the "empty vessel" of the student. More recently, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), a prominent professional development scholar, argued it is essential that teachers are viewed with an asset mindset. Asset pedagogy strives to help teachers develop an asset mindset, which should apply to the adult learner as well. Darling-Hammond (2017), Freire (1970), and Mezirow (1978) suggested, for effective professional development, the instructor needs to start with an asset-based mindset of the adult learners. Tangibly this meant the course had to be flexible and responsive to participants' needs. Participants also highly influenced the pacing and were given ample time to learn from each other. In the feedback shared, participants reiterated their appreciation for the structure of the course. When a teacher asked a question or solicited advice, it was not only the instructor answering but the other participants as well. In particular, when participants started to brainstorm implementation, they relied heavily on each other and the diverse skill sets they brought to the discussion. The design intentionally left space for teachers to be engaging actively and supporting each other. Honoring teachers' expertise and assets allowed for teachers to feel empowered during the learning.

Teacher Choice

Research has noted that when teachers are given the chance to “opt-in” to the work, professional developments are more successful, particularly when the topic is asset pedagogies or equity issues (Milner, 2012). In this study, all the teachers opted into the learning and were specifically looking for an opportunity to expand their praxis in the wake of a resurgence of interest in asset pedagogies and awareness of institutional racism in education. A few participants did specifically mention there were other teachers at their schools or in their communities who would be resistant to this work. The fact that teachers opted in and were already interested in this work may have impacted the outcomes of the study. Different schools have adopted different models, some allowing teachers to elect to engage in learning and conversations around asset pedagogies and abolition, others make it mandatory.

Internal Work

Literature on effective professional development for teachers highlights the importance of “internal work” which broadly encompasses unpacking bias, white privilege, and the implications of white supremacy on teachers as individuals (Jewell, 2020) suggesting, for teacher behaviors and mindsets to change, it is essential that this learning happens first. The current study supports this finding as well. As teachers moved through their journey from allies to abolitionists, grappling with the internal work was a critical component of their journey. Participants were often reflecting on their own experiences, deepening their understanding of intersectionality, and situating themselves in the work. It was only after this process were fruitful conversations about the provided resources possible. However, true information may be about the implications of systemic racism, because participants were socialized and based their self-

concept on a different reality, they needed support through the process of “unlearning.” The asset pedagogy materials provide what Mezirow (1978) called a disorienting dilemma or a moment that causes the learner to reconsider closely held world views, teachers needed time to process and make sense of what this new learning meant for them professionally and personally. The current study was designed specifically to accommodate this process. The heavy emphasis on reflection and purposely loose schedule provided teachers with ample time to attend to their internal work. Each participant came to the experience with different familiarity with the work meaning some spent more time reflecting on implicit bias, while others were inclined to jump into a conversation about white privilege.

The overall structure of a constructivist approach was a successful design choice for the professional development. Allowing teachers to opt into the learning created an environment where all participants were willingly engaged in the learning. Building community in the first session and creating an affinity space ensure participants were comfortable and open to sharing vulnerably. As the sessions progressed, the teachers were given multiple opportunities to engage in critical reflection which brought fruitful dialogue to the sessions. Ultimately the emphasis on internal work and the goal of developing an abolitionist consciousness led to complex and nuanced conversations between participants and contributed to participants’ ability to learn from the material.

Developing Abolitionist and Antiracist Practitioners

The Pedagogical Journey

Developing an abolitionist mindset is a nonlinear journey according to the foremost scholar of the discipline (Love, 2019). Love (2019) encouraged learners to move away from the

assumption that one can be “done” learning, but rather we continue to deepen our critical consciousness and frameworks for seeing the world of education. Teachers come to this work at a variety of stages, but regardless of their familiarity with concepts or ideas, everyone has work to do. Scholars have suggested that teachers need a somewhat scaffolded and differentiated approach to learning (Hammond, 2015; Love, 2019; Tatum, 1992). Hammond started her approach with leveraging practices that align or reference other pedagogical approaches that teachers might already be familiar with like growth mindset (Hammond, 2015). Tatum (1992) focused on building relationships with people unlike oneself to build schema and perspective (Tatum, 1992). For Love (2019), the first step is facing internalized racism and white supremacy. The current study reflected this finding as well. Each participant was invested in the work but arrived at Night One with different levels of familiarity. All expressed readiness on the entry scale, but through the conversation, it was clear that despite their similar upbringings, each teacher had a different familiarity and comfort with asset pedagogies and conversations on institutionalized racism. Some participants were more familiar with the vocabulary used during the course; others referenced the glossaries often. The supplemental course materials were accessible for participants regardless of their initial familiarity with the content because the materials intentionally tapped into different prior knowledge banks that the teacher may have already possessed. For example, some materials focused on practices first and provided tips and solutions like a podcast on strategies to decolonize social-emotional learning (Love, 2021-present) and others jumped into more reflective exercises for teachers (Jewell, 2020). Whatever stage teachers were at in their depth of understanding asset pedagogies, they were able to engage with the materials. These findings could signify that as schools and credentialing programs

incorporate more professional development, a variety of skill levels can be accommodated with some scaffolding and differentiation.

The level of familiarity impacted their interactions with the course materials. For the teachers that were new to abolitionist mindsets, but familiar with other asset pedagogies, Love's framing and clear critiques of charter schools and the concept of the "achievement gap" were challenging to hear (2019). For the teachers who had some experience of abolitionist teaching, it was challenging to scale the work down to daily practices for the classroom. This was aligned with Love's theory that asserts abolitionist teaching cannot be reduced to a checklist or set of teacher moves. The teachers did respond well to the additional materials to support the abolitionist and antiracist frameworks. By the end of the course, teachers were asking for more materials and a follow-up to the course to dive deeper into the learning.

In the later iterations of asset pedagogies, the literature suggests the teacher must not only use antiracist or culturally responsive and relevant practices in their classrooms but also must shift their mindset away from centering whiteness, white supremacy culture, and understanding how systemic racism impacts education (Love, 2019; Tintiangco-Cubales, 2014). For example, all pillars of Ethnic Studies pedagogy incorporate some sort of reflective or mindset practice for the teachers. Findings of the current study seem to align with those conclusions. For participants, their personal assumptions, biases, and experiences of race were not divorced from the work they were doing in the classroom. As they were parsing through the implications of systemic racism in their personal lives, their consciousness of their white identity in the classroom developed in tandem. As they read through the asset pedagogy texts and reflected on their interactions with students, they expanded that consciousness to their personal experiences. The learning never

stayed in either the personal or professional sphere. Love theorized a teacher cannot be abolitionist inside the classroom without engaging in active abolition outside of it as well (Love, 2019).

In 2020, inspired by the work of Kendi (2019), Ibrahim (A. Ibrahim, personal communication, May 20, 2020) conceptualized the journey of becoming antiracist in three zones: the fear zone, the learning zone, and the growth zone. In the fear zone, people are not yet ready to engage in antiracist work because they have yet to internalize racism as real or a problem. They prioritize comfort over acknowledging racism. In the learning zone, learners are concerned with educating themselves, working to understand privilege and are focused on listening. Last is the growth zone. Here, people sit with discomfort, speak out against racism and fight to dismantle systemic racism (A. Ibrahim, personal communication, May 20, 2020) There are many parallels between this finding and the stages of awareness articulated by participants in the study. Teachers' explanations of their early experiences in the classroom align with the fear zone, particularly their inclination to prioritize comfort over talking about race. Later, when teachers described opting more culturally responsive practices, much of their behavior could be described as the learning zone. The teachers were aware of their bias, whiteness, and interested in learning more. There are many behaviors in the growth zone that could be described as abolitionist teaching. Specifically, the focus on advocating for justice, yielding power and educating peers about the issues (A. Ibrahim, 2020). The structures laid out by Ibrahim could potentially serve as a meaningful and effective way of understanding the different stages that teachers go through as they develop antiracist and abolitionist practices.

The More You (Don't) Know

In alignment with Mezirow's (1978) findings on TLT, participants experience various phases and stages of knowledge along their journey toward becoming abolitionist practitioners. Later literature on TLT suggested adult learners may even go through cycles of the same process, each time reaching a deeper knowledge and understanding with progressively more fundamental shifts (Avalos, 2011). This was reflected in the current study as well. At the end of the course, participants were reflective on how far they had come in their understanding of abolitionist teaching, but also very much aware they still had work to do. The literature on asset-pedagogies is critical of practitioners that view professional learning as an ongoing pursuit. In Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, Paris and Alim (2017) identified the over-confidence of teachers who feel they are "done" learning. Klienrock (2021). went even further to suggest teachers who are falsely secure and unwilling to continue their own professional learning might cause more unintentional harm in the classroom. In instructional practices like Healing Centered Engagement (Ginwright, 2020), another branch of asset pedagogy, harm and progress are not possible without the teacher humbly acknowledging that regardless of where they may be in their journey as abolitionist and antiracist practitioners, they still have learning to do. Both Ginwright (2020) and Klienrock (2021) identified white teachers specifically but also added even teachers of color have to engage and continue their learning to be effective, which highlights that regardless of personal familiarity or professional experience with systemic racism in education, abolition requires everyone to learn and unlearn. Participants in the current study were vocal about continuing their learning and deepening their commitment, indicating perhaps their learning in the course aligned with this outcome. This finding also aligns with some of the tenets

of cultural humility. Cultural humility stresses the importance of flexibility, awareness of bias, recognition of power and privilege, and a focus on lifelong learning (Agner, 2020). Participants in the current study identified and articulated experiences that aligned with these concepts. When participants shared their various mindsets in different stages in their journey to developing an abolitionist mindset, they highlighted the importance of flexibility, for example, when working with schools and parents. An awareness of bias and recognition of privilege was critical for teachers grappling with their white identity in the classroom. Ultimately, enrollment in the course was an indication that teachers were committed to their continued learning. At the end of the course, teachers all expressed interest in participating in a follow-up course as well, further evidence of understanding the "lifelong learning" aspect of cultural humility.

The Limitations of Abolition

In *Lessons in Liberation: An Abolitionist Toolkit for Educators,* scholars in the Education for Liberation Network (2021) further explored the implications of abolition as a concept on the K–12 classroom. The authors drew on the history of abolition as a practice and the recent abolitionist movement centered around abolishing prisons and the Prison Industrial Complex (Stovall, 2021). The connection between abolitionist teaching and abolition is critical to articulate to understand the implications of truly abolitionist teaching practices. Stovall (2021) connected the Prison Industrial Complex to the "achievement gap" and systemic racism in education. The so-called "school to prison nexus" is a cycle through which systems in education are designed to ensure a critical mass of students, particularly Black and Latinx, fail and are funneled through the education system to the criminal justice system (Stovall, 2021). Teachers who do not implement abolitionist and antiracist practices are certainly part of the School to

Prison Nexus, but they work in tandem with structures and systems designed by stakeholders with broader power and influence than teachers. To actualize abolitionist teaching fully, systems of oppression and structural racism that permeate schools need to be abolished. In *Lessons in Liberation* by the Education for Liberation Network (2021), teachers are given a variety of tools; however, most still require a school culture that is receptive to the work. In the professional development course and feedback, participants specifically referenced the systemic barriers they anticipated facing in the quest to implement these practices. In the findings, it was clearly reflected that although teachers knew they had some level of autonomy and agency in their classrooms, standardized testing, uncooperative school leaders, and hesitant families could limit their ability to implement the desired practices.

Conflicting Consciousness

There were many contradictions highlighted in the findings of the project. First, despite teachers clearly indicating that they were open to difficult conversations about race and open to the discomfort that such a dialogue would bring, they were also vocal about their appreciation for the affinity space. Participants shared several times that they felt safer and more open in the group with just white women. Reconciling this with the expressed openness to engage in difficult conversations sheds light on perhaps the fact that participants may think they are more "ready" than they are in practice.

Participants ended the course questioning what their future in education would look like. For many participants, it seemed they came to an understanding that they were causing more harm than good in the classroom and needed to perhaps step away from the work. At the same time, they were vocal about their desire to have more sessions, a second course, and more

guidance. Participants were still engaged and dedicated to education and their students, despite not knowing if it was ultimately beneficial for them to be there.

Abolitionist teaching specifically avoids packaged teacher moves and practices because pedagogically it is more focused on mindsets. Participants, however, were incredibly vocal and preoccupied with practices, steps, checklists, and reproducible strategies. The feedback consistently highlighted the need for more classroom strategies in both the survey and the focus group. In what Bartolome (1994) described as “the methods fetish” teachers often hyper-focus on an endless quest to find the right “methods” that will bring Black and Brown students academic success instead of interrogating the systemic and contextual reasons for why the system sets them up to fail. Perhaps participants’ emphasis on finding more tools and classroom practices that can operationalize abolitionist teaching, instead of digging deeper into the racism and injustice in education, could fall into the “methods fetish” phenomena. It may also be that the desire to rely on teaching methods expressed by participants is due to reinforced white teaching norms, suggesting the shift for white teachers to adopt abolitionist teaching practices may take time.

Finally, all participants worked in charter schools and supported charters as an alternative to traditional public education. At the same time, abolitionist teaching is highly critical of charter schools and the neoliberal notions of reform that they are predicated on (Love, 2019). Love (2019) argued not only do charter schools subscribe to white supremacy culture in the same way traditional public schools do, but also they are potentially more dangerous. Because charters operate under the guise of being progressive, the harm they cause is even more obscured in the popular discourse (Love, 2019). Participants had to grapple with the reality that for many

abolitionists, charter schools must also be abolished while acknowledging they worked in charter schools and advocated for them. Holding the reality that charter schools are part of the problem, when they have been framed as the solution, was a source of cognitive dissonance for the teachers.

Significance

The so-called "achievement gap" has been a long-standing issue for teachers and administrators alike. The data are clear: Black and Brown students are not seeing the same academic outcomes as their white counterparts in schools. Whether we understand this as an achievement gap or education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) significant resources including time and money have been dedicated to bringing about more equitable educational outcomes for students. The literature suggests several potential causes of this gap, including the pervasive nature of systemic racism in education. Teachers perhaps can help students mitigate the impact of systemic racism, but the fact is, many teachers are underprepared to meet the needs of their students of color (Baggett & Simms, 2017). The solution is to upskill teachers and equip them with the tools that they need and by and large did not receive in their teacher credentialing programs. Transformation requires more than just a few teacher "moves" or pedagogical approaches. Asset pedagogies like CRT and its successors push teachers to grapple with the personal and professional implications of systems of oppression in education. The question for many districts and school leaders is how. Significant research and scholarship have been dedicated to this question. The literature has shown white teachers in particular struggle with meeting the needs of their Black and Brown students, and the field of education also happens to be predominately white (Baker, 2017). One solution is of course recruiting and hiring more

teachers of color, and there is an increasingly larger number of teachers of color in the field. That still leaves several white teachers and even teachers of color who may need more support. Supporting teachers, specifically white teachers, in this learning could positively impact their students. There is ample data on best practices for professional development, although professional development specifically in antiracism or asset pedagogies needs to be further explored. If schools and districts had a roadmap and clear strategy for post-credential learning, specifically building a capacity for teachers to implement asset pedagogical practices, we could see significant strides in the fight for educational equity.

Recommendations

The current study provides what could perhaps be a model or blueprint for asset pedagogy professional development. The current study highlights and confirms some important findings that have previously surfaced in the literature, while contributing a few nuances and best practices that could make teacher professional development more effective. Leaning on a constructivist framework allowed teachers to experience autonomy and perhaps more transformative learning experiences. An affinity space with an emphasis on relationship building and community yielded more open conversations. Providing a wide range of materials and supports that focus on both frameworks and tactical tools allowed the knowledge to be transferable and transformative. The length and sequence of the course ensured participants could dive deep into the literature and learn as opposed to a only gaining superficial understanding of the concepts.

The participant-led and highly collaborative nature of the professional development was effective and well received by participants. Due to a wide variety of logistical concerns, time,

space, and financial resources to name a few, many teachers experience “sit and get” professional developments. There is typically a speaker who shares the framework or best practices, and teachers listen and then ask questions. Despite many teachers striving to avoid this lecture style of learning in their own classrooms, when teachers are the learners, they are often faced with this lesson structure. In the current study, the learners were very much leading the discussion and engaging in application activities. There were challenges to planning a course of this nature; facilitation can be challenging when each participant responds to the material in their own way and draws their own conclusions. Results demonstrate, however, that despite the additional challenge more professional developments should adopt this structure.

Issues of equity and conversations about race can be particularly challenging for white teachers because of the shame associated with the conversations. The current study strove to mitigate the threat of shame by creating a space where all participants were white and therefore would perhaps be less concerned with how others would perceive them. The study was also geared specifically toward white teachers. Although all teachers could benefit from learning more about asset pedagogies, this study focused on white teachers so it could perhaps serve as a model for schools and districts with a white majority on staff.

Participants of this study were demographically similar in many ways; most were middle school or high school teachers, all were white women, and all worked at charter schools. Findings of the current study may have been impacted if there were men in the group or if the teachers represented different educational contexts. Exploring further the impact of abolitionist teaching professional development on different demographic groups could yield even further insight into effective methods and practices.

Findings of the current study may also signify that schools could find benefit in setting aside time for teachers to discuss and unpack similar issues as part of their regular experience. For many schools, the whirlwind of daily tasks, standardized testing, behavior, and teacher turnover leave little time for conversations about race that perhaps do not perceivably impact student outcomes. Despite literature suggesting asset pedagogies do not only increase academic outcomes but also support teacher retention and student wellness (Love, 2019; UNCF, 2018), many schools, including schools at which study participants worked, were hesitant to set a significant amount of time aside to invest in the work. Previous literature had suggested teachers respond best to tactical strategies that are easily applicable in their daily activities (Bancroft & Nyirenda, 2020); however, the current study found teachers were open and excited about more theoretical conversations as well as the tactical tools.

The research question for the current study specifically explored abolitionist mindsets and antiracist teaching practices to balance both the theoretical and the practical aspects of asset pedagogies. When considering professional development for teachers, schools should consider literature and findings of the current study to construct a scope and sequence that engages both theoretical and tactical aspects of asset pedagogies.

In the current study, all participants were open to the content and willing to engage in the work. Teacher choice may have played a critical role in the success of this study. For schools looking to engage this work, it may be beneficial for the teachers to opt into the learning, at least initially. Participants elected to do this work so when discussions were going late or contentious topic surfaced, they were still actively engaged.

What was perhaps the most exciting finding of the study was simply the overwhelming willingness for teachers to invest time and energy into this work. When teachers were initially prompted with the opportunity, there were more than enough potential participants. Because of the specifications of this study, not all participants could be accepted, but many teachers expressed interest. Many participants asked about another opportunity to take the course that they could share with their colleagues. Participants willingly gave their free time, not just to attend the meetings but also to read the materials and complete the supplemental activities. Upon completion of the course, participants asked for a "sequel" course as well. The clear willingness to invest time and energy into furthering their praxis and unpacking the implications of institutional racism in education signify that schools and credentialing programs may benefit from incorporating these topics into their curriculum and teacher professional development.

Limitations

There were several limitations to consider in the current study. The context, size of the study, and participant profile all were limiting factors. The study took place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Throughout the 2019–2020 school year, many schools were virtual and hosting classes on Zoom. All participants in the study were at some point teaching virtually instead of in person. This impacted their teaching practice significantly. Many students were on a streamlined school day and were only learning core content. For the teachers, they had, at times, more flexibility in their schedules, but they also had to contend with technology on top of the daily rigors of teaching. Teachers also struggled to translate antiracist practices into the virtual classroom. Many teachers were struggling personally with the pandemic as well. The toll of the pandemic was felt around the world. It was the pandemic that dictated the sessions would

be on Zoom. In the initial design of the study, participants would come in person which would ultimately help to build a community between them. The sessions being virtual also meant teachers were struggling with Zoom fatigue and had the additional task of navigating a virtual session that may have impacted the study.

Alongside the pandemic was an overdue reckoning on race which became the largest social justice movement in U.S. history (Buchanan & Bui, 2020). Participants noted this event was somewhat of a catalyst for them to seek out more support in their journey as abolitionist educators. Asset pedagogies existed before 2020, and many teachers and administrators had invested in the work previously; however, the surge of public awareness on the issue certainly brought the conversation to the forefront for teachers across the country. Participants in the study referenced the events of 2020 frequently and subsequent changes and lack of structural changes were certainly a topic of discussion.

The study lent itself well to a small and intimate group; however, the intimacy of the study may be another limitation. The commitment for the study was 6 weeks long and required substantial work outside of teachers' already hectic schedules. Recruiting was a challenge and the lift required of teachers may have prevented the feasibility of a larger sample size. The small sample size of the study may impact the generalizability.

For more teachers, professional learning is required. In many credentialing programs, teachers do not make all the decisions when it comes to which classes they will take. In the current study, teachers were all participating on an "opt-in" basis, meaning they were all interested in the learning and willing to invest the time necessary to complete the course

successfully. For schools and districts rolling out this work on a mandatory basis, there might be some hesitation or concern from teachers that may impact the outcomes of the study.

In the months following the study, a nationwide backlash to critical race theory ensued. Multiple stakeholders, including parents, governors, school board members, and teachers spoke out against critical race theory and were concerned teachers were using the theory in their classrooms. This resulted in some states even going as far as to ban not only critical race theory, but conversations about diversity, white privilege, and systemic racism in education (EdWeek Research Center, 2020). Most of the public outrage garnered national attention after the conclusion of the current study. Despite the study not using critical race theory as a framework, conducting the study in a highly anti-critical race theory context in the future could impact the findings.

Future Research

The literature on asset pedagogy professional development is still relatively new. More comprehensive research is needed to continue to gather a robust set of best practices for professional development in asset pedagogies. Specifically, exploring other theories in the field outside of abolitionist teaching. More research is also needed to gather data about how teachers might respond to the learning on a compulsory basis, and even in mixed groups. Many schools have representation from multiple different backgrounds, so affinity groups may not always be possible. Another iteration of the study might explore the impact of having a mixed group of teachers, including teachers who cannot opt out of the learning.

As with all PD, true effectiveness is found in the actual changes to teaching practices which may be best captured via observational research documenting how teachers shift their

practice because of the PD. The current study relied on self-report data to begin to document the effectiveness of the PD but future research may continue to follow teachers and observe their practice to determine which aspects of the PD were most effective.

Additionally, all participants were current in-service teachers. Although they ranged in experience in terms of number of years teaching, findings were relatively consistent in that each participant in the current study mentioned it would have been beneficial for them to be exposed to these ideas earlier in their careers and training. As such, another potential space for exploration would be the impact of a similar PD for preservice teachers. Further research on how this learning could impact preservice teachers could be fruitful and help teachers mitigate any harm that they may cause unintentionally in the classroom by not being abolitionist before they even start teaching.

Participants of the current study were all teachers at public charter schools. The context in which they were teaching was a common topic and certainly impacted their experience of the course. A follow-up study with teachers in parochial schools, private schools, or even groupings where teachers all worked with similar grade-levels may yield further insight into the challenges abolitionist teachers face in different grade levels and settings. Participants in the current study were also all women. Future research should explore the implementation of this curriculum with men and there may be insights to gain from working with single and mixed gender groups.

The current study focused on white teachers intentionally, but the literature also reflects that all teachers, including BIPOCs, can benefit from abolitionist professional development (Education for Liberation Network, 2021; Ginwright, 2020; Love, 2019). Further research could investigate the efficacy of similarly constructed professional developments with BIPOC

participants. In addition to a course for BIPOC participants, a course that grouped white and BIPOCs together would provide further insight into the role affinity spaces or nonaffinity spaces play in development of abolitionist practices.

The current study was sequenced across several weeks which may always not be feasible for students within the school context. Further studies should investigate the efficacy of a shorter, and perhaps even a longer sequencing of the course so, regardless of the time constraints, schools can find a model that will work for their teachers' schedules. A serial course that includes coaching and perhaps observations and feedback may also yield further insight into effective professional development.

Conclusion

Research strongly suggests discrepancies in achievement between white students and students of color are in some ways linked to their teachers' mindsets and practices (Goldenberg, 2014; Milner, 2012; Okonofua & Eberhardt 2015). Most teachers in the United States are white women (Baker, 2017) who are more likely to hold deficit mindsets and unconscious biases against their students of color (Morin, 2015). Coupled with systemic racism in education, deficit mindsets and bias impact the educational experience for many BIPOC students. What would it take to eliminate those biases? How can we close the gap for teachers with deficit mindsets?

The current study was conceptualized to test the efficacy of an abolitionist teaching professional development as a potential solution to support teachers in their teaching praxis. Ultimately teachers needed not only abolitionist mindsets, but also an understanding of antiracist practices. White women are an overrepresented group in the teaching field and establishing best practices for white women teachers would result in a critical mass of teachers in the field

potentially developing abolitionist practices. Data gathered from the process suggested teachers must indeed progress through several stages of deepening awareness and transformation on their journey from allies to abolitionists. At the conclusion of the study, it was clear the professional development course was successful in its initial goals. There is certainly more work to be done and further research that will help strengthen the findings of this study and add further to the growing field of abolitionist teaching.

Black and Brown students have a very different experience than their white counterparts. By most metrics, Black students are more frequently disciplined, less likely to reach grade-level expectations, and more likely to attend underfunded and under-resourced schools (Samuels, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Similar outcomes have been seen in Latinx students and other students of color. Systemic racism is deeply impacting BIPOC students. Although teachers are not the only responsible stakeholders, research has suggested teachers play a role in perpetuating systemic racism in the classroom (Warikoo, 2016). If teachers can be complicit in systemic racism, then perhaps they can also combat it. Antiracist teaching practices can perhaps provide teachers with a road map and pedagogical framework for actively pushing back against systemic racism in education. When teachers leave their credentialing programs, they report not having a deep familiarity with antiracist practices, but a willingness to learn (EdWeek Research Center, 2020). The literature is clear however, that to tackle the systemic nature of the problem, a mindset shift is also necessary (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Love, 2019). Cultivating an abolitionist mindset and equipping teachers with antiracist practices has the potential to yield not only positive results for students but also for teachers. It has become a social justice issue. Any iteration of social justice must include a critique and breakdown of systemic racism. Racism

interacts with many other systems of oppression, many of which converge in education. Education can be a site of liberation, or a continued center oppression.

The purpose of the current study was to explore the efficacy of a professional development, grounded in TLT, in helping teachers develop an abolitionist mindset and antiracist teaching practices. The design intentionally leveraged asset-based practices and best practices in professional development to produce a course that would allow teachers from a variety of experiences to engage with and learn from the materials. The course drew on not only the literature of adult learning, but also that of abolitionist teaching and another asset pedagogies. Over the course of 6 weeks, teachers steeped themselves in various texts and resources dedicated to developing an abolitionist consciousness and building an antiracist toolbox. Findings from the study, when put into conversation with the growing body of literature on asset pedagogies, can perhaps carve out a way forward and a road map for teachers who are interested in expanding their antiracist practices and developing an abolitionist mindset, and ultimately bring about more opportunities for educational justice.

APPENDIX A

Reading Guides

We Want to do More Than Survive

Chapter 1 &2

Reading Guide

WE ARE SITTING WITH

We must use all the analytic tools available to understand how our children are spirit-murdered and educated in a state of perpetual survival mode for the benefit of the educational survival complex

PERSONAL NOTES

INVITATIONS FOR INQUIRTY

What would a world where dark people mattered really look like?

Bettina Love says schools "function as places of black suffering" how do we grapple with that reality?

How have you seen "white rage" show up in your context? How have you seen "dark suffering" perpetuated?

Why is it so easy for teachers to dissociate their political beliefs from their teaching practice?

Note: Adapted from *We Want to do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* by B. Love, 2019, Beacon, copyright 2016 by Beacon Press.

We Want to do More Than Survive

Chapter 3

Reading Guide

WE ARE SITTING WITH

The real work is personal, emotional, spiritual, and communal

PERSONAL NOTES

INVITATIONS FOR INQUIRTY

What practices in school prevent authenticity for students of color? What practices liberate authenticity?

What is the difference between loving your students and actually believing they matter?

What could "teaching children to call for undisputed dignity" look like in schools?

What is your "homeplace"? Where do you feel you thrive? How can you create that for adults and children around you?

We Want to do More Than Survive

Chapter 4

Reading Guide

WE ARE SITTING WITH

Measuring dark students' grit while removing no institutional barriers is education's version of the Hunger Games

PERSONAL NOTES

INVITATIONS FOR INQUIRTY

How do narratives around grit in schools parallel other false narratives about social mobility and meritocracy?

Who benefits from socializing dark children into standards of respectability?

What could pro-black and brown character education look like?

Reflect on "epigenetic inheritance" -what experiences did you inherit? What intergenerational traumas are you carrying?

We Want to do More Than Survive

Chapter 5

Reading Guide

WE ARE SITTING WITH

Abolitionist Teaching is not a teaching approach. It is a way of life, a way of seeing the world, and a way of taking action against injustice.

PERSONAL NOTES

INVITATIONS FOR INQUIRTY

Bettina Love says that there is no one way to be an abolitionist teacher. Do you find that notion more liberating or anxiety inducing, why?

Abolitionist teaching starts with Freedom Dreaming. What is one dream you have for education?

Why is intersectionality important in abolitionist teaching?

How can we be better about incorporating and making space for joy?

We Want to do More Than Survive

Chapter 6

Reading Guide

WE ARE SITTING WITH

How can you love something you know so little about?

PERSONAL NOTES

INVITATIONS FOR INQUIRTY

Why is it important that we make time and space to understand theory?

Did your academic experience break down or perpetuate stereotypes and problematic understanding of race ?

Why do problematic programs and campaigns like "It Gets Better" still attract so much praise?

Both white and people of color have to unpack whiteness. How did you come to understand the meaning of whiteness?

We Want to do More Than Survive

Chapter 7

Reading Guide

WE ARE SITTING WITH

When pursuing educational freedom-really, all freedoms-survival cannot be the goal.

PERSONAL NOTES

INVITATIONS FOR INQUIRTY

What theories or frameworks have shaped your understanding of the world?

What concepts and experiences have informed your North Start?

What does "living in survival mode" look like for black and brown children?

For co-conspirators, what are you willing to give up for Black liberation? Black folks- what are some tangible ways you need co-conspirators to show up?

APPENDIX B

PD Curriculum Materials

MY HOUSE

- **Landscaping** = Privileges and disadvantages you bring to this work.
- **Foundation** = Your Values.
- **Walls** = What you do in life that expresses those values.
- **Door/s** = What you have received from others. This can be material, emotional or genetic.
- **Windows** = What you are most proud of.
- **Roof** = How you protect yourself in a significant personal relationship or during times of stress. This can also be thought of as defense mechanisms.
- **Chimney** = How you blow off steam.
- **Basement** = What you hide from others. Spend time on this section even if you choose not to share the meaning of the images you create with others.

We will be using the metaphor of a house as a structure to help guide your reflection and identify parts of your life to share with the group If it's not helpful for you use a house, you are welcome to choose another image or follow your creative inspiration where it takes you

Landscaping = Privileges and disadvantages you bring to this work.
Foundation = Your Values.
Walls = What you do in life that expresses those values.
Door/s = What you have received from others. This can be material, emotional or genetic.
Windows = What you are most proud of.
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Chimney = How you blow off steam.
Basement = What you hide from others. Spend time on this section even if you choose not to share the meaning of the images you create with others.

APPENDIX C

Post-Survey Questions

Dear Participant:
Thank you for participating in this course. The following questions will help me make adjustments for future courses. Thank you for your honest feedback.
Please indicate your general satisfaction with the course:
Not at all Satisfied to Very Satisfied (5-point scale)

1. This course increased my capacity to implement anti-racist and abolitionist teaching practices
2. This course equipped me with tools and strategies that I plan to use in my classroom
3. This course supported my ability to critically reflection on the implications of systemic racism in education
4. This course provided me with opportunities to reflect on how my racial identity impacts my work and my students

Next, please indicate your satisfaction with elements of the course:
Not at All to Definitely

1. The course reading guides assisted my processing of content
2. I would continue to use the reading guides in future classes
3. The text was a helpful resource to spark discussion
4. I would use the text in future classes
5. The group dynamic was helpful to share ideas
6. I would continue the small group dynamic in future classes
7. Any other feedback about the elements of the course: OPEN ENDED

To what extent has this professional development supported your ability to do the following:
As a result of the course, I feel I am ready to . . .
(5-point scale, Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

1. Actively work to understand my own bias so I can better counteract inequity within my school and classroom.
2. Celebrate the diverse backgrounds in my classroom.
3. Work to develop a reflective consciousness.
4. Acknowledge that privilege operates on many levels and provides benefits to members of dominant groups
5. Consciously account for and resist my personal biases.
6. Pose solutions to structural injustices in education and advocate for them.
7. Enact a vision for my classroom focused on equity.
8. Create a climate of belonging for all students.
9. Provide equitable learning opportunities for all of my students.
10. Prepare students to confront and dismantle systemic racism and injustice.
11. Build trust with the community.
12. Ensure that schooling reflects the community's culture and values.
13. Raise awareness to advance the school communities' levels of understanding about social inequities.
14. Provide specific examples related to my students' cultures during class time
15. Leverage students' cultural and ethnic backgrounds to fulfill lesson objectives

APPENDIX D

Abolitionist Teaching Course Post Focus Group

Focus Group Questions – Staff

Session 6 – Abolitionist Teaching Course

Facilitator: (Deonna) *Welcome to today's focus group. In a moment, I will ask you all to introduce yourself one more time. This meeting will also be recorded. The recording is for the purposes of coding the data gathered during the session and will not be shared. As you know, over the past 6 weeks we have been exploring the journey to become abolitionist practitioners. I greatly appreciate your attendance and dedication to this group. I am going to ask you a few questions. Please answer honestly, this feedback will be used to help the course get better and gain insight into effective methods for developing an abolitionist practice. The more I know, good and bad, the better. I also ask that your answers, as much as possible, exclusively reflect the work that relates to this course. I am sure that as professionals you are exposed to many other resources and opportunities for learning outside this class, but for the purposes of this conversation, please focus on experiences associated with this course.*

Group Questions

We appreciate your time and candid responses.

1. Which activities from this course were most helpful in your development of abolitionist teaching practices?
2. Which activities from this course were the least helpful in your development of abolitionist teaching practices?
3. What barriers did you experience when attempting to implement abolitionist practices or what barriers do you anticipate?
4. What structures and systems supported your implementation of abolitionist practices or what systems do you anticipate will facilitate implementation?
5. What readings or course selections most resonated with you?
6. To what extent do you feel that the materials and activities of this course facilitated or supported your development of abolitionist practices?
7. Anything else you'd like to add about this experience?

Closing – Thank you!

APPENDIX E

Readiness Presurvey

Demographic Data
Gender Identity
Male
Female
Nonbinary
Other/prefer not to say
Do you identify as "white."
Yes
No
What best describes your school?
Charter
Public
Private or Independent
Catholic or Religiously Affiliated
How many years have you been teaching? ***Drop Down Menu***
0-50
Do you hold a teaching valid credential?
Yes No
Have you participated in any antiracist training recently?
Yes No
What Subject(s) do you teach?
Multiple Subjects or Self-Contained Single Subject
Subjects: ____
I am able to commit to a 6-week course and attend every session YES NO
I am able to commit to reading a 202-page book in the next 6 weeks YES NO
Describe the current level of implementation antiracist practices or culturally relevant pedagogy
Daily implementation
Frequent implementation
Occasional implementation
Seldom implementation

READINESS
Everyone has a different comfort level when it comes to the topic of culturally responsive teaching. To gain a sense of how comfortable you are before the course begins, please indicate your comfort with the following along a scale of **1 NOT AT ALL, 2 SOMEWHAT, 3 COMFORTABLE TO 4 VERY COMFORTABLE**

1. I am comfortable discussing race-related issues with others.

2. I am comfortable sharing my experiences with other teachers I do not know.
3. I feel ready to learn about antiracist teaching practices.
4. I would enjoy participating in a group course to learn more about working with diverse students.
5. I enjoy interacting with culturally different people.
6. I know I need to consider my students' cultural values while I guide their learning.
7. I am curious about the cultural values that my students have.
8. I'm ready to teach in a culturally diverse classroom.

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