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## Is this Antiracist?: An Autoethnographic Evaluation of Professional Development

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Is This Antiracist?:

An Autoethnographic Evaluation of Professional Development

By

Allison Nava-Holstein

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

2023

Is This Antiracist?:

An Autoethnographic Evaluation of Professional Development

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by

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Los Angeles, CA 90045**

This dissertation written by Allison Nava-Holstein, 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.

**March 21, 2023**

Date

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Last, but not least, to my students, thank you for being my inspiration. You inspire me to help make this world more socially just, more loving, more deserving of you all.

## **DEDICATION**

For my dad, who was unable to finish the antiracism work he started. I hope the work I have done and commit to continuing will honor your memory.



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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Is This Antiracist?:**

#### **An Autoethnographic Evaluation of Professional Development**

By

Allison Nava-Holstein

Communities of color have been fighting for equal rights in society throughout history, resulting in the development of different social movements. In 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement was founded and protests erupted across America as Black lives were lost at the hands of law enforcement. In the summer of 2020, the protests continued, serving as a catalyst for schools to begin interrogating their practices and curricula, moving towards efforts to be pro-Black and antiracist.

Grounded in Critical Social Theory and Critical Race Theory, this autoethnographic study explores the experiences of me, a Latinx teacher in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) professional development (PD), intended to train teachers in how to be antiracist educators. This study centers my experience as both an educator of color and teacher, interrogating my experience through critical self-reflection and document analysis. This study explores the ways Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) teachers experience DEI professional development within this context of Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the racial reckoning of 2020.

The purpose of this study is to inform future professional development practices so that the BIPOC educator experience is considered within professional development (PDs), but specifically within DEI and antiracism work.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Who Am I?

As an English teacher and a lover of stories, I have chosen to share my research in the best way I know, through narratives. For as long as I can remember, I have devoured every novel, poem, play or lyric I could get my hands on. As a child, once I finished my first copy of *Spot the Dog* (Hill, 1983), I was hooked. Therefore, in this introduction, I will walk you through the moments and stories that shaped my research in order to provide context for every vignette that my research consists of.

### What Is My Research?: Context and Purpose

*For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: How do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed? (bell hooks, 2018)*

In 2019 I left a school I loved deeply, a private school with a big classroom and corner nook, to teach at a charter school in Los Angeles. I left the private school the year I finished my master's in education because I struggled with the fact that there were no accommodations being made for students with learning disabilities and I wanted to grow in my ability to plan and execute lessons using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices. I was a young teacher who wanted to grow in her abilities in order to provide an equitable education for her students; unfortunately, I did not feel this could happen at the private school site, despite my love for the close-knit community and small class sizes. On the other hand, I began to wrestle with the ways

my work was not equitable at the charter school. I may have been contributing to inequities by working first in privatized education and then at a charter school.

As I neared the end of my first year at my school site, Evergreen Charter, I read *We Want to do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*, by Dr. Bettina Love (Love, 2019). This added to the turmoil I experienced from the beginning of my doctoral program at LMU in social justice educational leadership. I questioned whether or not teaching at a charter school was harmful. Dr. Love discussed the ways charter schools in many states disproportionately harm Brown and Black students, citing the names of men who have become exorbitantly wealthy while profiting off of under-resourced schools and families hoping to provide their students with a fair chance at success. She named, “David Tepper (\$3.5 billion in earnings in 2013) founded Appaloosa Management and Better Education for Kids; Steven A. Cohen (2.4 billion in 2013) of SAC Capital Advisors donated \$10 million to the Achievement First charter school network” (Love, 2019, pg. 65). Growing up, the idea of private education was tied to ones of success and promise, especially for a child in a single parent home where sometimes the lights were off and sometimes there wasn’t much food in the home. The promise of education was the promise of stability and a way out. However, as an adult and teacher, I knew the nuances of that promise are riddled with racist policies and exploitation.

Dr. Love grounded her work in the idea that Brown and Black students cannot thrive because they spend all their time trying to survive (Love, 2019). This is an idea that has continued to resonate deeply with me as it did with my younger self; I struggled with my role within that potentially harmful system. I worked and desired to support students, but felt I was instead supporting the rich and making them richer. Love stated, “Their earnings rely on the stability of dark children and their families while surviving while preying on their desire to do more than just survive. They make money on dark families’ dreams of thriving through education” (Love, 2019, p. 65). As I sat with this new information and the personally relevant way in which Dr. Love framed it, I began to consider the ways I could use my position to embolden my

students and push my school site to be a safe space where students could thrive. However, I struggled with this idea, wondering if a system created in racist principles could ever be antiracist? Can one school site be enough or change enough to make a difference?

At the same time I wrestled with these ideas, the world simultaneously locked down and erupted into protest, seemingly wrestling with similar ideas while the names and stories of George Floyd and Breanna Taylor filled the homes of people across the country.

### **The Beginning of Reckoning and Hopes of Healing**

I began my third year of teaching at a new school site in January of 2020; three months later I, along with all students and staff, was sent home as we entered the COVID-19 pandemic and pivoted to online learning. We were unaware of the transformation we were about to face as a nation. Within those three months, Breanna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd were killed, more evidence of White Supremacy and the disregard for Black lives, whether through brutality of police or cavalier racism (Politico, 2021). As the video of George Floyd's murder circulated and homes were filled with the visuals of Derek Chauvin, then a Minneapolis police officer, kneeling on George Floyd's neck for nine minutes (Chang et al., 2010), the desperate pleas for his mother echoed throughout our nation. This led to cities across the country erupting in protest and demands for change. Intersecting with protests and anger over the entrenched racism was the fear and anxiety over the rise of COVID-19, the looming presidential election, the ongoing violence against immigrants, and the increase in anti-Asian rhetoric and hate crimes.

As a teacher working with middle schoolers, not only was I trying to process the state of our nation on my own, but more intimately, trying to figure out how I could help my students process and understand. I grappled daily with the ways in which I could help my students navigate the anti-Black racism entrenched in so many Latinx communities while also trying to

process hearing their president calling their families and communities “rapists and drug dealers” while stripping immigrants of their rights (Shear et al., 2021). It had been engrained in me to be an apolitical teacher and withhold my political opinions from my students. However, we were now in the middle of a global pandemic and racial reckoning so teaching became unavoidably political.

On November 3rd, 2020, as the whole world held their breath, I kept refreshing the CNN homepage on my phone during a Zoom ([www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us)) lesson with 20 eighth graders when one student finally asked, “Ms. Nava, who do you want to win?” I responded, “I don’t think I can tell you.” As the chat flooded with guesses, one student turned on their microphone and said, “We already know who [you want to win] because you’re not racist.”

Teaching and education have always been political, and just as the death of George Floyd was the catalyst for our nation’s racial reckoning, the shutdown of our nation as a result of COVID-19 forced everyone to face it. Windows were covered in Black Lives Matter (BLM) signs and Breanna Taylor, George Floyd and Ahmaud Abernathy’s names could be heard chanted down streets, but the fear of retaliation remained. As cities closed and doors were locked, people were forced to sit with themselves and the painful reality of the continuation of White supremacy that so many White communities claimed no longer existed. In these same months of the summer of 2020, I entered a doctorate program in social justice leadership. Upon reflection, I had not fully processed in the moment how unique my experience was; the historical timing my education and research was situated in has shaped me as an educator and person.

As I grappled with how to honor my students and their needs, curiosities and worries with the pressures to straddle politics in the classroom, I often referred back to Paulo Freire’s (1970)

concepts of education as liberation. As an educator, it was my job to guide and learn with them as they critically processed history in order to dismantle harmful systems and create a better future. Freire stated, “It [humanity] is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity” (Freire, 1970, p. 44). The world, my students, and I were yearning for freedom and justice. I asked how I could begin that work in the classroom and where I could find support for myself and my students?

As the country shut down as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, communities of color and low-income communities were disproportionately affected both by high positive and death rates (Politico, 2021), and the expectation that people of color would continue to work low-paying labor jobs, risking their life and the safety of their families while the world was shut down (Johnson et al., 2021). These two national occurrences left schools scrambling to find ways to respond to teachers, families, politicians and students. Families and schools faced new dilemmas in how to meet the needs of all students, again, leaving communities of color with less resources (Johnson et al., 2021). As schools maneuvered through the pandemic, they also responded to the cries for racial justice. Immediately, schools began choosing sides and declaring themselves antiracist or anti Critical Race theory, or CRT. Schools who chose the former began to push out statements standing with BLM and the Black community and committing to being an antiracist school. The next step begged, what does that look like for schools, educators and their students?

As the 2020-2021 school year began, all the schools in my district, including mine, were given a “social justice” curricula, without any training or guidance on how to implement it.



Coupled with the new stress of learning how to teach over Zoom, teaching a new curriculum quickly became overwhelming. While the curriculum was abundant with Black and Brown writers, I noticed many were men and few texts were outside of the nonfiction genre. One text in particular was problematic: it was written by a White woman and was a “non-fiction” text about Emmett Till which used language that excused, and almost justified, the acts of the two men who murdered him (McBirney, J. 2018). The article presented the murder as if there were two sides to the story, implying that Emmett Till could have somehow deserved his fate. The similarities between Emmett Till and his infamous open casket pictures in *Look Magazine* and the video of George Floyd’s murder speak to the lack of progress in racial equality in the United States. Both led to racial reckonings, yet here we were, still fighting for the same thing with some still needing visual, tangible proof. Not only was visual proof necessary for doubting communities, Whites still holding onto their privilege and supremacy, proof of racism that ended in a public and violent death was necessary for a movement to begin.

I was horrified and confused about why my district would ask me to teach this text so I asked to speak to the Director of Humanities at the district office and emailed a copy of the text with my comments. At our meeting, she was receptive to my concerns. We discussed the need for teachers to be trained in critical pedagogy so they could identify harmful texts and teach texts through a critical lens. However, despite her enthusiasm and our agreement, I still did not feel satisfied with the interaction or promise of change. So I asked her who designed the curriculum and trainings for the humanities team and what the racial makeup of the team was. She sighed and answered that the team is primarily White and that the use of the text is a result of a lack of time and the rush to release a social justice curriculum; she also explained that the district

recognizes there is a need for diversity on the team, but at the onslaught of COVID-19 and shut down of their downtown office, the newest members of the team were let go, almost all of which were people of color. Excitedly, she turned the conversation to a working group that has been created to develop a new social justice curricula. She continued to explain that the intention behind the working group was to engage different stakeholders from varying backgrounds; the intention was to diversify the voices and perspectives included in the development of the curricula. It struck me that at the same moment the district fired people of color, they were also asking their already burdened staff of color to do intellectual and emotional labor without regard for their stress or compensation. The leaders invited me with enthusiasm, and despite my hesitation and frustration, I joined with enthusiasm.

I watched the summer of 2020 bleed into the 2020 US Presidential election, when an unprecedented number of voters from communities of color voted, supported by activists and volunteers from communities of color. I watched communities of color face violence and then do the work to fight for change in the face of that violence- whether through nation-wide protests or nation-wide voter registration campaigns. I felt the tension I had been holding for months release when it was announced that President Biden had won. I swelled with pride with the knowledge the result came about because of the love and dedication of communities of color, specifically women of color (Chang, 2007). In that same moment I felt conflicted about the fact that the burden to be liberated, to teach White communities about racism, to convince men sexism is real, rested on the shoulders of the oppressed. As I spoke to this well-intentioned White woman who dictated what I could teach in my classroom and showed her the harmful text I had been given, she invited me to volunteer my labor and fix the issue, to teach her and do the work. My school

began the 2020-2021 school year with the commitment to being antiracist, but I questioned if we were truly reflecting and dismantling the racist systems within my school site, district, and larger educational system to support and center the BIPOC experience and success.

### **The Personal Is Political**

In my personal experience as a teacher in 2020, and as we all tried to transition back into “traditional” learning and interrogate education within the changing context of antiracism, schools were completely unsure and ill equipped to fulfill the promises they were making. Whether or not the intentions were genuine, the impact for students and teachers of color was real. Like most teachers across the globe, I was asked to pivot immediately to online learning, which led into the 2020-2021 school year. We were given new “social justice” curricula and expected to address the racial reckoning, capital riot, and presidential election while helping students understand how they fit into the world in a scary and confusing time. At my school site, we were not given training, but instead were asked to lead our peers in “antiracist” professional development (PD), where our leaders did not lead or support us, but instead gave us limited time to administer PDs and expected that we would plan said PDs outside of contract time. Personally, this lack of support and intentional time created for antiracist trainings, coupled with the lack of mission and vision to guide the PDs, led to burn out, frustration, and lack of buy-in. As one of the only teachers of color on the planning committee, I felt ignored and overworked. In what ways, I kept asking myself, is any of this antiracist?

Schools have shut down in response to the COVID global pandemic and the murder of George Floyd and Breanna Taylor at the hands of the police have forced people to sit with the

same ideas I was considering, reckoning with the fact that police brutality and police practices are rooted in racism; can a system created in racist principles ever be antiracist?

This began a call to action in education I felt eager to answer; as a doctoral student, I joined the DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) committee at my university, a concerted effort made by many schools and universities to begin facing the entrenched White supremacy of education and find ways to correct it. Through my work with the DAC (Diversity, equity and inclusion action committee) I participated in the development and execution of professional development that explored ideas of race and racism in our personal identity and life experiences, but also in the classroom. This experience was juxtaposed with my experience in school as a teacher and student. As I watched riots happen across the country and listened to political debates, I was also trying to engage my students and colleagues in the same discussions I was having with professors through DAC; what is happening in the world, why is it happening and how can we be better? There is no formula for any person or school to follow, but I felt the conversation needed to start.

During the 2020-2021 academic school year, I was teaching online and joined what my school site called the “sunshine committee.” This committee existed pre-COVID-19 and was designed to maintain a positive staff culture through planning events and intentional time for community building. However, during distance learning, it was presented as a DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) committee in response to the network’s commitment to being a pro-Black, antiracist school, much like the DAC, of which I was already a member. The sunshine committee then became a “culture team.” The Dean of culture at the school was asked to develop a team of staff and faculty who volunteer to facilitate conversations on race in order to establish an

antiracist culture that would allow teachers to have a space to collaborate and engage in dialogue. Again, I joined, eager to learn and unlearn in order to be better for my students and, hopefully, create professional development opportunities for other staff and faculty to do the same.

I offered to participate and, given that I am doing similar work for the DAC, felt I would be able to offer insight. I was hoping to learn from other educators. However, upon entering the first meeting, I was immediately met with the only White person in the group leading the meeting and soon found that all people in the group, including school leadership, deferred to her. I began to evaluate my positionality within the group: I was the newest teacher, one of three Latinx members, one of four women and the only classroom teacher. As the White woman, Mary, facilitated the meeting, I began to consider her positionality and the way in which she spoke without reservation, interrupted people and stated her opinions as if they were facts. I was both surprised and frustrated at the type of leadership she demanded when the actual school leadership, Dean of Culture, was in the meeting, and was confused by her confidence when speaking about what antiracist education looks and feels like for our Latinx students, given her lack of proximity to the Latinx experience.

I decided I needed and wanted my voice and opinions to be heard, but found they were being disregarded by Mary in the meeting so I sent my ideas on how we should structure the following meetings in order to first reflect on our understanding of bias and racism and examine our own biases before delving into what that would look like in our classrooms. Much of what I suggested was a result of my work with DAC where I worked with professors who did this work at the college level, using the DAC's work to guide our own. She responded with, "Thanks for starting the conversation, Ms. Nava!" At the next meeting she stated that we didn't have any

definitive goals or anywhere to start so she created a PowerPoint presentation to guide and facilitate the staff discussions.

All of the people on the team had read and ignored my email and continued to defer to Mary. I believe that is what confused me the most; why was everyone deferring to her?

Inclusive educational leadership is about who is included at the leadership table, their thoughts and experiences validated and included, not just who White leaders include as their subordinates at the table. It was not sufficient for the team to include me, a classroom teacher who could offer insight for the ultimate goal of integrating antiracist curricula into the classroom, and is of Latinx descent, if my thoughts and insights were not going to be heard and considered.

I struggled with the way DEI work was being led and way in which BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) staff and faculty were being expected to maneuver the space; however, I was reminded of my privilege and the severity of the antiblackness, not only in our country, education system, or school site, but within my student population and the Latinx community when my colleague Alex, one of two Black teachers on the school site, sent out an emailing informing the eighth grade team of an incident with a student during her online class. On August 31, 2020, three weeks into online learning, I received the following email:

Hi team,

I hope you all are doing well. I wanted you to know that I did not attend today's grade level meeting because I was taking time to process and recover from an incident that occurred during my class today. A student unmuted himself and said "f\*\*\*ing n\*\*\*er" in the middle of class. I was in utter and complete shock, and am greatly saddened and disappointed. It was honestly quite traumatic, especially given the current climate. I was told that the parents were contacted to schedule a meeting. I'm hoping this incident serves as an opportunity for restorative justice, and a catalyst for the anti-racist work that our school community so desperately needs.

I would appreciate the support of the team during this time in holding our community responsible for hate speech.

Thank you,  
Alex

I remember having conversations with students about BLM protests that flooded their social media and hearing whispers of, “What about us?” in the background of the conversations. Some students struggled with the idea of supporting the Black community because they felt that suggested the Latinx population wasn’t suffering. Students were not being asked to examine their biases, internalized racism, the horrors of colorism or antiblackness during conversations at school. I sat in so much shame and anger when I read this email, knowing this woman was attacked by one of my students and by one of my community members. I did not know how to respond despite my urge to help. I spoke with Alex on the phone later that week and I heard her exhaustion as she explained to me why she was quitting in between deep breaths and sighs. I still do not know what consequences that student faced. All the eighth graders who were present in the call, were never spoken with. They were never told why that word was harmful or the impact of it on their teacher. After the student called her the N-word, she continued teaching. She did not get angry, she did not stop the student’s learning in that moment to meet her own needs, and no one stepped in to help her. She was expected in that moment to carry the burden of the hate hurled at her, and then following the event, she communicated with us so we would know and pleaded for assistance.

Dr. Bettina Love called on the White community to be co-conspirators in antiracism work (Love, 2019). She called the White community to stand in the line of fire and carry the burden that the Black community has been forced to endure for so long so that their Black counterparts can flourish. In this moment, Alex was forced to do the emotional labor of informing the teachers

of the student who harmed her, of the incident. She updated us on how it would be handled, and then asked for our support and pleaded for antiracist work to be done at the school. This was a demonstration of both how much work needs to be done at my school site and society at large. She spoke to the incident being traumatic, especially because of the “current climate.” The racial and political upheaval that she was referring to did, and continues, to serve as a catalyst for many school sites and districts to implement social justice and antiracist curricula, but to what degree was the necessary work done to prepare schools to handle the actual realities of racism? During the 2020-2021 school year, I was given a “social justice” curricula to follow that was intended to represent diverse voices and stories, but when my Black colleague needed us to be her co-conspirators, we failed her.

Paulo Freire (1970) spoke to the significance of moments of failure that allow for people to learn in order to always be in a process of becoming antiracist. It is not a definitive space in which we can exist, but rather something we constantly strive towards. To be antiracist is to support ideas, policies and choose actions that promote equity for all racial groups (Kendi, 2019). To be racist is to promote and believe in policies, actions and ideas that create inequality for racial groups. A racist policy is any policy that sustains racial inequality, therefore, and antiracist policy is one that promotes equity between racial groups (Kendi, 2019). Therefore, after Evergreen Charter declared themselves an antiracist school, they were in the process of becoming; at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, they stated their commitment is to: “Be an anti-racist, pro-Black public charter school network by developing antiracist leaders who incorporate DEI, antiracist, pro-Black practices at school sites and by dismantling racist institutional behaviors, practices, systems, and structures.” However, in what ways were these



commitments being implemented? I continued to ask myself, how prepared are we as a network or a school site to tackle difficult conversations and dismantle racist ideas and practices in our school policies and culture? I wanted to know what training and culture changes were going to happen as a result of this commitment.

Alex was one of two Black staff members at my school site when she experienced targeted hate speech from a student during an online class; she quit a month later as a result of an accumulation of events and issues with the school culture, this moment of trauma being the breaking point. The only other Black teacher on staff quit at the end of the 2020-2021 school year; we entered our first year back on campus after the lockdown, having lost two valuable teachers. However, we started the 2021-2022 school year with one new Black, male Math teacher, who quit in October due to lack of support from school leadership, culture concerns, and microaggressions against him from students that were never addressed.

### **Antiblackness at Evergreen Charter: My Research Emerges**

During the week of professional development that precedes every school year, the district office sent two people to guide the staff and faculty through training on what microaggressions are: how to identify them and how to address them. This is the only time the district sent anyone to help train our staff in antiracist practices after having committed to being an antiracist school. By Dr. Kendi's definition, this training is an antiracist practice as it does promote racial equity in school culture, but is performative at best when it only happened once and the training was not used to support Black staff, leading to them leaving the school (Kendi, 2019).

This is when I began to develop the purpose of my doctoral study; I had initially hoped to look at social justice curricula and the practices with which they are implemented in a middle

school classroom, but it became clear that there were other steps that needed to happen first. Despite our network's commitment to antiracism, the steps we were taking as a school were performative and shallow. One short meeting about microaggressions was not sufficient, as development must be done over time and with fidelity in order for the learnings to transfer to the classroom, otherwise, it is simply the illusion of commitment to change (McManimon & Casey et al., 2018). I then began focusing my study on the way educators are trained through professional development to be antiracist educators and the ways in which the professional development itself is conducted through antiracist practices. As I reflected on the microaggressions professional development (PD), I felt that the facilitators had good intentions, but entered the space without knowing the school culture or staff. They began with direct instruction, telling us what microaggressions are and providing examples, and then proceeded to separate us into White and non-White groups, affinity groups. The White group, which consisted of four teachers, was given the larger space and the non-White group, the rest of the staff, was relegated to a small section of the room where we had to line up in order to fit. As a person of color, this was awkward and felt like an eerily accurate reflection of education as a whole; so much space was given to the few White people in the room and the rest of us were relegated to the corner, forced to try and be successful with the little space we were given. As a classroom teacher, I knew not all lessons were always successful and sometimes unforeseen problems arise, which is why genuinely and intentionally knowing our students and their background is so significant to the success of their learning. This PD experience helped me develop the purpose of my study in which I would center the BIPOC teacher experience; as I reflected on having watched my White colleagues, peers and friends stand in the middle of room, I thought about

how all the literature about DEI professional development centers on the White educator and White experience, but in what ways are we considering the BIPOC teacher experience? Who is carrying the burden and doing the work to make spaces antiracist? If the emotional and intellectual burden lands on the BIPOC teacher, is that antiracist? Is that a school and culture promoting equity amongst all races or is it promoting the expectation that if non-White teachers want to be treated equally, they have to do the work to educate and push forward change, just as Alex was forced to do after experiencing a racist act of hate?

### **Positionality Statement**

It is imperative to the integrity of this study that I entered the space recognizing and acknowledging my positionality and the intersectionality of my identity and the way in which that affects how I interacted within the research space and accessed information. I have been a teacher for five years, have taught at Catholic and Charter Public schools as a middle school teacher. I am a cisgender, heterosexual Latina, and a US citizen. English is my first language and as a Doctoral student who studies social justice within education, I hold a specific amount of privilege within this study. However, it is specifically as a Latina and having grown up in a lower socioeconomic community that I enter the space as a part of a marginalized community.

I have entered every educational space—work and school—eager to learn. As a result, I have been engaging in professional development in a way that has allowed me to grow in this specific field: as a teacher and participant. I have collaborated with coworkers to develop and deliver PDs, but I have also worked with DEI committees at the university level to provide DEI trainings and PDs for professors.

## **Purpose of the Study**

In response to the summer of 2020, individual schools and school districts began to make sweeping statements about the state of their schools, staff and curricula, without first evaluating ways they were engaging in practices that maintain systemic racism and oppression. Schools began asking teachers to teach in ways that are antiracist and use an antiracist curriculum; however, in what way are these teachers truly prepared to implement these curricula in a way that is actually antiracist and to what extent do school leaders understand what that means? Before the actual implementation of any curricula, teachers and educators need to be trained, through professional development, on how to be antiracist educators and what that means within the context of their school community. While important and relevant to the needs of communities, schools must first investigate the nuances of their culture before implementing any practices or curricula that may, without proper preparation, be harmful to students and families.

The purpose of this research is to explore and evaluate how a public charter school in Los Angeles is training its educators to be antiracist educators through DEI professional development sessions and the ways in which BIPOC teachers experience emerges within the PD process. In centering BIPOC teacher experience and voice, I hope to inform future PD practices and develop ways to be responsive to those needs and experiences within DEI trainings.

Traditional PD practices, outside of DEI or antiracist trainings, have proven to be ineffective. I hope to identify culturally responsive and effective PD practices to inform and improve future sessions.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions that drive this study were:

1. To what extent do the DEI PD materials and practices used by Evergreen Charter Network reflect antiracist tenets
2. What is the BIPOC teacher experience of the school culture from which the PD emerges?

### **Significance of the Study**

This research was significant because, currently, there has been a surge in schools attempting to implement antiracist policies, practices, and curricula. However, without properly or thoroughly considering the school culture in which the policies and curricula will be situated, the changes may be harmful to students, staff, and families. While the intent of these changes are for schools to be responsive to the needs of communities of color, BIPOC teachers and their experiences are not being considered or used to inform practices, which instead places the burden of teaching others about racism and the ways in which it shows up in education, on BIPOC teachers. Therefore, instead of supporting and centering BIPOC teachers, BIPOC teachers are expected to expend their emotional labor during PD sessions, instead of learning and reflecting personally in order to be better educators.

In past PD experiences, the sessions and session materials followed a banking model of education (Freire, 1970, pg. 71) where teachers were given information from outside administrators who did not have intimate connections to the school, staff, or culture. In banking education, the intention begins with and is rooted in the maintenance of power for the oppressor. In this case it was school district leaders. The sessions have been generalized for all schools with little time or space for educators to reflect and collectively develop new knowledge that will liberate students and teachers, as was described in the statements of solidarity shared by schools

and school districts. This study allowed intentional space for me, a BIPOC teacher, to interrogate the PD practices and determine which are effective in liberating its participants and which are harmful.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I used Critical Social Theory (CST) as a framework throughout the narration of my experience in the PD sessions. CST is an evaluative approach to critique what exists and find ways to transform it, using human experience to inform said change (Levinson, p. 2016). Therefore, I critiqued the PD experience and materials through CST with the goal to transform the current DEI PD structure in order to truly develop antiracist educators. CST states that meaning and truth operate within context and history, alluding to the need for schools to evaluate and understand the nuanced culture at their school site and the inability for any DEI work to be generalized or considered “one size fits all” (Levinson, p. 2016). The environment and context therefore has to be understood in order to critique it. Education has been developed to uphold White supremacy and various forms of oppression. Therefore, it is through discourse, reflection and engagement within the community that critical theorists can develop new knowledge as the current thoughts, beliefs and systems are interrogated and challenged.

Critical theorists seek to engage stakeholders who may not hold similar values or social positions within a program, practice, or community in ways that foster the transformation of individual understandings and adherences to taken-for-granted beliefs about self and others, while developing a commitment to collective action based on the transformative knowledge generated by the group’s interactions. (Levinson et al., 2016)

In the context of the study, the collective was the educators engaging the DEI PDs, and the systems, beliefs and thoughts being interrogated as a group through discourse are the entrenched ideas and systems of racism within education maintaining White supremacy.

Therefore, through the autoethnographic study, I centered my own experience in order to reflect and reconstruct knowledge via that lens.

Critical social theory offers a historical framework that both challenges the theoretical or ideological underpinnings of everyday practice and uses stakeholder perspectives of and experiences with those practices to develop new ways of conceiving of their meaning and purpose in society (Lather et al., 1986).

The three tenets of critical social theory are as follows: participatory, pedagogical and action oriented. The tenet of participatory action is that one must engage all stakeholders to name the injustices of a system in order to transform it (Freeman, & Vasconcelos, 2010). In relation to my experience with the PD process at my school site, outside facilitators that do not know the school culture or staff are developing and implementing PDs without engaging the voices of the educators they are hoping to transform. In order for all participants to engage in liberation, all must understand and believe that the systems need to change. For true teacher buy-in, which is necessary for a PD to be successful (Ralston et al., 2020), all stakeholders must participate in naming the harm that all will be emancipated from. The tenet that engages pedagogy states that all stakeholders need to learn new ways of seeing themselves and other people in their role to fight oppression (Freeman, & Vasconcelos, 2010). The final tenet is action-oriented which focuses on the development of new understanding and system changes. It states that sustainable changes depend on the continued self-reflexivity and development of emancipation and liberation as praxis (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010). When referencing PDs, this speaks to the need for PDs with follow through that are sustained over time. In order to be effective and meet

the expectations based on CST, there would need to be consistent and sustained follow through as opposed to PD sessions that are singular in design (Ralston et al., 2020).

Within these tenets is the common theme of liberating discourse. Within CST, all truth is subjective and open to critique, as critique is emancipatory and knowledge is based in human experience. This experience is situated within culture and historical context that molds it. Liberating discourse amongst communities allows all stakeholders to speak their truth and create new knowledge together (Freeman et al., 2010). Through this process, all participants engage in self-reflection and encourages all members to seek to understand through dialogue as opposed to observation. This allows for the inclusion of all voices and challenges the oppressed/oppressor binary (Freire, 1970).

The concept of dismantling harmful systems and critically analyzing harmful systems in order to transform or dismantle them is a thought shared by both CST and Critical Race Theory. “For transformation to occur for anyone, transformation has to occur for all. Power and powerlessness sustain each other, and in the tensions created in that interdependency are the possibilities for new relationships and new configurations of arrangements” (Delgado et al., 2017).

I will also be analyzing the PD materials and practices using Critical Race Theory as a framework to determine whether the practices are antiracist. The tenets of CRT are: Interest convergence, Race is a construct, not biological. Intersectionality, Race and Racism are embedded in society and social structure and Significance of storytelling and counter storytelling (Delgado et al., 2017). Interest convergence is the idea that people believe what benefits them-



therefore, a White man believing racism and sexism do not exist benefits him in that he does not have to acknowledge his privilege or any systems of oppressions that maintain his privilege (Delgado et al., 2017). The idea that race is a construct is foundational to the understanding of racism in that the biological or “scientific” justifications for racism are then disproven. Intersectionality is the overlapping or crossing of different aspects of a person’s identity and may explain different privileged or oppressed aspects of their identity and the way they engage with systems in society. Counterstories, an opposing narration-typically opposite to the privileged narration, are used by critical theorists to challenge harmful systems of belief (Delgado et al., 2017). These concepts function to explain how race and racism are embedded in all aspects of society and entrenched in harmful systems (Delgado et al., 2017).

In recent years, CRT has become a topic of debate within education, with opponents on either side feeling strongly about whether or not the theory should be used in the classroom. However, in this study, the theory would not literally enter the classroom and be taught to students, but rather the ideas of CRT will guide the creation and facilitation of PD sessions to ensure that materials and lessons are critically engaging educators and preparing them to understand and dismantle harmful systems. The goal is to ensure that the PD sessions are actually addressing and critiquing harmful systems of oppression and specifically naming race. If race and racism are not named, we risk invalidating or ignoring the daily realities of BIPOC educators and students within education, while allowing for White educators and students to claim to be “inclusive” or “culturally responsive” without ever having to recognize their privilege or analyze ways in which they may gain from or maintain White supremacy in the classroom.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

*Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication.* (Paulo Freire, 1970)

My research has been conducted through an autoethnographic study. Autoethnographies are a form of cultural analysis where the researcher is able to analyze their personal experience in order to understand a larger culture and cultural experience. It is a method that draws on Freire's (1970) concept of conscientization, the idea of developing consciousness so that you can critically analyze and dismantle harmful systems, such as those within education (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). It involves the individual becoming aware of their position within the systems and the space in which the research is situated; it is a critical examination of self within one's context. Autoethnography is a cycle of action based on reflection and action (Ngunjiri et al., 2010) The autoethnography is self-focused and allows the researcher to be both an object of research, someone who is investigated, and a researcher engaging in analysis (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). This allows for the researcher to understand the context in which the research is situated in a way that they would not be able to otherwise- the scholarship becomes an extension of and connected to self (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). It is also, however, rooted in the counter narrative of Critical Race Theory. Research, and narratives within research such as autoethnography, are intended to inform while counter narratives transform, they transform our understanding by engaging with the lived experience of marginalized groups in order to reimagine truth through interrogating our knowledge and biases (Bell et al., 2013). Counter-narratives are significant as they "expose the systems and symptoms of racism in its many forms, subtle and overt, conscious and unconscious, in the hope that exposure can lead to change" (Bell et al., 2013). Therefore, through my

autoethnographic work, I centered my experience as a woman of color in a historically White space, including the space of multicultural and antiracist education. This form of education is made for people of color to inform and educate White educators, ignoring the ways that perpetuates the racism that the education systems are trying to combat. Counter narratives also challenge the idea that my lived experiences, or the lived experiences of people of color, have nothing to do with race- people just need to work harder or be less lazy (Delgado & Stefancic, J. 2017).

Engaging in autoethnographic research has allowed me to engage readers in a personal way, appealing to their sensibilities through evocative autoethnography. “Evocative autoethnography is both transgressive and critical, grounded in personal experience that sensitizes readers to issues of identity, voice, and forms of representation that deepen empathy, acceptance, and understanding of larger societal constructs” (Ellis et al., 2011). Evocative autoethnography has allowed me as the researcher to share my experience through moments and details of emotions and nuances of interactions that guides readers through my thoughts in a way that is still critical, but personal (Ellis et al., 2011). I chose evocative autoethnography because it has allowed me to challenge Eurocentric forms of research by engaging in an accessible form of research that practitioners, teachers, educators and peers can understand and relate to. It makes research, the research process and my findings friendly, not only modeling my self-reflection, but asking readers to be reflective in a way that is necessary for antiracist praxis (Vergara, 2017). In doing this, I hope that readers will grow in empathy and as allies, or co-conspirators, in this work.

Autoethnography, as a research method, can be especially successful in education as it is rooted in the development of knowledge through the understanding of human experience and the ways in which the environment or culture affect said experience and perceptions. It can be significant in educational research, “As a form of critical pedagogy, autoethnography often places emphasis on a transformative or emancipatory process for the individual and in the more widely constructed social relations in which the individual participates” (Anthym & Tuitt 2019). Therefore, as I analyzed my personal experience within the DEI PDs, I have been able to transform my understanding of myself and the culture in which I was, and am, situated. The PDs were focused on developing the educator’s understanding of antiracism, and through using autoethnography as a research method, I engaged in a process that not only observes the commitment to antiracism in the school and school structure, but within the larger society and system of education. Self-reflexivity is significant to the process of becoming antiracism as “[t]hose who are immersed in the construction of education, and more importantly are responsible for its direction, benefit from locating themselves within the educational system in order to build a foundation for transformative learning and emancipatory pedagogy” (Eisner, 2004). Through this exploration, I developed knowledge and understanding that has led to emancipatory learning for myself and my colleagues, but I hope will also transform the systems within education that guide our decisions and practices. This study—one that centered teacher voice and experience—allowed someone who is immersed in education to participate in its evaluation and be transformed.

In the years 2020-2022, when our world entered a global pandemic and racial reckoning, I engaged in antiracist work and learning in different capacities: at work, in my doctoral

program, as part of the DEI committee, and through personal research and reflection. I have grown in my understanding of myself and the way I interact with the world in a way that has begun the process of moving from false consciousness to critical consciousness. Through listening to my classmates and colleagues, I have felt validated and forced to re-examine and relearn parts of myself and my beliefs. An example of this is the relationship between professor and student: growing up as a Mexican child, I was taught that you do not question your teacher and you do not question adults. As an adult graduate student, I struggled to be able to act on the concerns I had with a professor who was harmful in their teachings and practices. However, through collaboration with my peers, I was validated in my anger and experiences, aiding in the process of transforming my previous knowledge, understanding and teachings. However, upon entering a school site, I often ask myself, is the traditional hierarchy anti racist and can we have an antiracist school while excluding collaboration and inclusion of voices?

By conducting my research through autoethnographic methods, I have been able to include voices of my colleagues through collaboration and engagement during PDs. My research follows a narrative format common to autoethnographies, making it accessible to more audiences (Chang et al., 2007). I also feel the narrative honors the way in which my ancestors shared their knowledge through oral history (Reese, 2012). For this process to be emancipatory and liberating, it must also be accessible and relevant to those who the system of education affects (Freire 1970).

### **How Did I Conduct My Research?**

I conducted my research at a public charter school in Los Angeles, during the 2022-2023 academic school year, where I am serving as an eighth-grade teacher. As a classroom teacher and

participant in the PD sessions, I narrate my experiences through selected vignettes that emerged from my field notes. I analyzed my experience and documented the ways in which the sessions were successful and unsuccessful in reflecting antiracist tenets, based on the definition of antiracism as defined by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi and in the tenets of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Kendi, 2019). The autoethnographic process creates a bridge between what I experienced as researcher and participant and the community dynamics as a whole. It allowed me to be self-reflexive in my experience, but also consider the context through my interactions with colleagues, detailing and analyzing the nuanced culture in which the DEI PDs exist.

In exploring how schools are training teachers to be antiracist educators, I centered the voice and experiences of me as a Lantinx woman. In centering my experience, I am adding the perspective and experience of a member of a community of BIPOC educators historically ignored in the development and research of effective PDs, including DEI PDs. In entering any space, the intersectionality of our identity colors our experiences and the way we access information. The current literature on the development of antiracist PDs is centered on the experience of White educators, predominantly, White women. However, in order to systematically dismantle harmful systems within education and teaching, BIPOC educators and their experiences must be centered and used to inform PD practices and materials. Therefore, I critically analyzed the PD materials using Critical Race Theory as my framework, while narrating the nuanced experience of attending the PDs, evaluating the ways in which the pedagogical practices of the PD are or are not culturally responsive and it is situated within the school culture. I hope this research will be used to expand the understanding of effective DEI PD

practices and the ways in which they can be improved to respect, include and center the BIPOC educator and their experience.

### **Data Collection Within the Autoethnographic Process**

The data collection consisted of field notes, personal reflections and observations from attending the PDs and relevant documents. As I entered every PD space, I took notes on what I felt, saw, observed, heard, read, and did. I also paid attention to interactions. I looked at the PD materials, noting whether or not specific race-based language was being used and whether the materials were accessible to all staff and faculty. I noted the people who were invited to actively participate, the identity markers of those people and the ways in which everyone interacted. This allowed me to explore the nuances of the culture from which the PD emerges, interrogating the ways in which my identity interacted with the culture and the PD. Upon arrival at the PD, I took note of the PD objective, and did a further analysis after the PD.

I prefer to work with printed materials and therefore printed all my notes and documents, reading them to look for major themes and instances. These major instances can be emotional, speaking to my experience, or moments that answer the research questions. I analyzed the field notes and observations through coding and thematic analysis, separating major themes found within the data to develop the vignettes. Analyzing my field notes and PD materials followed the following steps: 1) Reviewed memories, interactions and experiences through notes in order to find themes, 2) Wrote analytic memos while connecting themes to time and context, 3) Studied and re-read memos to interpret themes, 4) Summarized findings in personal evocative vignettes (Hatch, 2002; Vergara, 2017). Again, the development of conscientization was prioritized in this process as I hoped the process of evaluating my experiences through thematic analysis would

allow me to critically analyze the beliefs I hold so that I can reflect and develop new knowledge based on the experience (Freire, 1970). This allowed me to answer the second research question: What is the BIPOC teacher experience of the school culture from which the PD emerges?

I also collected data through the PD materials which I analyzed using Critical Race Theory. I analyzed the materials using the five tenets of CRT: Interest convergence, Race is a construct- not biological, Intersectionality, Race and Racism are embedded in society and social structure and Significance of storytelling and counter storytelling (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2017). The aim of the PD materials was to engage educators in the necessary learning to become antiracist educators. Therefore, through evaluating using the tenets of CRT, I was able to explore whether or not the materials are engaging in critical analysis and pedagogy or passive discussions to placate stakeholders and oppressors (Delgado, & Stefancic, 2017).

The subsequent vignettes are organized around the same pattern. The vignettes are structured first to provide context for the moment described in the narrative, followed by the incident that informed my research. Third is my analysis, based on my experience and literature. When appropriate, I ended the vignette with my “wonderings” or questions to engage the reader so that this may be a process of self-reflection, using my experience to further integrate their own.

The autoethnographic process is personal, and by choosing to write an evocative autoethnography, I hoped to share my moments of vulnerability with readers in a way that they can resonate with or learn from. As a woman of color who grew up in poverty, my experiences within education mirror that of so many who share aspects of my identity. Education was created for White, wealthy men and the culture and practices within education have reflected that since its conception. Therefore, in my research I was able to explore so much of what I have come to



accept as normal within education. I reflected on moments of finding myself appeasing others or making myself smaller so that I can continue to exist in a space I love that was not made for me, and even more so for others. This has forced me to face and interrogate moments of pain, shame, and joy. It is my hope this can add to the conversation about how we can create spaces for marginalized groups within education, and specifically, within antiracist work done for and with everyone.

### **Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions**

The primary limitations lie in the teachers being trained and those training them; all people will be engaging in the trainings with varying levels of prior knowledge and levels of commitment. There is the assumption that teachers who have chosen to teach at a school implementing an antiracist curricula are dedicated to the work, and that may not always be true.

Another limitation is time; engaging in more sessions of professional development over longer periods of time would allow for more data. However, specifically with an autoethnography, the largest limitation is that the data is primarily based on personal experience, memories and personal reflection and interpretation. However, in order to address this limitation, I have critically analyzed relevant documents to support my analysis.

While I understand that sharing only one person's experience was a limitation, I hope it can add to the conversation and others will engage with my experience as they engage in their antiracism work.

## CHAPTER 2

### VIGNETTES

#### **Vignette 1: Us Versus Them; Equity Within Staff Culture**

*Loving friendships provide us with a space to experience the joy of community in a relationship where we learn to process all our issues, to cope with differences and conflict while staying connected. (bell hooks, 1999, p. 33).*

#### **The Context**

On any given day, I can walk into our school office and say hello to be responded with silence. On a good day, there might be head nods or mumbles of good morning. In my four years at my school site, there has always been a palpable tension in the office, but this past August, the frustration peaked when the school leadership team told the teachers to share the copy machine in the library, at the request of the office staff, because the office staff have immediate printing needs that are interrupted by the teachers.

The request was received with shock; no one said anything as we all processed having 20 teachers share one very old, very slow copy machine placed in the library, far from all the classrooms. As all the teachers retreated to their classrooms, I heard grumbles of frustration and talk of revolt. The next day over lunch a teacher recounted to me that she walked out of the long line in the library to use the available printer in the office and found a sign on the printer stating, “Teachers use printer upstairs.”

She proceeded to move the sign and make her copies. An office staff member then proceeded to stand up, push the sign back into place, and resume her work at her desk. No words were exchanged, but a culture of frustration, anger and exclusivity was clear.

This culture of “us versus them” had been clear through my four years at my school site, and has not been addressed. In contrast, I felt it has been avoided and therefore reinforced, largely by not requiring teachers and staff to collaborate. Through the process of discussing and developing DEI PDs, the office staff have not been considered individually, I believe, because the implication was that everything in the DEI PDs should pertain to the work of everyone in the school. However, this is problematic because it ignores the individual people, their identity within the school and within the work, and the varying levels of understanding of DEI work. Therefore, for the first DEI PD, the equity team decided that we would engage the faculty and staff, including the office staff and leadership team, in a listening tour or the “equity team soiree.” The idea was the PD was a protected time where staff and faculty would rotate from classroom to classroom in their designated groups and meet with a member of the equity team. Each team member was given a set of questions to ask the group and was expected to take notes and listen- this was not meant to be a conversation, but a listening session. The objective was: “Staff and faculty to meet with individuals on E-team (equity team) discuss understanding of equity, discuss needs from and hopes for E-team, and create a positive culture of community through time to share snacks and engage with colleagues outside of work and meetings” This met the overall equity team objective: *“By the end of Q1, the Merkin E team will engage 100% of staff in authentic connection, listening, and learning to access the needs of our school community as it relates to past, present, and future diversity, equity, and inclusive work.”* (See Appendix A).

The listening tour PD took place on October 12, 2022 and the purpose was to provide space for faculty and staff to be heard, but also to gather data that would inform future DEI PDs.

It would be impossible to effectively plan for the team without understanding their current understanding of DEI and antiracism work, as well as their level of commitment and what they hope to gain. For the first two PDs, the office staff was not required by leadership to attend, despite closing the office for the duration of PD time. Therefore, during the listening session PD, none of the office staff were present. Jarringly, only one member of the leadership team was present. There are four members of the leadership team: one interim principal who is also our acting superintendent, one dean of students, one dean of instruction, and an assistant principal. The assistant principal was on the equity team and was present for the listening session and the dean of instruction attended the session on his own. When he entered the room, I asked if he was the only one joining us, and he apologized profusely, stating that he hoped he could still be helpful to the process. He was visibly nervous and unable to answer the questions, but he was there and trying. When I emailed our principal and asked that he be at following PDs, emphasizing the importance for faculty and staff to see him actively and visibly supporting the work, reinforcing that he finds this DEI and antiracism work to be important, he responded with, “Thanks for the push” and proceeded to explain how busy he is and that he will try to attend future meetings.

The lack of visible administrator presence and participation speaks to the performative nature of antiracism work at my school site. Therefore, when the office staff opted out of the PD, feeling that it was not necessary or relevant to them, it was a reflection of the culture created by leadership. Why would anyone invest in something their leader does not find important? As an equity team, we still felt that we could not proceed with our work without engaging the office staff. Regrettably, I felt very alone in this process. As the lead I was supposed to

collaborate in this work with my team, but I engaged in this process alone. I emailed our principal asking to schedule this meeting and asking that he ask the team to attend all future DEI PDs. After two weeks of emails and stopping the office manager in the hall, I was able to secure a date for the follow up to the listening session. However, before that meeting happened, the equity team had a PD about the school mission and vision, where the office staff entered late and left early. The lack of engagement was clear and this culture of apathy bled into our listening session.

### **The Incident**

I met with the office staff on November 16, 2022. Five out of seven of the team members (four Latinx women and one White man) attended a separate listening session with designated questions I held in order to collect their data and include them (See Appendix B). As they entered the room, arms crossed, sitting begrudgingly, and whispering to each other, I felt my chest tighten. I felt like I was in middle school again and I wanted to prove myself to my classmates. I took a deep breath, smiled and tried to make as much eye contact around the room as possible. The meeting was held in my classroom with one other equity team member who translated the conversation when I could not. The meeting began quietly and awkwardly. I thanked everyone for being there and introduced myself. I had the questions on the board and also emailed them out to allow for access, but in hindsight, I did not translate the questions, which was not culturally responsive and impeded access to the questions and possibly hindered the ability for some people to engage in the conversation. It didn't take long to notice a pattern in the questions; the team focused on how equity and equality are the same, dismissing all claims that students might have different needs. The office staff felt the focus of social justice should be on discipline because "they are the ones who have to deal with it."

I began by asking the first question: What is social justice? I waited silently as everyone looked around at each other, nervous giggles and sighs filled the silence. One woman spoke up and said, “It’s fairness. Everyone gets treated equally.” Throughout the entire conversation, there was an emphasis on the idea of equality with no evidence of understanding the difference between equity and equality. The continued response to all questions was the idea that all people should be treated the same and held to the same standard. When I finally spoke and pushed for clarity, I asked for examples of where they saw these ideas of equality happening or where they need to happen. This opened the conversation to the rest of the group and piqued the interest of all five members. The consensus seemed to be there needed to be equality in discipline and how it is handled. One woman emphasized teachers do not understand because teachers do not do lunch supervision and the office staff felt that students were not always held equally accountable. “It shouldn’t matter what your gender or race is, everyone should be disciplined equally and held accountable.”

This idea of equality in discipline despite gender or race led to question five: How has your identity affected your experience at our school site? I offered an example and explained how, in my experience, being a female teacher in, what I perceive to be an incredibly patriarchal school culture, has made my classroom management incredibly difficult. I noted that I have observed male teachers in class and interact with students and noticed the marked differences in how they respond.

My reflection seemed to agitate the two most outspoken women as they sat up straight, arms crossed and stated that they do not believe that to be true; there is no difference in the way they are treated in comparison to their male counterparts because they maintain equality in their

discipline with students: One woman relayed, “I am Latina. I was part of this community so I do understand them. Male to female doesn't change how I have a conversation with students. I came here to give back to the community.”

In response, another office staff member stated, “I’m similar to how she grew up. I grew up in South LA. That is the reason why I can relate to students and parents as well.”

I felt my body tighten as I listened to their responses, not upset with them, but triggered by what felt like my very real experiences being dismissed and undermined. All three of us are working at the same school site as Latinx women. How do our experiences differ and why? What parts of our identity inform our understanding of equity and the ways we believe it should show up in our work? This mismatch may stem from working in different capacities within the school site, which one woman spoke to when asked: What can the equity team do for you? What do you need from us to do this work? She responded with the request that the equity team make the PDs relevant to them. They feel that so much emphasis is put on instruction, that it doesn’t seem like they should be in those meetings or that it doesn’t matter if they are there. I immediately validated this sentiment and ensured them all that this is specifically something we will address as a team, but also noted for myself that the restorative justice and trauma informed practices that have been discussed within the equity team and amongst teachers are relevant to them. However, it has never been presented to them that way and a culture shift needs to happen so we all have an understanding of how we can work together and support each other to best support our students. This shift needs to be inclusive of all staff and faculty and emphasize the significance of everyone in being trauma informed and culturally responsive as a school.

The air was lighter as the meeting ended and I began to explain affinity groups and asked if they felt that would be a good place to start in terms of scaffolding PDs. I wanted to immediately show them that I valued their opinion and that plans were already being made to address their concerns. Although, there was a clear distinction between data collected amongst teachers and the office staff team in regards to foundation understanding of equity and social justice ideas, the data provided a starting point for the DEI work at the school site. However, a more nuanced and potentially more difficult issue to address is the culture of apathy towards equity work. When the office staff discussed how much work they have to do during supervision and how they do the disciplining that teachers do not have to do, the resentment was clear. How can true antiracism work be done when the adults do not see the value in each other and feel valued?

### **The Analysis**

In exploring to what extent do the PD materials reflect antiracist principles, I leaned on Dr. Kendi's definition of antiracism as something that promotes policies, practices, and ideas that create equality for all people, regardless of race (Kendi, 2019). In this session, the materials did not promote equality because they were not accessible to everyone due to a language barrier, making the PD materials inequitable. If people are going to be expected to engage in any materials, it should be available in the language they can best access. I cannot remember any PD I have attended at the middle or high school where they provided translated materials. I was responsible for this particular meeting and, despite trying to be prepared and having what I considered to be good intentions, I allowed myself to be so frustrated with the process of setting up this meeting and the people who I perceived as not caring enough, that I did not prepare the



meeting in a way that was a reflection of antiracist principles. Evergreen Charter Network defined antiracism as:

The active process of dismantling White supremacist beliefs, policies, and systems. This requires individuals and institutions to acknowledge the systemic nature of racism, to courageously combat against racial biases & dominant cultural norms, and ultimately, to cede power to those who have been racially oppressed in order to become an equitable and pro-Black organization.

In exploring the extent to which the DEI PD materials and practices at Evergreen reflect antiracist principles, the lack of translated materials showed the lack of inclusion and access, but also speaks to the assumption that we have all been educated the same and will have the desire to engage in this work. It is dangerous to assume that DEI work is and, more significantly, feels important to everyone. The team made it clear that they did not feel included in DEI work, nor did they feel it was relevant to their work. However, if we are going to engage in antiracist work, following the definition provided by the network, we need to be self-reflexive and honest in order to identify ways that White supremacy is embedded in our practices as a school and individual biases.

When people are overworked, they are more likely to make mistakes and be less open to learning new material or trying new practices. All of us—including BIPOC individuals—must ask, what culture, specifically school culture, is conducive to labor and time intensive DEI work? Critical social theory states that truth exists within human experience and the context in which that is situated. Therefore, in those moments, my truth is different from that of my colleagues because we have experienced oppression within the world, and specifically our school site (Lather, 1986). We all entered this space feeling guarded, evidence that we have past traumatic experiences that now inform how we engage with this work and each other. When I watched the

ops team leave the second PD after having been there for ten minutes and having arrived late, anger swelled inside me and all I could think about was how little they care about this work and how little they respect the work I have done to bring this to our team, regardless of whether or not that was true. I have experienced so much harm at this school site where I felt unsupported, undermined and belittled, so that colored my experience, possibly projecting my frustrations onto them.

We should not feel like we are fighting with each other and there needs to be space for self-reflection so we do not act on these frustrations in a way that is harmful. Although we met weeks after the initial date, the meeting was productive and I was able to collect valuable data, but more importantly, I felt a small shift in the tension as we exited from the meeting.

CST resides in the tradition of using education to enlighten and transform, “[CST] insists that we get real by critically examining the values and worldviews that inform our own social practice and by engaging these values with those of other people in our sphere of work” (Levinson, 2016). The intention of the listening session was to gather data about the knowledge faculty and staff have in regards to antiracist practices and DEI work. However, the nuances of the conversation and feelings of tension and anxiety that permeated the space speak to the significance of the culture and how the practices of inclusion need to be addressed before antiracist work can truly be accomplished. In the CST and CRT tradition, self-reflexivity also needs to exist and be embedded in the practice for all stakeholders in order to develop new knowledge, guided by reflexivity and grounded in personal experience (Levinson, 2016). It is through critically analyzing the systems in which our experiences exist, even if we disagree, that we can dismantle harmful systems and repair harm done to each other. The question at my

school site continues to be: how do we fix the culture when everyone is angry or disagreeing? CST calls researchers to engage with those whose views differ from theirs so that they may engage in discourse and critique systems together, giving them multiple perspectives from which to build new knowledge that can inform new systems (Leonardo, 2004). In this particular case, we have different experiences of DEI work, sexism on campus, and interactions with disciplining students, and having begun that conversation, we can continue to work to understand each other in order to analyze how our experiences exist within the education system and our school site in order to make changes.

### **Vignette 2: Antiblackness at Evergreen**

*It is no accident that this homeplace, as fragile and as transitional as it may be, a makeshift shed, a small bit of earth where one rests, is always subject to violation and destruction. For when a people no longer have the space to construct homeplace, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance. (bell hooks, 1999)*

#### **The Context**

I teach at a predominantly Latinx school where 90% of students are of Latinx background, mostly of Mexican origin communities. Of the 16 teachers at the school, 10 are of Latinx descent and eight identify as Mexican.

The following statements were made in response to a Hispanic Heritage Month suggestion we have celebratory Latinx snacks during professional development.

*“I will not eat your Mexican snacks.”*

*“Mexican food is overdone for me.”*

The statements represent pushback by, Ms. Stevenson, one of three teachers at the school who identify as Black.

My initial thoughts were of frustration; this felt like a microaggression against the Mexican community. It felt unnecessarily hostile. However, I witnessed an evolution in her. Originally very vocal, she stopped engaging during meetings and left comments on the DEI surveys about how the school does not care about the Black experience. I questioned my anger. I struggled between my own frustration and wanting to support my colleague, not knowing how. I sent electronic chat messages (Google Chat) to ask if we could meet, hoping I could provide a space for her to talk and for me to listen. I absolutely agreed with her sentiments the school needs to do better by its Black students and staff; we need to center the Black experience. I struggled with asking a Black woman to do any of the labor to make that happen.

I entered this meeting nervous, considering her positionality as one of the only Black teachers in the school and not wanting to say the wrong thing. I listened to her; she apologized, somewhat, for her comments about Mexican food, but mostly, she apologized that I was upset by them. This was fleeting as she began to become more animated and proclaimed over and over that I am the dominant culture. I am the dominant group. I will never know how she feels because in this space, I am the majority.

I was horrified by the number of racist, specifically Anti-Black incidents she described: hearing the N-word used casually, alerting admin to students telling a student to move his “black ass” and having them promise to “investigate” it, but have nothing be done. I was stunned, but I also wasn’t. Anti-Blackness is very real in the Latinx community and the adults around her were just letting it happen.

## **The Incident: November 17, 2022**

Stomach in my throat, this is a reflection I am hesitant to write this because it forces me to question the view I have of myself as an ally, as an antiracist, and as a good person. One of the questions my therapist will ask me often is, how does your body feel? And right now, my legs are numb, my head is swirling, and I'm nauseated.

On November 17, 2022 Ms. Stevenson messaged me and asked me to have a follow-up conversation with her. I immediately felt my body move into panic mode. Our last conversation ended in a shared understanding that so much was out of our hands, but we were on the same team. I believed it ended positively. However, Ms. Stevenson elicits those panicked feelings for a lot of people because many feel she is antagonistic. I can imagine it exhausting being a Black woman in a school that perceptively or openly dismisses the Black experience or has made it clear the Black voice was not important. I would be triggered to antagonism as well.

I have fundamentally reconsidered my experience at the school and why it has been a certain type of experience. While I have struggled in my own ways, I have generally felt like I could be heard. What part of my identity allows me that privilege and how can we change it? As I entered her room, it was clear she was upset and immediately began telling me why she had called me down. She was still upset about our conversation about Hispanic Heritage month, and more so after a teacher had told her that I had told a group of teachers that she is just looking for reasons to get upset. I was floored. Surprisingly, I didn't have immediate feelings of anxiety and panic, I believe partly because this was a lie and I knew I hadn't said or done anything wrong. I sat there, listening to her voice rise in anger and her legs moving in anxiety. Time slowed and I finally spoke, "But, Ms. Stevenson, I never said any of that. I would never."

She responded, “Well, Ms. Nava, I don’t have reason to believe that you’re lying, so I will take you at your word. But this is a top three best example of why this school is problematic. This is fake allyship.” The words rang in my ears and I stopped breathing. I was floored. Why would anyone lie like that?

When I was recounting this to a trusted friend, I felt sad. I felt like she seemed angry and betrayed, which I understood. It looked like I had gained her trust and pretended to care and then went around speaking poorly about her, dismissing and undermining her feelings and trust. While that did not happen, I knew the impact of that lie was real and deep.

As I write this, I am taking deep breaths and breaks, feeling the slump of my shoulders as the weight of my grief and disappointment sits on me. The words “fake ally” have not left my mind since she said them. In a space where I am part of the dominant culture and feel seen and heard, I cannot understand what this situation must have felt for her. As I conduct my research on what the DEI PD process is for a Latina, I am stepping back to recognize and name my privilege in a way I had not anticipated. I am the minority in so many spaces, but not this one. A question reverberates. How must this feel for her and how can I fix it?

### **The Analysis**

This situation and my visceral reaction to feeling “wrong” in this moment reminds me of two things: to decenter myself in a moment that is not mine, and that DEI and antiracism work is ongoing. It is messy. This work is a process and if we are not able to reflect and do better next time, then we are not truly committed to this work. No one can be an antiracist definitively, it is something we are always becoming. The idea of constantly working to become is rooted in Frier’s concept of dialogue rooted in love and humility. As we work towards radical liberation of

all the oppressed, we have to enter spaces open to dialogue that can allow us to learn. Where “there are neither ignorance nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting together, to learn more than they now know” (Freire, 1970). This moment with Ms. Stevenson is a moment of painful growth for me, and an example of the harm done to minorities in spaces not created to support and uplift them. Though deeply uncomfortable, the dialogue between myself and Ms. Stevenson forced me to recognize my contribution to systems of oppression within the school system, culture and my own research. However, this allows me to recreate my understanding of the situation in order to move toward radical liberation, using my privilege (Freire, 1970).

I want to talk to Ms. Stevenson and have a restorative conversation in order to help rebuild the necessary faith and trust required for liberatory dialogue. I want to apologize and move forward in creating long-lasting systems that are pro-Black and school-wide. However, this is a stark reminder that nothing can be done without a strong, trained, and committed leadership staff. When this event occurred, I had friends and trusted colleagues I could speak with, but did she? No one on our leadership team is Black and no one, in my experience, is trained or equipped to support either of us in restoring our relationship or fixing the harm done at our school site. It is not sufficient for our school to invest in ideas like diversity or equity if they are not explicitly pro-Black and embedded in policies and practices.

Anti-Black racism cannot be an add-on to the practices of school leaders and teachers, and it cannot be incorporated into broad school actions on intolerance, racism, and even White privilege. Key to the effort of addressing anti-Blackness is the need for educators to ‘draw on their agency to unlearn, learn, relearn and reframe. (Dumas, 2016)

In order to be a pro-Black and antiracist school, moments of dialogue and learning need to be common practice. Systemic, lasting changes within the school will not happen without an

entire staff, led by a committed leadership team, engaging in reflexive praxis. As difficult as these conversations and the reflective writings were, I am emerging having learned and relearned about myself and my positionality within the context of my school, classroom and research. However, in order for the reflective space to be collaborative and allow for a culture of trust to build, it cannot be done in isolation.

The purpose of this research was to explore the BIPOC teacher experience of DEI PDs situated in the school culture of Evergreen Charter Network; however, Ms. Stevenson had forced me to examine my privilege and positionality within the school culture, thus reevaluating and reconsidering how I was situated within the purpose of my research.

For apart from the inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other. (Freire, 1970)

I entered this research with the naive idea that I was providing insight into the experience of a marginalized member of the community, not considering that I am comfortably a part of the majority within the community. I have been forced to reconsider and develop a new understanding of the intersectionality of my identity and the ways in which that affects how I engage with my work and colleagues. My students see me and accept me immediately because I look and sound like them. We share experiences and understandings of the world and how it works, but through a departure from the comfort of that space, I was able to gain new knowledge that can inform my teachings, PDs, and actions as an antiracist.

In a study of antiracist PDs centering on White female teachers, the PDs focused on Freire's idea of becoming and focused on providing intentional space for reflective dialogue amongst colleagues sharing a common goal (McManimon & Casey 2018). The sense of



accountability that fueled the work was relational; teachers felt safe being vulnerable and invested in the growth of each other as teachers and people. At Evergreen Charter, there was no common goal or mission and vision that is grounding the work of becoming; staff and faculty do not know what they are working towards “becoming.” How can we develop a similar sense of shared accountability? Currently, it is clear that staff and faculty feel uneasy having difficult conversations, as proven through my visceral anxiety having this conversation. However, in 2019-2023, all staff and faculty have voiced their resistance to and fear of having difficult conversations, especially around race. These comments vary from, “I’m scared to have these talks with my kids.” to, “I think we have bigger problems we need to fix at our school first.” Ms. Stevenson has shined the light on the desperate need for a shared vision as a school, training for and commitment from leadership to antiracism so that we can—as a school community—engage in liberatory dialogue rooted in trust and love that will foster an equitable, pro-Black, antiracist school.

### **Vignette 3: New Leadership, Old Problems**

*If we want a beloved community, we must stand for justice.* (bell hooks, 1999)

#### **The Context**

Our new principal started at the beginning of second semester, January 9, 2023. On January 10 I met with him to discuss my work leading the DEI committee on campus, my hopes for the semester and my concerns about last semester. I came prepared with my notes, having reflected independently and spoken with my colleagues about their concerns and hopes. As I sat down and began to speak, I was unsure about his objective for the meeting, but knew what I wanted: to continue the work momentum from last semester, fearful that stalling would lead to

another DEI committee simply existing for show, performative. I listed several concerns, with two specific, major ones: 1) the use of the N-word on campus; and 2) culture issues amongst the staff and faculty. I told him, given the antiblackness that exists in the Latinx community which we serve, we needed to find and communicate a consistent response to students using the N-word. I also asked if it would be possible to have a budget for the DEI committee, even for small expenses like food, hoping that we could include food from a Black owned business in our Black History Month celebrations.

Before I finished, I scanned my notes and then asked if he had any questions. He smiled and laughed lightly, saying that we can have money for food but he worries that we would be tokenizing the Black community through it. He then proceeded to ask what data supports having a DEI committee and the provided scope and sequence (see Appendix A). I was taken aback by this question, confused about why I needed to justify the necessity and existence of the committee. I paused and reminded him that the day before we had looked at data from a staff survey that showed only 40% of our school staff feels a sense of belonging at this school. As a committee, we also used survey data at the end of each PD to inform the following PD; the scope and sequence itself is rooted in research I have done in my dissertation process and in what similar schools were establishing at their sites.

He appeared to be actively thinking about what I was saying, nodding his head and looking around. He then concluded that leading DEI efforts should not be my responsibility and, in fact, should be the job of the deans at the school. He stated we would pause the work of the committee until he has had a chance to decide how to move forward and who should be leading the work.

## **The Incident**

On February 1, 2023, we had our first DEI PD since the principal had dismantled the team. He presented us with packets that included a couple of guiding questions and a lot of graphs. The contents looked promising, but it quickly became clear that he was uncomfortable and unsure of himself and the material. He stumbled over himself as he projected a scene from the movie, *The Black Panther* (Coogler, 2018), telling us that a villain is just a hurt or unhealed hero. This was supported by the visuals on the packet, but we did not discuss the visual or the statement as he continued to proclaim, “I don’t want to make any general claims, but all you have to do is look at the news in the last two weeks.”

I sat there confused about what he meant, then frustrated when I realized he meant he wouldn’t make any general claims about racism. Immediately I wanted to stop him and ask him to say it, use the words, call it out. How are we going to combat something we do not feel comfortable naming? He then proceeded to ask us to answer the reflection questions independently and began numbering us off for groups. My stomach began to turn as I wondered who would be in my group and how that would affect my ability to engage in the work. When I saw my two friends get the same number as me, I softened and we began our discussion. As we began the group conversation, engaging all the teachers, the conversation turned to the way the N- word is used so casually and frequently by students, with one teacher becoming emotional, stating that she has watched some of her students stop socializing and creating art as their self-esteem is destroyed by the constant hate speech. As we all nodded in agreement, knowing that we have witnessed similar moments, a teacher raised his hand and finally asked, “What are the consequences for using the N-word? What can we do and expect to happen?” The principal then

looked at his watch and said that it was time to move on. He then spent the next ten minutes referring us to graphs that we did not stop to analyze.

As we prepared to go and he began to dismiss us, a teacher asked what the scope and sequence is and when we can expect to have our next DEI PD, to which he replied, there is no scope and sequence and he does not know when the next one will be, but he feels it is important that this work continue. He also emphasized that Evergreen does not have a definitive plan as a network, so it is okay that we are all “figuring it out.” I raised my hand and began to speak before being called on because I was frustrated and fearful that he would say we were moving on; I asked for clarification on consequences to the N-word to which he replied that he is working on a matrix, or plan, and right now, there is not a set consequence. Again, he emphasized that the network is also in process of figuring this out. He stumbled over himself saying that he was not aware this was a problem and stated, “If this was a White school, everyone would be outraged!” to which I replied, “I do not think this is okay, no one here does, which is why we are asking for consequences.”

He seemed visibly upset and frustrated, responding that he does not want to start a set of consequences and not have consistency or follow through. He continued to ask for volunteers to develop a DEI committee that could have input in these conversations, as opposed to the whole team. I left that meeting fuming, frustrated that none of our questions were answered, that he could continued to refuse to provide, or discuss, consequences for students using racial slurs. And, after our meeting where he explicitly asked me to stop working on the equity team, he asked for volunteers to help him begin the equity work at our school. Not only did I feel hurt and

disregarded in that moment, but I felt incredibly disheartened that all the work we had done in the first semester was not going to be continued.

### **The Analysis**

School leaders need to go through their own training and have a foundational understanding and belief in antiracist practices in order for it to be effectively implemented in a school. It is a prerequisite for teacher buy-in and for sustainability. This foundation allows for administrators or school leaders to have a greater ability to create relationships and a school culture conducive to change where the support for antiracist practice is clear through visible commitments (McManimon & Casey 2018). As a staff, we were upset because he would not name the clear racism in the acts of using a slur and then refused to definitively promise consequences. In fact, he began the PD by stating that he did not want to generalize racism or how prevalent it is. Historically, by not naming something as racist or racism, it is ignoring the root of the problem and reality that the problem is rooted in race (McManimon & Casey 2018). This is one reason that the move from naming curricula and practices as antiracist as opposed to inclusive or multicultural is so significant; by calling a practice or curriculum multicultural, it allows practitioners and educators to ignore the ideas of race and racism through not having to use the language and explicitly name race, but instead using vague language such as diversity that can make a person feel as if that is sufficient (McManimon & Casey 2018). This same idea is seen with my principal being unable to name the problems of our school, and society, as being explicitly based in racism. If we cannot name and identify the true problem, we cannot fix it.

This was also harmful to the school culture. As a person of color, I am watching and

listening to my school leader undermine and ignore the realities of my lived experience to the detriment of our efforts around DEI.

A study exploring how a teacher's perception of school culture affects the transfer of their skills and commitment to antiracist classroom practices, from professional development to the actual classroom, found the level of visible commitment from leadership largely determined the effectiveness of the training (Sotto-Santiago et. al, 2022). Teachers would say they were committed to changing and improving their teaching through implementing their pedagogical practices, but did not remain committed or continue to engage in the practices they learned through professional development because the culture of the school did not prioritize it. Teachers explained they felt encouraged to transfer knowledge from PDs when there was a vision and they felt supported by the admin while other teachers said they knew admin would not pay for trainings and felt like they did not view it as important, therefore feeling less supported and compelled to transfer knowledge from PDs to their classroom (Lawrence, 2005). This was made clear at our PD when a teacher pushed to discuss ways to address the use of racial slurs and our principal looked at his watch, declaring it was time to move on, demonstrating faculty were not supported and they did not share a mission and vision.

When our principal was interviewed by a panel of stakeholders (parents, teachers, and the superintendent) I asked what his plan and vision was for DEI work at our school. He said that he felt it was important work, but was not completely confident in his knowledge and abilities, so he would be leaning on the staff and faculty for collaboration. Much like in the tradition of Social Critical theory, he explained that his plan was to engage with stakeholders and watch the culture of the school for the first month so that he could understand it before he made any decisions or

changes. He was an outsider entering with power and wanted, he explained, to understand the culture in which he would be engaging in this work. However, this was not what happened. As a White presenting man in a school of predominantly Latinx staff, faculty, students and families, he approached our DEI work with no scope and sequence, protected time, or integration of input from his staff of color.

In exploring the culture in which these PDs emerge, it is important to recognize the trauma and lack of trust already deeply embedded in the culture he entered as leader. Therefore, it was difficult to hear our new leader dismiss our concerns about an ongoing problem, stating that if it was happening at a White school, there would be more outrage. This felt like he was placing the blame on us for not having been sufficiently outraged and fixing this issue, ignoring the fact that we lacked leadership for an entire semester. It also felt, as he was talking to a staff that is predominantly people of color, that he was comparing us to a predominantly White school and staff, which statistically has access to better resources and more consistent leadership (Lawrence 2005). Therefore, blaming us for the harm being done to us and our students with complete disregard for our lack of resources, equates to disregarding White supremacy and the ways in which we, our students, and our school are affected by it. Scholars agreed “[a]n administrator’s ability to engender that respect among the staff, as well as his or her ability to foster collegial relationships between those who try to implement change and those who do not, are aspects of leadership that are central to teacher commitment and to the success of new educational practices” (Reese, 2012). At this moment, divisions were being created amongst the staff as priorities were not consistent or shared amongst the staff. Lawrence (2005) reminded us “[s]tudies on educational change efforts reveal that major changes are seldom effective unless all

parties involved in teaching and learning—teachers, students, parents, and school administrators—support the proposed changes.” For professional development to be successful, all stakeholders must be committed to a shared vision and that commitment must be visible (Lawrence 2005). Through my experience and in speaking with my colleagues, the ideas of authentic commitment and visibility from school leaders were vital to successful change. Studies have shown successful professional development is rooted in and begins with a shared mission and vision, either already developed by the school or by stakeholders (Duchscher, 2000). This allows people to ground themselves in a shared goal and gauge the changes and commitments of leadership (Duchscher, 2000).

Our current principal entered our school in January 2023 after we were without official and consistent leadership for a semester. The teachers had kept the school running by making executive decisions, such as continuing the DEI work and PDs, after our principal had resigned. We continued to have field trips, host clubs at lunch, and maintain rigorous classrooms. However, he arrived and began to make changes which were frustrating and felt dismissive of faculty work done to maintain a safe and nurturing school for our students.

When I had my meeting with him, he communicated he wanted to ensure the structures were in place to maintain the DEI work in a way that was sustainable, emphasizing wanting to do the antiracism work in a way that did not tokenize our Black students or colleagues. However, when the Black students and colleagues needed him to provide consequences for students using the N-word, he became frustrated and refused to commit to any action. In that moment, it felt like the moment with Alex, where she was called the N-word by a student and asked to carry that burden on her own. Our principal remarked that teachers could complete a referral and have a



conversation with students if they used the slur, but so many teachers are nervous to have those conversations and make those changes without any true support from leadership. A school culture will not change and teachers will not be able to implement antiracist practices, such as restorative justice, if their leadership does not commit to making cultural changes first.

#### **Vignette 4: Let's Create Community Across the Complex**

*One of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone. (bell hooks, 1999)*

#### **The Context**

Evergreen Charter has a high school and middle school on the same complex. This makes working at the middle school incredibly special and rewarding because teachers are able to teach students in middle school and watch them grow throughout high school. This also makes it possible for families, siblings and cousins, to go to school together as they maneuver middle and high school. However, while these schools are on the same campus, there are clear distinctions between the two. A number of staff who, when given the option, choose to work at the high school over the middle school. The school cultures are distinct.

Despite a deep love for working with middle schoolers, we lost a school psychologist and English Language Development teacher to the high school last academic year. Both people cited communication and structure as the primary differences between the two schools. The high school has a leadership team that communicates well and provides a consistent structure to the school while the middle school struggles.

For example, on the first day of the current school year, students filed into the school yard past the gates, middle and high schoolers waiting with anxious excitement. At the bell, high

schoolers moved into their building, finding their name on a list with their first class. Once inside their first class, teachers passed out their schedules and students were able to proceed with their day. However, the other side of the yard was chaotic. As teachers opened their doors, welcoming students and embracing the excitement of a new year, the sixth-grade teachers were met with empty classrooms and confused students. All non-teaching staff-administration team members, including teacher aids, special education and office staff were outside scrambling and on their computers trying to figure out schedules for all the sixth graders. At that moment, none of the sixth grade students had class schedules and none of the sixth grade teachers were unprepared for the first day of class.

There is an indentation in the ground between the high school and middle school where the ground slopes down and serves as an unintentional divider. That day, it divided chaos and structure, students who knew where they belonged and students who were wandering, unsure of where to go.

As I closed my door on the first day of the school year and sat at my desk, I reflected on the lack of communication, structure, and preparedness is a reflection of the school and school culture. I contemplated the question my colleague had been asking me for three years, “How can we focus on antiracist work when our school barely functions?”

### **The Incident**

A running theme, and sometimes sarcastic joke, was that our work emails and questions never get responses. In my three years with Ms. Howard as my principal, she has only responded to my emails a handful of times. Therefore, when I began my dissertation process, I reached out to the high school, hoping to understand the process by which they engage in their DEI work, I

was surprised at how quick and responsive everyone on the leadership team was. I was immediately connected with the director of instruction at the high school who leads the DEI work. He immediately made plans to meet with me and answer all my questions. He sent me a Google Invite and we were set. I sat there, shocked, with this entire communication having happened within the span of 24 hours.

I met with Mr. Johnson, the high school director of instruction, who informed me that he uses research to develop a scope and sequence and PD sessions. He then takes it to the high school's equity team that consists of different school site stakeholders. Once they review and agree on the materials Mr. Johnson presented, he is responsible for facilitating the PD with faculty and staff.

I was invited to join one of the sessions where I thought I would just observe and take notes, but was instead immediately invited into a small group where everyone made sure I had all the necessary materials. All groups formed organically as people arrived and sat at tables, having hushed conversations and exchanging good mornings while we all waited. The PD began with revisiting the high school priorities:

***High School Culture Priorities for 2022-2023***

Creating an equitable and inclusive school community for all stakeholders by:

- Unpacking and dismantling racism and bias within ourselves and our school community.
- Understanding and responding to our scholars' contexts through a restorative and trauma-informed lens.

- Fostering a culture of joy, meaningful connection, and social-emotional wellbeing among all stakeholders.

### ***High School Instructional Priorities for 2022-2023***

Creating equitable and inclusive classroom communities for ALL scholars by:

- Promoting critical-thinking and reasoning through grade-level content that is culturally relevant and anti-racist.
- Identifying and meeting the needs of our diverse learners to ensure ALL scholars are prepared for the rigors of college, career, and beyond.
- Responding consistently to scholar data through differentiated small group instruction and reteach and reassessment.

Beginning the PD with the list of priorities allowed participants to identify which priority was relevant to the work and ground themselves as they engaged and collaborated. The topic of the PD was “equity traps” or “traps” that educators can fall into that are harmful and rooted in racism, such as color blindness or racist assumptions about students and families. We were provided with a reading and were following the presenter through a slide deck, but the small group discussions were the most fruitful. As we were discussing, one teacher commented on the second equity trap, “Valencia’s (1997) work on deficit thinking: a theory that posits that the student who fails in school does so principally because of internal deficits or deficiencies.” She stated that, as the PE teacher and volleyball coach, she became frustrated with a student who never wore the correct shoes to practice, assuming that the student was not taking the team and practices seriously. However, when she confronted the student, the student confessed that she only had one pair of shoes and could not afford any others at the moment. The teacher was able

to be vulnerable and honest, and she confessed how ashamed she felt after the conversation with the student, but engaged in deep self-reflection to consider why she assumed the student did not want to follow the rules.

I sat in that moment listening to this teacher speak with genuine concern and love for her students, which is something I also hear from teachers at the middle school, but it is not something that is given space. I immediately looked at the PD scope and sequence and calendar for the high school, noting that materials were hyperlinked in the scope and sequence and there were DEI PDs planned once a month for the rest of the year, as well as grade level and department meetings where teachers were expected to continue self-reflecting and embedding their learnings from the PDs into their classroom work.

As I sat and watched the high school faculty and staff collaborate in a way that felt productive and safe, I began to wonder what the difference was. I understand that no school is perfect, but it definitely felt like this school and staff was united and moving towards a shared goal in a positive way.

### **The Analysis**

As schools were pushed to face the ways that they have, as an institution, participated in upholding White supremacy, other aspects of society had to do the same. One example is in medicine, medical training in medical school and also antiracism and bias training for practicing physicians. The commonalities between antiracist training for physicians and educators is similar in that both institutions have been built on and rooted in White supremacy and requires those within the institution to unlearn racist beliefs and practices while understanding and dismantling their own biases in order to be antiracist.

Duchscher's (2000) framework for antiracist medical educators and practitioners calls for professional development to follow five steps in educating antiracist educators:

- 1) Developing foundational awareness through reflecting on identity, power, and positionality
- 2) Developing foundational knowledge through understanding the historical context of the institution
- 3) Embedding antiracism into practice through teaching and policies
- 4) Dismantling oppressive structures and building coalitions
- 5) Function as and within an antiracist culture and institution.

Through understanding my experience within the culture and antiracist professional development of my school site, we are still at the first step while the high school seems to be at the second. A glaring difference between the two sites is also the fact that the high school has a designated person whose job it is to develop and facilitate antiracist trainings. They are paid to dedicate their time and knowledge so that the school and its educators may move through the steps and become an antiracist institution. While he is a man of color whose burden it is to teach everyone, he is a man of color who is compensated and supported, with his experience as a man of color being validated through his work (Sotto-Santiago et. al 2022). This is distinctly different from the middle school in that there is visible commitment, a shared goal and consistent communication and learning that allows teachers to transfer their knowledge into the classroom.

I believe the commitment is there from the middle school faculty and staff, based on the first semester, the work I did through the DEI committee, and conversations we had and survey data. Teachers were especially asking for action steps and lessons, tangible practices they can do

in their classroom. However, to start from step one and build foundational awareness will require trust, space for vulnerability and visible commitment from our leadership. The visible commitment includes home office, or the district leaders, who support and provide resources for leadership in order to successfully develop antiracist educators who actively combat White supremacy in their daily practices. Commitment from all stakeholders is necessary as “[t]he success of antiracism curricula relies on a robust infrastructure, human power, and resources, with explicit, high-quality education that engages learners, inviting them to participate in advocacy and activism” (Sotto-Santiago et. al 2022). Therefore, it is imperative that leadership at all levels engage in and actively commit to antiracist professional development, such as in time, money and human resources in order to be successful, as the high school has demonstrated.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Concluding Thoughts and Wonderings: What Comes Next?**

Through the process of self-reflection and critical analysis of my memories, experiences, interactions and feelings, I hope to add the literature of what effective antiracist professional development is, with specific consideration to the BIPOC teacher experience within the PD. When beginning this dissertation process, there was little research that spoke to the BIPOC experience and centered Whiteness, even in spaces meant to support BIPOC educators and combat racism. I hope I can add to the conversation of how to make the change so that BIPOC educators are supported and not burdened, and White educators are genuinely doing the personal reflective work necessary in this praxis to show up for their colleagues, as this is an ongoing process of becoming (Freire, 1970). My concluding thoughts are based on my experience and in interaction with the available literature. I have included “Reflections and Wonderings” for each vignette to model my reflexive praxis in the autoethnographic process, but even more to encourage the continuation of this work and to demonstrate that we can never finish being antiracist. To be antiracist is to always question, reflect and grow. What comes next?

### **Vignette Reflections and Wonderings**

#### **Vignette 1: Us Versus Them; Equity Within Staff Culture**

Vignette 1 reflected on my experience within the tension between staff and faculty on campus and the ensuing effects it has on staff culture. It followed my experience engaging in DEI work with the office staff.

I wonder in what ways the operations team, or the office staff, could be engaged in a way that feels meaningful. The office team was frustrated and resistant to the work of the equity team



because, as they stated in the PD, they already feel ignored for what their contribution is to the school and what they perceive as their contribution to creating equality within the school.

There are no opportunities outside of the work day for teachers and office staff to positively engage and create community nor nourish and sustain this work. Therefore, I wonder what this would look like and in what ways this could be done with intentionality. Leadership being visibly present during these community building opportunities, authentically engaging with people and demonstrating visible commitment to the work, and also getting to know their faculty and staff in a way that can be seen through these moments of culture building, could begin to build a culture where antiracist work can be successful. This is much like a teacher using their knowledge of their students to create an inclusive and safe classroom culture for them to collaborate and learn; students will not learn if they do not feel safe and they cannot trust their teacher if their teacher is not being authentic.

### **Vignette 2: Anti-Blackness at Evergreen**

Vignette 2 followed my experience with a Black co-worker and the ways in which I am forced to reflect on my own beliefs, biases and behavior and the ways my identity markers interact with the school culture.

As I reflect on this particular set of exchanges and the way Ms. Stevenson emphasized needing to be heard, I wonder, what does that look and feel like in education and at my school site? I have said before that I feel heard at my site, but what I really feel is that people are willing to meet with me. When I reach out to the district, to the Director of Humanities or Superintendent, they are always willing to meet with me and validate my feelings and

experience. This has given me a false sense of being heard, because I wonder, am I really being heard if nothing gets done?

I have had several experiences of sexual harassment from students, examples being inappropriate jokes in class and explicit instagram posts. Each time the onus has been on me to address the student, their behavior and the harm done to me. Despite the fact that I sat down with leadership and parents, nothing was done unless I was the one to initiate it and ensure follow through. I wonder how this culture of expecting the victim to own the responsibility of repairing harm keeps the school from being able to fully engage in antiracism work. Who is then responsible for facilitating the repair and embedding these practices into the culture? When I spoke with the Superintendent regarding sexist jokes and comments made towards me as a female teacher, his response was that I should facilitate the conversation with the student and do a lesson on sexism and sexual harassment with the class where the incident happened. His logic was then that I would be reclaiming the power that the harmful jokes and comments had taken from me; however, I wanted him to use his positionality as a man and leader to reinforce how inexcusable the ideas were, especially at our school. Therefore, I wonder how we could imbed expectations of inclusion for all identity markers into the school culture in a way that is not isolated, but rather part of the everyday practice and school culture. Can we truly be antiracist if we are not also anti-discrimination in all its forms?

### **Vignette 3: New Leadership, Old Problems**

Vignette 3 follows my experience trying to work with our new principal in continuing DEI work at our school site and my experience in the first DEI PD he leads.

As I reflect on these moments and this PD experience, I wonder in what ways could the administration have approached this topic of DEI PDS, and eventually, hate speech at school differently. Considering the culture of the school and level of trauma that has ensued since online learning, could the principal have allowed teachers to choose their group members during small group discussion in order to allow them to feel more confident and comfortable discussing sensitive topics, in order to build towards a productive whole group discussion? Last semester, our DEI committee led a listening session where faculty and staff were grouped by grade level, leadership and office staff. In the survey collected after the PD, 15 of the 18 responses we received noted that they found the groupings to significantly support their ability to engage and feel comfortable, asking for us to continue the practice. Antiracist practices, and the internal work that is required to engage in them successfully, requires vulnerability and self-reflection. It is difficult to fully implement anti racist practices in a school or classroom without first examining one's own biases, which can be a long and difficult, but necessary process. "When combined with a critical andragogy approach and culturally relevant and inclusive methodologies, antiracism education can serve as a tool to transform and equip faculty with the knowledge, skills, confidence, and empowerment to own their teaching, agency, and activism" (Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994). I do believe my principal and our network want to serve our students, but I question how committed are they to doing the necessary internal work to transform so that they may actualize these practices through professional development, in a way that aligns with the school mission and transfer to true teacher learning and classroom practices?

Lastly, I wonder if my principal's fear of tokenizing the Black community would lessen if the school genuinely prioritized supporting Black students and staff in a way that was embedded in daily practices, and not relegated to February during Black History Month.

#### **Vignette 4: Let's Create Community Across the Complex**

Vignette 4 followed my experience at the DEI PDs at the high school in comparison to the middle school, looking for ways we could learn from and work with each other.

I have several memories of the leadership at my school site becoming frustrated with the teachers, explicitly asking us not to compare our school to the high school. I wonder how much we could grow as a complex if we worked together and had complex-wide equity team meetings that led events for all students in both schools. There is a constant need for vulnerability and reflection with DEI and antiracism work that my leadership team has been openly and consistently opposed to, one example being their refusal to work with the high school as a team.

I wonder how our school culture would transform if we made intentional opportunities for community building for the adults in the middle and high school that could lead to collaboration and learning opportunities. If we were not all so afraid of being wrong and insistent that we are right, I wonder what we could do as a team and what our school community could become as a complex?

#### **What Makes an Effective PD?**

The objective of professional development is to continue to educate teachers and support them in growing in their practice. The inadequacies of traditional professional development practices is evident in the lack of transfer to classroom practice; "theory is viewed as unrelated to practice; content knowledge is seen as disconnected from teaching methods, and

instructional methods are beheld as detached from learning and development”(Shanker 1996). Historically, professional development is burdensome to teachers and not viewed as worthwhile, as they often follow a “one and done” model, where ideas are only visited once in a PD, not allowing teachers time to collaborate or implement the skill in their classroom and then reflect on their success. Self-reflexivity is imperative to antiracist praxis and is necessary for genuine learning to transfer to classroom practices. Therefore, outside companies who do not engage in a series of PDs that give teachers opportunities to reinforce their skills will not be successful. Just as in the classroom, it is necessary to understand the teachers who are engaging in the PD so that learning can be differentiated and meaningful; when the cultural and racial background of the adults are considered, the PD will be responsive to those identity markers and will be more successful. Therefore, the following are necessary for effective PDs:

Differentiate PDs,

Know and understand staff and school culture,

PD series must have follow through and cannot follow a “one and done” model,

Knowledge must be transferable to classroom,

Leadership must be visibly committed,

Protect PD time and begin planning during the summer or in the previous year, and

Have shared norms and mission/vision.

When my school site DEI committee conducted the listening tour PD, we grouped teachers by grade level and they engaged with different members as they moved from different classrooms. The groupings allowed teachers to feel comfortable with their peers and engage with a diverse group of people; it also allowed the committee to gather data to inform ways to

differentiate future PDs. The DEI committee consisted of one woman of color, one man of color, one White non-binary person, and one white woman, who also served in different capacities within the school site. This allowed all educators to collaborate with people of different identities and viewpoints. It also puts the burden of teaching about racism on a group of diverse people, two white and two people of color who have studied and volunteered to lead the work (Anthym & Tuitt 2019). The work is then not a burden of the educators of color, but instead a choice. In this way, BIPOC educators are not expected to teach their White counterparts, but instead invite them in to learn and do the work together, as co-conspirators (Love, 2019).

We also provided an objective and scope and sequence that followed through the entire year to allow for teacher buy-in so that everyone could ground themselves in the shared objective, and not feel like it was another “one and done” PD session on racism (Wilson & Berne 1999). The following is a scope and sequence that I developed collaboratively with my colleagues on the equity team at my school site. This scope and sequence is designed to guide educators through personal, interpersonal and systemic learnings and reflections to make tangible changes at their school site (see Appendix A). The learning in this process is designed to be supported by intentional community building that is reflective of the needs of the specific school community; for example, at my school site, part of the intentional community building would be centered on building trust and camaraderie between teachers and office staff. This may not be a need at every school site, but leaders in this work must gauge the needs of their community and stakeholders with intentionality while doing ongoing antiracism work:

Quarter 1:

- Conduct listening sessions.

- Collect data on staff's level of understanding.
- Use data to inform PDs.

Quarter 2:

- Build a shared foundational of understanding of equity in education.
- Conduct PDs on principles of equity and intentional community building.

Quarter 3:

- Analyze and self-reflect on personal identity.
- Begin to identify and dismantle biases.
- Explore how biases affect our work in the school.

Quarter 4:

- Engage in learning about how to apply principles and understanding of equity in the classroom and school policies.
- Apply learnings to personal work within the school.
- Practice Self-reflection on learnings from the year. (Appendix A)

Therefore, I recommend that leadership begin the PD process by investing time in understanding and knowing the intersectional identities of their staff and the ways in which they interact with the school culture. DEI and antiracist work needs to begin with the culture in which the work will live; if the school culture is not conducive to DEI work and does not prioritize antiracism in all practices, the PDs will be unsuccessful.

Another consideration is time, both time dedicated within the school year to PDs, but also the time that is protected for PD preparations. When my school site developed a DEI team,

Another consideration is time, both time dedicated within the school year to PDs, but also the time that is protected for PD preparations. When my school site developed a DEI team, both attempts were done at the beginning of the school year, therefore competing with other mandatory school trainings and classroom set ups. Waiting to establish the DEI team and PD series until the beginning of the new school year leaves the team unprepared and presents DEI work as an extra thing that school faculty and staff must do, as opposed to embedding it in the school culture and practices. This can be avoided by developing the team and planning the scope and sequence at the end of the academic school year in preparation for the upcoming year. By doing this, the team is established and data regarding staff background can be gathered to inform the scope and sequence that can start at the beginning of the year. In allowing for more time, the planning and implementation of DEI teams and training can be done intentionally; this also shifts the culture in terms of priorities.

In beginning the development of a DEI team and PD series early, the DEI team is also allowed time to discuss and agree on expectations and norms as a group. Before this group of individuals can work together to guide their staff in identity and race work, they must first do that work individually and as a team. A lack of protected time for the work communicates that it is a lack of priority.

### **What Makes a PD Antiracist?**

I have been to several district required antiracist PD sessions where it was one session where it was “just the beginning” of the conversation. I distinctly remember turning to my colleague during the PD led by our principal on February 1 and she rolled her eyes at me as she mouthed what he was saying, “This is just the beginning of the conversation. Do not expect



closure at the end of this; we will not end racism today.” The comment on not ending racism felt flippant and made me feel as if he does not know his staff. We are ready to address racism, no one is naive enough to think we could fix it. This PD was reflective of most PDs I, and many teachers, experience. Like most PDs in general, “much of the professional development on race available to US inservice teachers is (like other teacher education course) one-off, delivered by fly-in-fly-out outside experts, and/or repeats of a kind of ‘Racism 101’” (McManimon & Casey, 2018). This has been my experience at Evergreen and, statistically, the experience of most US teachers, which does not make antiracist PDs sustainable or does not make them designed for ongoing learning and self-reflection. In contrast, a study was done to compare how teachers from two different regions of the country, Iowa and Massachusetts, perceived racism in school and how those perceptions and attitudes changed after being engaged in different antiracist training with different materials (Donner, 2021). The teachers engaged in a PD series over thirteen years that showed proof of drastically changing attitudes and practices in the classroom because teachers were asked to do reflective writing and engage in dialogue with their peers; this was successful because it was sustained over time, rooted in a shared goal that names the value of antiracism, is self-reflective and is collaborative (Donner, 2021). A successful antiracist PD requires, “clarity of purpose, specificity of goals, regular evaluation, and meaningful accountability. These elements should be codified through communication among stakeholders across the institution” (Anthym & Tuitt 2019). Therefore, an antiracist PD should include the following:

Have a clear, shared goal that names racism;

Antiracist practices must live in all aspects of the school, not just during PD;

BIPOC educators should not be expected to teach their White peers;  
Center, support and compensate BIPOC educators who lead the work;  
Engage educators as professionals through: inquiry, dialogue, peer observations;  
Visible commitments from all levels of leadership; and  
PDs must be done in series.

Having consistent PD trainings should also mean consistent teacher evaluations that include antiracist practices; being antiracist cannot live separately from everyday policies and practice, antiracism must be embedded in all aspects of the school and classroom (Anthym & Tuitt, 2019). Trainings that continue into coaching meetings and holding each other accountable is meaningful and demonstrative of visible commitment to the shared goal. Therefore, whichever skills and concepts that were learned in DEI PDs should be part of classroom observations and coaching meetings, allowing for a cycle of practice and reflection that embeds antiracist principles into the school culture and practices. Teachers are professionals who need to be treated as such in the process of professional development; engaging them in inquiry and demonstrating the value through professional development can lead to sustained and successful trainings (Anthym & Tuitt 2019). This can be done through: collaborative dialogue, critique of harmful systems and peer observations. This study is supported by the framework used to educate antiracist physicians in that educators first had to assess their perception of racism, or their identity and biases before engaging in any other learnings; this again emphasizes the need for self-reflective work to avoid deficit thinking and being harmful to students through misunderstandings or biases.

Also imperative to a successful antiracist PD, as demonstrated through the success of Evergreen Charter High School, is committing to being antiracist through visible commitments, such as hiring an expert to lead the work and ensuring that the school leadership is visibly engaging in the work as well (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). It is not sufficient for educators to engage in race conversations and DEI work, these conversations and PDs themselves must be rooted in antiracist practices as:

There must be ongoing honest conversations about race, racism, and racial trauma, including conversations about the specific harm associated with ‘color-blind’ institutional practices and policies. While the presence of People of Color in these conversations is essential, the burden of organization and facilitation should lie elsewhere, ideally with white administrators in collaboration with other white people and People of Color who specialize in anti-racism work. (Anthym & Tuitt 2019)

Not only is the DEI lead at the high school a man of color, his degrees and credentials reflect his expertise and commitment to antiracism work. He is compensated, supported and respected, as evidenced through his ability to consistently conduct antiracist PDs and events that all staff and leadership engage in.

Therefore, I recommend that PDs are conducted by people of color in spaces where their work is compensated and they are openly supported, as opposed to asking educators of color to be solely responsible for teaching their white counterparts about racism. This then avoids educators of color being expected to use their own trauma and experience to prove the existence of racism and need for antiracism.

I also recommend that PDs be done in series, not singular days or sessions. In my experience, teachers will buy into PD experiences that provide skills that transfer to their classroom, which requires time for them to reflect, practice and collaborate with coaches and their peers. This can be embedded in coaching sessions and provide spaces for teachers to

transfer skills to the classroom, be observed and reflect in a routine that feels meaningful. As a teacher, I work with other educators who are dedicated to antiracist work and their students. However, the amount of work that is necessary to do our job as teachers well is incredibly time consuming, and using that time with PDs that feel meaningless is disrespectful to our dedication to our students and our learning. It is imperative that learning feels meaningful, which means it is transferable and consistent.

### **Why Does this Matter; Why Does This Matter for Charter Schools?**

In two studies examining White teacher identity, it was found that the teachers who continued to be resistant to questioning and examining racist policies, practices and biases, were supported by the school culture and community (McManimon & Casey, 2018). The culture of the school and the support from leadership, both administration and district level, affects the level of success a school can have as an antiracist school. When I began my work with Evergreen charter school, I struggled to justify working within an institution that I found to be harmful, moving into Brown and Black neighborhoods, seemingly making fortunes on the backs of my students (Love, 2019). However, charter schools have a plethora of monetary resources and diverse, dedicated teachers and can contribute positively to communities. Creating safe, nurturing environments that are actually antiracist and pro-black starts with the faculty and staff agreeing that they will do the work together, leadership committing through visible, monetary contributions. Evergreen Charter Middle School can start with the first step: foundational awareness. Through this, we will unpack and dismantle biases so if a student were to say the N-word, we can hold them accountable, support our Black students and colleagues, and create true equity in the classroom.

## APPENDIX A

### Scope and Sequence

#### Quarter 1:

- Listening Tour
- Collect data on staff's level of understanding
- Use data to inform PDs

#### Quarter 2:

- Build a shared foundational of understanding of equity in education
- PDs and intentional community building

#### Quarter 3:

- Analyze and self-reflect on personal identity
- Begin to identify and dismantle biases
- Explore how they may affect our work in the school

#### Quarter 4:

- Engage in learning about how to apply principles and understanding of equity in the classroom and school policies
- Apply learnings to personal work within the school
- Self-reflection

## **APPENDIX B**

1. What is social justice?
2. What is equity?
3. What is DEI?
4. What is pro-black?
5. How has your identity affected your experience at RMMS?
6. What are the gaps you notice in the area of DEI?
7. When was the last time you practiced equity?
8. Through a lens of equity, how do you think students perceive you?

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