“DON’T LOSE YOU”: INTERROGATING WHITENESS AND DEFICIT AT A NO EXCUSES CHARTER SCHOOL

Jason Javier-Watson

A DISSERTATION

in

Reading/Writing/Literacy

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Education

2016

Supervisor of Dissertation:

_________________________________________________________________
Diane R. Waff, Practice Professor

Dean, Graduate School of Education:

_________________________________________________________________
Pamela L. Grossman, Dean and Professor

Dissertation Committee:

Diane R. Waff, Practice Professor

H. Gerald Campano, Associate Professor of Education

D. Brent Edwards, Jr., Assistant Clinical Professor, Drexel University

Dina Portnoy, Director, Knowles Science Teaching Foundation
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing partner, Nicole Javier-Watson. Without your love, care, encouragement, support, and patience this project never would have happened.

This work is also dedicated to my family. It is dedicated to my parents, Jim and Carol Watson and to my brother Chris. I love you all very much.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without help from a great number of people. I would first like to acknowledge the participants who helped shape this dissertation. Without their willingness to share their stories, this project never would have gotten off the ground. The courage they showed daily working for kids is truly inspiring.

I would like to acknowledge my gracious and helpful dissertation chair, Diane Waff as well as the rest of my committee for its guidance: Gerald Campano, Dina Portnoy, and Brent Edwards all offered tremendous support throughout this process. Thank you all for believing in me and my vision for research.

I would like to give a special thanks to Howard Stevenson for funding me during the writing of this dissertation. Thank you, Dr. S., for being a great mentor over the past year. With your support, I have found am intellectual home at the Racial Empowerment Collaborative.

Thank you to Kelsey Jones for being such a wonderful thought partner over the past few years. I never would have found the Racial Empowerment Collaborative without your gracious invitation. I appreciate you.

I would also like to give a very special shout out to the 2012 cohort of doctoral students in the Reading, Writing, and Literacy program at the University of Pennsylvania
Graduate School of Education: Alicia Rusoja, James Arrington, Erin Whitney, Bethany Silva, Rhiannon Maton, & Helen Anderson-Clark. I learned so much about language, literacy, and life with all of you over long hours of conversation and study. Also, thank you to the faculty of the Reading, Writing, and Literacy program who were not on my committee, but nonetheless vital to the thinking that went into this project: Vivian Gadsden, Amy Stornaiulo, and Ebony E. Thomas.

Thank you to Alicia Rusoja and Robert Rivera-Amezola for participating in our writing group. This group helped me think and feel my way though the later stages of this dissertation, and helped me to find the strength to finish.

Thank you to the people who taught me how to teach: Marsha Pincus, Dina Portnoy, Mattie Davis, Sonia Rosen, Robert Massie, Victoria Rivers, Deborah Singleton, and Beverly Tedesco. Finally, thank you to the people who taught me how to lead: Earl Ball, Priscilla Dawson, Ted Domers, Gary O’Brien, and Torch Lytle. I am grateful to have had such great examples to follow over the years.
ABSTRACT

“DON’T LOSE YOU”: INTERROGATING WHITENESS AND DEFICIT
AT A NO EXCUSES CHARTER SCHOOL

Jason Javier-Watson
Diane R. Waff

Urban public education is currently being remade to reflect corporate values and management structures. Charter CMO’s particularly are constructed by policy as the most viable solution for “turning around failing schools.” To date, there are few, if any, insider accounts from charter management-operated (CMO) schools in the research literature. This project brings critical practitioner inquiry into this under-explored space in order to better understand the ways teachers and staff within one specific CMO-operated charter elementary school resist the dehumanizing forces of whiteness and deficit notions of teaching, learning, students, as well as the communities in which they serve. Using critical organizational theory and collaborative inquiry, as well as a narrative inquiry methodology, this project looks at the experiences of teachers and staff members as they enacted the “no excuses” philosophy over the course of one school year. First, the no excuses philosophy and management practices of College Prep Elementary School (CPES) will be explored. This includes narratives from staff members as they interpret their experiences being trained in the no excuses philosophy and how their views changed throughout the year. Then, the emotional reactions of the teachers and staff members will be more thoroughly analyzed as important intersections of identity and
politics. Next, I explore stories of institutional microaggression and deficit shared by Staff of Color to gain a better understanding of the ways whiteness exists in schools. Finally, the inquiry group theorizes culturally competent school leadership, arriving at three main themes all resonating with the ethic of care: care for students, care for families and community, and care for teachers. In the final chapter, implications for policy and practice are shared, as well as the limitations of this study.
Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.................................................................................................................. iii

ABSTRACT......................................................................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES............................................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER I: Introduction.................................................................................................................. 1

Inquiry as Stance: Interrogating my assumptions about teaching and learning.......................... 1
  The Politics of What We “Know” of Teaching and Learning.................................................... 3
Story of the Problem.......................................................................................................................... 5
Purpose and Significance................................................................................................................... 12
  Purpose......................................................................................................................................... 12
  Significance.................................................................................................................................... 15
Organization of Dissertation........................................................................................................... 17

CHAPTER II: Legacy, Location, Positionality, Ways of Knowing, Orientation......................... 19

Finding Myself in My Teaching...................................................................................................... 19
  Relocating to New Pedagogical Ground....................................................................................... 20
  The Sociocultural Approach......................................................................................................... 22
  Deficit, School Failure, Reform..................................................................................................... 25
A Student Again: Reading, Writing, & Literacy........................................................................... 30
  Racial Literacy & Whiteness........................................................................................................... 30
  Critical Approaches to Leadership............................................................................................... 37
A Note about Bricolage, Rigor, & Madness.................................................................................. 40

CHAPTER III: Literature Review.................................................................................................... 43

Introduction...................................................................................................................................... 43
Critical Organizational Studies....................................................................................................... 44
  Postmodernism and Critical Organizational Studies................................................................. 45
  (Re)Emergence of Realist Perspectives....................................................................................... 49
Summary.......................................................................................................................................... 50
Leadership Practitioner Inquiry..................................................................................................... 51
  Being Critical in Uncritical Times................................................................................................. 52
Summary.......................................................................................................................................... 58
Conclusion: Critical Organizational Studies, Leadership Practitioner Inquiry, and the Absence of Race........................................................................................................................................ 60

CHAPTER IV: Site of Practice, Research Questions, Methodology & Project Design............... 62

Site of Practice................................................................................................................................ 62
Research Questions.......................................................................................................................... 65
Methodology and Project Design..........................................................................................66
Narrative Inquiry..................................................................................................................66
Emotions.................................................................................................................................68
Methodological Crystallization: Incorporating Organizational Autoethnographic
Perspectives & Collaborative Inquiry................................................................................70
Data Collection and Analysis...............................................................................................75
Trustworthiness & Validity.....................................................................................................81
The Participants.....................................................................................................................83

CHAPTER V: A Day in the Life of a Staff Member at CPES..............................................85
Introduction.........................................................................................................................85
Living the Mission...............................................................................................................86
No Excuses.............................................................................................................................88
A Snapshot of Disciplinary Power at CPES.........................................................................97
“For only by expecting more can we achieve more.” .........................................................97
“The gains we make every day can be undermined and even torn down by the forces of
negativity.” ......................................................................................................................104
Drinking the Kool-Aid..........................................................................................................105
A Critical Organizational Perspective: Disciplinary Power and Coercion............................111
Conclusion..............................................................................................................................115

CHAPTER VI: Narratives of Deficit.....................................................................................116
Introduction..........................................................................................................................117
Narratives of Deficit..............................................................................................................118
Linguistic Deficit....................................................................................................................119
Cultural Deficit.....................................................................................................................125
The Treatment of Students and Families: Experiencing Vicarious
Microaggression.....................................................................................................................128
Whiteness and Personal Accountability...............................................................................132
Organization as Whiteness...................................................................................................133
No Excuses and Colorblindness Racism............................................................................134
Don’t Lose You....................................................................................................................138
Silencing...............................................................................................................................138
Breaking Us Down...............................................................................................................140
Building Us Back Up in Their Image...................................................................................141
Conclusion..............................................................................................................................145

CHAPTER VII: How No Excuses Feels.............................................................................146
Introduction..........................................................................................................................146
Emotions, Identity, & Politics...............................................................................................147
That Sunday Kind of Feeling..............................................................................................149
Sara.......................................................................................................................................149
Eric.......................................................................................................................................152
Sam.......................................................................................................................................155
Alex.......................................................................................................................................157
Melanie.................................................................................................................................159
My Voice: A Mash-up of Reflections..................................................................................162
Conclusion..........................................................................................................................166

CHAPTER VIII: Narratives of Resistance—Collaborative Inquiry.................................168
Introduction......................................................................................................................168
Narratives of Resistance.................................................................................................169
   Carving Out Spaces of Solidarity..................................................................................170
   Formal Inquiry—Theorizing Culturally Competent Leadership.....................................172
Racial Literacy as Resistance to Whiteness......................................................................178
Letter to White Educators...............................................................................................190
Conclusion.........................................................................................................................195

CHAPTER IX: Conclusions...............................................................................................197
Introduction......................................................................................................................197
Implications......................................................................................................................199
   Organizational Power is Coercive and Racial...............................................................200
   College Prep Charter Schools are Not a Counternarrative.........................................201
   Inquiry as an Emotional Process..................................................................................203
Limitations and Directions for Future Research..............................................................205
   Democratic Validity......................................................................................................206
   Voice and Signature.....................................................................................................208
   Absence of the Perspective of Leaders of Color...........................................................209
Final Thoughts..................................................................................................................210

REFERENCES....................................................................................................................212
List of Tables

Table 1: Evaluation of critical elements of practitioner inquiry dissertations..............54
Table 2: Data collection and analysis table.................................................................80
CHAPTER I: Introduction

“Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”
-Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 34

“Experience and memory are, thus, open contradictory interpretations governed by social interests and prevailing discourses. The individual is both the site and subject of these discursive struggles for identity and for remaking memory. Because the individual is subject to multiple and competing discourses in many realms, one’s subjectivity is shifting and contradictory—not stable, fixed, and rigid.”

Inquiry as Stance: Interrogating my assumptions about teaching and learning

Throughout my career as an educator, I have sought to take an inquiry stance on my practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) in order to better understand the phenomena taking place in my classroom and school. Inquiry as stance, the driving force behind practitioner research, represents a “grounded theory of action” (p. 119) that positions local practitioners as the key knowledge generators of teaching and learning not outside policy makers or university researchers. Ravitch (2014) delineates taking an inquiry stance on practice and practitioner research stating that the two are complimentary and iterative rather than analogous:

Taking an inquiry stance on practice can be viewed as an overarching, ideologically based professional stance in which practitioners situate ourselves as inquirers engaged in an ongoing discovery process through which we view and
approach ourselves as active learners engaged with various stakeholders in the co-construction of knowledge.

Practitioner research, the methodologically grounded approach to deep and rigorous engagement in the taking of one’s inquiry stance, is a way of operationalizing that stance methodologically so that inquiry is supported by data that one generates in relation to the specific domain of inquiry itself. (p. 8)

There are many intellectual and epistemological traditions informing practitioner research and many works that summarize these contributions (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, 1999a; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). Practitioner research is an umbrella term that can be used to describe many types of activist genres of research, all of which attempt to challenge and disrupt traditional ways of knowing that reinforce social inequality (i.e., the status quo). What is shared among all genres of practitioner research is the assumption that those who work and live in particular local settings have significant knowledge about those settings (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In privileging local knowledge, practitioner inquiry takes a radically different position towards knowledge and knowing than traditional research paradigms. Specifically, practitioner research challenges the notion that knowledge of teaching and learning can be made generalizable and universal across locations (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Zeichner and Noffke, 2001).

Ultimately, practitioner research is a social justice tool and represents practitioners’ commitment to transforming schools into more equitable institutions. As Ravitch (2014) states:
Practitioner research, when constructed critically, can allow for opportunities to work against the ways in which current policies, practices and norms (explicit and implicit) can serve to disempower and constrain people and organizations, and the practitioners and stakeholders within them, from engaging in the kinds of critical thinking, engagement and learning necessary for the development of a strong sense of agency for individuals and groups working within systems.

If disrupting prevailing knowledge regimes is the purpose of practitioner inquiry, then a key feature of practitioner research is the notion of “working the dialectic” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This refers to the process through which the intersections of practice, knowledge, and research are problematized. By intentionally examining and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching and learning, new interstices open up which allow for knowledge creation to occur. As teachers do this work together over time, certain patterns emerge to form a “shared phenomenology” (Campano, as cited in Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). From here exists the potential for the development of radical classroom-based social change. When viewed in this light, teachers who utilize practitioner research become agents of change within their learning communities. By acting so, teachers connect to larger and more global political movements fighting for indigenous knowledges in response to outside political pressures which seek to invalidate these ways of knowing across the world.

The politics of what we “know” of teaching and learning

The above description of teachers’ work sharply contrasts with notions of teaching and learning currently put forth by education policy-making circles where the prevailing
view is of teacher as “technician, consumer, receiver, transmitter, and implementer of other people’s knowledge” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, 93). In discussing the politics of educational knowledge, Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen (2007) further point out that “the knowledge of educational practitioners, along with the knowledge of other marginalized groups like women, the poor, and some ethnic and racial groups, is subjugated knowledge” (p. 42). However, the argument made by practitioner researchers should not be misinterpreted as one advocating blindly privileging local knowledge (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Rather, the purpose of practitioner inquiry is to problematize knowledge generation in general, both that of the practitioner as well as the university researcher or policy maker (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

The practitioner research dissertation, in particular, is unique and challenging because it disrupts traditional notions of academic dissertation research that are deeply entrenched in the academy (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Herr and Anderson, 2005). Becoming “unbound” to traditional academic convention is a powerful political and epistemological statement that calls into question what we “know” about developing as an educator and who gets to make knowledge claims about the profession in general. Though unconventional in relation to traditional academic dissertations, the epistemology and methodology represented in this project rests on firm and well-developed theoretical ground. This work represents my attempt to “enter the conversation” (Rose, as cited in Hatch, 2005) and to contribute to the growing body of practitioner research that has developed since the 1940’s and 1950’s.
This dissertation proposal outlines a plan of action for completing a practitioner research project that examines a school year at a charter elementary school in a large Northeast city where I served as the dean of students and principal fellow (principal-in-training). The goal of this project is to generate a local “knowledge-of-practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999b) for school leaders that encourages more equitable school-based practices. Specifically, I will investigate the ways the staff interacted with the students, school, community, and larger charter management organization (CMO) to increase equity and access for their students despite these actions oftentimes going against the organization’s definition of “best practice.” Throughout this process, I hope to identify the ways in which current reforms do not address central inequities in the schooling experience of students and often times exacerbate them. In doing so, I hope to illuminate the ways teachers balance working “within and against” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 2009) oppressive systems to deliver quality education for students. Furthermore, I believe the questions posed throughout this project will inform the larger debates currently impacting urban education such as charter school practices, teacher development, and school discipline, to name a few.

**Story of the Problem**

This project begins with a problem. As dean of students, it was my primary responsibility to deal with student misbehavior. My mandated objective was to eliminate disruptions as quickly and efficiently as possible to maximize class time for each student. As I will explain in later chapters, this goal was inflexibly spelled out by College Prep
Elementary School (CPES), with little or no area for interpretation. Early in the year, it became apparent that the policies and procedures for dealing with student behavior were not adequate to meet the needs of the students. I will use a vignette to illuminate this point:

Michelle\(^1\) is having another difficult day. After exhibiting what the school classifies as “extremely defiant behavior,” she has been removed from class and sent to the dean’s office. After half an hour in the dean’s office, she is still acting in an “extremely defiant” manner, including sobbing on the floor, trying to run out of the office at times, hitting and kicking the dean, and spitting. The official procedures for dealing with extremely defiant behavior calls for the dean to act in an authoritative manner, demanding with as few words as possible that the student complies with directions at all times and offering no comforting words until compliance is demonstrated. Compliance in this case means sitting at one of the desks in the office facing forward, hands folded on top of the desk.

I recognize that this vignette is written from a detached, authoritative, and bureaucratic position. I purposefully wrote it this way to demonstrate the perspective of the organization as represented through official policies and procedures. Although the actions as represented by the organization are detached, Michelle is fiercely alive and human and protesting categorization as simply “defiant” with her every breath. She is demanding that some adult meet her need for safety and security—that someone sees and hears her cries. Based on the training and policies for handling students, Michelle’s

\(^1\) All names of people and places within this dissertation are pseudonyms.
actions are not constructed this way by the school. Rather, she is labeled as “misbehaving” and prescribed a routine set of behaviors that are not tailored to her individual needs. Furthermore, the policies and procedures as outlined in specific documents, as well as in feedback meetings with the principal, give the adult little leeway in deciding how to interact with the student in situations such as this. In meetings, both as a whole staff and one-on-one, it is made clear that there is no room for nuance, negotiation, or deviation from the protocols. Nothing outside of the prescribed methods are to be used, and the threat of disciplinary action is constant. Therefore, my decision to disobey a procedure has added weight, even though I have little doubt that Michelle needs more than the policy has to offer.

What follows is a different version of the events; one that more fully explores the ways the staff members bend and break the policies and procedures to better serve the student:

I hear Michelle coming from all the way down the hall, and my heart aches. She is crying and screaming and being carried by her teacher to my office. I have been the full time dean of students at College Prep Elementary School since January. It is now mid-February and the scene about to unfold has become a daily event for Michelle lately. Two weeks ago, Michelle was taken from her home by child protective services. She is in pain and I feel powerless to help her. There is no social worker or counselor on staff, and I feel the weight of the responsibility for helping her cope with emotions she does not yet understand because she is six years old.
Her lead teacher, Ms. Thompson comes in and sets her on the ground. Michelle is kicking and screaming, but the teacher must get back to her class, so all she can do is shake her head sadly as she hurries out the door. I try and comfort Michelle with light touch and a soft voice. It isn’t working. I don’t have much of a relationship with Michelle and it is clear that she doesn’t trust my reassurances. Finally, after a half hour of this, her co-teacher Sara enters the room. She picks up Michelle and holds her. In a soothing voice and while stroking her back, Sara told Michelle that everything was going to be okay. After a short time, Michelle calms down and falls asleep in her arms. In recognition that she is in violation of official procedure, Sara looks at me and says, “Not all kids need the same thing.”

There is much to unpack here. There are questions we can raise about the organization’s policies and procedures: What constitutes “extremely defiant behavior” to the school? Why categorize Michelle’s behavior as such and what does this say about how the school interprets natural child behavior? Then there are questions of human agency, pertaining especially to the adults in the situation. What are the repercussions of the adults taking matters into their own hands? What management strategies affected the adults and why was it so difficult to act on the behalf of children? What is the emotional toll of being told to do things to kids that seems wrong day in and day out? How were our identities (mine, a white man and hers, an African American woman) and experiences impacting our decision making? Finally, what did we learn from this experience and how did it alter our practice moving forward?
These vignettes serve as examples from which I sought to establish an inquiry stance towards practice. Thus, the questions posed in the paragraph above are not simply academic wonderings. Rather, they represent an intersection of theory and practice and a potential source of new knowledge about how to better serve kids even when working in unforgiving and harsh environments. This stance highlights the immediate implications for practitioners striving to enact social justice in their schools, often times within organizations that make such adaptations difficult. In this case the decisions we made as practitioners had very direct and real consequences for not only Michelle but for the other students as well.

Returning to the organizational perspective for a moment, it is clear from the vignettes that the organization’s understanding of Michelle is woefully inadequate. There were no policies or procedures in place for staff to help her cope with her distress. In fact, in order for her emotional needs to be met minimally, we had to act in ways that would be considered subversive within our context. Because CPES subscribes to the “no excuses” approach to schooling which uses rigid behaviorist frameworks (this will be explored further in later chapters), there was no organizational support for an emotional intervention. However, it remains important to me to better understand the thinking behind the construction of the policies that inform no excuses schooling. Rather than simply demonize proponents of this growing educational trend, I hope to problematize the larger notions of teaching and learning that make such policies and schools possible. Despite my feeling that proponents of the no excuses model are misguided, their
perspective has grown out of an earnest attempt to solve educational inequity and bring conversations of racial injustice into the mainstream discourse.

Despite the good intentions of those who have developed this model, the overall effect is one that de-professionalizes teaching and often reduces learning to rote memorization and test-preparation. As mentioned above, the no excuses movement was born of a political climate that views teachers and school leaders as nothing more than technicians (Cochran Smith & Lytle, 2009). With the proliferation of standardized tests in the era of No Child Left Behind (as well as more recent iterations of the accountability movement in the form of Race to the Top), we have seen the reemergence of the transmission model of education (2009) that sees the learning process as if it was a computer download. Practitioner research offers a meaningful way to push back against this narrative and to reassert the agency of teachers and students as change-makers. This is not going to happen without an epistemological struggle, and my work hopes to continue to that struggle by working within systems and against them using the inquiry process.

In a recent commencement speech to the graduates of Bank Street Graduate School of Education, Richard Rothstein (2015) addressed the ethical issues faced by teachers:

How do you do the good work for which Bank Street has prepared you, within a system that may undermine your efforts and thwart your students’ education? When a teacher is enrolled in a corrupt system, where fulfillment of her legal and organizational responsibilities require her to harm her students, when does she owe it to herself and to her students to refuse? How should teachers balance the good they
may do by saving their right to participate in a corrupt system, with their professional and ethical obligations to shun corruption?

Ethical choices do not consist either of civil disobedience that refuses to participate in an unjust system or of obsequious compliance with corrupt orders. Ethical lives are comprised of compromises, of considering where to take stands and where not to make waves. Throughout the careers on which you are about to embark, you will frequently have to decide when to resist, in both tiny and big ways, when to compromise, in both tiny and big ways, and when to capitulate, in both tiny and big ways. You will often have to decide whether you can do more good by going along, or more good by taking a risk, perhaps just a small one, sometimes a large one, with your security and career.

The choices we make as educators within our specific sites not only directly impact our students, but have larger political implications as well. What can we do as practitioners in the face of such limitations? What ethical considerations bound us in our work? These are all issues I seek to address with this project. Overall, this project will investigate the relational nature of teaching and learning in schools. This includes the relationships between teachers and staff members, as well as the ways each of these groups relates to the organization. By examining the relationships between teachers, staff members, and the leadership of the school, much will be revealed about the ways power operates throughout the organization. Ultimately, these power operations shape the experiences of the educators and students in the school community and they deserve ample attention from school leaders. Leadership practitioner inquiry has the potential to serve as a powerful tool for leaders to: 1) make critical sense of schools as social organizations; and 2) increase educational equity and access for traditionally marginalized populations.
Purpose and Significance

Purpose

The primary purpose of this project is to intentionally and systematically investigate my practice as an emerging school leader so that I can develop to better serve the communities in which I work. I have recognized throughout my career that the more work I do in developing my own identity as a practitioner, the more I am able to shine a light on the dark corners that blind me from seeing not only my own truth, but the truths of others. Another purpose driving this work is desire to spread practitioner inquiry to as many educational spaces as possible. I believe deeply in theory of learning that serves as the foundation of Inquiry as Stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) and that schools can be transformed as each practitioner working within the school is transformed. Inquiry represents a political struggle that is much larger than any individual practitioner, yet each one of us has the potential to impact that struggle in profound ways. To maximize that impact, it is necessary to empirically map out the political terrain to which we are bound.

By problematizing notions of teaching, learning, and organization within a collaborative setting, we can come to better understand the ways resistance to deficit thinking about Communities of Color is taking place. In doing so, I hope to generate new understanding of equitable leadership practices and culturally competent leadership that facilitates resistance. As I outlined above, critical practitioner inquiry is a powerful tool
for bringing about grassroots social change based on building a political movement of resistance. To me, the power of practitioner inquiry is in its ability to bring about change first in the practitioner. If my praxis is aligned with equity and social justice, the political and social world around me become irrevocably altered as well. Therefore, I believe that bringing critical practitioner inquiry into any space has the potential to push it in the direction of equity. Furthermore, students in all settings deserve to have educators who embrace inquiry as stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Perhaps this purpose gains importance in light of the fact that charter CMO’s have not traditionally embraced intentional theoretical reflection as an important part of teacher development. Therefore, the central purpose of this project is to develop a stance towards leadership that embraces teacher inquiry even in uncritical educational spaces.

As an extension, I hope this investigation will yield deeper understandings of the ways that teachers develop resistance to racial injustice. It would be a partial narrative indeed if I only wrote about oppression without investigating the ways resistance pushes back against it; oppression and resistance are two sides of the same coin. Giroux states that “the notion of resistance points to the need to understand more thoroughly the complex ways in which people mediate and respond to the interface between their own lived experiences and structures of domination and constraint” (2001, p.108). For me, this means detailing resistance to the oppressive narrative of whiteness^2 (Leonardo, 2013) that

^2 Throughout this dissertation I will capitalize White as a racial category, but I will not capitalize whiteness as a social/cultural force. This is a reflection of what Kolchin (2002) calls the emptiness of whiteness as a cultural construct. In other words, there is an Italian culture, but there is no White culture that can be described by whiteness.
dominates educational and societal discourses and silences the voices of People of Color to name their own experiences. As a form of oppression, whiteness (discussed further in Chapter II) operates to disenfranchise Communities of Color despite the good intentions of those who perpetuate these deficit beliefs (2013). Overall, this project will use racialized critical frameworks to better understand the organizational and interpersonal actions that oppress and marginalize, as well as the ways resistance to these forces is mobilized. In this sense, my project will explore the ways that teachers and staff members attempt to subvert the dominant discourses using interpersonal networks, both formal and informal. The critical postmodern approach used in this study encourages an examination of power at the micro-social level (Foucault, 1980), so the ways that staff either related to one another in enacting and/or resisting the policies and procedures of the organization become extremely important units of analysis. Hopefully, this knowledge can be used to improve both policy and practice.

Secondarily, I believe this work offers a broader critique of the current education policy discourse of “reform.” The site of practice for this project serves as a "telling case" (Mitchell, 1984) which illuminates more clearly the effects of recent federal and state policies. By examining the ways that this school and the larger organization construct teaching and learning, I believe we can make linkages to critiques of market-based reform efforts elsewhere (Ross & Gibson, 2007). However, the purpose is not to settle the debate between traditional public schools and the charter management organizations that are now at the center of market based reforms. Instead, I hope to problematize notions of race and racism that exist institutionally across all sectors of society. In doing so, I hope
to enrich the debate and bring together committed social justice educators into a more coalitional view of educational inequity. Finally, the enduring question consistent throughout this project will be problematizing the “ends question” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) that is taken for granted in the public discourse of education. Whereas the purpose of providing a free and public education was once a debatable topic, it is now treated as a foregone conclusion that we do so to create workers to participate in the economy (2009). This project aims to align with the larger political struggle to reintroduce the ends question as a means of disrupting the current narrow discourse which defines educational success as success on high-stakes standardized assessments.

**Significance**

This project is significant in two ways by bringing critical practitioner research into new spaces. First, the field of educational leadership in general lacks critical perspectives. Schools demonstrate a “dynamic conservatism” (Schon, 1990, as cited in Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007) which makes them resistant to change. Wolcott (1973, as cited in Riehl, 2000) found that principals in particular tend to monitor and maintain the status quo within schools as opposed to serving as agents of change. Additionally, educational leadership studies are beset with grand theories, over-hyped rhetoric, and a panacea framework that is largely irrelevant to localized and contextualized practice (Gross, 2009; Richmon & Allison, 2003). In these trying times, critical research gains added significance. Recognizing that no research is neutral (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007), it is imperative that leaders integrate critical frameworks into their daily praxis. Despite the
fact that standards-based reforms, accountability, privatization, and other various forces make implementing a social justice leadership perspective difficult (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005), they also make the continued political struggle for social justice significantly more relevant.

Secondly, to my knowledge there are no published insider accounts of practitioners in charter schools, let alone leaders in charter schools. This happens for a few reasons all of which will be expounded upon throughout this project: extremely long work hours, limited free time or autonomy throughout the day, and a culture that minimizes personal and/or professional reflection as an important aspect of practitioner development. While there is an emerging literature attempting to open the “black box” of charter school achievement (Zimmer & Buddin, 2007; Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Berends, Goldring, Stein, & Cravens, 2010), there remains a dearth of research on charter schools focusing specifically on leadership practices. It is vital that we examine polices and practices of charter organizations given their proliferation (Renzulli, 2005). Insider and autoethnographic accounts of organizations are important because they often times shed light on the more overlooked and harder to study aspects of organizational life (Boyle & Parry, 2007). By shifting the focus away from an outcome-based analysis of organizations, we are able to deepen our understandings of organizational life “including the sense-making, construction of organizational identities, evaluation of leadership, and the construction of a myriad of moral/emotional narratives such as fear of organizational failure, jouissance, sadness, and anger” (p. 187). Therefore, insider accounts offer a
unique perspective of organizations, specifically the emotional/relational aspects that provide essential information pertaining to the operation of schools.

**Organization of Dissertation**

In Chapter II, I share the story of how the inquiry process has informed my approach to teaching, learning, and leadership. Specifically, I will discuss the ways sociocultural approaches to language and literacy shaped my classroom pedagogy early in my career, as well as the impact that critical theory has encouraged me to interrogate notions of deficit and whiteness.

In Chapter III, I review the relevant literature on critical organizational studies and leadership practitioner inquiry in order to put the two fields into conversation with one another. In doing so, I will illuminate how this projects fills a gap in literature and establishes new directions for potential research.

In Chapter IV, I describe the site of practice, research questions, research methodology, and project design. It is here that I describe the narrative inquiry methodology that will frame this dissertation, as well as how I will enact this methodology to carry out the project.

In Chapter V, I analyze the organizational philosophies, policies, and practices of CPES using a critical organizational lens to identify the disciplinary frameworks of
CPES. Furthermore, I will explore the ways power operates to discipline the bodies, minds, and emotions of teachers using interview and inquiry group data.

In Chapter VI, I use storytelling to describe the ways that staff encountered deficit and ideology throughout the year. By describing the staff’s experiences with microaggressive and explicitly racist views from leadership, I hope to map out the ways that whiteness is justified and encouraged through organizational policies and practices.

In Chapter VII, I explore the political and discursive nature of teacher and staff emotions. Then, I excavate the emotional experiences of the teachers and staff at CPES to link emotional resistance to growing political resistance to oppression.

In Chapter VIII, I describe the experience of participating in collaborative inquiry along side the staff members. I will analyze the ways we troubled notions of race, community, deficit, and leadership. I will also present new conceptions of culturally competent leadership.

Finally, in Chapter IX, I draw conclusions about our experience working at CPES, how this project satisfied the initial research questions. I also describe the limitations of this dissertation as well as potential directions for future research.
CHAPTER II: Legacy, Location, Positionality, Ways of Knowing, Orientation

“Unfinishedness is essential to our human condition.”
- Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 52

“This interface between the personal and the social—between the historical, social, cultural uses of language and the ways these are shaped by the writer—are most evident in the practice described by Foucault as hupomnemata, personal notebooks used in the first and second centuries to care for and develop the self. These notebooks contained quotations, fragments of works read, actions witnessed, arguments, reflections, ‘a material memory of things read, heard, thought’ which one might ‘read, reread, meditate, converse with oneself and others.’
- Barbara Kamler, Relocating the Personal, p. 51

Finding Myself in My Teaching

In my second year of teaching, I was lucky enough to be able to participate in the annual Ethnography Forum at the University of Pennsylvania. A small group of us from the Teach For America (TFA) Master’s program were presenting our culminating work from a course on practitioner inquiry. My mentor, Marsha Pincus, had guided us through the development of a practitioner research project, and now was our time to “go public” (Hatch et al, 2005) with our teaching. My particular project described the ways I raised student engagement when I set aside the traditional foreign language curriculum and instead taught Spanish through a revolutionary Latin-American lens. When it came my turn to present, I remember I spoke for all of two minutes. Afterwards, I shared my embarrassment at having so little to say about a project that was so meaningful to me. Marsha simply told me, “You may not know what to say about your teaching yet.” There was no judgment in her tone or validation of my feelings of failure. But she said it with
such a matter-of-fact assurance like any good teacher trying to calm a nervous student ultimately communicating that he or she is exactly where he or she is supposed to be.

However, it was hard for me at the time to internalize the message behind her reaction. My thinking about my practice was stuck in a novice/expert binary (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999b), and at my core I didn’t believe that I had anything to contribute to the conversation about pedagogy. Marsha was telling me that binaries did not apply here (expert/novice, success/failure) and instead brought to my attention the (always) incomplete story of my craft. Looking back, it is clear to me now what I couldn’t say about my teaching then. I can see what had not yet congealed in terms of my own identity and the ways that my blind spots in terms of my identity prevented me from forming a coherent story of my practice.

**Relocating to New Pedagogical Ground**

Barbara Kamler (2001) theorizes replacing the notion of voice in writing with the metaphor of narrative instead. This requires us to leave the competency-based model of development and instead view one’s writing as an ever-evolving narrative. Kamler also theorized that in order to understand our own narratives, we must first interrogate the “politics of location” (p. 20) from where we write. Thus, it would be irresponsible to compose my teaching narrative without first interrogating the sociopolitical location(s) upon which it developed. As I mentioned earlier, I entered the profession of teaching through the TFA organization. Although I was completely unaware at the time, my newly
acquired teaching position in a North Philadelphia high school was situated upon highly contested political ground. By being a part of TFA, I had assumed the identity of an educational reformer in the age of market-driven, top-down reform. I was granted access to a community I would have otherwise never set foot in, dutifully waving the flag of white savior as I made my way. Whiteness granted me the privilege not to see this at the time, of course, and I readily bought into the pedagogical rhetoric of “high expectations,” which essentially meant a skills-based, direct instruction model of teaching.

As I will explore in detail in Chapter VIII, my lack of awareness pertaining to my racial identity became visible in my first year of teaching. The dissonance (Pincus, 1994) I experienced was immobilizing. Nothing I was doing was working, and it was clear that not many students were learning in my classroom. What added to my frustration was witnessing the same students who would not do work for me working diligently for other teachers. The frameworks I had been handed to understand teaching and learning were not serving my students or me. According to TFA, classroom practice was split into behavior management and instruction, an interesting binary that requires a bit more unpacking. It was explained to us that we could not focus on instruction (direct instruction and standardized assessments) until our management was “tight” (i.e. all students were silent and compliant). I spent most of my time in class trying to manage student behavior and delivered very little content. It would have been easy to fall back on blaming the students which was common for TFA corps members. TFA teachers frequently engaged in conversations bemoaning the culture of poverty surrounding “our”
students that kept them from embracing the education we came to deliver. I knew this was false and that I had no where else to look but my own practice.

Rather than turn away, I embraced the dissonance. With the help of mentors, I systematically examined it for meaning using theoretical frameworks that helped me understand what I was experiencing. Instead of blaming the students, I chose to interrogate the assumptions about teaching and learning made by TFA. Kamler (2001) uses the term “relocation” to describe a repositioning of oneself with relationship to writing, and I will extend the metaphor to teaching here. Relocation implies a discomfort or dissatisfaction, “a desire to move elsewhere from somewhere” (p. 14). By relocating my positioning towards my practice, I was shifting my stance towards myself, my students, and what it meant to teach and learn. Relocating was for me a painful experience but also one that was always motivated by hope. Ultimately, the process of relocation was one of resistance in the face of despair, fatalism, and emotional disengagement that Michie (2012, as cited in Burant, Christensen, & Salas, 2010) describes as the undertow.

The Sociocultural Approach

The pedagogical foundation I came to stand upon is supported primarily by two theorists: Lev Vygotsky and Paulo Freire. There is much that links their work, and recent scholarship has developed this intersection by highlighting the dialectical approach of both authors (Souto-Manning & Smagorinsky, 2010; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2014). As
opposed to the nature of the reforms in the era of NCLB, Freire and Vygotsky both theorized the generation of knowledge as a process of sociocultural mediation. That is, reality—and knowledge of it—exist primarily as a constantly evolving relationship between individuals and their environments. Thus, knowledge rests upon contested political, social, and cultural grounds—grounds that are never static or neutral.

The implications for my classroom practice based upon these theories were tremendous. It seemed that everything I was encouraged to do as a teacher was diametrically opposed to a classroom of collaboration, innovation, and freedom. Why do I ask/demand my students to be silent for most of class? Why are my desks arranged in rows facing forward (to make communicating with one another difficult for my students)? Who is producing the “knowledge” I am presenting to my students as fact? Moreover, what are their purposes for claiming knowledge of “facts?”

Rather than viewing students as empty vessels to be filled with a teacher’s knowledge, I came to see young people as constructors of their own knowledge. I began to see myself more as a learner than a teacher and to view learning as a community endeavor. The exploration of my pedagogy was encouraged by my mentors from the Penn GSE master’s program. Guided by experts in the field such as Marsha Pincus, James Lytle, and Dina Portnoy, I was able to investigate my practice using rigorous inquiry that asked fundamental, practical questions about any notions of “success” and “failure.” I began to see student disruption as protest—and what they protested was my
lack of knowledge about them. I began to explore ways to make my curriculum more culturally relevant and my deliver my content in more engaging.

I came to believe that limiting academic success to assessment scores was actually a form of oppression in and of itself (Valencia, 2010), I sought instead to make connections between my students’ lives and the analyses being generated in class. Sociopolitical and cultural perspectives allowed me to generate a deeper understanding of my students. As a result, I came to value the educational process over the product. Ultimately, inquiry led me to search for ways to put students’ culture and ways of knowing at the center of my curriculum. As a direct result of the systematic and deliberate research into my own practice, my students began to do the same with literature. After completing my Master’s work, I joined the Philadelphia Writing Project to surround myself with like-minded professionals integrating inquiry into everyday practice. Through the use of inquiry, education became a transformational process. Rather than being a passive technician, I became a teacher concerned with developing new understandings of epistemology, race, and power while utilizing the inquiry process and a growing sense of reflexivity.

In looking back, I am struck with gratitude for my teacher preparation program and the way I was encouraged to critically analyze my place in this world. As educators, we know how powerful our words and actions are to those we teach. Without a foundation of inquiry, I would have been perpetuating a worldview of unfettered whiteness to my students and further marginalizing their perspectives. To make the leap and relocate as Kamler describes, we must at least perceive that where we will land is safe. My mentors
served as guides who gave me a compass and encouraged me to explore for new understandings of myself and my students.

Over time, my teaching praxis came to reflect more and more of my own development as a teacher. Rather than focusing on getting students to the “right” answer, I allowed them to guide our interrogations into the issues they felt affected their lives the most. Guided by essential questions, we questioned our place in the world together by building bridges between our experiences and larger theories. The learning we participated in was messy and non-linear, unlike the curriculum guides and standardized tests would have us believe. But I can remember the impact it had on my students and the way they lit up when a deep and fundamental connection was made with the material.

**Deficit, School Failure, and Reform**

After my sixth year of teaching, Simon Gratz fell victim to standards-based reform and the accountability movement. Due to low test scores on the state assessment, it was decided by the School Reform Commission that Gratz would be taken over by a charter operator, Mastery Charter Schools. Gratz, which had existed as a pillar of the the Nicetown/Tioga neighborhood since since 1927, was closed with its institutional memory erased. Most of the staff, almost half of which was African American, was replaced with mostly young, White people who were not from the neighborhood or the surrounding area. In order to better understand standards-based reforms and “school failure,” we must consider the role of deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010) in such policies. Identifying deficit
thinking requires we contextualize and historicize current notions of failure and school reform. For example, we must ask ourselves what constitutes failure and why privatization is seen as the best alternative for reform? To better understand the ways school failure is constructed we look to a framework provided by Valencia (2010).

*Deconstructing Deficit Thinking* (Valencia, 2010) breaks the construct of deficit into six characteristics which serve as a useful analytic framework for understanding deficit thinking and its intersection with current school reform policy. The characteristics are as follows: 1) blaming the victim; 2) oppression; 3) pseudoscience; 4) temporal changes; 5) educability; 6) heterodoxy. Each component of the deficit construction is inextricably linked to the others and builds off one another to create the justifications for continuing the status quo.

**Blaming the Victim.** Considered the ideological base of deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010), blaming the victim is the process wherein the powerful blame the innocent for social problems. This phenomenon is central to the creation of much social and educational policy and is characterized by the following process: 1) the powerful identify a social problem; 2) studies explore how disadvantaged groups are different than advantaged groups; 3) once differences are identified, they are defined as the cause of the social problem; and 4) interventions are set into play to correct the differences (p. 3). In terms of the ways that “school failure” is constructed, we see school closings justified by the individual and collective standardized test scores of the schools’ students. Therefore,
we are locating the failure within the individual students as opposed to the structures and forces that perpetuate educational disparities.

**Oppression.** This term describes “the unjust use of authority and power to keep a group of people in their place” (p. 4). If victim-blaming and pseudoscience are the justifications for maintaining the status quo, oppression is the final enactment of deficit ideology. The high stakes testing regime that has been in place since the passage of NCLB is a prime example of the ways oppression is institutionalized after a process of victim-blaming and pseudoscience. The result has been the narrowing of curricula to primarily tested subjects, as well as the narrowing of the content within those subjects which has been broken down to mirror the information that will appear on the tests (Au, 2007; Au, 2010). Furthermore, we know that high stakes testing disproportionately effects schools that serve a majority of students from minoritized populations (Au, 2010). The punishments associated with low performance on standardized tests, such as school closings and reconstitutions wherein schools are turned over to private CMO’s, further dislocate and fragment communities.

**Pseudoscience.** Draped in the appearance of the scientific method, pseudoscience attempts to justify biased or deficit beliefs using empirical evidence. Ultimately, the findings from pseudoscientific research simply do not hold up to scrutiny, but nevertheless gain wide acceptance. A stunning example of this was the Hart and Risley study (1995) claiming to demonstrate a large word gap between low income and high income. This work is widely cited and used across sectors to drive policy and practice
despite having serious issues in its premise, methodology, and circular reasoning (Johnson, 2015; Dyson, 2015; Miller & Sperry, 2012). As a premise, this study locates the problem within the victim and then builds a faulty empirical argument to support it, thus driving policy that aims to change the oppressed rather than the oppressor.

**Temporal Changes.** This tenet describes the ways that deficit ideology changes over time. Deficit thinking is the result of the ideological climate at any particular period of time and therefore reflects current societal/cultural explanations of difference. Whereas deficit thinking in the early to mid-20th century was based primarily upon genetic and hereditarian views, over time it evolved to focus on cultural and environmental factors as the “transmitters of pathology” (p. 7). Ultimately, if the problems leading to educational inequity are being located in students’ genetics, their families and/or culture, or their environment then we can be sure of the presence of deficit thinking.

**Educability.** Once a deficiency or pathology is identified in the victim and then “verified” with pseudoscience, policy is then created which proclaims to mediate the deficiency or pathology. Due to the fact that these interventions attempt to change the behavior of the oppressed rather than the social problems themselves, they inalterably reinscribe difference and worsen the effects of oppression. Deficit has been used to create inferior learning environments for marginalized youth for quite some time, and the current reform efforts are no different. The scripted pedagogy and no excuses disciplinary systems that characterize a growing proportion of schools in urban communities are examples of the education that deficit thinkers believe marginalized youth deserve.
Remediation and a focus on basic skills, drill and kill test prep, and rote memorization are deemed appropriate in what Haberman (1991) termed the “pedagogy of poverty.”

**Heterdoxy.** This concept, borrowed from Bourdieu (1977), describes the societal/cultural resistance to deficit thinking that pushes against the narrative of domination. A powerful example is the recent attention that police violence against African Americans has attracted in the mainstream media. Indiscriminate police violence and murder are not new issues to marginalized communities. The orthodoxy, or the generally accepted theory of policing, is as follows: police officers protect and serve while African Americans must be in some way instigating the actions of the police officers. However, with the help of video technology and social media, heterodoxy is now resisting this narrative of oppression and altering the public discourse around police treatment of Communities of Color. Similarly, the discourse around schooling is seeing a shift in terms of harsh discipline policies enforced upon Students of Color. While orthodoxy argues that Students of Color must be acting in ways that deserve harsher disciplinary actions than their White counterparts, recent research illuminates the subjective nature by which discipline is inequitably applied to different racial and ethnic groups, often times for similar infractions (Skiba et al, 2011; Skiba et al, 2002).

While deficit thinking drives much policy and practice that constructs the educational experiences of Black and Brown youth, there are larger political-economic issues that are beyond the scope of this research project that are nonetheless relevant. Researchers have done a thorough job detailing the undemocratic forces at work that lend themselves to the
choice and accountability movement currently dominating notions of education reform. For a powerful analysis of how teaching is portrayed in the era of NCLB, see chapter 3 of *Inquiry as Stance* by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009). To better understand the political and economic forces of neoliberalism, I would point anyone towards Ross and Gibson’s (2007) *Neoliberalism and Education Reform* or Apple’s (2014) *Official Knowledge*. While not speaking directly to these larger issues, I do believe that there are clear policy implications that will come from answering my research questions, which I present in Chapter IV.

**A Student Again: Reading, Writing, and Literacy**

**Racial Literacy and Whiteness Studies**

I knew that I would find a community of deeply committed practitioners in the Reading, Writing, and Literacy division at UPenn GSE. Given my experience with the Philadelphia Writing Project, it seemed a natural fit for my continued study. During my doctoral coursework, I engaged with Critical Literacy theorists who further developed and reinforced my understandings of dialectical pedagogies. My vision of classroom practice was expanded beyond the four walls of the school with works by Morrell (2008), Janks (2000), and Lankshear (1993). I was further challenged by the theorizing of asset pedagogies beyond the culturally relevant pedagogy I had been utilizing in my own classroom (specifically, hybridity and the “third space” pedagogies of Gutierrez [2008], Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda [1999], and the culturally sustaining pedagogies
of Paris [2012], and Paris & Alim [2014]). I also became aware of important critiques of
liberatory pedagogy especially in the ways they potentially encourage deficit thinking of
students and a false sense of empowerment (Ellsworth, 1989; Kamler, 2001).

In terms of personal transformation, my academic trajectory has not necessarily
always been a smooth one. During my doctoral coursework I came into contact with new
ways of thinking that caused me incredible sadness and anxiety. At times, I felt lost or
overwhelmed in my intellectual process—seeking temporary relief as the process is an
unending cycle. This is most apparent in the ways my thinking (and being) has evolved
on issues of race. Upon reflection, I realized I had built an island out of intellectual and
theoretical understandings of race without taking into account the racialized lived
experience. At one time, I argued that the key to ending systemic racism was in
embracing marginalized epistemologies. In reality, I wanted to write from perspectives
and epistemologies that didn’t align with my experience because I thought it would make
me less racist. In a sense, I was trying to avoid my whiteness rather than confront it and
ways it has shaped my experience. I would be the first to say in a group that as a White
man, I experience White privilege on a daily basis. But there remained a gap between
admitting my privilege and doing the difficult work that is owning up to my daily
behavior and the ways I acted to preserve this privilege. In essence, I know understand
what I was trying to do as epistemological appropriation which denigrates the very
traditions from which I was claiming to draw.
The following story illuminates an important point in my process. As I sought to narrow potential dissertation topics, I met with an advisor who gave me a word of caution about my interest in studying school from the perspective of Black and Brown cultural epistemologies without first working through my issues with whiteness. Although saddened and deeply worried at the time, this advice was exactly what I needed to hear. It is much clearer to me now, because after all, isn’t the ability to speak for others a prime example of white privilege? In reflecting back, I can see the ways I had used critical race frameworks and a social justice orientation to avoid looking at my own privilege and the ways it manifested in my day to day life. It was eventually a racial literacy framework that allowed me to process and move beyond the white guilt (Baldwin, 1998) that kept me from taking an honest account of my place in the world. As opposed to studying intellectual and theoretical frameworks, I needed to examine the embodied experience of my whiteness. Once again, I find myself unfinished.

**Racial Literacy.** Whenever I think about racial literacy, I think back to the first diversity training I had as a young TFA corps member. I can’t remember a word that was said, but I do remember being painfully uncomfortable the entire time. My neck and face were glowing red and felt flushed, my heart beat as if it was going to jump out of my chest, and my whole body poured out sweat as if I was running a marathon. According to Stevenson (2014), stress reactions such as these are common responses to racial interactions. Discussions about race, as well as racial encounters in general, are so stressful that they are most often ignored or danced around at any cost. Racial encounters “are the stressful intra- or interpersonal interactions that tax individual self-regulation of
emotions physiology, cognitions, and voice” (p. 29). Therefore, racial encounters play out as interactions of mind, body, and spirit, and usually the exchange can seem catastrophic. What Stevenson calls racial literacy “is the ability to read, recast, and resolve racially stressful social interactions” (p. 16). While racial literacy is primarily concerned with face-to-face racial encounters, the larger structural issues are not ignored. However, many times structural issues are discussed at the expense of focusing on the effects those structures have on the psyches of individuals (2014).

Racial literacy was developed to prevent the internalization of negative messages leading to stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) in Youth of Color, although it is also applicable to the stress White educators and school leaders experience as well. To combat the well-practiced patterns of racial avoidance that happen in schools, racial literacy training encourages risk taking and courageous conversations pertaining to race and the ways it is experienced in schools. In terms of story I told of one of my first diversity trainings, I now understand the overwhelming reaction I had to race was a direct result of having been passed down the “white racial contract” by my parents stating that conversations about race were to be avoided at all costs (Mills, 1997). Growing in racial literacy has improved my practice as both a teacher and as a school leader as I will discuss in the following chapter though I recognize that this will be a never-ending process.

More recently, Dr. Howard Stevenson and Dr. Kelsey Jones have been developing culturally relevant racial literacy interventions for boys and girls in schools throughout
Philadelphia. During my second year of coursework, I met Dr. Jones by chance at a friend’s birthday party, struck up a conversation about her work, and swiftly volunteered my services as a volunteer on the project. I missed being in schools and working with students; additionally, I fell into the early-in-the-semester trap of not feeling like I had very much going on (which turned into a tsunami of stress closer to the end of the semester). It felt serendipitous because Dr. Stevenson had led one of the first trainings I received as a new teacher. I remember the ways he presented the students with whom he worked as lovable kids who acted in very developmentally appropriate ways as opposed to the narrative of students in urban communities I had previously received. Through working with Dr. Stevenson and Dr. Jones on Project PLAAY\(^3\) (Preventing Long-term Anger and Aggression in Youth), I was able to engage with young men in a different way than I had as a teacher.

The adolescents participating in the program shared powerful stories of the racism they had experienced throughout their lives. After a session that focused on families, I was shaken by memories from when I was a child. I went home and wrote a sobbing memo reflecting on these traumas in relation to what I heard the boys talk about. This memo marks a turning point for me and my relationship to race and whiteness. My trauma and the feelings of loss and pain around it are all valid; however, they are a different pain than that caused by experiencing racial discrimination. Somewhere along the way, my trauma got wrapped up in my emerging identity as an educator committed to

\(^3\) https://www.gse.upenn.edu/features/knowledge/plaay
social justice values. This created an immense sense of white guilt that prevented me from looking at the ways my whiteness was expressed in my every breath. As I have healed through the trauma of my past and disaggregated it from the pain the boys expressed due to racial discrimination, my white guilt has subsided. Consequently, through healing, I can now commit more energy to living the social justice values I hold so dear.

**Whiteness.** Working with Dr. Stevenson and Dr. Jones on PLAAY gave me a nuanced perspective on my own whiteness and motivated me to further investigate whiteness as a theoretical perspective and conceptual framework. A fairly new and developing field, whiteness studies attempts to decenter whiteness by looking directly at it. According to DiAngelo (2011), whiteness represents more than skin privilege, rather it signifies “a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced, and which are intrinsically linked to dynamic relations of domination” (p. 56).

The purpose of this theoretical orientation is to problematize the white experience by “making the familiar strange” (Erickson, 1984). This means analyzing ways whiteness is normalized and centered in research, and how whiteness is “reconstituted as quality, deservingness, and merit” (Fine, 2004) in educational settings. For instance, we find an abundance of research on students using the constructs of ‘at-risk,’ ‘urban,’ ‘inner city,’ and ‘disadvantaged’ but rarely use ‘white,’ ‘overadvantaged,’ or ‘privileged’” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 55). In this way, researchers reinscribe difference and perpetuate deficit notions without recognizing they are operating on behalf of whiteness. Therefore, whiteness and the domination it justifies are in the air we breathe, although we often times don’t even
realize they are present. Whiteness studies is a useful framework for Whites to reflexively turn our gaze inward and examine the ways whiteness reinforces its normativity thus generating white privilege (McIntosh, 1992).

Although race and racial ideologies are social constructs, they undoubtedly affect the material realities of daily life of individuals (Castagno, 2008; Stevenson, 2014). To many scholars, whiteness is more than a racial identity. It represents the ideological linkages existing between many institutions which justify the dominance of White people over People of Color (Castagno, 2008; Castagno, 2013; Dyson, 1997; Maher and Tetrealt, 2000). Essed and Trienekens (2007, as cited in Leonardo and Zembylas, 2013) note that to People of Color, whiteness is nothing new. Whiteness is less about revealing new information about how whiteness matters in general, rather how whiteness matters to White people (2013). This is necessary because whiteness often times is “invisible and remains unnamed and unmarked” (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011, p. 3) to White people. As mentioned in the previous section on racial literacy, pointing out the ways in which whiteness operates as an ideology elicits extreme emotional and physical responses by White people who are not used to thinking about themselves as racialized beings. DiAngelo terms the overwhelming emotional and physical response of White people to racial conversations as “White Fragility” (2011), which she describes as a “reduced psychosocial stamina” (p. 56) that is due to the myriad ways Whites insulate themselves from all racial matters.
In sum, becoming more aware of my whiteness and the ways it operates to privilege me at every turn of my life has made me a more racially literate person. I believe that when it comes to racial domination, the emperor really wears no clothes. By illuminating the false and contradictory nature of whiteness and its operations wrapped in a message of compassion and care, I do believe that White people can become warriors against whiteness. In a sense, to reject whiteness is a form of taking an oath to “do no harm” when it comes to educating other peoples’ children. Whiteness and White racial ignorance, despite whatever good intentions may exist, is unequivocally the sustaining force behind racial discrimination and educational disparities. Whiteness is at the heart of deficit thinking, and White Fragility and guilt works to insulate White people from ever having to grow. I do believe there is hope for social justice movements to chip away at the foundation upholding the current configuration of racial hierarchy. But as Howard (2006) states, we can’t teach what we don’t know. It is imperative that White educators teaching other peoples’ children embark on the uncomfortable journey towards becoming more racially literate, because, after all, it is our moral and ethical imperative (Stevenson, 2014). To do so, White school leaders must put issues of whiteness and racial justice at the center of pedagogical discussions and professional development. I will further explore storytelling and the emotional processing of my whiteness in Chapter VIII.

Critical Approaches to Leadership

With the memories of the Gratz community being fundamentally failed by leadership still fresh, I entered the leadership training program during my second year as a doctoral
student. I sought to develop a leadership stance that promoted the vision of learning I described above. This would prove difficult because the pressures of the political environment seemed to grow stronger, and a language of resistance weaker, the more removed from the classroom one gets. I found most of the leadership theory to be traditional and uncritical. There was an abundance of flashy sounding approaches none of which took local knowledge and context into account. All seemed to promote a grand narrative of leadership which does not hold up to a postmodern theoretical understanding. All have great names and catch phrases and all surely make their progenitors quite a bit of money (see “transformational leadership,” Bass, 1991; “situational leadership,” Hersey, Blanchard, & Natemeyer, 1979; “sustainable leadership,” Hargreaves and Fink, 2012). To be clear, I am not claiming that these leadership texts are without scientific and practical merit. I am simply pointing out that none address school leadership from a critical perspective and value local context or local knowledge creation.

The text that has had the greatest impact on my leadership thinking is Lytle’s (2010) *Working for Kids*. I first met Lytle during a summer course for my master’s degree (p. 140) although I knew of his work at University City High School through colleagues. *Working for Kids* is a model of how to use an inquiry stance at all levels of school administration to produce creative solutions for some of educations stickiest problems. Teachers were engaged and active participants in the school culture, kids felt supported, and the learning experiences of the students were enhanced by this climate (2010).
As opposed to prescribing a single vision of school leadership, Lytle encourages the use of ethnographic methods and postmodern understandings of organizations to make meaning around the specific contexts with which he has worked (i.e. becoming “context-literate,” p. 147). Most importantly, Lytle encourages us to “lead for learning” (p. 153), which means purposefully positioning the students’ experiences in classrooms at the forefront of the decision making process. To do this, Lytle puts forth a framework for understanding organizations borrowed from sociology. Especially cogent in Lytle’s work are the concepts of Intellectual, Social, and Organization capitals (Hargreaves, as cited in Lytle (2010)), which result from the relationships between people working within and around organizations rather than infrastructure or financial capital. Lytle uses these terms to push an agenda of increasing equity and access to higher education and employment for his students. This project in particular owes much to Lytle’s influence. I will use similar sociological and organizational approaches for this study though one central difference is that I utilize racial oppression and whiteness key analytic frames for viewing schooling. In this sense, my work is also heavily influenced by other great examples of leadership practitioner research that incorporate critical and racialized frameworks. Specifically, Magness (2012), Waff (2007, 2009), and Farmbry (1997, 2010) were examples I sought to emulate; each will be explored in more detail in the literature review in the following chapter.

In sum, my development as a leader has been the complex process of aligning my leadership philosophies and practices with my developing identity as an educator committed to social justice. In viewing school leadership through the lenses of
sociocultural and asset pedagogies, anti-deficit thinking and racial literacy, as well as critical approaches to leadership I believe I have identified key frameworks that will facilitate more equitable educational experiences for young people. These conceptual frameworks serve as a leadership heuristic for analyzing whiteness and deficit as it exists within schools. I am not presenting this as an evaluative tool for labeling schools, organizations, or school models as good or bad, racist or non-racist, or failing or successful. However, we exist in a white supremacist culture and have a responsibility to publicly address the ways our schools are working to end this ideology.

**A Note about the Bricolage, Rigor, and Madness**

The heuristic I have presented in this chapter draws from many different intellectual traditions and reflects the richness and diversity of thought that composes much educational research. This interdisciplinarity has been described by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) as bricolage, or the piecing together of different methods, methodologies, and epistemologies in order to form new understandings. More traditionalist researchers claim that a focus on interdisciplinarity is at best a waste of time, and at worst a descent into madness (Palmer, 2006; McLeod, 2000). More to the point, these researchers believe the disruption of traditional disciplinary silos compromises validity and rigor, an idea that is stridently opposed to postmodern thinking about how knowledge is formed. In contrast, critical qualitative researchers see the blurring of epistemologies and methodologies as a way to attack the dialectic (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) of knowledge creation,
forming new ground upon which to theorize a knowledge of resistance to dominant discourse.

Indeed, Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) describe bricolage as an emancipatory research construct: one that adds complexity and rigor, and avoids the reductionist truth narratives found in the modernist disciplinary traditions. The complexity at the center of bricolage relies on the researcher’s ability to be deeply reflexive and sensitive to the context of the research, instead of trying to constrain the research into the confines of particular disciplinary thought (Kincheloe, 2001). To be clear, the researcher-as-bricoleur is a call that goes beyond simply putting multiple disciplines into conversation with one another. Rather, it signals the responsibility that critical qualitative researchers have, both ethically and intellectually, to incorporate awareness of the complex issues of power shaping the research process (2011).

In reference to the relationship between interdisciplinarity, validity, and rigor, Kincheloe (2001) speaks to the synergy generated by bricolage:

> As bricoleurs recognize the limitations of a single method, the discursive strictures of one disciplinary approach, what is missed by traditional practices of validation, the historicity of certified modes of knowledge production, the inseparability of knower and known, and the complexity and heterogeneity of all human experience, they understand the necessity of new forms of rigor in the research process (p. 681).

By using philosophy, psychology, sociology, and cultural studies to create my heuristic for this project, I am trying to demonstrate a respect for the complexity of knowledge
creation and the context-dependent nature of all things known. In doing so, I hope to establish a rigorous approach to the topics I am examining, while maintaining reflexive awareness of the “situatedness” of my conclusions.

In sum, this chapter has laid out the intellectual legacy, or ways of knowing, I have developed throughout my career. I also attempted to explore my social location and positionality and to discuss the ways these have impacted not only this study, but also my worldview in general. As I have grown in this work, I have increasingly found race, and particularly my whiteness, to be important areas of exploration as I work towards stronger notions of educational equity. I shared the critical literacy conceptual framework that has been meaningful to my sense-making around my lived experience of whiteness, and will continue this exploration further in Chapter VIII. Finally, I made the case for an interdisciplinarity, which enhances the rigor and validity of this study by reflexively drawing from various intellectual lineages. In the next chapter, I will review the relevant literature to situate this study within the field.
CHAPTER III: Literature Review

I often say that sociology is a martial art, a means of self-defense. Basically, you use it to defend yourself, without having the right to use it for unfair attacks.
-Bourdieu (as cited in Gonzalez, Frégosi, & Carles, 2001)

Introduction

This literature review is not intended to be an exhaustive review of the fields I hope to put into conversation with one another. Instead, I will take a purposive sample (Randolph, 2009) from the literature on Critical Organizational Studies (COS) and put it in conversation with a representative sample (2009) from the literature on Leadership Practitioner Inquiry (LPI). Second, I will offer a critique of the LPI literature on the grounds that much recent scholarship lacks the critical perspectives on identity and race that have always been central to practitioner inquiry. Finally, I will attempt to construct a “linguistic bridge” (2009) between the two fields, demonstrating how both fields may overlap to fill in these gaps. Therefore, the overall purpose of this literature review is to develop a new, more critical, theoretical framework by merging two fields that have much to offer one another.

The role of traditional theoretical perspectives in practitioner inquiry is a highly contested political issue (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Elliot, 2009), as practitioner inquiry was developed on the epistemological foundation of practitioner sense-making being privileged grand theoretical narratives. I am driven to reassert a theoretical
perspective given the shifts in education discourse towards privatization, wherein disciplinary power operates along the lines of increasing “efficiency and effectiveness” (Anderson & Cohen, 2015). Anderson and Cohen (2015) argue that “disciplinary power achieves its ends through the circulation of discourses that, over time, become taken-for-granted as norms or truths” (p. 7), and that these norms operate to distribute power upward. My hope is that stronger theoretical perspectives can resist the disciplinary power of education reform currently dominating educational discourse.

**Critical Organizational Studies**

The field of COS offers one such theoretical framework for school-based administrators to analyze our practice. As school leaders committed to social justice, it is imperative to recognize the pervasive nature of inequity and oppression as they exist in the broader world and within our schools. A critical postmodern understanding of power understands it as a system of relations being perpetuated and reinforced during our most micro-social interactions (Foucault, 1980). By analyzing the relations of power in our organizations through a critical lens, we can better understand how our policies, practices, and communications either promote or resist the democratic process. This is imperative in the current political climate wherein the very notion of social justice is contested between very different and often contradictory stances towards policy (McKenzie et al, 2008).
My primary focus is first to map the theoretical trajectory of the recent literature on COS, illuminating a potential methodological gap which I believe critical practitioner inquiry can help fill. In Chapter II, I made an argument that critical theory in general has lacked in-depth analysis when it comes to the political construction of race, as well as the lived experience of minoritized populations. In fact, much organizational research on race has been based on more thoroughly theorized gender inequality lenses (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990), which is another form of silencing the narratives of People of Color. After completing a review of a purposive sample of the literature, I maintain that claim here in relation to COS as well.

**Postmodernism and Critical Organizational Studies**

The literature on COS depicts a conceptual landscape full of recent shifts, ruptures, and ambiguity about how to understand and research organizations and management. These changes are the result of a shift away from classical modernism towards critical modernism and postmodernism/poststructuralist theoretical stances (these terms will be further elaborated upon below). What began as the now taken-for-granted notion of competing paradigms and metaphors characterizing organizations (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Morgan, 1986) led to the disruption of long-held ideas about how organizations function. Though Weber’s modernist understandings of organization and bureaucracy dominated most of the 20th century, new avenues for understanding were opening up beginning in the 1970’s (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006). Organizational theorists were no longer satisfied with basic tenets of philosophical modernism, specifically its grand
narrative of progress, truth, and the triumph of rationality. Broader philosophical movements such as critical modernism and postmodernism began to supplant modernist organizational understandings as critiques emerged of the value-free nature of scientific knowledge and its emancipatory potential (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006).

This analysis will describe the shifts in the field of organizational theory—specifically COS—away from its modernist roots. First, I will outline how critical theory has shaped the recent study of management and organizations. I will then draw out the ways that the postmodern perspective has shifted our view of organizations as well as how theorists are reconciling the two philosophical positionings. Critical organizational theory has developed under the larger field of critical management studies (Reed, 2005). The following is a summary of the central understandings of critical management studies which also serves as a comprehensive summary of the basic components of COS in general (Alvesson & Willmott, 2012, pp. 41-42, emphasis mine):

- Management is a social practice. Its content, both theoretical and practical, is embedded in the historical and cultural relations of power and domination (e.g. capitalism, patriarchy) that enable/impede its emergence and development.
- Mainstream thinking represents management practices as objective/impartial/scientific/technically superior. It normalizes and obfuscates how power relations shape the formation and organization of management.
- Tensions exist between the lived reality of management as a politically charged process and its ‘official’ representation as a set of impartial techniques for directing and coordinating human and material resources.
- Critical studies of management recognize, expose and examine these tensions. Instead of seeking to mitigate the tensions through the refinement of techniques, often sanctified by appeals to ‘science’, ‘humanism’ and so on, critical studies anticipate the possibility of resolving them through a transformation of social relations.
- Critical studies are also a product of prevailing relations of power. The existence of critical studies is dependent upon tensions (see above) which stimulate
reflection upon conventional theory and practice. The embeddedness of critical thinking in power relations renders its own claims partial and provisional.

- Critical studies may reconstruct received wisdom (e.g. about management). Reconstruction provides an alternative body of knowledge but without any necessary change either in the person (e.g. a manager) who adopts this analysis or in their practical actions.
- Reconstruction becomes critique when it inspires and guides processes of personal and social transformation.
- Critical studies seek to illuminate and transform institutions and social relations despite being embedded in these relations. Such studies provide alternative frameworks for interpreting the practices of management, and facilitate a process of radical change as envisaged and struggled for by progressive social movements.
- Emancipatory transformation occurs as people change, personally or collectively, by changing habits and institutions that impede the development of greater autonomy and responsibility. Responsibility depends upon the practical realization of the interdependence of human beings and our interdependence with nature. Autonomy depends upon the development of institutions in which individualism is problematized and minimized, thereby allowing the unimpeded realization of interdependence.

Led by Habermas, the critical modernist position outlined above “share[s] a postmodern skepticism about value-free knowledge, yet seek[s] to retain and revive the spirit of the Enlightenment” (Willmott, 2002). The purpose of such a position is to create organizations and workplaces that are democratic, free from domination, and ultimately, contribute to the basic human needs of all (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006). Habermas (1984) argues that organizations have come to be dominated by a technical rationality that is “instrumental, governed by the theoretical and hypothetical, and focus[ed] on control” (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006). The opposite of technical rationality is practical interest (Habermas, 1984), which is a process-oriented approach focusing on gaining mutual understanding and shared responsibility in working towards goals. Thus, through reclaiming the “language of the community” (this term refers to the natural reasoning that will free us from the repressive control of modernist instrumental reasoning: see
Habermas, 1984 and/or Cooper & Burrell, 1988) we may realize the goals of the Enlightenment once again.

A postmodern perspective is skeptical of the progress narrative put forth by critical modernism. An umbrella term describing a great number of research agendas (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006), postmodernism is predominantly interested in “the constructed nature of people and reality” (256). Language and discourse—concepts that will be unpacked below—are central to this construction. According to postmodern researchers, examining the ways language and discourse construct our perspectives allows us to come to know the nature of reality. Then, we can attempt to establish, albeit tenuously, the ways that power and knowledge control and repress (Foucault, 1980; Anderson & Grinberg, 1998). Hence, one of the most significant contributions of postmodernism to organizational analysis has been the focus on language (Alvesson & Karremon 2000, 2006; Chouliarki & Fairclough, 2010). The Foucauldian notion of discourse, as interpreted by Weedon (1987, p. 108), refers to:

Ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern.

Power operates through the discursive formation of language, material practices, and reasoning (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006). According to Foucault (1972), power, embedded within social relations, operates in such a way that confines what we know and what we
can know. Our bodies and minds are disciplined into these discursive fields, and in this process our false binaries emerge [e.g. normal/abnormal] (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998). Furthermore, we internalize these discursive fields and accept them as reality, thus disciplining ourselves and alleviating the need for more coercive forms of power to emerge. Foucault theorized power as “irreducibly multiple and heterogeneous” (Medina, 2011, p. 10), instead of the monolithic, top-down representation of power as offered by modernist theory. Instead of focusing on the formal structures of organizations, postmodern organizational theorists analyze the relations of power that constitute the organization. The organization itself is no longer considered stable or real. Rather, it is examined as “the condensation of local cultures of values, power, rules, discretion and paradox” (Clegg, 1994).

(Re)Emergence of Realist Perspectives

A growing number of critical organizational theorists are positing that the pendulum has swung too far towards a relativist/social constructionist perspective and that language, while important, has been overemphasized by many postmodern organizational researchers (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006; Alvesson and Karremon, 2000, 2011; Reed, 2005). There are two issues at the heart of this critique: 1) Language is but one aspect of discursive construction thus eliminating other material aspects of discourse limits our understandings of the operations of power; and, 2) Language does not reflect social reality thus focusing an inquiry on language without the proper methodological considerations (i.e. reflexivity) will not reveal subtle systems of power.
In response to both critiques, critical organizational theorists are integrating aspects of both critical and postmodern theories to establish a critical realist theoretical perspective (Alvesson and Deetz, 2006; Alvesson and Karremon, 2000, 2011; Reed, 2005). A critical realist perspective maintains the epistemological stance established by postmodernism yet believes that the constructed nature of reality occurs upon material societal structures. To the first issue mentioned above, critical realists encourage methodologies that blend the two epistemological stances. Reinterpretations of Foucault by Reed (2005) have shown that non-discursive material practices were imperative to his analysis of power operations, although such considerations have been outside the purview of recent organizational scholarship. Alvesson and Karremon (2000, 2011) offer another critique of the myopic focus on language.

**Summary**

By bringing a “critical edge to postmodernism” (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006, 256), we are able to interrogate and expose the discursive constructions of inequality. Methodologically, this means that we must shift away from ideology critique to analyzing workers’ self-understanding (2006) while at the same time acknowledging the flawed and partial nature of our interpretations as researchers. In doing so we hope to generate knowledge about the nature of subjugation and marginalization, without falling for the scientific certainty of previous positivist or empiricist models (Reed, 2005). Furthermore, the complexity of power and domination can be understood only within the
relational contexts in which they occur. Therefore, the literature of COS depicts a field in
the midst of a shift towards a more material and realist philosophical positioning. In the
next section, I will analyze a representative sample with the goal of investigating the
ways (and to what extent) contemporary critical theory informs the extant literature on
LPI.

**Leadership Practitioner Inquiry**

While a great amount of the theoretical and conceptual work around practitioner
inquiry has been done specifically around teacher research, there is strong base of
conceptual and empirical works that theorize LPI as well (Anderson & Herr, 2009;
Anderson & Saavedra, 1995; Anderson & Jones, 2000; Batagiannis, 2011; Copland,
2003). Most point to the potential of LPI to transform practice and contribute to the
knowledge base of education. However, many of these works depict the difficulty of
doing practitioner inquiry as a school leader in terms of epistemic claims, positionality,
and methodology (Anderson, 2002; Anderson & Jones, 2000; Anderson & Herr, 2009;
Anderson & Saavedra, 1995). This review will point to a new theoretical emphasis that
may potentially serve to solidify the theoretical foundation of LPI.

Zeichner and Noffke (1987, as cited in Anderson & Jones, 2000) suggest that
literature reviews of practitioner research are inappropriate because of the local and
contextual nature of the knowledge produced by this research. While I do think this is an
important point, I find it necessary to take a brief inventory of the trends across a
representative sample of published accounts. As Anderson and Jones (2000) point out, there has been a recent “proliferation of site-based Ed.D. dissertations that claim to produce knowledge from within educational settings (34 of the 50 dissertations in our sample were defended since 1995, and only 1 was defended before 1992)” (p. 433). Therefore, LPI has a growing impact on what is considered knowledge about educational leadership. This point alone makes a convincing argument for a “pulse check” of the field.

Another important reason for conducting a review of practitioner inquiry literature is that as practitioner inquiry has expanded, so has the threat of cooptation of its methods into the accountability regime dominating the public discourse of education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007; Herr & Anderson, 2005). Taking stock of published works is one way to ensure that the heart of practitioner inquiry, the “ends question” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), is adequately being addressed. In not specifically addressing the assumptions permeating the debate about what constitutes teaching and learning (it is currently an unspoken assumption that the role of school is to prepare workers for the economy), practitioner researchers might be supporting the perpetuation of hegemony and domination.

**Being Critical in Uncritical Times**

It is my belief that adopting a more critical perspective of the organizations where we work will reaffirm the social justice purpose of teaching, learning, and research within
schools. While some may argue that conducting practitioner inquiry in and of itself is an act of resistance (2009), I argue that the current political arrangement demands a more intentional and close examination of the operations of power if we are to move schools towards becoming more democratic and inclusive. This is a challenging task because of the ways educational leadership is “trapped within a discourse of efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness” (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998, p. 344). This review hopes to develop a critical framework that will open up the discursive space around school leadership practices and provide transgressive spaces that reveal various forms of subjugated knowledges (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998; Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

My analysis of the LPI research found differing levels of criticality, which I have broken into three tiers. To reiterate, this is by no means a judgment of the validity of the studies or their respective conclusions. I do believe that utilizing a practitioner inquiry framework in and of itself is a political form of resistance, as I outlined in the first section of this proposal. The purpose of this review is to establish the place for more overtly political and critical stances to counterbalance the discourse of accountability and choice currently dominating the discourse of public education. The three categories are thus defined: A) Limited or no critical elements; B) Implied or partial critical elements; and, C) Critical elements throughout.
The published works from category A, all dissertations, lacked definitive evidence of a critical stance towards teaching, learning, or leadership. Without problematizing these constructs or reflecting upon the purpose of educating students (the “ends question”), these works demonstrated an effort by the practitioners to become more efficient, productive, and/or effective (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998). Therefore, these works fall well inside the dominant discourses that shape the disciplinary practices of educational administrators (1998) thus legitimizing the current political construction of schools.

One example from that data category that will demonstrate this point is Sztorc (2009). The purpose of this action research project was to find better way to serve the students within this author’s alternative school. In discussing the unique challenges that alternative
education providers face, the author said, “Students in alternative programs pose high levels of risk behaviors. These behaviors have a relationship to academic outcomes. Yet how and exactly what this relationship is remains unclear” (p. 54). Without problematizing constructs such as risk, success, failure, and academics, the knowledge generated by this dissertation will most likely end up reifying difference instead of mitigating it. The conclusions drawn from the study produce more efficient, productive, and effective means of “serving” alternatively placed students, none of which address the inherently dehumanizing educational process the students in alternative placement experience.

Another example demonstrating this point from category A is Canady (2013), who conducted action research around principal-led teacher professional development. Canady analyzes providing better professional development through the theoretical lens of sense-making and micro-teaching techniques. As in the case of Sztorc, when no critical elements are introduced to the theoretical or methodological frameworks, the dominant discourse is reified. In the conclusion, Canady (pp. 139-140, emphasis mine) states:

The need for contiguous professional development in the area of vocabulary instruction at Hope is merely an indicator of a greater need for continued study. Due to the nature of this case’s methodology, findings cannot be generalized; however, findings would suggest the vocabulary instruction may not be an issue limited to Hope. Data would suggest that if the experiences of the “Hope four” are reflective of practitioners in other districts, local educational authorities (LEAs) and states, that the paucity in vocabulary instruction in their respective teacher education programs, and lack of professional development gained are contributing factors to the marginal vocabulary instruction, and must be further investigated.
From a critical perspective, there is much to unpack here—enough to write a separate section, in fact. By not critically interrogating the words and phrases above, conclusions such as this run the risk of reinforcing the dominant knowledge of deficit that is used to define the school experiences of special education students and English language learners. The above examples are not made to discredit the work of these practitioners—only to point out the potential effects of not using a critical orientation in our research.

The works in category B contained critical elements in some part(s) of the study, or implied throughout. Bell (2013), Ekk (2014), and Lazar (2011) all used a critical perspective in the conclusion sections of their studies. Although none explicitly addressed the “ends issue,” each author interrogated the dominant discourse of education by questioning the role of identity, power, and/or politics in the educational process. For example, Bell (2013), in her study of coaching teachers in a large urban district, incorporated a sociocultural theoretical framework that subverts the skills-based approach currently dominating policy. Furthermore, Bell (2013) concludes that an integral part of any further research on the subject will have to take identity and power into account.

The studies conducted by Dawson (2007), Gilbert (2013), and Hayward (2011) demonstrate a critical orientation implied in the authors’ positionality. For example, Dawson (2007) discussed ways to “help staff understand the cultural aspects of the students’ lives and to be able to use their understanding in ways that would help students conform to the requirements needed for success in school” (p. 205). In Hayward’s (2011)
study, the author states, “What the teacher failed to understand is that students permit a level of authority over them based on how they view the relationship. The stronger the relationship, the more they will trust you to lead them. Unfortunately, this is apparently not widely understood by educators, especially educators in urban areas” (p. 108). What both authors are communicating is a cultural competence that defies deficit notions of students in urban communities. Within this stance is an implied criticality, due to the fact that students from urban communities’ culture is often constructed as a threat to academic progress as opposed to being a valuable asset.

Finally, we look to category C which contains studies maintaining a critical orientation throughout. Having a critical orientation means demonstrating alignment epistemologically and methodologically. Magness (2012) used theoretical frameworks that put sociocultural theory, critical literacy, and identity into conversation with one another. Specifically, this dissertation calls upon critical literacy to situate literacy practices as “a collection of cultural and communicative practices that are historical, cultural, and social” (p. 49). Furthermore, Magness (2012) revisits these theoretical orientations during her findings by signaling critical theorists such as Freire and Macedo to help make sense of her findings. These lenses lead her and her staff to draw conclusions about the ways that literacy, language, and schooling are processes embedded within power relations. Furthermore, Magness (2012) concludes by theorizing ways to increase access to school literacies and power codes for traditionally marginalized communities. This, to me, demonstrates an epistemological and methodological alignment missing from many of the other dissertations reviewed.
Waff (2007, 2009) uses a critical feminist methodology to analyze education reform in Philadelphia through the lens of her career. Rather than simply call on these frameworks to interpret findings from a traditional data collection process, Waff (2007) demonstrates the dialectical nature of “ways of knowing” which have been born out of and shaped her experience as a teacher and leader. Thus, what is created is an embodied theoretical orientation which then serves as heuristic for interpreting the events of Waff’s career as an educator. This heuristic creates a rich framework through which Waff analyzes teaching, leading, professional development, and reform over a decades long career.

Both of these dissertations are examples demonstrating the true potential for transformative leadership (Shields, 2004) using practitioner inquiry. By critiquing the role of power as it shapes the schooling experience, practitioners may gain insights into the nature of oppression, resistance, and transformation as it pertains to teaching, learning and communities.

Summary

In sum, a review of a representative sample from the LPI literature demonstrates a need for more studies with a critical theoretical orientation. This is especially important given the contested nature of social justice education in the era of NCLB. If constructions
of deficit and failure are not interrogated by practitioner researchers, then we are doing little else than spinning our wheels in our push for more equitable educational outcomes.

The role of theory in practitioner inquiry is a contested topic (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007). At the heart of inquiry as stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) is the claim that practitioners have more situated and context-based claims to educational knowledge than the so-called experts who dictate much of the policy that is imposed upon educators. Therefore, what has been anointed “theory” is really a set of politically charged and privileged knowledges vetted and approved by an inequitable power structure seeking to make educational practice “generalizable.” Thus, the practitioner research becomes a political struggle to privilege traditionally marginalized epistemologies, and a skeptical perspective is adopted towards sweeping theoretical perspectives. This is why, in this dissertation, I am guided by interpersonal and emotional concepts in addition to larger structural critiques. However, as discussed in the review of the purposive COS sample above, there are emerging theoretical orientations that take these limitations into account.

For instance, while postmodernism itself is skeptical of grand narratives and sweeping theoretical orientations (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006), a realist perspective has re-emerged that seeks to account for the very material consequences of larger ideological trends (Reed, 2005). Therefore, it is possible to be keenly aware of the context-based nature of knowledge production while still acknowledging larger theoretical and empirical patterns that go beyond a specific context. I argue, then, that academic theory
making can serve a role, albeit a restricted and always precarious one, in practitioner research. Given my analysis of whiteness as an oppressive force, I also argue that using critical theoretical perspectives may be one way to combat the rampant pragmatism and empiricism that drives much current educational reform.

**Conclusion: Critical Organizational Studies, Leadership Practitioner Inquiry, and the Absence of Race**

Given both the methodological gaps in the COS literature as well as the dearth of critical frameworks for understanding organizations, I make the argument that critical practitioner inquiry is well suited for the study of schools as organizations. Another glaring omission from both the COS and LPI literature are racialized frameworks that can help us better understand the race as a lived experience. Furthermore, when race does appear in the literature it is often times simply a demographic category that does not capture ways that these categories are dynamic, imbued with relations of power, and ultimately relational (Stevenson, 2014). By not taking a close look at the ways racial politics impact notions of school leadership, both fields perpetuate “whiteness as invisible norm” (Anderson, 2003) wherein research and practice are filtered through the white gaze. But because of the hegemonic nature of whiteness, these racial power dynamics go unnamed, effectively erasing oppression by sheer force of will. Bringing racialized perspectives, and for the purposes of this project a particular examination of whiteness, allows practitioner researchers to address racial hierarchy in nuanced and authentic ways that critical theory alone does not allow.
A key concept from the realist perspective in terms of this project is the notion of “strong objectivity” as put forth by Harding (1992). Strong objectivity refers to the need for “understanding ourselves and the world around us requires understanding what others think of us and our beliefs and actions, not just what we think of ourselves and them” (1992, p. 461). The purpose of this concept is to respond to the realist call for a shared subjectivity in the place of empirical objectivity. Harding encourages research "starting from marginalized lives" (p. 462), arguing that we may learn a great deal from the shared subjectivities of those who face the weight of oppression. This project argues that because the participants other than myself are People of Color, their shared subjectivities of deficit and oppression hold objective weight. Furthermore, I argue that White school leaders who have not done the emotional work of disentangling their racial privilege from their experience are not as able to grasp this objectivity.

Again, given the gaps in the methodology in the sample COS literature, the lack of criticality in the sample LPI literature, as well the overall lack of racialized frameworks in both literatures, I believe this project is in a unique position to contribute to the field of leadership and organizational studies. In the following chapter, I will describe the site of practice, present my research questions, and lay out the methodology, methods, and project design that will frame the rest of this study.
CHAPTER IV: Site of Practice, Research Questions, Methodology and Project

Design

Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not 
organize the people— they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they 
liberated: they oppress.
- Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 178

Site of Practice/Community

I joined College Prep Charter Schools (CPCS) in the spring of 2014 because they 
offered me a unique opportunity. I would train for a year in their principal fellow 
program and then help to open a middle school in Junction City starting with a 5th grade 
the following fall (the original plan called for adding one grade a year each year after 
until the school was a true 5th – 8th grade). I felt compelled to interview for the job after 
speaking with the managing director and a couple principals within the organization who 
expressed a deep commitment to social justice and educational equity. This organization 
in particular seemed to strongly advocate for its students and actively sought to fight 
against a deficit view of students living in urban communities. After a rigorous interview 
process, I was offered the position and accepted. The organization took a risk in hiring 
me because I had very little previous experience working within no excuses schools. 
However, College Prep Elementary School (CPES) would be the first school for CPCS in 
a new region where they previously had little footprint. Not to play down my talents, but 
CPCS was in a position to hire as many people as quickly as possible to get the school up 
and running in a relatively short amount of time.
Although I was weary of Charter Management Organizations (CMO’s) from my experience at Gratz, I felt this was a promising opportunity to create a community of practice. I was excited at the prospect of running a school, and I believed I would have the autonomy and flexibility to be “entrepreneurial”—the claim of many charter advocates. Moreover, I had grown weary of the public battle between charter and public school advocates, coming to believe that a path forward for urban schools would be found in the local practices of the schools, not in the policies decided at the state or federal levels.

The recent history of reform in Junction City mirrors that of other post-industrial cities on the east coast. Junction City school district is beset with crumbling infrastructure and a history of underperformance on both state and national standardized assessments. A new reform-minded superintendent from outside Junction City was appointed by the governor to lead the transformation (i.e. privatization) of the school district. This signaled the closing of traditional public schools, charters opening, union teachers being laid off, and the outsourcing all staffing and services to private companies. This is a familiar narrative to anyone who has witnessed large school districts enact reform across the country over the past 15 years.

College Prep Charter Schools is one of four CMO’s operating in Junction City under a newly implemented state act (NJSL, 2012) allowing for the creation of hybrid charters. These charters are considered hybrid because they are privately managed by the CMO
but serve a designated catchment area similar to traditional neighborhood schools. These new “Renaissance Schools” receive additional per pupil funding (95%, rather than the 90% received by typical charter schools) as well as state funds to build new school facilities. The passage of this state law has been met with much acrimony from the teacher’s union as well as some local community organizations. Amid protests, CPCS won a designation to open a Renaissance School based on its successful operation of a number of schools at four different locations on the East Coast. College Prep Elementary School (CPES) opened its doors to 71 kindergartners in the fall of 2014. Because of the limited time between its charter being approved and the start of the school year, CPES spent its first year renting space from a church.

The composition of the leadership team was as follows: two co-leaders, one instructional and one operational; me, the principal fellow (principal in training) and dean of students. Both co-leaders are white women in their mid-twenties who had a combined experience of six years in education. As an instructional fellow, I was training to become a principal the following year but was assigned to be dean of students while at CPES. Initially, my time was split between CPES and a middle school in a large city nearby; however, that changed half way through the year when I expressed to CPCS that I would not be returning the following year. After that, I worked at CPES full time as the dean of students. Lastly, none of us had any previous experience working in Junction City.

Each of the three classrooms had a lead teacher and a co-teacher, all six of whom were women. In addition to the classroom teachers, there was a fitness teacher, a special
education teacher, and a support teacher who filled in for various tasks and covered classes when there was an absence. Of the teaching staff at the beginning of the year, six were African American, one was White, and two were Latino—a unique situation considering the national face of the teacher workforce (Ingersoll, 2014). Three of the teachers were a part of the Teach For America (TFA) organization, and only three were fully certified teachers at the time they were hired. Two teachers quit working for CPES within the first months of the year school year forcing the principal to become the lead teacher for one of the classrooms.

The organizational structure of CPCS school is split into an instructional side, as described above, and an operational side. On the operations side, the co-leader managed an office manager and a community outreach coordinator. The office manager was a Latino man and the community outreach coordinator was an African-American woman, both originally from Junction City and residing within the community. One office manager, an African-American woman from Junction City in her early twenties, was fired early in the year.

**Research questions**

As stated in Chapter II, the purpose of this project is to investigate the ways whiteness and deficit are constructed and perpetuated by the school as an organization. Based on the gaps I identified in the literature, this project seeks to answer the following research questions:
1) How does my experience as someone committed to taking a critical perspective on issues of schooling impact my sense-making of CPES?
   a) How do whiteness and deficit operate within CPES to marginalize the perspectives of Teachers and Staff of Color?
   b) What conclusions can I draw about culturally competent leadership based on my experience?

2) How do the teachers and staff members make sense of their experience at CPES?
   a) How are Teachers and Staff of Color impacted by the deficit ideology as perpetuated by the school’s leadership?
   b) How are Teachers and Staff of Color impacted by the deficit ideology as perpetuated at the organizational level?
   c) What are the emotional responses of Teachers and Staff of Color to the deficit they encountered and what are the political implications of these emotions?

3) As an inquiry group, what can we uncover when we explore our shared experience of CPES?
   a) What is the impact of our collective sense-making of the racialized experience of working at CPES?
   b) What knowledge can we generate about race as it relates to teaching, learning, and leadership?

**Methodology and Project Design**

**Narrative Inquiry**

This project will be carried out using a narrative inquiry framework as outlined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Narrative inquiry represents the sense-making of experience as it pertains to situation, continuity, and interaction. In framing my inquiry as
such, I will use the following narrative boundaries: place (situation); past, present, and future (continuity); and, personal and social (interaction). Thus a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space is generated, “reducing the stories to a set of understandings” (2000, p. 54). These stories undermine the notion of a grand narrative and will result in the generation of a localized narrative constructed with localized knowledge. Through constructing this narrative, I believe new perspectives emerged that inform both policy and practice. The use of a narrative methodology is justified on ontological grounds by the critical realist approach outlined in the literature review and is epistemologically aligned with the social justice aims of practitioner inquiry.

Narrative is the fundamental way that humans organize our thoughts and make meaning of our experiences (Polkinhorne, 1988; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Richardson, 1997; Trahar, 2009; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Bochner, 2009; Moen, 2006). Most scientific writing, however, uses a logico-scientific metanarrative which privileges it from other genres (Richardson, 1997). By using the traditional scientific format, language, and statistics, positivist researchers argue their work reveals Truth, a claim that the interpretivist tradition of research whole-heartedly rejects. Beneath the privileged metanarrative of positivist science exists a preoperative narrative logic that tells a story, although it is often one which positivist researchers are not aware. Moreover, the ways we present our research questions, define our measures, and interpret our results will never be value-free or neutral. Bochner (2009, p. 363) sates about scientific processes:
First, that **scientific activity is recursive**. To see phenomena a scientist must
transform them; having transformed them, he or she is transformed by them;
second, that **data can not tell us what to ask of them, nor what they mean**. Thus,
the meanings of data are never beyond challenge, never closed to other meanings,
ever capable of absolutely falsifying or verifying. What we do to or with data is
an intellectual activity; and third, **ideas are as important as facts** and nowhere is
it evident that they are inducable from them.

Narrative inquiry is often taken up by those committed to personal and social change;
and it has the potential to facilitate healing for those speaking and those being heard both
in the writing of the narrative and in the public dialogue that follows (Chase, 2011).
Throughout my time working alongside the participants in this study, issues of trauma
and healing were constantly on their minds, as indicated by the vignette in the Story of
the Problem section in Chapter I. Throughout the days at school, during the interviews,
and also during the inquiry group work, storytelling was therapeutic. As someone who
has healed tremendously from personal trauma through therapy, I know the weight of
carrying around wounds unseen. I am equally aware of the danger of calling inquiry
groups a form of therapy. Still, I want to emphasize an important aspect of this project is
that it provides the participants and myself a venue for being heard. In this case, I am
making the claim that fighting for the right to tell a story, one’s own personal story, is a
part of the political struggle for social justice work.

**Emotions**

An important aspect of narrative space requiring further explication is the role of
emotion, which appears in the interaction dimension of the narrative framework but I
believe deserves more emphasis. Jones (2015) uses emotion itself as a conceptual
framework, and I wish to do similarly here. This understanding will help me piece together narrative fragments using emotion as a bond. In making space for emotion, I believe that I am making it possible to stay in the tension that is inevitably created when trying to “capture” relational experience. Jones defines emotion as a “feeling that overwhelms other simultaneously-occurring feelings, sometimes starting in my gut and slowly winding its way to my heart and mind” (44). Teaching and learning is an emotional endeavor; every aspect of the relational nature of teaching and learning is bound by how we feel about the process. Furthermore, learning is a risk-taking adventure wherein the safety of the students is a prerequisite. If students do not feel safe with a teacher, they will not learn from him or her. Engaging deeply in material so new connections can be made requires trust and encouragement from the teacher, who ultimately must establish an environment of wonder and inquiry. All of this is an emotional process; students must have positive emotions towards learning if they are to want to continue it. Teachers who are in touch with the emotional nature of our work are more likely to create safe learning environments for students.

Emotion is also linked with our identities and thus is inherently political (Zembylas, 2003; Zembylas, 2005). Our emotional reactions, then, become a site worthy of analysis. Furthermore, considering that emotion is at least partially “the product of cultural, social, and political relations” (Zembylas, 2003, p.104), we must then begin to rethink the role of emotion within the frameworks of Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and Freire (who embrace the notion of emotion and love as central to the learning process), as well as other sociocultural theorists. Emotion is a powerful mediator of knowledge that is an essential
component meaning making of our worlds. Zembylas (2003) posits that although educational researchers are beginning to conceptualize emotion as central to teachers’ work, the political aspect of emotion has gone largely ignored. I will use emotion in this project as a framework for understanding power relations within the CPES community. Who has the right to feel in this system? How do staff feel about their work? Where do they go and what do they do with those emotions? Do staff members feel differently about their work based on social identity? How are those emotions allowed/not allowed within the space? These are potential avenues of inquiry this project will explore at some point.

**Methodological Crystallization: Incorporating Organizational Autoethnographic Perspectives and Collaborative Inquiry**

There are two perspectives that impacted the shape of my methodology: organizational autoethnography and collaborative inquiry. While practitioner inquiry lacks one true form (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), it is important to justify my methodological choices and the ways they align ontologically and epistemologically. In keeping with the notion of researcher-as-bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), the blend of methodological approaches I use are intended to honor the complexity of the specific context within which I carried out my research. I have found Richardson’s (2000) notion of the crystal to be a very helpful guide in understanding how to strive for rigor and validity in creating a multi-faceted research design. As opposed to the notion of
triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of methodologies and its flat, rigid, fixed, three-sidedness, Richardson (2000) argues for the metaphor of the crystal:

The central imagery is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter but are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose. Not triangulation, crystallization. In postmodernist mixed-genre texts, we have moved from plane geometry to light theory, where light can be both waves and particles (92).

Maggs-Rapport (2000) suggests that while there are some risks to using more than one methodological approach, there is an abundance of information to be gained so long as the researcher is mindful of the ways the overlapping methodologies compliment and restrict one another. My hope is to utilize the methodological perspectives in ways that make my conclusions stronger. That is to say, I have my perspective, the perspectives of the individual participants, and the shared perspective of the inquiry group that all serve to “reflect and refract” interpretations and meaning. These reflections and refractions are points of inquiry, not ends in themselves. As inquiry leads to more inquiry, the crystallization of the research takes shape.

**Organizational Autoethnography.** An approach to research that greatly influences this work is organizational autoethnography. In doing so, I hope to open up new spaces for dialogue and collaboration around equity and schools as organizations that would have otherwise gone undiscovered. Specifically, in making the case for the use of organizational autoethnographic perspectives. Ellis and Bochner (2000) state, “The goal
is to write meaningfully and evocatively about topics that matter and may make a difference, to include sensory and emotional experience, and to write from an ethic of care and concern” (742). Boyle and Parry (2007) identified three unique elements of autoethnography that allow for unique readings of organizational life not offered through other approaches: 1) the ability to connect everyday practice with larger political agendas; 2) more likely to discover implied, tacit, or subjugated aspects of organizations; and 3) the ability to uncover personal, rich, and engaging interpretations. These elements make it possible to explore difficult or taboo topics that would otherwise remain “shrouded in secrecy” (Ellis & Bochner, as cited in Boyle & Parry, 2007). In the case of CPES, race and racism emerged as daily realities for teachers. Using organizational autoethnographic perspectives will allow me approach these school dynamics in ways that would be out of reach for more traditional methodologies.

A tension in autoethnographic research pertains to the decisions that need to be made around the form and extent of personal disclosure on the part of the researcher (Haynes, 2011). There is a large personal and professional risk in using organizational autoethnographic perspectives in my work because of the personal nature to the emotions, thoughts, and actions portrayed (Boyle & Parry, 2007; Haynes, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). However, in that risk lies the reward of making deeper meanings around events and situations, and encouraging others to do the same. In pushing myself to create evocative and emotional texts, I unlock a world that would otherwise remain untouched using other methodologies and methods. Behar (1997) states, “When you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably. A different set of problems and predicaments

72
arise which would never surface in response to more detached writing” (p. 16). Which parts of myself should I make vulnerable? How will I recognize what is too much, too far? Unfortunately, it is usually only apparent once I have gone too far. But too far for whom? I have found this question especially relevant as I begin to make sense of the ways whiteness works to elude serious racial discussions. I am convinced that White silence, in particular, is now far more damaging than any mistakes we might make in exposing our thoughts, beliefs, and actions pertaining to teaching other people's’ children (Stevenson, 2014). Systemic racism, as well as our participation in it and against it, is heartbreaking. Ultimately, the potential insight gained from this approach is worth the risk, and I agree with Behar (1997) that social science “that doesn’t break your heart is not worth doing” (p. 177).

**Collaborative Inquiry.** The collaborative inquiry for this project developed after the school year ended, and I had already left my position at CPES. Throughout the difficult year, the staff developed close relationships with one another. For example, many staff members met on Thursdays after school to grab dinner and Eric and I met through the spring to talk pedagogy and practice. Due to the climate of the school and because we felt that openly discussing critical perspectives would draw negative attention from leadership, we met at coffee shops and pizza joints with print-outs of academic texts and journal reflections from our experiences throughout the day. Through working together under what unfortunately were subversive circumstances, we began to wonder what the rest of the staff could gain from incorporating these perspectives into their work. Thus, we began having conversations with teachers and staff members about the ways we were
understanding the day-to-day events in the school. The result was a sort of network of sharing that all took place “when no one was looking.” This may seem dramatic, like I am trying to describe a scene from a spy movie, but as I will demonstrate in later chapters the systems and management practices of the school made it seem impossible to meaningfully collaborate on practice. In communicating with one another about our practice, especially our desire to provide care and protection to students, we established trusting bonds that last to this day despite the fact that none of us work in the same building.

At the beginning of the following school year, I sent out invitations to teachers and staff members at CPES to see if they would be interested in participating in an inquiry group. Of the invitations sent, five teachers accepted and we agreed to meet twice over the coming months as a starting point for our inquiry. I sent out the following description by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) to my colleagues as a description of the goals of an inquiry group:

The goal is to create access for all learners to equitable and stimulating learning opportunities; to identify levers for needed change in people, institutions, and systems; and to act in ways that respect and honor the participation of various constituencies whose lives are implicated in the educational practices and policies under consideration (p. 142).

The purpose of the group was to approach our work by looking back and making collaborative sense of our experience working at CPES. In doing so we worked “to uncover, articulate, and question [our] own assumptions about teaching, learning, and schooling” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Specifically, through analyzing our own
narratives, we were able to call into question our notions of achievement, equity, community, and leadership. This process and the knowledge generated through it will be explored more in Chapters V-VIII; however, I felt it important to situate the inquiry group work as central to the epistemological and methodological considerations of this project.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

**Composition of Field Texts.** Data collection is an arduous process for practitioner researchers. This is primarily due to the fact that the demands of the job make traditional research methods difficult to execute (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007), as I will explore further below. However, the ability to capture telling events and situations throughout the day, despite the tedium and massive amount of documents collected, is a vital part of the inquiry process. The “story” of the research process will be explored further in the next section, but here is a list of the various types of field texts that were composed for this project:

- Journals
- Field notes
- Photographs
- Public documents from the organization
- Organizational documents
- Artifacts generated from inquiry group with the teachers (journals, pictures, drawings, meeting notes)
- Semi-structured interviews
- Text messages exchanged among staff
- Emails exchanged among staff
- Inquiry group transcripts
The composition of field texts is a part of the interpretive process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Ultimately, all decisions were based on my interpretations of the people, places, and events I encountered: what was said, what was left unsaid, when the tape recorder was turned on and off, what exactly was transcribed, what was written in a field note and what was left out, which documents were deemed important and which ones were not. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the relationships between researcher and participants drives much of the decision making about field texts, because they “embed meaning in the field text and impose form on the research text ultimately developed” (94). Therefore, issues that are difficult to relate via text such as trust, care, respect all need to be taken into account during the inquiry process.

Composition of Research Texts. For researchers using narrative inquiry, the data analysis process is hardly linear (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Rather, it involves the constant reading and rereading of field texts, always considering them in relation to “character, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator, context, and tone” (p. 131). In moving towards more systematic analyses of the field texts I collected, I was mindful of the absence of text as much as what was on the page. In doing so, I hoped to begin to create interpretive understandings based on the negative space contained within the field texts. For example, a note scribbled in ink on the corner of a napkin could be about almost anything that occurred during the day. The fact that writing the note was so important that I could not take the time to locate my computer to type it up, let alone a full sheet of paper, indicates a level of emotion and urgency that adds weight to the text.
In transitioning from field texts to research texts, it was necessary for me first to create archival record (2000) of all the field texts I had collected throughout the year. This archival record included categories for dates collected, type of document, context/situation, people involved, topics covered, and the emotions involved. As I created the archive, I began to think about placing texts within three-dimensional narrative space described above; situation, continuity, and interaction. After all the field texts were archived, I began to sift through them and recode the field texts into relevant narrative categories. These narrative codes were not fixed, however, as many field texts fit into multiple categories depending on the story being told. I found myself constantly returning to the field texts, using interim texts such as memos and drafts to reflect upon the various narrative directions that appeared (2000). Once I found consistency and story throughout the codes, I recoded for themes that emerged across the potential narratives.

Once the narrative codes were established, true uncertainty and fear set in. I worried as to whether or not I would be able to capture the essence of the emotions and voice of myself and the other staff members. I became acutely aware of the pressure to represent their perspectives with fidelity while at the same time knowing that I could never completely capture the nature of these relationships with text. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest there are several considerations to be aware of in the midst of uncertainty: voice, signature, audience, and narrative form. What follows are the ways I considered each of these tensions while composing the research texts (Research memo, 1/5/16):
Voice: I try to be conscious as a White male not to speak for women and People of Color about how they experience their identities. This is a subtle form of racism and erasure that is pervasive within progressive white thought (Thompson, 2003). However, speaking for the People of Color who participated in this project seems unavoidable given that I am the researcher who will compose the final version of the research text. The decisions I make about what to include, what not to include, how things get worded, and finally how they appear in print are all decisions I will be making on their behalf. Two things strike me moving forward, 1) I need to continue the extensive use of memos throughout this process, as well as relying upon critical friends to assess if what I am writing is a good reflection of the research texts, and 2) in future projects, co-authoring or using even more democratic methodologies would be a better way to address this.

Signature: Closely linked to voice, signature represents the personal essence within the text. Here I am not so concerned with the exact wording of the participants, but instead something far more human, i.e. “Is this you?” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 149). I need to be mindful of my signature as well. I have already conducted a member check and discussed what was said in the personal interviews, and I will also send a draft of the individual narratives pertaining to each participant. Again, while I can’t avoid speaking for the participants on this project, I want to make sure to capture their signatures as much as possible.

Audience: The idea that an audience is peering over my shoulder even as I write this is always on my mind. This is a central tension for me, as I am constantly worried that what I write will somehow be deemed “unacceptable” by my audience. Audience
for me is first and foremost my dissertation committee, but also the participants, my academic division, and the broader academic community as well. This particular tension makes me feel as if I am being pulled in multiple directions at once. Furthermore, I feel if I go too far in one direction, the other audiences will be displeased. Undoubtedly, it is impossible to write solely for external audiences without losing the heart of the project. I must continue to reflect upon my writing to ensure that my voice and my signature are not lost while at the same time continuing to consider audience as I compose my research texts.

Narrative Form: This tension is one that bothers me the least at this point. Having created an epistemological and methodological foundation that embraces crystallization and dissonance, I feel confident that I will be able to play with narrative form in ways that capture the overarching story of CPES while creating a readable and rigorous research text. I will shift in and out of varying narrative forms such as poetry and prose. I will intermittently break in with conceptual and theoretical analysis (expository writing) while incorporating the actual words of the participants when I feel this is the best way to portray certain ways of thinking.

Addressing these tensions using research memos relieved some of the anxiety I felt around issues of representation and reminded me of the iterative nature of the research process. As I have mentioned many times throughout these first chapters, I am unfinished. This work is unfinished, and long after it is submitted it will be unfinished still. Furthermore, I cannot let the fear of making mistakes prevent me from writing the important story of this organization. Having described the process of moving from field
texts to research texts, I will now map out the strategies I used for increasing the validity and trustworthiness of my findings, and ultimately strengthening the inquiry process.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Coding Process</th>
<th>Research Question Answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Journals, field notes, photographs, public documents from the organization, organizational documents, semi-structured interviews, text messages exchanged among staff, emails exchanged among staff</td>
<td>August 2014-June 2015</td>
<td>Multiple rounds of coding and recoding: 1) Narrative codes <em>situation</em>, <em>continuity</em>, and <em>interaction</em>; 2) recoded for narrative aspects <em>voice</em>, <em>signature</em>, <em>audience</em>, and <em>narrative form</em></td>
<td>1.a, 1.b, 2.a, 2.b, 2.c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autoethnographic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Inquiry group meeting transcripts, artifacts generated from inquiry group with the teachers (journals, pictures, drawings, meeting notes)</td>
<td>October 2015-December 2015</td>
<td>Multiple rounds of coding and recoding: 1) Narrative codes <em>situation</em>, <em>continuity</em>, and <em>interaction</em>; 2) recoded for narrative aspects <em>voice</em>, <em>signature</em>, <em>audience</em>, and <em>narrative form</em></td>
<td>1.b, 2.c, 3.a, 3.b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Validity and Trustworthiness

**Validity.** A common critique of practitioner inquiry is that validity is impossible to surmise when the researcher is so involved with the research. While this critique is based on the positivist scientific approach critiqued above, practitioner-researchers have none the less formulated new criteria for validity according to postmodern and critical theorization. In addition to the aforementioned bricolage and crystallization, Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007) put forth a criteria approach to ensuring validity of findings and they are as follows:

- Democratic Validity; to what extent is the research done in collaboration with all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation?
- Outcome Validity; does the project lead to conclusions that satisfy the original problem?
- Process Validity; are we able to determine the adequacy of the process and are problems solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system?
- Catalytic Validity; what is the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it?
- Dialogic Validity; To what extent is this work in active conversation with other works of a similar nature? To what extent has this work been made public?

In my final chapter, I will summarize the ways this project did and did not meet the validity criteria above. Admittedly, it felt it immensely challenging to meet all of the criteria, and I have specifically come up short in dialogic validity (for now) and democratic validity. The dialogic validity will be increased as I publish this dissertation, present my data and conclusions at various conferences in the upcoming years, and as I publish articles using this data. The criterion for democratic validity is the one that
troubles me the most. Given the constraints of time and circumstance, the collaborative nature of this dissertation study was limited far more than it could have been.

Trustworthiness. I utilized two specific reflexive research techniques to increase the trustworthiness of my findings, both of which were mentioned briefly above: member checks and research memos. Member checks are utilized by researchers to ensure that their conclusions are accurate reflections of the data provided by the participants of a research study (Maxwell, 2013). To do this, I followed up the initial individual interviews by sending a copy of the transcripts to the participants and conducting follow up interviews to clarify my understandings. I also sent out drafts of the narrative samples involving individual participants to ensure that their voices and signatures were accurately captured.

I used memos throughout the research process to deepen my understanding of the participants’ experience as well as my own. Memos are essentially road markers of critical reflection throughout my dissertation process; they include what I am understanding the participants to be saying, how my own positionality affects what I understand, and what shared meanings we may be producing (Maxwell, 2013). Overall, the purpose of the memos was to ensure that I did not lose sight of three things: the tensions inherent in creating a narrative using the voices of others, the power dynamics of the research relationships, and my positionality within the research (Herr & Anderson, 2005).
The Participants

Eric. Eric is a first-year Teach For America teacher from the Boston area. Working at CPES is his first job after college, and he is excited to work for an organization committed to the social justice principles by which he strives to live. After visiting a CPCS school in a neighboring city, Eric became excited to create an energetic and positive classroom culture for the students CPES in Junction City. He identifies strongly with his Puerto Rican roots, and Eric looks forward to working with the Spanish-speaking families to help them navigate the educational system and find access to spaces from which they have traditionally been marginalized.

Melanie. Melanie was born and raised in Junction City and has worked as a community engagement coordinator and family counselor for over 20 years. As an African-American woman, Melanie is passionate about her community and helping families gain access to the best education possible. Though she considers herself on the back end of her career, her daughter encouraged her to apply to CPES when she heard recruiters speak about the new school. After researching more about CPCS and reading about their stellar test score results, Melanie applied for the Community Engagement Coordinator position.

Alex. Alex was also raised in Junction City after moving there with his family from Puerto Rico as a young child. After attending an Ivy League university and one of the top business schools to earn an MBA, Alex moved away from the east coast to work in the
entertainment industry. After a few years, Alex decided it was time to move home and pursue his passion for becoming involved with education. Having attended Junction City’s public schools from first through eighth grades, Alex felt the urgency to provide Junction City’s students with the top education they deserved.

**Sam.** Sam has worked in many different types of school settings such as Montessori, Reggio Milio, and Chinese immersion. For the past five years, Sam had helped found and run the after school programming for a charter school in a major US city. Sam was born in Senegal and immigrated to the US with his family as a child. He heard about CPES through a friend who worked in central office leadership at CPCS. Early on, Sam was amazed by the test scores CPCS students achieved and felt inspired by the positive impact its presence would bring to Junction City. Furthermore, he is a big believer in self-discipline and hard work so he felt his style would be a natural fit at CPES.

**Sara.** Like Eric, Sara is a first-year Teach For America corps member and CPES will be her first job out of college. Born and raised in Brooklyn, Sara graduated from a small liberal arts school in the northeast. Sara is biracial African American and Latina but identifies more with the African-American community she grew up around. She was inspired to join the CPES staff after meeting with some strong African-American women in school-based and central office leadership roles at CPCS who she felt were making an impact towards educational equity.
CHAPTER V: A Day in the Life of a Staff Member at CPES

The accountability movement assumes there is a consensus across society about what it means to be educated, whose knowledge and values are of most worth, and what counts as effectiveness.
-Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009, p. 10

If we truly care about our students, we need to use our energies to ensure that they have the skills they need to succeed. If we only show caring but do not give them the tools to go to college we have not given them enough of a gift. We must ensure that they have the talents that will open doors of opportunity and give them the freedom to choose a future that will be happy. They need a strong knowledge base, the ability to read, write, and calculate and problem-solve well. They must be able to analyze, synthesize, apply and evaluate—to think well. Therefore, at CPCS, academics come first, for they will provide those tools.
-CPCS training document

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to familiarize the reader with the philosophies of the no excuses approach to schooling. To do this, I will first describe the tenets of the no excuses approach: closing the achievement gap; discipline; and organization, efficiency, and effectiveness. Then, I will present a snapshot of the daily routine at College Prep Charter School (CPES) to demonstrate the ways that this philosophy structures the school activities. Next, I will describe the training and management program that functions to discipline teachers and staff members, ensuring that scripts are followed and policies enforced. Finally, I will offer a critique of the hierarchical nature of CPES from a critical organizational studies perspective.
The “no excuses” ideology is most often associated with charter management operated (CMO) schools (Goodman, 2014) and is considered under the umbrella of larger notions of “ed reform.” Ed reform is described in the research literature mostly as a market-driven worldview championing deregulation, privatization, competition, and choice (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Ravitch, 2011). In the past 10 years, a caricature of the typical “ed reformer” has emerged within progressive education circles: a white, male, ivy-league hedge-fund manager in a suit who takes over urban schools in order to install a neoliberal regime for the purposes of funneling resources to his cronies. And within reform circles, the caricature of the lazy, traditional public school teacher who clocks in late and leaves early, doesn’t grade papers, and slowly counts the minutes until retirement dominates reformers perceptions. Thus, the public discourse splits the world of education into two reductive camps; the progressives and the reformers.

The problem with stereotypes, as Adichie (2009) reminds us, isn’t that they are false; it is that they are singular and flat. They tell only a single story of people and erase their complexity. While it is true that the charter movement relies heavily on the ideology of neoliberalism, this could also be said of most markets in the world today. And while there are ivy-league white men entering urban communities completely unaware of their privilege and the damage it reaps, this didn’t begin with the charter movement. As one who was brought into education within the reform camp (TFA) and trained within more
progressive schools of thought, I find the facile descriptions of both sides bothersome because they involve the erasure of decades of activism, largely driven by People of Color and those who don’t fit neatly into either group. The goal of this chapter is to add nuance and complexity to this debate by describing the mindset and philosophies of the no excuses model that go beyond the descriptions that currently exist in much of the progressive research literature. In doing so, I hope to create an opportunity for dialogue that bridges the divide between progressive educators and reformers and opens space for a coalitional approach to education policy and practice.

In saying this, I do not claim to be a neutral observer to the political struggle for educational equity; I am firmly in support of community control of schools and democratic governance. However, I also believe that little progress can be made by remaining entrenched in the debate as it is currently constructed. As will become evident throughout the next four chapters, I am critical of the no excuses model as implemented by CPCS and CMO’s elsewhere, and question it as a true path to equity. No matter one’s political beliefs, these policies and practices are worth public examination because of the public funds these schools receive to “takeover” struggling public schools. That said, I have great respect for the vision and commitment to equality that many people within the reform movement demonstrate. While I often times don’t agree with the implementation of this vision, it is wrong to erase the perspective of those who have struggled to provide an avenue of access to higher education for traditionally marginalized students. In the following sections, I will explore the essential components of the no excuses philosophy enacted at CPES. In doing so, I hope to illuminate the ways that leaders leverage
organizational power to discipline the minds and bodies of staff, teachers, and students. Conclusively, the disciplinary practices (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998) enacted at CPES make clear that compliance and obedience to authority are essential measures of success within the organization.

No Excuses

While the “no excuses” model of schooling takes form in many different shapes and sizes, schools subscribing to its philosophies operate upon a set of shared set of beliefs about academic success and human motivation. In that sense, generalizing the specific practices of College Prep Charter Schools (CPCS) to all schools claiming to be no excuses schools may not be appropriate—however, it important to map out what it means at this local site to better understand some of the ways it is implemented. With that limitation established, I will note that CPCS has a national reputation as a model no excuses charter management organization (CMO), and school leaders and teachers from no excuses schools from across the country attend trainings led by CPCS leadership and staff. Therefore, while we cannot generalize all no excuses charter schools’ practices based on this study we can assume that many other schools implement similar policies and practices, as they look to CPCS as the standard for model implementation. CPCS began as a single charter school in a large industrial city in the northeast, one of the first charter schools ratified by its state. From there it has grown into a multistate CMO operating over 40 schools in six large industrial cities. The following analysis draws from my personal experiences being trained in the no excuses model, the experiences of the
other staff members who were trained in the same ways based on interview and inquiry group data, and organizational documents which explain the philosophies and planning that go into implementing the no excuses approach within this particular CMO.

**Closing the Achievement Gap.** The highest priority of CPCS and the no excuses model is closing the “achievement gap” between Black and Brown children and their White counterparts as measured by standardized tests. This goal drives any and all actions taken by the organization with little or no thought to outside considerations. The achievement gap, which I will problematize from a deficit perspective in Chapter VI, is seen by no excuses advocates as the result of a system that does not care for Black and Brown students. The driving force behind this inequality is teachers, more specifically racist teachers who have low expectations for the academic success of Black and Brown students. These low expectations take the form of unchallenging instruction, passing students despite subpar performance, and allowing unacceptable behaviors that detract from the learning environment. The no excuses philosophy states that only an extremely rigorous academic experience will undo this systemic problem, push traditionally low performing students to great achievement, and close the gap on standardized tests.

It is believed that the achievement gap represents the civil rights fight of our generation, much like marching for voting rights or ending Jim Crow segregation in the 1960’s in the south. The connection to the Civil Rights movement is made explicit in CPCS trainings as well as during scripted professional developments and ceremonies held throughout the year. Signs and banners decorated with quotes from civil rights
leaders extolling hard work and overcoming obstacles are hung around every CPCS school. It is constantly messaged that the achievement gap only persists because we allow it to persist—with effort and focus, the Black and Brown students who attend CPCS will perform equal to, if not better than, White students in the suburbs. Because of the deeply entrenched nature of this problem, and the belief that we can no longer wait to solve it, no excuses advocates embody a sense of urgency in their work. Therefore, all no excuses policies and practices are designed with achieving this goal in the most efficient and effective way possible.

If “no excuses” is seen by its advocates as the solution to the problem of educational inequity, it is important to better understand exactly what constitutes an “excuse” under this model. Poverty, especially, is said to be a red herring in the struggle for educational equity. While this positioning may sound harsh, this ideology is driven by a rigid pragmatism. In this sense, asking more profound questions about the purpose of education is seen as an attempt to justify unequal treatment of Students of Color. If White students in the suburbs get a great education, then there is no excuse for Black and Brown students not to receive the same. With a challenging curriculum, good teaching, and hard work, none of the things widely associated with poverty are said to be real barriers to student achievement (Goodman, 2013). At its heart, the no excuses movement perceives itself as rejecting deficit notions of students from traditionally marginalized backgrounds. Many of the leadership consider themselves aligned with the revolutionary politics of Malcom X and Nelson Mandela. The founder of CPCS’s first school in 1997 even stated
during a meeting, “The revolution has begun.” If social justice is the stated goal, the mechanism by which it will be achieved is discipline.

**Discipline.** The no excuses model, as put forth by CPCS, holds up discipline as central to the learning process. The idea that students must demonstrate discipline at all times—both in their comportment as well as their academics—pervades the schooling experience at CPES. This belief is operationalized in CPCS schools by maintaining unmovable discipline policies that do not consider the individual contexts of a student infraction, only that an infraction occurred. Rigid discipline is said to demonstrate high expectations and care. Once individual accommodations enter the picture, it is believed the subjective slippery slope of low expectations is soon to follow. Therefore, the strict policies and procedures are as much to ensure teachers are maintaining high expectations as they are to hold students accountable. The discipline system is clear and enforced to every detail. Often times the instilling of discipline supersedes the learning of any course material. Indeed, it is messaged in trainings that classroom management (i.e. establishing routines, procedures, and disciplinary rules in the classroom) must be mastered before any instructional strategies will be effective. Therefore, all teacher evaluation rubrics prioritize the concept of “100%.” This means that 100 percent of students are completing 100 percent of tasks 100 percent of the time. Student resistance is expected (the messages of cultural deficit behind this will be discussed further in Chapter VI), so myriad methods have been devised to ensure student compliance. These exist as “teacher taxonomy”—the heart of professional developments in the first trainings as well as throughout the rest of the year. Taxonomy is the body of teacher moves, such as where to stand, what to say,
and how to say it that encompass the feedback from administrators. If it isn’t reflected in the taxonomy, and there are 49 categories in all, it doesn’t exist in CPCS classrooms.

One example of these methods is “Strong Voice,” which is broken up into sub-taxonomies: 1. Economy of language (use as few words as possible); 2. Do not talk over (stop all student talking in the class before talking); 3. Do not engage (do not engage in arguments, simply restate the directions); 4. Square up (directly face students); 5. Exude quiet power (use direct eye contact without speaking, i.e. “the teacher look”). If an instructional leader walked into a classroom that he or she felt was not “tight,” the feedback might be around giving “clear what to do’s” (i.e. directions in fewer words), talking over students, or engaging with students around their behavior. The leader would prescribe bite-sized and actionable feedback that could be implemented, observed, and mastered the very next day. A leader would then send a follow up email with the action step to “Use economy of language during lessons. Give clear what to do’s in three words or less.” The teacher would be expected to revise their lesson plan scripts to note the action step as well as their plan for practicing and implementing it. Moreover, in a classroom with tight culture where 100% is being consistently reached, the leader would begin giving the teacher action steps based on internalization of material. If discipline slips and a teacher is deemed to have regressed from 100%, the leader would call for a reset of all classroom norms and procedures and the teacher would start again from the bottom of the rubric.
“Sweating the small stuff” is the primary approach to enforcing the notion of “100%” upon the students. Much like the ways teachers are coached, the discipline system is extremely systematized and thorough. Essentially everything that a student says or does, even how they look for the most part, is scripted for the entire day. The driving idea is that ambiguity leads to uncertainty and uncertainty leads to misbehavior. Students are watched at all times to be sure they are complying with the school rules and a system of consequences is prescribed for any and every infraction. So in effect, the adults need to be disciplined in their approach as well. In “sweating the small stuff,” the adults are trained to always be aware of, attentive to, and swiftly reactionary to all of the behaviors of students. If this sounds anxiety-producing and exhausting, it is.

Every student, teacher, and staff member in the building (with the notable exception of the school leaders) are evaluated based on observable behaviors that can be found somewhere on a rubric. With such a clear path to professional development, the only expectation of a staff member is a sense of urgency and dedication. Essentially, it is believed that you must have an unwavering belief in the model and the enforcement of it for it to work. This is known as “fidelity of implementation,” which describes the length one is willing to go to implement the no excuses school policies. In other words, it is not enough to simply believe in it—you must demonstrate that belief by endlessly striving to carry it out. To ensure fidelity, leaders devise simple yet extensive systems of surveillance to ensure staff members are compliant to the policies and practices put forth by CPCS; these systems of surveillance will be detailed throughout this chapter.
At the elementary school, the main tool for measuring student compliance is STAR (Sit up straight; Track the teacher with your eyes; Ask and answer all questions [or Always participate, depending on the school]; and Respect others at all times) and HALL (Hands at your sides; Always walk; Look forward; and Lips sealed). When in class, kids are expected to be sitting in STAR with hands folded on the desk and feet flat on the floor at all times unless instructed to do otherwise. Teachers are trained to always reset to STARS between activities because it is an easily observable measure of control. When in a transition, whether it is in the hallways or within a classroom, students are to walk in HALL along lines of tape on the floor. Teachers are trained to walk in segments, stopping every so often to square-up the line and ensure that all students are silently walking in HALL. Any deviation from STAR or HALL is met with a stern reprimand and a check. If a student receives three checks in one day, he or she is moved from green to yellow or from yellow to red. Yellow or red means that a student gets his or her star removed from their behavior log that day, and they are eliminated from the weekly prize drawing at the end of the week.

With such an intricate behavioral system, a language develops wherein teachers tell students to “Check your ‘S’” or just “S” instead of “sit up straight,” and “Bright faces!” to get the kids to smile. When moving students from one point to the next, “HALL!” is a kind of all-encompassing “correction” and is a quick way to communicate displeasure about student actions—actions ranging from laughing to the swinging of arms or not walking quickly enough to keep up with the next person in line. The way teachers should reprimand students is also scripted. The teacher is to say the students name and give the
consequence, followed by the repetition of the desired behavior. So it might sound like this, “John, check, HALL.” Again, the point is to get compliance with as few words as possible. Compliance chants are recited multiple times a day especially during breakfast and lunch in the form of call and response: “Bottoms flat! Backs straight! Hands in STAR! Tracking me!” The teacher taxonomy officially calls for multiple steps before a student is directly called out by name in front of his or her classmates. However, a leader once laughed at the notion of not “coming right at a kid,” saying “we have been doing too many presentations to outside people.” Swift and harsh reactions to student non-compliance are encouraged by leadership. Lastly, it is important to recognize that CMO’s from all over the country are trained in these methods by CPCS because they wish to replicate their results.

**Organization, Efficiency, and Effectiveness.** To close the achievement gap as quickly as possible, CPCS demands its teachers and students approach their work with urgency and efficiency. School-wide and classroom procedures are scripted and memorized to the extent that there is never a time when a teacher or student is supposed to be confused about where he or she should be or what he or she should be doing. There is a designated task for every minute of every day, and organization is required of students and teachers at all times. Students’ desks only contain what they will not need for the day, and they are not allowed to have anything in their pockets. Their binders are organized into different sections, all of which are used every day. There are simply no superfluous items in the school experience of CPES students. Teachers lives are also stripped of anything considered non-essential—if it is not planned, it does not exist. To
stay organized, teachers maintain a “flexi” containing their task list, schedule for the week, and their professional development goals. These flexis are checked and evaluated weekly by the principal. Similarly, student binders contain sections for a reading log, homework, and behavior sheet that must be checked nightly by a parent. Everything you need, both as a teacher and as a student, is spelled out and has its own unique ritual. Everyone must subscribe to the same disciplined, no excuses approach to life in school.

Teachers have a list of tasks they must complete daily outside of their regular teaching schedule. All lesson plans for the week are due by Sunday at 2 PM so they can be reviewed by the principal. The principal sends feedback and resubmissions are due by 8 PM. As mentioned above, teachers must submit their flexis to the principal as well. Typical daily tasks include: sharpening the entire classroom set of pencils, placing two pencils on each desk, placing the morning Do Now/Spiral Review worksheet on top of every desk, resetting all the computers, updating the lesson plans for the next week on the clipboard, updating the star chart, resetting the color chart, placing new behavior check sheets on the clipboards, updating the calendar, making sure all the posters/graphic organizers for the next day are up, making sure all the materials that will be needed for the next day for each subject are prepared, printing out homework/classwork packets and materials, etc. These tasks are to be completed for the next day before a teacher leaves in the evening. Again, the notion of discipline must be demonstrated by teachers at all times—they then hold students accountable to the same high bar.
A Snapshot of Disciplinary Power at CPES

“For only by expecting more can we achieve more.”

The doors to the school open to children at 7:00 AM. Posts are assigned to each teacher starting at 6:50 AM. Lead-teachers circulate and actively monitor students while they are eating breakfast. Students are not allowed to talk while they eat, although lead-teachers are allowed to have quiet and brief conversations with individual students about academics. Once students are done eating, they place their hand on top of their head to signal they are finished. Lead-teachers throw away students’ food trays and the students immediately begin working on the Bright Work which is a packet of coloring and basic literacy and math. During breakfast, co-teachers are stationed at the cubbies, which are movable carts with hooks for book bags and coats. As students arrive, co-teachers receive their binders and check them for completed homework, as well as signed behavior logs and reading logs. Parents are required to read to their children at least thirty minutes every night and sign off that the child’s homework is completed and that they saw his or her daily behavior report.

At 7:30 AM, the principal uses silent hand motions to alert the students to turn in their seats and face her for the beginning of Morning Meeting. During this time, teachers have begun aggressively monitoring students to ensure that they are in STAR, sitting up straight with their hands folded in their laps. This is done silently as teachers model clasped hands and smile vigorously at the students to get them to do the same. They pace
back and forth around the perimeter of the room with urgency, trying to catch the eye of offending students to redirect them without having to go directly to them. They are constantly moving and using “be seen looking”—they are craning their necks and making exaggerated head movements to signal to students that they are being watched. If students do not comply after given a redirect, then the teacher kneels down to give a quiet verbal correction, accompanied by a check. Students who don’t comply to redirects are pulled aside or sent to the dean’s office. Once things are settled and all students are seated correctly, the ritual call and response begins (it will be used every day for the entire school year):

“Good morning, scholars!” the principal yells to the cafeteria of kindergarteners.

“Good morning, Ms. Principal!” the kids scream in response.

“I said, good morning, scholars!” asking for still more energy from the kids.

“Good morning, Ms. Principal!” They yell even louder.

“Bottoms flat!” she yells.

“Bottoms flat!”

“Backs straight!”

“Backs Straight”

“Hands in STAR!”

“Hands in STAR!”

“Tracking me!”

“Tracking you!”
And then without missing a beat, she breaks them into the Days of the Week chant, which is sung to the tune of *The Addams Family* theme song.

"Days of the week!" (Clap, clap) "Days of the week" (Clap, Clap) "Days of the week! Days of the week! Days of the week! (Clap, Clap).

Once the students have sung the Days of the Week song, the day of the week and date are identified on the calendar. While this is going on, teachers are continually moving around the perimeter of the room, aggressively monitoring student behavior, and giving non-verbal and verbal redirects.

"If yesterday was Tuesday, scholars, what day is it today?"

Most students’ hands shoot up excitedly, as they are trained to do. Teachers circulate to make sure every student has raised a vertical hand. A vertical hand means that arms are straight up against the students’ ears and that fingers are together tightly and straight up. The day begins with strong enforcement of 100%, the most important tenet of the no excuses model. No student is allowed to sit without participating. Whether or not a student has the correct answer or wants to participate are inconsequential, and teachers go around the room to straighten arms of students whose hands are not vertical hand and/or model the desired behavior themselves. Once all hands are raised, the principal calls on one student who stands up and gives the answer with a strong voice and a complete sentence. The day must be said, “Today is Wednesday.” Teachers continue to circulate and identify “hot-spots” where an individual student might be misbehaving. Then the
same is done for the date. “Today’s date is Wednesday, March 18, 2015” in the cadence they have memorized.

“Today’s date is. WeeednesdayMarch. Eighteenth. TwoThooouuusand Fifteen.”

The Morning Meeting continues as the principal drills students on some of the basic math skills they have been learning in class. She begins chanting and the students repeat.

“5!” (They yell the number back in the same cadence, a two syllable clap)

“10!”

“15!” She stops and models a vertical hand. A student picks up where she left off.

“20!”

“25!” She may stop the student at a certain point and ask another to pick up from there, all the way up to 100.

After more review of basic math, the principal brings the Morning Meeting to a close with some more chanting and a reminder to have a great day. The repetition is critical—the end of year Terranova exam will ultimately measure the skill sets that are being practiced. Broken down into the concepts and skills that measures, the Terranova content is the basis for what is taught in math and literacy classrooms at CPES. Counting by 5’s and 10’s, as well as identifying missing numbers in sequences, are foundational skills on the exam to be practiced over and over throughout every day. This same counting ritual is repeated at lunch.
After Morning Meeting, students are transitioned to their classrooms. To do this, lead-teachers pound on the tables to get their class’s attention, and the students all turn to face them. Then the teacher uses hand motions to signal the kid to stand up, step out, and close the gaps in the line. If this entire procession is not done in unison, the teacher has the students sit back down and do it again until the desired behaviors are achieved. This often takes five or six repetitions, but once it is done, the students move to their classrooms where they will sit through three hours of literacy, two hours of math, one hour of either science or social studies, and one hour of fitness—with each hour as scripted with ritual as the morning meeting.

When Kids are a “Constant Disruption,” and the Role of the Dean. As dean, my day usually started by greeting kids at the door to make sure their uniforms were in compliance. If a student had on the wrong pair of pants, shoes, socks, belt, make-up, etc. I would send them to the office to change and get a call home. However, as the year went on, I would start the day in the dean’s office with two or three students who would not consistently participate in Morning Meeting. Once they ate breakfast and sat in STAR for 20 minutes, they were allowed to go to class. Once all students were in class, I went from classroom to classroom supporting culture and ensuring that all students were compliant. This rarely lasted long, however, as I was called to remove kids from classes within 20 minutes of the start of class, as early as 7:50 nearly every morning. Some days I never left the dean’s office. If a student refused to sit in STAR for 10 minutes and go back to class, his or her parent or guardian was called. If they still wouldn’t sit in STAR, the calls would continue and pressure would be put on the parent to come up for a meeting. Often
times, students that continually refused to comply were sent home without paperwork for an official suspension. In cases where a kid was physical with a staff member, a suspension would be carried out. The point of all this description is to say that once the day started at 7:00 AM, enforcing the behaviors required by the organization was a never-ending job.

One of the points of pride at CPCS, and a selling point to parents, is that the behavior is so tightly controlled that there are no opportunities for bullying or fighting, as opposed to district schools that are portrayed as disorganized and chaotic environments where these behaviors are common. The central figure in the discipline system is the dean. This was not true at CPES, because deans are not usually hired in the first year of a new school. I became the de facto dean halfway through the year only after I announced that I would not be pursuing a principalship with CPCS. As dean, I was called into classrooms via text message to remove students once checks and color charts did not “fix” a student’s behavior. Once in the dean’s office, the students were to sit in STAR for a 10-minute timeout, with the timer being reset if the student moved or talked. Once the student had completed the time out and earned his or her way back into the classroom, I would walk them back and their day would continue on red which would keep them out of fitness class and choice time at the end of the day.

All of the coaching and feedback I received all pertained to the presence they wished for me to exude as dean of students. I was told to enter a classroom with urgency and a stern look. I was to approach kids and to “be seen looking,” making it obvious that I was
checking for everything: STAR, feet still, kids working hard and staying on task, etc. At one point, my feedback was that I was warm-professional with the students and that I needed to become a warm-demander. I took this to mean that I was not being hard enough on the kids, although at the time I wasn’t sure I knew how to do this. Students were rarely able to complete ten minutes of STAR without moving or talking and starting the clock over again and again became a daily battle. Some students spent over an hour in this process adding up to a great deal of class time spent in my office. It was clear it wasn’t working, especially in situations where trauma was apparent (as in the vignette in Chapter I). However, in my feedback meetings, taxonomy drove my action steps despite my attempts to brainstorm other ways to handle student behavior.

This was a tremendous area of tension for me. I felt it was developmentally inappropriate to have students sit in STAR for ten minutes, but this was interpreted by my manager as low expectations. Given the top-down structure of the organization, it was interpreted as insubordination every time I disagreed with feedback given to me. I would try something on my own, and if a school leaders saw it I would get an email redirecting me back to my action steps. Slowly, I felt myself give up asserting myself and I ceased present new ideas. I felt that we had two competing views of children that were impossible to reconcile; the principal’s was the behaviorist approach of carrots and sticks while mine was more aligned with the relational approach of attachment theory. While I stopped asserting my views, I tried to continue to act in ways that I felt were best for kids. Every time I was observed doing this, I received an email reprimanding me for it and redirecting me towards the teacher taxonomy and the warm-demander approach. The
point is that the constant nudging from administration wore me down and made every small battle feel large. The surveillance began to feel maddening, and the management felt combative and manipulative. Within this system, you are not allowed to think for yourself.

“The gains we make every day can be undermined and even torn down by the forces of negativity”

The pace expected of teachers and detail to task with which I describe morning ritual could be done for all nine hours of the school day. The only time teachers have for themselves is during the fitness hour when students return to the cafeteria for structured exercise. Many days, however, teachers remain in their classrooms, monitoring students who are on yellow ten minutes before they can attend fitness or keeping kids who are on red out for the entire period. During lunch, teachers actively monitor the students while they eat themselves. Every day after school, teachers have a staff huddle from 4:30-5:30 PM to prepare for upcoming events, grade papers, analyze data, or receive new school-wide strategies for improving student compliance. After 5:30 PM, teachers can complete their task list and head home when they are finished. Most days, teachers take home remaining tasks, but on some days they don’t leave the building until 8 or 9 PM.

The demands placed upon teachers and students at CPCS are constant and unrelenting, and, the human beings who enact these philosophies get tired and burned out. Messages of the urgency of the mission and the civil rights quotes from the past and
present remind teachers to keep pushing through fatigue and doubt. These messages serve to discipline the teachers and staff into a self-regulating mental framework that does not question the goals of the organization. This mental framework places blame for failure on the individual and his or her amount of effort. The guiding ideology is that if one of the instructional and behavior strategies provided by CPCS didn’t work, it is because of lack of effort or fidelity to the script.

We must be strong, unrelenting, tenacious, and loving with an almost religious zeal. Nothing should be able to stop us in our collective endeavor to help our children—not poverty, not racism, not poor parents, not horrible histories of abuse, not the state bureaucracy, not even a low budget. None of these should keep us from teaching well. We can make no excuses. We have the power to make a difference. (CPCS training document)

Teachers and staff members are faced with the dilemma of working in a place that espouses such worthy goals while costing so much on a personal level. To bridge the gap between the natural human tendency to appreciate agency and the demands of the organization, CPCS utilizes extensive surveillance and training mechanisms to ensure that teachers and staff are implementing the program with fidelity.

**Drinking the Kool-Aid**

Messages around the implementation of no excuses schooling begin immediately during the two weeks of training in the beginning of August. There is this feeling that everything you do is being evaluated and that you are expected to be “on” at all times.
This is communicated by the constant surveillance of the leadership of CPCS, who seem to always be watching, taking notes, and/or giving feedback on everything from the way teachers are sitting during trainings to their body language and wording while practicing the techniques. The first week of training was conducted at a conference center every staff member staying at a hotel. All of the basic techniques, some of which will be detailed below, were taught and practiced time and time again, followed by near revival-like whole group presentations extolling the success of CPCS students on state standardized test scores and college completion. The organization’s leaders elicited loud cheers and raucous applause when they announced that certain grade levels in particular subjects had “reversed the achievement-gap” by outperforming the state’s White students on the previous year’s state tests. In looking around and feeling the energy of the room full of hundreds of teachers, it is hard not to get swept up by the crowd and to truly feel a part of a “movement.”

Participants’ Experiences. During the first week of training at the hotel, Sam noticed that that these people were weird. He couldn’t understand how they could be having a normal conversation with a friend one minute, and then without notice snap into “school mode” which can only be characterized as an overly excited smile, intense eye contact, and rigid posture. It just seemed so…rehearsed. Maybe it is because they are young, Sam thinks. Sam and Eric roomed together during the summer training session, and Sam noticed Eric was working very hard at mimicking the words, inflection, and body language of the leadership of CPCS. Sam sat through each session in amazement as they were forced to spend hours practicing how to address students using the correct
words (as few as possible), the correct inflexion (stern and punctuated), and correct body language (square up and stand still). And now as he tried to relax after a stressful day of being told how to talk to kids, he watched Eric practicing, “Pencils down. Hands folded. Eyes on me” over and over.

Sam was not about to waste time learning these new methods like Eric. He had, after all, spent the past five years helping to get a charter school off the ground in a near-by major US city. Sam managed all of the extra-curricular and afterschool activities for that school and served as a part-time administrator dealing with student behavior, families, or anything else that didn’t fall under the basic job description of the people working at school. It’s not that Sam didn’t care. He did. He just figured he would pick these methods up as he went along. After all, Sam could not argue with results. The test scores at CPCS were some of the best in the country for urban students. Also, he had to admit that he was a little moved to see hundreds of CPCS teachers excited and shouting about providing a great education for kids. Maybe this is what a place like Junction City needs, he thought. Sam was excited to be a part of a team that was building something again. He hoped to get his teaching certificate so that he could become a full time teacher and maybe make this his profession for life. Still, he couldn’t bring himself to practice in front of the mirror like Eric. “You’re drinking the Kool-Aid, man!” he told him.

Eric couldn’t seem to get it right despite practicing in front of a mirror for what seemed like hours. While he was excited to start his new career as a teacher, something about the way these people wanted him to talk just did not feel natural. Eric felt a lot of
pressure to get this right. Maybe it was the way that he saw the leadership looking at him—their glares were intense and sometimes they even took notes. Then, they would switch without warning to an excited and enthusiastic tone that didn’t make much sense to him. But these are the methods he saw in the videos that got him interested in CPCS in the first place. According to the leadership, these are the methods that are used by teachers to get the incredible gains in test scores the organization constantly touts. Any weirdness he felt must be worth it if it would lead to student learning. So here he was practicing in front of a mirror late into the night, like his principal had told him to do.

The next day, Eric became very uncomfortable as he marched into the auditorium in a single file line with his colleagues. Again, one of the leaders gave an energetic speech saying things like “If not now, when? If not us, who?” and he began to think of the ways people have used high-minded rhetoric to go into other peoples’ communities in the past. He began to wonder if this wasn’t sort of imperialistic? Because the message was coming from a Woman of Color who was passionate and had proven results, Eric tried to push away any doubts he had. He continued to practice the techniques all week, and although Eric struggled to get the timing and cadence of the wording exactly the way they wanted it, he was inspired by the social justice rhetoric and truly felt a part of a movement. Social justice leaders and thinkers like Margaret Meade were read, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has," so despite the fact that he was tired and a bit weary, Eric felt like so many people working together couldn’t be a bad thing.
Sara was also caught off guard by the way they were asking her to talk to kids; it didn’t feel natural to tell a child “Sit,” “Eyes,” “Hands folded.” Coming from a large family, she would never talk to her nieces or nephews this way. Sara also didn’t like the way the staff members themselves were treated like kids. Before they entered the conference room for the big presentation of the day they were told to stand in HALL, eyes forward, walking in a single-file line as they entered the room to cheers and chants about how important they were to Junction City. If they were so important to Junction City, then why treat them like students? She also felt as if she was always being watched, and reflected that if this made her feel uneasy, how would it make the kids feel? In her mind, school should be a happy place. It should be that place the kids want to come to and where the teacher is warm yet still encouraging of academic excellence. That was what she thought she saw in the videos and in the leadership with whom she interviewed. After the first week of training that, she couldn’t help feeling that these people were little off in ways she couldn’t quite identify.

**The Leadership Perspective.** As a principal fellow, I was asked to observe the leadership debriefs that took place after each day of training. The purpose of these session, I was told, was for the leadership to share notes on individual teachers. The goal of the meeting was to identify teachers to watch by labeling them as a “red flag.” We red-flagged teachers who showed any kind of resistance to the trainings throughout the day, specifically their attitudes, effort, and success during practice rounds. One teacher was red-flagged for mentioning a desire for work-life balance so she could spend time with her young daughter. Another teacher was red flagged for wearing inappropriate clothing,
sweat pants, on a dress down day. Teachers who struggled with the methods, but still showed a willingness to work hard and practice were also red-flagged. Once a teacher is red flagged, administration begins putting pressure on the teacher to either conform to the expectation or to push them out. The idea is that it’s better for them to quit sooner than later so that a replacement can be found if needed. Because of the stressful working conditions, teachers at CPCS quit frequently. At CPES specifically, two out of nine teachers on staff quit in the first part of the year. The leadership understands that showing resistance in the first week of training is a pretty good indication that this person will not last throughout the entire year. There is no gray area; you are either performing in the ways that are required or you are not.

It is readily apparent that leadership is a highly valued title within CPCS. The leaders within the organization are understood to have mastered the techniques that make a good teacher—that they have “passed the test” so to speak—and are above any of the direct feedback such that they give teachers. Feedback is always given in the direction of teachers which creates an incredible pressure to get it right. My job as an instructional leader was to quickly diagnose an aspect of the teacher’s practice that needed improvement and give bite-sized and actionable feedback as was described earlier in this chapter. Again, the thinking behind this development model is that any minute wasted is a minute that contributes to the achievement gap between Black and Brown students and their White counterparts.
As I participated in the initial trainings, it struck me that total devotion to the mission was required of staff. An intricate culture of surveillance was created to enforce policies and practices not only on teachers every move but on their thoughts and emotions as well. We had an entire leadership session on how to stamp out staff dissent. Strategies were given for ensuring that “staff culture” remained aligned to the mission at all times. We were encouraged to confront dissent directly and call out peoples’ commitment to educational equity if they were even perceived to take issue with any of the practices. Leadership is always watching, correcting behaviors of teachers, and sending feedback emails at many points throughout the day. As someone who has found the inquiry process integral to making meaning about my practice, I was dumbfounded by the way teachers are assumed to know nothing and have nothing to bring to their work. The school leader’s task at CPCS is to ensure that teachers are faithfully implementing a narrow set of prescribed actions that are designed to increase the standardized test scores of students.

**A Critical Organizational Perspective: Disciplinary Power and Coercion**

The above descriptions reflect current academic understandings of managerial and organizational shifts occurring in urban schools. Most analyses link these shifts with larger economic policy specifically the widespread privatization affecting public sectors globally, a process also known as neoliberalism (see my brief analysis in Chapter I). Anderson and Cohen (2015) argue that the increasing emphasis on private sector managerial perspectives has altered perceptions of the teaching for both outsiders and those within the profession. The authors term this the “new professionalism” of the
current reform era, and characterize it by:

A decrease in professional autonomy and in control over one’s profession through the exercise of professional judgment and through professional associations, and an increase in control by managers in work organizations. This control is characterized by rational-legal control, standardized work procedures and practices, and external forms of regulation and accountability measures. (p. 4)

Other theorists argue that rather than something new, these shifts signal a reemergence of the scientific management philosophy of the early 1900’s called Taylorism (Au, 2011). This management philosophy, at the time called ‘scientific management,’ relied on “managers’ ability to gather all the information possible about the work which they oversaw, systematically analyze it according to ‘scientific’ methods, figure out the most efficient ways for workers to complete individual tasks, and then tell the worker exactly how to produce their products in an ordered manner” (p. 26). Trujillo (2014) calls this the “New Public Management,” a series of managerial techniques which avoid the political and social aspects of schooling in favor of a focus on reductive and observable managerial inputs and outputs. These analyses are helpful and descriptive, but do not address what I believe is the motivation behind the education reform movement. I would argue that to ed reformers, market forces and corporate managerial philosophies are seen as a means to achieve social justice ends. This goal contributes to the justification of the inhumane nature of the policies and practices, both for teachers, staff, and students.

Anderson and Cohen (2015) link this approach to managing teachers with Foucault’s notion of governmentality. The authors argue that the “disciplinary power achieves its
ends through the circulation of discourses that, over time, become taken-for-granted as norms or truths” (p. 7), and that these norms operate to distribute power upward. At CPCS, teachers must blindly follow the prescribed narrative or else face a quick response from management. In doing so, teachers are never given space to reflect upon their purpose or meaning of their work. In this sense, teachers are convinced/coerced to act in ways that reinscribe their own subjugation (2015). By asserting the social justice purpose, CPCS tried to normalize the disciplinary power it enacts upon its teachers and students. However, the social justice purpose is never truly problematized within the organization, and thus neither are the methods used to bring about its vision. Essentially, the organization used surveillance and social justice rhetoric to impose a disciplinary practice (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998) upon the teachers and staff in ways that made the discomfort seem justified. This also created an environment characterized by a “you are either with us, or you are against us” mentality. The result is that demonstrating compliance and obedience to authority are emphasized above all else.

As I mentioned earlier, I only became the dean after relinquishing my position as principal fellow halfway through the year. I was struggling to make sense of my experience at CPES but wanted to finish out the year. I turned to inquiry methods as a way to process what I was feeling—specifically the tension I felt between a mission I believed in and the incredibly flawed way it was implemented. I began my project by inquiring into the mindset of a no excuses educator. Mostly, I wanted to gain a better understanding of the no excuses approach and how I was experiencing it as an educator committed to critical discourses. Doing inquiry at CPES, however, was extremely
challenging due to intense nature of the work and the constant surveillance by school leaders. I would soon find, however, that I wasn’t alone in my endeavors. By reaching out to other teachers and staff members and asking them to participate in the inquiry process with me, a community of practice was established. More about this community of practice and the process through which it developed will be discussed in later chapters.

In sum, students,’ teachers,’ and staff members’ minds, bodies, and emotions were disciplined by the organization as its leaders sought to enact the “no excuses” philosophy of schooling. Not only were students, teachers, and staff members given scripted words and behaviors for every moment of the day, but strict adherence to the scripts was enforced through constant critique via “feedback” from leadership. The purpose of the scripts from the organization’s perspective was twofold: 1) to provide the most efficient and effective pathway towards proficiency for the students; and 2) to prevent teachers’ low expectations of students from effecting the children’s education. This view is problematic because the scripts themselves are never put under critical examination. Rather, the disciplinary systems serve to guard against critical reflection and organizational change. The result is a top-down and rigidly hierarchical organizational structure which dehumanizes staff, teachers, and students. This illuminates the sad irony of the no excuses model: its proponents believe they can achieve equity and justice with such inequitable and unjust means.
Conclusion

This chapter began by exploring the basic overlapping tenets of the no excuses philosophy, particularly closing the achievement gap, discipline, and organization, efficiency, and effectiveness. I have attempted to demonstrate the links between this goal and the rigidly hierarchical structure that strips teachers and students of any meaningful agency. In essence, teachers’ and students’ minds, bodies, and emotions are disciplined by the organization in ways that the organization and its leadership believe will contribute to academic success. To motivate teachers to push through fatigue, surveillance systems of constant observation and feedback are used as explicit power mechanisms. Civil rights and social justice rhetoric were used in ways that resemble Foucault’s (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998) notion of disciplinary practice, wherein the discourse seems to promote a sense of freedom or a path to righteousness, but really operates as a subtle mechanism for control. The overt demonstrations of power occurring within management—experienced as dehumanizing by the teachers and staff—are justified by the ends of educational equity as it is narrowly defined by standardized test scores. As teachers and staff members, we felt a tension around conforming to the organization on the one hand and doing what we felt was right by kids on the other hand. This tension created anxiety and fear, as well as feelings of voicelessness and hopelessness that things could be changed. In the next chapter, I will explore the ways deficit played a central role in the organization’s construction of academics and management structures. Following that, I will explore the emotional effects the racialized disciplinary power had on teachers and staff members.
CHAPTER VI: Narratives of Deficit

“Our Story,” by Eric

Now I want you to come on a journey. Contemplate for a moment. Use your God-given imagination and (Dream). Dream of what it is like to belong, or more so what its like not to. To feel socially ostracized like an ex-cop on the wrong side of a jail cell.

See, I was one of those bilingual students. The ones that spoke English and Spanish and English. Those kind. But I quickly learned that English could be spoken in a number of ways, but I didn’t know how to judge the scale.

Pound for pound my words varied depending on my spheres. In other words my words meant different things for different ears.

See when I was in the city, I had to talk “ghetto.” Something some might call ebonics. But to my teachers, I spoke capital E English, as if I had learned to read from “hooked on phonics.” But, my baseball teammates seem to call it English. But I suppose it was lower case, more like slang.

See you might be a little confused wondering how this is possible. Let me just clarify for all those who may find my story extra simplistic and/or somewhat of an obstacle.

I went to elementary school in the burbs, I learned I was brown, played ball in the Bean where my “English” wasn’t helpful or profound, and there I discovered a culture and language.

I discovered I lacked communication skills at first, which caused some distance and anguish… I then moved once in 6th and 10th, and then I was back in Boston. To some I had the wrong dialect I suppose, who knows. Lets just say I easily had to learn to adapt.
“Power is never so overwhelming that there's no room for resistance.”
-Henry Giroux, as cited in Kershner (2013)

“The oppressors do not favor promoting the community as a whole, but rather selected leaders.”
-Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 142

**Introduction**

In the last chapter, I explored the disciplinary practices of College Prep Elementary School (CPES), and the ways the policies and procedures functioned to discipline staff, teachers, and students to adhere to the no excuses model. This created a hierarchical structure which worked to eliminate teacher and student decision-making and emphasized obedience to authority and compliance. This chapter will illuminate another aspect of the ways power operated to shape the organization by exploring the manifestations of deficit ideology CPES. Ultimately, I argue that deficit ideology worked within the organization to perpetuate whiteness. Whiteness is defined by Frankenburg (1993) as follows:

> Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, ‘Whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p. 1)

To gain insight into the operations of whiteness, I will share narratives of deficit from Staff and Teachers of Color. I use the narratives to illuminate the deficit ideologies as represented by the individual school leaders at CPES are also embedded within the larger organization. In examining these narratives of deficit, we can better understand the links
between disciplinary practice and deficit ideology; specifically, I will examine how despite the social justice and civil rights discourses perpetuated by the organization, polices and practices enacted at CPES reinforce notions of whiteness.

**Narratives of Deficit**

Most of the participants experienced the top-down management style of CPES as racial. Even those who did not characterize the overall structures as racist, such as Sam and Sara, were still able to recount stories of racial bias they experienced coming from leaders. This section will describe the microaggressions experienced by the staff. The term microaggression refers to “the subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are putdowns or subtle insults directed towards people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Sue et al, 2007, pp. 272-273). Microaggressions represent the performance of whiteness, the enactment of the white experience, wherein unconscious biases that privilege whiteness are verbalized or acted upon towards a Person of Color. Therefore, microaggressions are indicators of the presence of deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010). This section will combine the racial and deficit frameworks from Chapter II with Sue’s notion of microaggression to analyze the experiences of the staff of CPES.

As discussed in Chapter II, many White people see ourselves as inherently wholesome and good people on account of our race (Feagin, 2010; Sue et al, 2007) and lack awareness of the effects our microaggressive behaviors have on others. Furthermore,
Whites often insulate ourselves from racial stress by leveraging white privilege to: segregate ourselves from People of Color, subscribe to universalism and individualism ideologies wherein race is eliminated as a valid lived experience, demand entitlement to racial comfort, maintain racial arrogance and the belief that being White is inherently positive, enjoy racial belonging in US society, and experience the psychic freedom that comes with not having to bear a raced identity (DiAngelo, 2011). Therefore, the White school leaders who enacted the microaggressions discussed in this chapter most likely did not see the events discussed as racial. From a racial literacy perspective, we say that the ability to deal with racial issues is a matter of competence, not character (Stevenson, 2014). Therefore, the following descriptions of events are not intended to attack the character of anyone mentioned, rather to point out patterns for which school leaders need to be aware. Furthermore, these ideologies represent much larger genealogies of thought. Ultimately, the deficit ideology revealed by the school leaders fell into two categories, linguistic and cultural deficit.

**Linguistic Deficit**

Linguistic deficit refers to biased notions against non-dominant languages; linguistic racism is the enactment of deficit ideology upon the linguistic norms of a traditionally marginalized group. Language, culture, and power are inextricably linked within the racial matrix of US politics (Huber, 2011; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004). Anzaldúa (1987) states, “So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language.
Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself” (p. 81). Furthermore, the process of linguistic deficit is clearly raced, as it is targeted at Black and Brown populations. In education, we see linguistic racism in phonics programs, standardized testing, and in policies such as the Common Core and No Child Left Behind (NCLB)—all assume there is one correct way to speak.

I will start with two narratives that demonstrate the different ways staff members experienced linguistic racism:

Parent-teacher conferences are a stressful event at CPES. They occur over two nights after school and require that staff to stay in the building until 8 or 9 PM. Apart from meeting with every student’s family from his own class, Eric has an additional responsibility as the only Spanish-speaking teacher to meet with the Spanish-speaking parents from all other classes. Eric sees this as an application of his gift, however, and is glad to speak with these families as much as possible. On the first night of conferences he is shocked as he hears the principal repeatedly tell parents not to speak Spanish to their children. His shock is really two-fold: one that she has uttered this statement and two that he is translating her comments into Spanish to the parents.

The first time she says it he is caught off guard. He knows that culturally, the Spanish language is a vital part of his experience and that it is wrong on so many levels to tell the families not to speak it to their children. The second time he grows angry but feels forced to swallow it in order to get through the conference. In one
conference, Eric hears a parent tell the principal that her daughter won’t speak Spanish at home anymore. The principal responds in affirmation, saying “That’s awesome!” Later, Eric confronts the principal and tells her that there is something important about the Spanish language to Spanish-speaking people, that it was not right to tell the parents not to speak to their children in their language, and that it was not right to affirm the daughter for not wanting to speak Spanish at home. The principal responds, “I am all about culturally responsive teaching but we are in America. You have to speak English. You need English to get to college.” Eric leaves it at that.

The principal’s explanation reflects her bias towards Spanish-speaking and immigrant families and represents what Huber (2011) calls racist nativist discourse. Racist nativist discourses “are the institutionalized ways people perceive, understand, and make sense of contemporary US immigration, which assigns values to real or imagined differences, that justifies the perceived superiority and dominance of the native (whites) and reinforces hegemonic power” (383). Based in a deficit perspective of immigrant families, this nativist discourse defies the growing body of research demonstrating multilingual pedagogies as powerful learning tools (Gutiérrez, 2008; Moje et al, 2004; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999; Gutiérrez, Gutiérrez, Baqueando-López, & Turner, 1997; Birr-Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008). To Eric, the process by which school leaders stripped him of his cultural norms in his speech in terms of word choice and cadence (as described in Chapter V) as well as the deficit portrayal of his home language brings to mind the colonial projects that have existed for centuries in Latin American culture. Eric repeatedly talks about how the philosophy at CPES seems to
break down the teachers and the students so they feel you need the leadership—once broken, Eric believes, the school leaders attempt to build you back up in their image, the image of whiteness.

Sara has also had encounters with the linguistic racism of the school leaders. Throughout the inquiry group work, Sara was resistant to the idea that race had a major impact on her experience at CPES. While she acknowledged instances where leaders acted upon implicit bias, Sara felt these were more tell-tale signs of their lack of professionalism than any kid of systematic way of treating her differently. Whereas Sara does not link the particular instances of the following vignette to systemic racism or linguistic racism, she did indicate that she felt wrongfully targeted. Furthermore, she states explicitly that she identifies with the students culturally and uses “us” and “them” to differentiate herself, her students, and their families from the White leadership. Because of her hesitance to specifically call the situation racial—and because of the long history of White people distorting the stories of People of Color—I am using her words instead of mine in the form of narrative here.

Sara opens her email to read her daily feedback from her Reading Mastery lesson, a phonics and letter scripted curriculum she teaches every day during literacy blocks. She’s nervous before she even opens the email because she doesn’t want to see another piece of feedback about the way she pronounces words. Lately, she has been coming in before school to practice the “correct” pronunciations with the principal, and she’s tired of hearing, “Oh no, it’s just because you’re from Brooklyn.” She is tired of having to convince herself that there is nothing wrong with the way she speaks, but it is hard not to feel like she is being attacked
as a person. It is to the point where every time she opens her mouth she is thinking about what she is saying. Unfortunately, this doesn’t only happen during Reading Mastery. It wasn’t long ago that an instructional leader from another city was visiting and heard an interaction Sara had with a student between activities. Sara received a long email giving her feedback on what the leader heard and how she should “always be modeling proper English to students.” Sara couldn’t even finish reading the email, she was so upset.

_This was just you attacking the way I speak. So, when it comes to teaching and being who I am and where I come from, it sometimes conflicts. I have to watch how I say certain words... I don’t want to teach my kids the wrong form or word. I want to make sure I am using the right tense when I am speaking. But if I’m having a conversation with my kids and we’re talking, why do I have to just think about every word that comes out of my mouth? Obviously I am going to be professional, I’m not going to say anything crazy. I’m talking about grammar. So, I don’t know._ (Sara, Personal Interview, 8/29/2015)

The most recent time this happened, the principal interrupted Sara’s lesson as she was reading a story aloud to her students. After Sara had said the word “kitten” from the “Three Little Kittens,” the principal cut in and said “kiTTens” with the t’s emphasized.

_And she kept on saying it. After every sentence I said, she would correct a word I said. I got so frustrated that I literally handed her the script. I’m not saying the word wrong, so if you want to teach, teach. She said, “Oh no, it’s just your Brooklyn accent. Right is right.”_ (Sara, Personal Interview, 8/29/2015)
“Right is right” is a teaching taxonomy term coined by one of the leaders of College Prep Charter Schools (CPCS), and it refers to the teacher’s responsibility to hold students to the correct answer at all times. Similar to taxonomy practices described in a previous chapter, it is based on the assumption again that teachers with low expectations allow Black and Brown students to give answers they feel good about, as opposed to the “correct” answers that will count on standardized tests. Given the links between language, discourse, and power (Foucault, 1980a; Lippi-Green, 1997), we can better understand “right is right” as a disciplinary technique aimed at marginalizing non-dominant groups. As Lippi-Green (1997) states:

In the simplest terms, the disciplining of discourse has to do with who is allowed to speak, and thus, who is hear. A standard language ideology, which proposes that an idealized nation-state has one perfect, homogenous language, becomes the means by which discourse is seized, and provides rationalization for limiting access to discourse. (pp. 64-65)

Using the organizational power granted her by her leadership position to critique the accent of an African-American teacher, the principal called upon a discourse of whiteness to critique the accent of an African-American teacher. Therefore, the deficit ideology of the principal manifested as linguistic racism in both cases, although only in one (Eric’s) was the event specifically experienced as microaggressive. The following section will examine another pervasive form of deficit thinking, cultural deficit.
Cultural Deficit

In addition to the microaggressive behavior of the school leadership, there are also stories of the enactment of more overt racist ideology at CPES. Cultural racism is explained by Bonilla-Silva (2014) as “a frame that relies on culturally based arguments to explain the standing of minorities in society” (p. 76). Evolved from biological racism (Valencia, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2014), cultural racism is an example of blaming the victim deficit ideology in that it locates the causes of inequality in the cultural traits of oppressed groups.

Alex considers himself a very outspoken person, especially when it comes to issues of equity and social justice, two areas to which he has dedicated his life. But he is struggling to get along with his White manager, the Director of Operations (DOO) as CPES. He feels she doesn’t respect him or value what he brings to the organization. It is clear that what leadership says, goes, and that challenging the DOO in any way leads to outright hostility in response. This started to affect his sense of self, and he is challenging her less and less. Alex even stayed at work one afternoon despite the fact that his mom had to be rushed to the hospital with an irregular heartbeat. After explaining the situation to the DOO, he asked if he could leave to meet his family at the hospital and she responded that he would have to stay until dismissal. When he finally arrived at the hospital, his sisters nearly killed him. “Why would you not just leave?” they asked in between cussing him out. “I couldn’t leave,” he would say.
The way the DOO constantly raises her voice at him and snaps when he asks questions is grinding him down. On this day, he decides to push back more than usual because he is starting to think he can’t take it anymore. After refusing to let one point go, she screams at him, “You are always beating me up!” But she doesn’t stop there. She also accuses him of arrogance and having issues with women. This cuts right to Alex’s core—he was raised in a home full of women, a mother and sisters, all strong women who taught him everything he knows. Alex goes home that evening and asks earnestly if there is a blind spot he is missing. “No!” they all tell him. And calling him arrogant? Alex knows that is a blatantly racist stereotype! Any time a Man of Color is assertive, they get labeled aggressive. Alex feels he is being treated unfairly by the DOO because of his race and ethnicity, and yet there is a part of him that doesn’t want to believe this is so.

The DOO’s reaction when confronted with her mistreatment of Alex typifies White Fragility (DiAngelo, 2011)—the inability to cope with any level of racial discomfort. Rather than listen to Alex’s position and respond thoughtfully, she reacted as the victim of Alex’s sexist beliefs towards women. The denial of bias in and of itself is a microaggressive behavior but is compounded in this case by the DOO’s assertion of her victimhood due to gender (Sue et al, 2007). What follows are more examples of the ways staff and teachers experienced the cultural racism on the part of school leadership.

After a long day, Eric is cleaning up the classroom and preparing for the next day’s instruction. The principal, now the lead teacher of the class, is playing music from her computer. Students from the aftercare program are playing in the adjacent space though one student is helping Eric tidy up. After a short time, Eric notices that the music contains explicit lyrics and this makes him uncomfortable. Eric imagines if his sibling, nephew, or little cousin
was in a room with adults and how he would want to protect him from the language he is hearing. Eric gets uncomfortable and anxious; wanting to protect the student, having to confront his supervisor about her actions, and internalizing the stress of working alongside a person who doesn’t seem to understand such things. He mentions the explicit lyrics to the principal. She shrugs off Eric’s comment and says, “He probably hears this at home all the time.” Again, Eric is torn about how to react, but he feels that she doesn’t respect this student and she doesn’t respect him.

Melanie has also been having similar issues to Alex, in terms of her treatment by the DOO. They got into a heated conversation during breakfast one morning about whether or not Melanie had reached out to a family for recruitment material behind the DOO’s back. The DOO accused Melanie of being dishonest, something that Melanie knows she wouldn’t have done if she were White. After months of long hours for many days in a row without a day off, Melanie feels like she’s damned if she does and damned if she doesn’t with this job. She doesn’t get recognized for her contributions; rather, she gets interrogated and questioned with suspicion about how she spends her time.

Sam has also begun to wonder about the ways the leadership sees him and the community. During a conversation with the DOO about hiring for next year, she describes how they are looking for an authoritative Black man to be the dean, and Sam feels this is a criticism of him for being too “soft” on the kids. He thinks at the time, “Man, that’s really racist!” Also, it continues to make him feel like they don’t value him or what he brings to CPES. Woven together with the other feedback he has received throughout the year Sam feels like they want him to be a walking stereotype.
He misses the diverse city he moved away from where people seemed to have much more nuanced and deep views of race, as opposed to CPES, where people seem to hold such essentialized and reductive notions of race and culture.

According to Sue et al (2007), “The power of microaggressions lies in their invisibility to the perpetrator and, oftentimes, the recipient” (275). In the last three stories, Eric, Melanie, and Sam witnessed the overtly reductive and essentialist vision of racial others often perpetuated by White people (Feagin, 2013). As opposed to the subtle nature of microaggressions, these stories represent a more naked and brazen racist ideology. This racist ideology, however, cannot simply be pinned to these individuals. Rather, they reflect larger discourses of deficit infused throughout the organization as a whole and carried out through organizational policies and practices. In a sense, the organization serves to perpetuate deficit ideology—the links between racist ideology and the organization will be further explored below.

**The Treatment of Students and Families: Experiencing Vicarious Microaggression**

Another term that is pertinent to this chapter is Harrell’s (2000) notion of “vicarious microaggression,” which describes the ways that observing microaggressive behavior towards a friend, family member, or acquaintance with whom a racial identity is shared can cause racial stress and “can create anxiety, a heightened sense of danger/vulnerability, anger, and sadness, among other emotional and psychological reactions” (p. 45). Staff and Teachers of Color expressed identification with the treatment
of the students and vocalized the pain of watching them being treated unfairly. Eric (as described above), Alex, and Melanie all explicitly mentioned the links between the ways they were treated and the treatment of the students.

As the end of the year nears, Alex sees the rhetoric around “high expectations” very differently than when he started. He wonders for kind of life CPES is preparing its kids. While he isn’t exactly sure what the school to prison pipeline is, he feels that CPES can’t be far off. As opposed to providing deep and meaningful academic experiences where kids are free to ponder and explore, the scripts and rules make CPES feel more like a prison than a school. This is what bothers Alex—even though there is all this talk of social justice, he feels that this type of school actually has low expectations for Black and Brown kids in that it assumes they need to be controlled all the time. The students here are never given the benefit of the doubt. Just the other day, a student entered the office and leadership bit her head off without even asking why she was there.

What truly haunts Alex are the ways the community is kept out of any meaningful participation in the school. He finds this unforgivable because he is from this community and how much the people from Junction City care about education. Throughout the year, Alex has witnessed the ways that parents are intentionally pushed out of any collaboration. Alex has already announced to the leadership that he will not be returning as the office manager next year. Instead, he will interview for teaching positions with another CMO. He won’t work at a place that treats kids this poorly. When he asks about hiring another Spanish-speaker to replace him, he is told that it isn’t “high leverage,” the management speak for saying it isn’t a priority. This
hurts Alex because of the strong relationships he has built with the Latino families over the year. After the school year ends, the families continue to call him all summer and into the following school year.

Melanie is starting to rethink this whole no excuses approach. This has made her job as a spokesperson for the organization harder to do, because she hates the thought of selling something she doesn’t believe in. A point of tension for her has been the discipline policies and especially the uniform policy. Students are withheld from class for something as small as the wrong color belt. Why get so upset about an overpriced uniform, though? As a one-time struggling single parent, she knows how hard it can be for some families to keep one pair of pants clean all the time. Sometimes parents send their kids to school in a clean pair of khakis that isn’t from the approved vendor, and Alex has to call them and harass them about it first thing in the morning. Some families get calls every single day. Melanie also feels that the organization and its leaders don’t respect the community. She also has been put in very uncomfortable situations as she has tried to navigate her role as community coordinator. Often times Melanie feels her job is to placate the community so that they go along with whatever the leadership at CPES decide.

One of the more egregious examples was when CPES wanted to partner with a prominent community organization during one of their block parties. The leadership, looking to turn the event into a recruitment opportunity, committed to provide food and beverages, but asked that a table be placed at the entrance and barriers be placed so that people who entered had to sign in at the CPES table. Of course, the community leader hosting the block party refused to cordon off the street, and in
response, the leadership threatened to withdraw the offer to provide food and soft drinks. What kind of stuff is that, Melanie asks herself? You don’t get your way so now you want to take your toys and go home? But this sort of “my way or the highway” response has been typical of the approach CPES has used towards the community. As a person raised in Junction City, Melanie feels disrespected because she knows the leadership of CPES looks down on the people they claim to serve. She feels it is very paternal to treat them like they don’t know what is best for their own community. If you are going to help, help. But help doesn’t mean telling people how to run their lives. As a parent who believes in discipline, Melanie never thought she would say that a school could be too strict. But having he kids march in lines, answer the same, sit the same, and dress the same is too much like the military for her. Adults sign up for the military, these are just kids. And as an African-American woman, Melanie finds it offensive that the kids are stripped of their individuality.

As members of the community, Alex and Melanie’s narratives are particularly salient. Their perspectives represent a focal point for my inquiry as they raise important questions contesting knowledge. If a school does not serve those from the community, who does it serve? In this case, members of the community who were also employees of the school felt marginalized by the organization and its leadership. Again, this racial burden was not only felt through direct mistreatment by leadership, but also compounded by vicariously experiencing microaggressions through treatment of students, communities, and families.
Whiteness and Personal Accountability

Throughout this chapter and the preceding one, I have been intentional about how and in what ways to invoke my voice as the author. In this section I feel it necessary to assert my voice in a different way. Silence can be a form of privilege (DiAngelo, 2012) and this analysis wouldn’t be authentic if I didn’t point out the ways that I participated as a member of the leadership team at CPES. Therefore, I was also a perpetrator of microaggressions at CPES. It is incredibly difficult to look back on the experiences from the year because I feel personally responsible for participating in the very policies and procedures I problematize throughout this dissertation. In looking back over the year, I am filled with sadness and regret that I didn’t speak up louder and more often when it came to the treatment of the students. A power dynamics demonstrated in the previous chapter explain why it was difficult to speak up. However, I do not wish to portray the situation as if I had no agency. I have often heard leaders say that the higher up you get within an organization, the less power you have to impact significant changes. While I know first hand the difficulty in speaking up when an organization is asking things that don’t feel ethical, I had a moral imperative to do more.

The ability to sink into the feelings of sadness and guilt—and to accept them, rather than avoid them—is the key to unlearning the racist ideology that is programmed into my consciousness. I also think bringing my struggles with/against whiteness into the academic and public dialogue will help normalize a conversation that is still very much taboo. In sharing my experiences, I am encouraging others to do the same. This
contribute to a genealogy whiteness (Foucault, 1980): one that maps the terrain of the racialized experience of whiteness, particularly as it pertains to schools. The goal is to gain a better understanding of the operations of whiteness in education, which in turn allows for the building of stronger resistance against it. Deficit ideology justifies dehumanization. In the case of no excuses schooling, treating Black and Brown students with rigid discipline is rationalized because the students, their families, and their communities are viewed as culturally deficient. The no excuses approach only makes sense if we assume students and their families are making excuses for the situations they find themselves in, a classic blame-the-victim racist ideological trope (Valencia, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2013). Next, I will further explore the ways that the organization perpetuates whiteness through its policies and practices.

Organization as Whiteness

Critical Organizational Studies encourages the use of metaphor to conceptualize organizations (Chia, 1995; Chia, 1996; Morgan, 1986). Examining the school as a unit of analysis is important for two reasons. First, organizations by nature pool resources and are thus more powerful than individuals alone. By focusing on the ways they pool resources in accordance to the hierarchical structures of society is an important intermediary step in understanding larger systemic oppression. Second, the school as an organization is a powerful unit of analysis for the school leaders. Legally and professionally, the school is considered in many respects the domain of the school leader (Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006). Therefore, it serves as the default unit of
analysis using a leadership lens. Here I make the argument that deficit ideology—an ideology that perpetuates whiteness—drives much of the policy and practice of CPES. Therefore, I put forth the metaphor of organization as whiteness as a helpful conceptual framework for understanding CPES as school. Whiteness as a discourse maintains racial hierarchy and recreates social inequity. In other words, whiteness makes social inequality make sense. Throughout this chapter I have discussed the ways the leadership of CPES perpetuated deficit views of the Students and Teachers of Color. The rest of the chapter will theorize how deficit ideology is manifested not only in individuals, but in the policies and practices of the larger organization as well.

No Excuses as Colorblind Racism

Colorblind racism represents the most recent adaptation of systemic racism which maintains racial hierarchy (Leonardo, 2007, 2013; Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Despite a mission proclaiming to be aligned with social justice purposes and racial equity, CPES perpetuates an ideology of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) which in effect privileges whiteness. Colorblindness represents a racial ideology that “explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of non-racial dynamics” (p. 2). In effect, colorblindness erases the racialized experience of marginalized groups because it puts forth a discourse that explains away racial phenomena using a variety of techniques. The technique of colorblindness most prevalent at CPCS is meritocracy—the belief that objective measures of success define who achieves and who does not (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). In the case of education reform, standardized testing lies at the center of the ideology of colorblind
meritocracy. This technique is inscribed into the very mission of the school which prioritizes raising the standardized test scores of Black and Brown children.

The notion of the achievement gap between Black and Brown students and their White counterparts on standardized tests is problematic in a number of ways, specifically in its use of racial categories. By comparing students through the use of racial categories without critically interrogating the ways these categories are constructed privileges whiteness. Leonardo (2007) identifies the lens of whiteness as the hidden referent of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the same could be said of CPES’s approach to racial achievement vis-à-vis the achievement gap: “NCLB’s inability to locate educational disparities within larger relations of power does not just betray its color-blind ideology, but its reinforcement of whiteness” (p. 270). The achievement gap focuses attention on those deemed “failing” rather than the issues of power and whiteness. In doing so, it perpetuates negative stereotypes and reinscribes difference (Taylor, 2006). In extending Leonardo’s policy analysis to the organizational level we see how CPES perpetuates colorblind racism by utilizing the hidden referent of whiteness as the measure of success. In other words, in holding up Black and Brown student performance on standardized tests against the performance of White students, CPES maintains whiteness as the standard for which we should all strive. To be clear, meritocracy and the belief that achievement gaps result from learners’ deficits undermine any social justice and civil rights rhetoric put forth by CPCS. In practice, we see how these social justice pronouncements ring hollow, and that these symbols function as mere appropriations; beneath the language and
symbols of civil rights and racial equality we find that they function as a form of colorblindness.

As mentioned in Chapter II, the high stakes testing regime is a prime example of the institutionalization of oppression after a process of victim-blaming and pseudoscience. As a result, curricula and content are narrowed to information that will appear on the tests (Au, 2007; Au, 2010). These phenomena disproportionately effect schools serving majority students from minoritized populations (Au, 2010) and the punishments associated with low performance on standardized tests, such as school closings and reconstitutions wherein schools are turned over to private CMO’s, further dislocate and fragment communities. The narrative that Brown and Black students are “behind” White students is then used to justify prison-like school environments wherein behaviors, thoughts, and emotions are closely regulated. As stated in Chapter V, the “sweat the small stuff” behavior systems of the no excuses philosophy are clearly rooted in deficit notions of Black and Brown culture. Despite the rhetoric of high expectations, the notion that students need to be tightly controlled at all times throughout the day in order to succeed is actually extremely low expectations (Alex, Inquiry Group Meeting, 12/14/2015). These policies reflect blame-the-victim deficit thinking which views student behavior, and not the oppression of whiteness, as the cause of educational inequity. Therefore, it places the responsibility for overcoming racism squarely on those who are the victims of its oppression. To complicate this critique, I will add that some People of Color within this movement have shared with me the ways this position refuses victimhood, and thus serves as a source of empowerment. There are more substantive
arguments made around this position elsewhere (see Stevenson, 2014), but I will assert that if we can find ways to attack whiteness more directly, this response will no longer be necessary.

The following story will further illuminate the ways in which CPCS blames the students’ cultural deficits for “gaps” in their academic performance. While the morning meetings at the elementary schools are spent reciting math or science facts, this time is used differently at the middle schools. These meetings often consist of a PowerPoint presentation on a motivational topic, usually around positive psychology or the benefits of hard work. During a visit to a CPCS middle school in a nearby city, I remember a presentation about Benny the Bear. Benny was a cartoon bear who everyone thought was a total failure. While deep down Benny knew that he was a really great bear, the things people thought about him really angered him and he began to act in stereotypical bear ways. Then, an older and wiser bear had a talk with Benny about not believing the things people say about bears. The final message of the presentation was to not be like Benny; don’t believe the things people say about bears and don’t start acting like the stereotype.

Again, this reveals the true foundation of the no excuses approach. On its surface, I believe the intention of the presentation was to encourage students to reject the negative perceptions people have of People of Color thus avoiding what Steele and Aronson (1995) have termed “stereotype threat.” However, the more insidious message was to avoid acting in stereotypical ways which is typical of the blame-the-victim deficit mentality described by Valencia (2010). It places the blame for inequitable social
structures on the stereotypical cultural traits of oppressed individuals. In essence, this story demonstrates that despite its intentions to out-achieve racism, the no excuses philosophy perpetuates notions of the cultural deficiency of People of Color, and ultimately serves to perpetuate whiteness.

**Don’t Lose You**

The racial microaggressions and overt deficit ideology created a culture of fear and mistrust towards leadership among the staff. The pressure to conform meant different things to different staff members, and some experienced it as explicitly racial whereas others did not. Either way, staff and teachers felt the organization was pressuring them to change something essential within themselves. Understanding this process is critical because it describes the way organizational power operated to discipline teachers and staff members using a discourse of whiteness. This meant silencing us, breaking us down, and then building us back up in the organization’s image.

**Silencing**

The inquiry group spent a much of our first session trying to better understand the forces that kept us silent about so many things. The most prevalent expression was that the organization and its leadership simply did not care about us as people and therefore would not act on our complaints if raised. It was perceived by the participants that the high rate of turnover for teachers and staff was a feature of the no excuses
implementation. If you disagreed, you would be pushed out and replaced by someone willing to do the work. There are examples to support this. For one, the office of human resources was alerted regarding the abrasive and racially illiterate behavior of the director of operations (DOO) and an investigation was conducted around the middle of the year. However, despite staff being open and honest with HR about their treatment, nothing happened to address the situation, at least publicly, and her treatment of Staff of Color did not change. Although there were clear feelings among the participants that what we were doing wasn’t right, everyone remained committed to finishing out the year without trying to “take them down,” as Sam referred to it (Personal Interview, 8/18/2015).

I have a few additional thoughts on the ways we were silenced from the leadership and organizational perspective. It is clear that the discourses perpetuated by the organization perpetuates and its strict, top-down management style are meant to shape the realities of the employees. More than anything else, social justice is equated with student performance on standardized tests. The notions of social justice, relationships, and self you held were quickly discarded and replaced with the organization’s limited framework. This feels crazy-making and discombobulating, but because of the organization’s size and power, it is easy to feel like you are the one that is wrong for taking issue with their policies and practices. Furthermore, the discourse around social justice is essentially leveraged as a surveillance tactic within the school building. The posters, signs, chants, and constant feedback have a deeply psychological effect on the teachers, and despite our best efforts, all of the staff members noticed the ways we changed to conform throughout the year. Overall, the organization instills guilt—if you are for social justice, then you are
with us and if you are against us, you are against social justice. The effect is the active silencing of the voices of staff and students.

**Breaking Us Down**

It is difficult to describe the pressure and anxiety caused by the no excuses approach to management. It is clear from the narratives above that the racialized experience of Staff and Teachers of Color added an additional burden. Sam spoke of the management techniques as a form of psychological gamesmanship and manipulation and, Melanie shared her experience:

> It’s kind of like this, ‘I am really worried about you.’ Okay, no you’re not because you were just over there giving me death stares a couple of minutes ago. Then that same speech just kept happening throughout the year. It’s like a planned speech. You’re not worried, you are trying to scare me into doing something. It’s a weird tactic…Every day, I was nuts. (Sam, Personal Interview, 8/18/2015)

> I was just afraid, and I said to my husband, I have never…not for many, many, many years been afraid to speak up. Because if you do, you were looked at as being defiant…You can’t run a ship on fear. (Melanie, Inquiry Group Meeting, 12/14/2015)

Eric made the connection between the parallel ways staff and students were treated:
What’s crazy to me, and what I keep thinking about, is often times for teachers and students it’s a matter of breaking them down until they are nothing. So you need to cling to them and do what they say. As a teacher, I felt like that was their process to break me down, and I am still trying to get by humanity back. I still feel it.

(Inquiry Group Meeting, 12/14/2015)

Again, while all staff and teachers were systematically silenced, this silencing took different meaning when held in consideration of the racialized nature of the no excuses model. For Staff and Teachers of Color, silencing meant not protesting dehumanizing and deficitizing practices. While Eric was the only participant to explicitly reference the colonial nature of this process, most participants felt the organization was attempting to strip away their individuality and cultural identity.

**Building Us Back Up in Their Image**

Sara poignantly made the connection between being managed in this way and the losing of something vital about yourself. The notion of the organization wanting us to be robots came up in multiple conversations:

It's like you need to conform in order to move up…I think you have to lose a part of yourself, you have to be that passive robot. (Sara, Inquiry Group Meeting, 11/16/2015)
Structure is fine. You can’t have a successful school without structure. However, I think what happens is you start to get programmed and you lose sight of what you’re there for. So you’re worried about the management of the class because you’re scared that a leader is going to come in and rip you apart that you’re not focused on what you really need to do or the purpose or why you’re here. And then you start to like, your purpose starts to change, I felt. (Sara, Personal Interview, 8/29/2015)

Eric shared how at his new school, he is still trying to undo some of the training he internalized as a member of the CPES staff:

Some on my feedback this year has been not to talk like a robot. Just talk to the students, why do you sound like a robot? (Eric, Inquiry Group Meeting, 11/16/2015)

Additionally, all staff members reflected on the points at which the pressure to step in line with the organization became overwhelming that a conscious decision was made to give up resisting. Most staff members had ambiguous feelings about this decision in terms of whether or not it was the right thing to do. In most cases, the prevailing emotion was helplessness and defeatism.

Eric: I feel like it got to a point where I stopped fighting back, I was just waiting until the end and I just wanted it to be over. I feel like I learned to be a very passive human. This is just how they are. But I realized how our input was not valued and I felt like why would I try to communicate with you? Which maybe wasn’t the right thing, I don’t know? I feel like there are a lot of things I did because I had to do them
but had no passion behind what I did, especially into the year. I still believe in education as a goal, but just disagreed so greatly how we were getting there and I felt like a lot of the things we were doing were not okay, the way we treated students and whatnot. (Personal interview, 8/19/2015)

Alex: Every time I spoke up she (the DOO) would ask me why I was always beating her up. So I could not have an opinion. “Why are you always beating me up?” I can’t tell you how many times I heard that, so eventually I just gave in. That’s bad, I just gave up. I was like, I’m out of here so that’s it. (Inquiry Group Meeting, 11/16/2015)

Sam: It was hard being like, “I can’t do this.” It was so hard. I was so hard from the beginning. (Inquiry Group Meeting, 12/14/2015)

Melanie: You get very disillusioned. I just can’t be a part of it. I don’t feel like I am making any kind of impact. And when you feel like you are probably going to leave, you have no respect for the system anymore. I wake up and I’m like I don’t care; I don’t want to go to work anymore. And that is not who I am. (Personal Interview, 8/19/2015)

As the only participant to return to the organization, Sara has seen how the organization has doubled down on their approach this year. She talked about how the coercion to conform has cost her something special, even though she has tried to constantly be aware of who she was when she joined the organization. Sara also sees the changes in the ways the parents react to her. In her first year, she related to parents and
very much felt a part of the community. However, an experience with a parent this year made her pause about how she has changed in one short year.

Sara: It is to the point where there is nothing that I…I know what’s happening. I know what to expect. There’s nothing new. I don’t have to say much of anything. If there’s something I don’t like, I don’t say anything. If I don’t get a prep, I’m just like whatever...There was a parent who came in today and I guess his kid got suspended. He was leaving out, and I said hello to him. He was like, “What’s your name?” I said, “my name is Ms. Solórzano.” He was like, “No, what’s your real name?” I said, “Ms. Solórzano.” He said, “I’m old enough to be your dad. Y’all talk the same. Y’all like robots.” I was like, wow, that’s how they see us. It was the first time a parent said that to me. “Do they train y’all to say the same thing?” You don’t notice it! You literally say the same things!" (Inquiry Group Meeting, 12/14/2016, emphasis added)

Sara’s experience poignantly demonstrates the ways that despite our best efforts, the organization was successful as disciplining us according to its notions of “success.” While the experience of being disciplined by CPES was not experienced as a process of acculturation for me, I did perceive the coercion of the organization as an act of whiteness. Whiteness devalues Black and Brown life and does not take Black and Brown reality into consideration. I felt that the policies and procedures I observed, the feedback I received, and the ways I saw exalted leadership mistreated students was the embodiment of the White worldview I was socialized to enact. Further examination of the organization’s disciplinary practices through a racialized lens allows us to see the ways in which this process strips students, teachers, and staff of their cultural identities. This
happened, first and foremost, through the silencing individual voices and then through applying pressure to conform to deficitizing discourses of academic success. Once a staff member or teacher was completely aligned with the agenda of whiteness, they were said to be “mission aligned” and organizational coercion decreased.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I have uncovered the ways whiteness operates to perpetuate notions of deficit and justify harsh treatment towards teachers, staff, and students at CPES. Deficit notions of Teachers and Staff of Color, as well as students, their families, and their communities were vocalized by leadership and indicate larger discourses of deficit and whiteness perpetuated by the organization. The no excuses philosophy as enacted through the policies and practices of the organization are justified by notions of “academic failure” and cultural deficit as constructed through the lens of whiteness. While the direct experience of students is beyond the scope of this project, the deficit views as enacted were experienced as microaggressions and overt racism by many of the Teachers and Staff of Color. As a result, I put forth the metaphor of organization as whiteness as an extension of the work Leonardo (2007) has done identifying policy as whiteness. In doing so, I identified the ways deficit ideology drives much of the policies and practices of the school. In the following chapter, I will explore the ways teacher emotion operated as a political platform at CPES and ultimately resulted in the formation of an inquiry community of resistance.
Chapter VII: How No Excuses Feels

“I would like to suggest another way to go further toward a new economy of power relations, a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice. It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point.”

-Foucault, The Subject and Power, p. 778

“Surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action.”

-Foucault, Discipline and Punish, p. 201

Introduction

Recent scholarship is starting to take the role of teacher emotion more seriously (Zembylas, 2003). Given the school environment as described in the preceding two chapters, it goes without saying that there were powerful emotional reactions amongst the staff and teachers. This chapter will explore those of the teachers and staff at College Prep Elementary School (CPES), as well as the ways these emotions reflect important aspects of identity and politics. The rigid top-down management structure, the microaggressive (and at times overtly biased) behavior of the leadership, and the deficit views embedded within the policies and procedures of the organization created a toxic work environment (Inquiry Group Meeting, 11/16/2015). What follows are the personal narratives from the teachers and staff as recorded in field notes, interviews, and inquiry group meetings. Similar to the previous two chapters, I will use emic organizational terms and offer deeper explanations where I believe necessary. Before sharing the
narratives, I will explore the meaning of emotions and what they can tell us about organizational power and resistance.

**Emotions, Identity, and Politics**

So often, the emotional nature of teaching and research are relegated to the side, cast out as distractors from pure reason and logic. As was discussed in the Chapter IV in the methodology section (see Richardson, 1997 and Behar, 1997 for great examples of this), poststructuralist thinkers began the project of deconstructing the false logic/emotion binary. I make the argument that because emotions are socially and discursively constructed (Zembylas, 2003; Zembylas, 2005), teacher emotions serve as important political markers. These markers are identity-based—our emotional reactions are politically bound by the discourses of language, power, and culture. Therefore, the voicing of emotions for teachers becomes a political act. Furthermore, emotions are dialectical in nature (2005); they are neither strictly psychological (internal) nor shaped by societal structures (external). They represent a dialectical back and forth that is ultimately performative in nature (2005). In viewing teachers and staff emotions as interactions with power and oppression—and ultimately political statements of resistance—we gain a better understanding of subtle solidarity of teacher work. Zembylas (2003) puts forth the following conception of teacher emotions:

1) Emotions are not private or universal and are not impulses that simply happen to passive sufferers (the Aristotelian view). Instead, emotions are constituted through language and refer to a wider social life. This view challenges any sharp distinction
between the “private” domain (the existentialist and the psychoanalytic concern) and the “public” domain (the structuralist concern).

2) Power relations are inherent in “emotion talk” and shape the expression of emotions by permitting us to feel some emotions while prohibiting others (for example, through moral norms and explicit social values, e.g. efficiency, objectivity, neutrality). Unavoidably, then, resistance is a part and power is productive (Foucault, 1977). (p. 937)

Based on the above framework we now look to the ways that CPES teachers’ and staff members’ emotional talk was shaped by the operations of power imposed by the organization. Specifically, I will call attention to the ways that emotions served as a form of resistance to the disciplinary regime imposed by CPES. What follows are narratives constructed from interviews, inquiry group work, and statements collected during the school year from each participant. Interspersed between the narratives are my personal reflections on how I bonded emotionally and politically with each participant, forming connections of solidarity which became junctures of resistance. Eventually, these junctures served as the foundation of our collective inquiry work together. To be clear, I am not claiming that we all had identical interests and goals. Rather, I am claiming that emotional bonds, inherently political in nature, allowed us to find common ground and mutual understanding which we leveraged to better serve the students of CPES. While an entire dissertation could be written on this topic, I use this as a way to map our coming together as an inquiry group; a charting of the emotional path to become a more formal political entity.

The following narratives were gathered during personal interviews, private conversations throughout the school year, and during inquiry group meetings. Due to the
conversational nature of the way they were collected, I have attempted to preserve the informal ethos because it better captures the emotional impact of the statements. Therefore, I am shifting the writing to better capture the signature and voice of the participants.

**That Sunday Kind of Feeling**

**Sara**

Despite a rough start, Sara is finding success as a CPES teacher. Her students are performing well on the standardized interim assessments, especially in math, compared to the other classrooms. Sara is proud of her students and believes she and her lead-teacher bring out the best in them by providing a caring and rigorous environment. She has even received praise from a CPCS regional manager who said her classroom is a model for College Prep Charter Schools (CPCS). Sara strives to embody the warm-demander demeanor of the adults who helped shape her own life. Yet, her body and soul are tired from the long days and all the tasks she has to complete. Despite her commitment to the kids, she has pondered quitting and even interviewed for another job earlier in the year. But she couldn’t leave her students behind and did not want to be considered a quitter. Even with all the stress, she feels that her kids are growing and learning. She loves her kids and thinks of them as members of her own family. In fact, many of their parents go far out of their way to talk to her in the mornings when they drop their children off at work.
Mostly, Sara is tired of feeling like she’s always being watched. Early in the year she got an email from a member of the leadership team reminding her of the following expectation: when she walks to the halls, she is supposed to have the same bright face that is required of the students. On that particular day, she was a little stressed out and apparently wearing it on her face as she passed an administrator. Knowing full well the ways that administrators red flag staff members, Sara is upset for being written up for something so petty and laughs at the irony of getting an email like this from a person who walks around looking stressed out all the time. Then there is the way the kids are treated. Being strict is one thing, and Sara believes order and structure are keys to high expectations. But in this system, it is commonplace for adults to raise their voices at kids, and Sara feels the students are commonly mistreated. Most of the time, Sara believes, the rigid discipline and overreactions to student behavior get in the way of meaningful learning rather than enhance it.

Regardless of these things, Sara feels her classroom is a place where her students are protected. She has an unwavering belief in their ability to excel academically if they work hard. Additionally, the lead-teacher of their class is one of her best friends and the person on staff she trusts the most. Within their classroom, Sara feels she and the lead-teacher are able to foster a warm environment and be themselves around the kids, despite all the scripts. Sara is most frustrated by the fact that the administration has told her not to hug her students. To them, hugging is coddling, a form of low expectations for urban students. To Sara, however, hugging is one of the most important things she does as a
teacher. If teachers don’t hug their students, she fears the school will become a very cold place. Moreover, Sara is also sad about the times she is so tired and frustrated from a long day that she might raise her voice or get short with the students. She wants to be more loving and positive but feels like the structures and policies of the school prevent her from becoming the type of teacher she knows she is capable of becoming. Sara constantly reminds herself of who she was when she started; the tension between wanting to create a vibrant learning environment for her students on the one hand, and the need to protect her students from what goes on outside of her classroom, creates a stress that makes coming in on Mondays difficult.

_Sara came in to the office today and really saved me when I was completely failing to help a student. I was amazed; she just picked the little girl up in her arms and held her. It is so sad that such a human response triggered an “Oh no, you’re gonna get in trouble!” reaction from me. Of course, I didn’t say this out loud because as I had the thought I knew it was crazy. She was doing the right thing. It is crazy how warped my sense of right and wrong is becoming after working here. She said, “Not all kids need the same thing.” I thought, “Damn, it’s really that simple.” She gave me the courage to do what I feel is right whether or not it is what leadership has said is the “correct” way to do things. I have been doing this more or less all along, but I feel like I am not so alone now. I seriously thought everyone here bought in. I mean, I have never had any time to talk with Sara outside of this insane schedule. I am so grateful for her and sad at how lost I feel I have become. I didn’t know she felt that way or that she took issue with the robot treatment we are encouraged to embody._
(Journal, 2/16/2015)
Eric wakes up early on Monday morning with knots in his stomach after a night of tossing and turning. As the year has gone on, the anxiety and fear of going into work has only grown worse. On this particular Monday morning, Eric has to arrive at school much earlier than usual to get the math bags ready for the day’s math lesson. If the day’s lessons were already prepped, he could arrive at his usual 6:15 AM. However, after a weekend spent visiting his family, he will go in around 5:30 AM to fill individual brown bags full of the geometric shapes the kids will use during the math block that day.

Refilling math bags is no small task, for each math bag has to have the exact same amount of geometrical shapes for each student. That means twenty-five math bags with the correct number of rectangles, squares, rhombuses, pentagons, and circles that will be needed for the math activity that day. This is an extremely time intensive, monotonous task, which he has to do two to three times a week. So on this Monday morning, after a weekend spent laughing and enjoying family, Eric is filled with anxiety and dread. He no longer sees the purpose of the type of learning he sees at school. The experience of Morning Meeting is so different than the image he remembers from his initial school visit. While he was once impressed with the students’ ability to remember so much information, he now knows how much drilling is dedicated to memorizing those basic skills.
Eric is the co-teacher for the Rutgers classroom. Being a co-teacher usually means doing most of the grunt work while the lead-teachers executes most of the lessons and transitions students throughout the day. Rutgers is an especially tough assignment: the lead-teacher and co-teacher quit early in the year, so the school’s principal took over with Eric as co-teacher. While the other two kindergarten classrooms, Howard and Princeton, have more equitable arrangements between the co-teacher and lead teacher, Eric is assigned all of the nitty-gritty tasks to keep the classroom running smoothly. Eric, who considers himself a laid-back person, struggles with the pressure from the principal to become the archetype CPCS teacher since he doesn’t feel she is successful in using them herself.

Eric constantly feels singled out and mistreated by the principal. Even worse, he feels like he is not a real teacher and is not growing in his practice. The students see the way he is treated because she is often rude and dismissive towards him in front of the class; on the days when his science or social studies period isn’t bumped for additional math or literacy test prep, he has a hard time managing his class. The students won’t follow his directions and he struggles to teach the content. The feedback he receives pertains to using more “firm a voice” and more effectively executing the consequence system. It has gotten to the point where he feels like all he does during his classes is yell and give checks. While he believes it would be more effective to build relationships with students and use different methods than the ones prescribed by the scripted lesson plans, the pressure from the principal keeps him from trying new, more interesting things. Being told he is doing the same things wrong day in and day out, Eric has started to believe he
will never become a proficient teacher. He is frustrated and angry that he can’t better serve his students, but feels his hands are tied by the no excuses approach of the school.

*It is difficult to sit by and watch Eric struggle with no support from a school leader. I can tell he is really suffering and I can empathize with how he must be feeling—completely unsupported and set up to fail. As we sat at our desks in the teacher work room today, directly facing each other but staring at our computer screens, I kind of peered up and asked him how he would feel if I observed him and gave him some feedback. His face lit up and he seemed genuinely excited at the prospect. I have no idea what I can offer, but I feel he is owed support. I don’t know what the principal will think because this is definitely outside of the chain of command, but she has abdicated that responsibility so I what can she say? He needs support, we all do. (Journal, 3/3/15)*

*Eric and I met for coffee. He wants to be a good teacher so badly! He told me about his struggles this year, how he hates the discipline policies and how he feels abandoned by the organization. He had asked me to bring CRT [Critical Race Theory] articles. We read excerpts from Gloria Ladson-Billings and Kimberlé Crenshaw about and talked about how the school perpetuates many deficit views of children and communities. He describes himself as “a thinker” and says he needs this time to reflect. So do I. I feel like I have a lot to learn from him and his experience. We have agreed to meet regularly to discuss our practice and hold each other accountable to ethical standards while at CPES. I really appreciate him and I wonder if others would benefit from forming an inquiry group? (Journal, 4/28/15).*
Sam

Sam is also having a hard time adjusting to the no excuses approach. He has felt singled out since the first week of training when he showed up late to a meeting and received angry stares from members of the leadership team. The glares were followed by what he has now come to know is a scripted conversation inquiring into his well-being while clarifying that “this can’t happen again.” Sam feels the leadership tries to come off as if they care about how he is doing, but in actuality this is a tactic to coerce him to do something. As school year has progressed, things grew increasingly more difficult as he struggled to conform to the methods required by the organization for running his fitness class, interacting with kids, and dealing with misbehaviors. What were at first merely intense smiles quickly became lengthy email reprimands requiring that he reply to each piece of feedback with a plan for implementation. Sam is confused about what they want from him in response, but apparently simply saying “I will try to do what you told me to” was not good enough. He is required to resubmit his implementation plan multiple times until it looks they way they want it, though Sam believes they just want him to sweat.

His feedback is always the same: that he is using too many words, he isn’t firm enough with the students, he isn’t memorizing the lesson plans, and that he is allowing too much misbehavior slide by unaddressed. The principal has told him he is to be at school by 6:30 AM to practice using a strong voice and given clear directions before he goes to his 7:00 AM post. Sam’s class is observed every day complimented with a new
focus. He feels beat down and demoralized mostly because he does not believe in the approach that the school is pushing.

Historically, Sam has been known as the tough administrator in the schools in which he’s worked. However, at CPES he is told he is being too soft with the kids because of his preferred method of dealing with student misbehavior: talking to the child to gain his or her trust, and then working with the student to determine a way forward. The pressure of constantly being observed and critiqued is weighing on him and he feels like they want him to be someone he is not. Never one to go off a script, Sam sees these methods as canned and inauthentic. The stress is unbearable sometimes, and Sam feels as if he is losing his mind trying to keep the leadership off his back.

Sam is knowledgeable when it comes to working with kids as he has done in many different contexts. Despite his skepticism during training, he used to be excited at the prospect of bringing a new educational option to the families of Junction City. However, now dreads having to carry out the policies of CPES. No breakfast for late kids? Is that supposed to be some kind of weird punishment? If this is what no excuses means, then Sam wants no part of it. It seems like they are creating a situation where only the strong survive. The kids who have the family support will “get it,” and the ones that don’t will get punished out of the school. On top of that, CPES takes credit for the successes; what a scam! Sam wants to let his students run around and be kids, but the leadership is constantly on him about providing more structure to his fitness class and aftercare
program. He feels it is impossible to get to know the kids in this system and wonders if he will miss the students when he leaves at the end of the year.

Had “the talk” with Sam today. Since talking with Sara and Eric, I feel like we all must be feeling insane and broken. I always start with by throwing out a feeler, like “Hey, this is kind of messed up, huh?” Then, if the person I am talking to wants to take it up, they are welcome to. Sam jumped at the opportunity to vent his feelings about CPES. He seemed to get angry as we spoke today; he said “we were all lied to” in terms of what we thought we were getting into versus the reality of what we do. He said they ask more of teachers, kids, and families than they said. It is way stricter than they said. They made it sound like a joyful place, but that was just marketing.

Very powerful. (Journal, 4/16/15)

Alex

The aspect of his job that Alex enjoys the most is interacting and encouraging the students and their families. The educational experience of the families of Junction City is a personal matter for Alex: he went to Junction City Public Schools and has fond memories of the teachers who took the time to care for him and his family despite the fact that they didn’t speak English very well. Specifically, Alex remembers Ms. Smart who made him feel cared for but still pushed him to succeed. She also made his mother feel like a collaborator in Alex’s education and treated her with dignity and respect whenever they interacted. Alex brings that same respect to all of the families, especially the Spanish-speaking families of the CPES community. However, he does not feel that same
respect towards the community coming from the leadership of CPES, or towards himself for that matter. It is his commitment to the students, their families, and the teachers at CPES that motivate him to keep going.

Alex is an extremely hard worker who prides himself in doing amazing work for the teachers of CPES. As the office manager, he is in charge of organizing all the materials the teachers will need throughout their day as well as planning and leading the logistics of all CPES events. Like any other job at CPES, there are more tasks to be completed than there is time in a day. His manager, the director of operations at CPES, inspects his flexi daily to make sure he is managing his tasks in an efficient manner. Being micromanaged and having unending task lists are things Alex is willing to accept about the job—after all, working for educational equity is an extremely demanding proposition, and one that he is ready to take on. However, he felt the way he was treated by the director of operations was unprofessional and unethical.

Alex was not the first office manager hired at CPES. The first office manager, another young lady also from Junction City, was let go for poor performance after struggling to keep up with the pace of the work. Alex was on-boarded as her replacement during her last weeks though she was told he was only there to help out. Alex saw how the director of operations bullied her; she had such a sharp tone and attacked her character in front of other staff members. He began to believe that her firing might be better for her long-term mental health. After she was fired, though, the director of operations turned her attention to Alex, and he received much the same treatment as the previous office manager. Alex
always felt as if his work ethic was in question despite the fact that he was often times the first person into the building and the last one out. There were times when she would raise her voice at him or condescend him and it felt very demoralizing. Despite his passion for this work, her treatment made Alex shut down at the office. Usually a happy and outgoing person, Alex felt himself change over the course of the year. Over the course of the year, he felt a deep twist in his stomach at the thought of having to go back to work in such a toxic.

*I don’t get much of a chance to catch up with Alex because he is always so busy. I have never seen the DOO be disrespectful towards him, but the teachers say it is an issue. Alex works so hard and is so well-liked by the staff; he is so positive and caring towards the kids. Maybe that is why she picks on him. I have noticed he seems sad as he goes about his work. Sara and I were in the teacher work room today and he came in for a quick second to talk. I told him how important a part of the community he is here, and how well I think he is doing. He got very emotional because he said he hasn’t gotten much positive feedback all year. I told him if that is true, then that is a shame because he is clearly a talented guy. Here is the rub about meritocracy. Here is a guy who as far as I can tell is doing really well but can’t get the credit and recognition he deserves. For an organization that supposedly claims to be data-driven, they are missing all the evidence when it comes to Alex.* (Journal, 4/17/15)

Melanie
Melanie can’t sleep on Sunday evenings. Throughout the day, her stomach is in knots anticipating having to go back to work. As the oldest staff member and only trained clinician, Melanie has taken on a maternal role for both the students and some of the staff members. Despite her official role as community coordinator, she serves as a de facto counselor and sometimes nurse. The stress caused by her multiple roles and the ways in which she is managed are taking its toll on her. One day, after helping a teacher get outside to manage a panic attack, Melanie can’t help but think this job could give a person a heart attack. On some days, Melanie has trouble getting to work on time because of the anxiety. Although Melanie is new to CPCS, she has a long and distinguished career serving families in Junction City. She previously worked in a position management, so it was an adjustment to work for such a top-down organization where she feels like she is at the bottom of the barrel.

When Melanie joined CPCS, she thought it would be a great opportunity to bring an exceptional education to the children of Junction City. Given her long career working in and for the community, Melanie figured it was a perfect fit. Soon after taking the job, Melanie realized her role was not the one described in her interview. Melanie has never felt the organization or its leadership value her opinion. In other regions, CPCS community coordinators are practically marketers and lobbyists—creating advertisements for billboards one day and talking to politicians about school choice on another. The situation in Junction City is different, and Melanie knows that coming into the role. This is the first CPCS charter school in Junction City, so the members of the community don’t know and don’t care about CPCS’s successes in other cities. Skepticism is high because
other charter chains have come to Junction City to meet with church leaders, city
government, and community institutions only to come up short on delivering the type of
education promised.

After a few months on the job, Melanie has begun to feel like a pawn. Though she
hoped to develop relationships with community partners to bring resources to the families
of CPES, she now feels like they hired her, a member of the community, to keep other
community members at bay. Restricted by the micromanagement of the DOO, she has to
deal with her erratic and rude behavior towards Melanie. She has never been talked to
like this in a professional setting, and Melanie feels dehumanized and humiliated.

Melanie is also getting tired of all the scripts. There are scripts for everything she says
to the community partners, and it gets under her skin because every time she reads one
because it doesn’t reflect the way she thinks or talks. “We are going to consider that,” and
“I will have to check on that and get back to you,” are the two lines she uses far more
than she is comfortable. Recently, she was given a script for a meeting with HUD about
potential new building sites for a permanent school in Junction City. The script she
received had more information than she was usually privy too, such as potential sites and
costs for renovation. “Why am I the one delivering this?” she asks herself. It dawns on
her that the reason they want her to be the face of this proposal to HUD is because she is
from Junction City, not because she actually contributed to the planning. Melanie feels
that she is the token African-American on the staff who is from the community and that
CPES doesn’t really care about the knowledge that she brings.
Melanie came to see me in the dean’s office today. She said, “Alex says we need to talk.” It is truly sad how subversive it is in this organization to bond with colleagues. She shared a lot about how she felt things had gone off the rails and how miserable she is. I have called on her for help with kids many times and in the small moments she gave the impression she wasn’t entirely happy. But I had no idea it was this bad...Now that many of us are connected, where do we go with this? (Journal, 5/4/15)

My Voice: A Mash-up of Reflections

When I took the position at CPCS, I was contemplating leaving my doctoral work behind and focusing on building a middle school. I knew the work would be hard, but I had no idea it would look like this. I had some experience with what I thought was the no excuses model, but I have never seen adults and children being treated like this. As an educator who embraces inquiry as stance, the rote memorization and rigid discipline systems are against everything for which I had come to stand. Sundays are absolutely the worst day of the week because I know Monday through Friday will consist of the same train of anxiety and moving from one emergency to the next; witnessing one terrible situation after another. I am struggling to know where to push back and when to live to fight another day, so to speak. I am finding that I change my persona when a school leader walks in the room. This feels horrible. The anxiety caused by all these competing tensions takes a physical toll on my body. My back hurts and my joints ache. There is
very little time to sit and catch my breath throughout the day, let alone process everything that is going on and how I feel about it.

There are three interconnected areas of tension for me that I have difficulty resolving. This is not to say there aren’t other issues: the rote memorization and regurgitation played off as pedagogy, the ability grouping, the complete lack of authentic assessment and exploration, to name a couple. But these are not as urgent and don’t elicit the painful reaction as the following three elements. First, I am struggling with the top-down management style that positions the manager as expert to be obeyed with no exceptions. Second, I am struggling with the discipline policy which regulates behaviors, dress, and even attitudes/emotions in ways I don’t believe have anything to do with student learning. Finally, I am struggling with the ways community is shut out from any meaningful participation in the school.

I am struggling to come to terms with the top-down management style that assumes the manager is always correct and must be obeyed no matter what. This effectively removes my voice as well as the voices of the teachers being developed within this approach. The no excuses model seems to be all about blindly following an ideology despite the evidence. So much of the management philosophy seems bent on getting inside people’s heads and causing them stress and anxiety. The surveillance is truly scary at times. The teachers were recently given timers to wear around their necks to ensure they are on pace during lessons. At least they are consistent, both the adults and the kids must do as they are told at all times.
The feedback I get is about being tougher on the kids but I know their approach is wrong. I sit through the feedback meetings and ask questions at the end like, “Why do you think this is the right way to handle this?” and “What makes you think that about children?” but I do not call out what I believe are the racist undertones to what they want me to do. The anxiety comes from conflicting emotions are created when I don’t speak up about things. Battles pop up quicker than I can choose whether or not to fight them. I feel like I am speaking a different language than the school leadership. The only question that matters is, “Would you treat your own child like that?” Once, when visiting the model campus of CPCS I saw the principal yell at a first grader until he cried. I was stunned because she just kept going at him about his behavior despite the fact that he was sobbing. All because he made noises with his mouth during a lesson. I was horrified, but I remained silent. In staying silent, I was complicit and that is very difficult to reconcile. I now recognize that this type of harsh treatment towards kids is systematic and even encouraged by leadership at these schools. Furthermore, the leaders who treat kids this way are glorified for the results they achieve. Here at CPCS, the ends justify the means, so long as high test scores are achieved.

Second, and really an extension of the first issue, is the discipline policy that I am in charge of enforcing. I will never understand why we have kids walk on lines taped to the floor. I will never understand why they have to fold their hands at all times, both at their desks and on the rug. During my leadership training at the University of Pennsylvania, I did a site visit at an elite private elementary school. The kindergartners there were
laughing and rolling on the floor with their backpacks and papers strewn about. The teacher took five solid minutes to get everyone to the carpet, and one child even refused to come over. The patient teacher, who had taught kindergarten there for many years explained that he would come over when he was ready or he wouldn’t. Maybe he would read a book by himself. Either way that was just fine. The urban educators in my group were dumbfounded; we had never seen such poor “classroom management.” Earlier I said I will never understand why we treat kids this way at CPES and that isn’t true: I think I understand it perfectly well. It is racist ideology, pure and simple. The argument for why urban children (i.e. Black and Brown kids attending majority Black and Brown schools) get treated so differently is because “they are behind.” I think behind is something we created, and then we turn around and reinforce it with this type of education. I try and disrupt the no excuses philosophy whenever I can by talking with kids about what bothers them, letting the stupid rules be broken, and using the dean’s room to teach fun content or relaxation techniques. Still, it feels horrible to know that I have a role in the way they are treated.

Finally, the way the parents and the community are treated are truly appalling. There are daily phone calls harassing parents about uniform, lateness, missing homework, nail polish, etc. Whenever community members are allowed in the building, it is in very scripted and awkward way. During a scripted Black History Month celebration, the principal used a completely inappropriate call and response with the parents. It was the same technique we use with the kids and I can’t imagine that was lost on the parents. I wonder how she (the principal) feels, always reading from a script? It can’t be
comfortable. I feel like this typifies the relationship between leadership and the parents. We are missing a huge opportunity to build a school with the community, for the community. There is such a paternal attitude towards parents is palpable, as if we know what is best for you and your child.

As the dean of students, I have the most freedom to move about the school throughout the day. I can see the collective struggle going on which the various staff members all share, often times without even knowing it. As a leader in the building, I feel powerless and silenced. However, I also feel the responsibility to make sense of the situation and connect with the staff and students in meaningful ways. Collecting stories and sharing emotions have been a relief. Things are changing, despite the immovability of the policies and procedures of CPES. I am not sure exactly how, but I feel differently having begun conversations with other staff members about what is going on here.

**Conclusion**

The above data indicates an emergent shared subjectivity (Rose, as cited in Zembylas, 2005) wherein teachers and staff members bonded over emotional reactions to the disciplinary practice of CPES. While these subjectivities were constructed and enacted through different notions of identity, a coalition was nonetheless formed based upon shared understandings of equity and fairness. In other words, my emotional reactions to what I experienced at CPES were based upon my identity as a critical practitioner and these overlapped with the emotional reactions of Alex and Melanie, who were raised in
Junction City. Therefore, despite our very different identities, an emotional bond turned into political solidarity and resistance against the discourse of whiteness as perpetuated by CPES.

In conclusion, given the political nature of emotion in general, examining teachers’ and staff members’ emotional reactions to the policies and practices of CPES becomes an important point of analysis for understanding organizational power. What can we ascertain about the no excuses model if it feels this bad to those hired to enact it? Ultimately, teachers and staff were left questioning the organization’s and its leaderships’ commitment to the social justice mission they purportedly espoused. The feeling that the organization was more interested in self-promoting rather than educating children, and the fact leadership within the organization was purposefully dishonest in attempting to do so, were sentiments shared by all the participants in this study, myself included. In the following chapter, I will describe the process of growing political resistance against the enforcement of whiteness by the organization and its leadership.
CHAPTER VIII: Narratives of Resistance—Collaborative Inquiry

“But our ability as a civil society to address racial disparity in schooling is not solely predicated on whether we eradicate and heal from difficult racial conflicts or elephants. Reducing racial disparity and inequity in schools begins and ends with whether we believe we can. It’s mostly about the racial self-efficacy, the will, the courage. Can we talk about racial stress, conflict, and disparity in classrooms across America and walk through the jungle of racially blind bones? Yes, of course, but will we take the risk to do so? That is the question.”

-Stevenson, 2014, p. 202

“But where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.”

-Foucault, 1980b, p. 95

Introduction

This chapter will describe the ways we resisted the disciplinary practices of College Prep Elementary School (CPES) through subversive vulnerability and collaborative inquiry. Given the political and discursive nature of emotions as established in the previous chapter, I describe subversive vulnerability as the initial means by which teachers formed solidarity with one another based upon their shared subjectivities. Through sharing our emotions and personal meaning-making around our experiences, we formed deep, emotional bonds with one another that developed into a community of practice. This eventually led to many teachers and staff members unifying for collaborative inquiry. Together, we used our shared experience at CPES to theorize notions of culturally competent leadership—the central component of which was an ethic of care as expressed through care for students, care for their families and the community, and care for teachers. Finally, we theorized the need for all educators to be more racially
literate. I will discuss some of the literature on racial literacy coupled with the use of personal storytelling to demonstrate the emotional process racial literacy work entails.

**Narratives of Resistance**

This section will explore the process the participants and I experienced to form an inquiry group. It is important to reflect and write about the process of becoming an inquiry group because the work these groups carry out is largely relational. Trust and emotional bonding are the foundations upon which educational theories are built. Without these, no one feels safe to put his or her heart and soul into the collaboration; the result would be disinvested thinking and lackluster conclusions. Therefore, the emotional labor involved with inquiry work is truly essential and an area that needs to be further theorized.

A text that greatly helped me think about our group was by Sumara and Davis (1997) where they use complex systems theory to describe the ways action research is a “culture making” process. As systems interact, they grow in complexity ultimately creating “an opening of new possibilities, a continuous enlargement of the space of the possible” (p. 303). In the following sections, I will argue that through subversive vulnerability, the staff and teachers generated a “space of the possible” to build resistance against the dehumanizing policies and practices they were subjected to at College Prep Elementary School (CPES). In doing so, the materiality (1997), as well as the practices through which it is mediated, were altered.
Carving Out Spaces of Solidarity

As the year progressed and people grew more and more frustrated by the policies and practices of the school, the teacher work room developed into an important space for teachers to openly discuss their opinions, ideas, and emotions. The teacher work room was initially conceived as a functional space for teachers to store their belongings, print materials, store extra supplies, etc. However, it became a “commonplace location” (1997) where teachers came throughout the day to make meaning of their experience working at CPES. The make-shift dean’s office occupied one corner of the teacher work room, and I was often situated there for lengthy stretches of time. Teachers and staff members would come and go, and through casual conversation, I would check in with people and to find out how they were feeling. At first, I felt these were simply collegial conversations. However, as emotional bonds strengthened and trust grew, people began to share more about their perceptions of the school and its leadership. Sumara and Davis (1997) discuss the importance of cultural objects that exist in a dialectical relationship with practice. In this case, the no excuses philosophy was the cultural object around which we generated our shared meanings. Eventually, ruptures of mutual understanding occurred, usually around stressful or traumatic events, that “function to reorganize and mediate new pedagogical structures in the school” (306).

One such example previously mentioned was the vignette involving Sara, the distressed student, and myself in Chapter II. Sara and I performed a rereading of the no
excuses philosophy through the lens of her complex experience and mine, resulting in altered practices. From that point on, whenever Michelle was having a hard time, I would immediately send a text message to Sara to come in and assist rather than follow the script from the organization. At the time, I was surprised by Sara’s feelings—in my eyes, she seemed bought into the systems of CPES. I could tell at times she was frustrated but had chalked it up to the long hours rather than an ideological difference with the organization. By making herself vulnerable and sharing her true feelings with me, we shared a commitment to more equitable treatment of the students. In other words, through sharing we became linked by a shared emotional commitment to care for the students. As our conversations continued, a communal perspective of care for students and for each other emerged.

Eric and I agreed to meet outside of school to read articles and theorize our practice. This was the beginning of what would eventually become the larger collaborative inquiry group. Eric shared his frustrations as well as his hopes of becoming a great teacher like some of the ones he had as a child. He shared the importance of his language and culture, and I shared my understandings of race and pedagogy. We agreed to hold each other accountable to treating the students with care under any and all circumstances. During one school day, I received a text message from Eric—it was a student drawing attached to a page-long story. He later shared with me that the student had been removed from class for “disruption,” and rather than send her to the office, he took her out of the vision of the principal and asked her to write a story. By rejecting the notion that this student was not fit to remain in a learning environment, Eric enacted a pedagogy of resistance.
This same pattern emerged with other staff members as well—subversive practices were shared with one another which developed into care networks for students. Whether it was feeding a child who was refused snack for behavior, reassuring a crying student with a hug, or “not noticing” kids not in STAR or HALL, the practices of resistance were usually brought back and shared in our commonplace location, the teacher work room. For longer and more in depth conversations, we began meeting in small groups or one-on-one for coffee or a meal. Eventually, this led to us all meet as a group for more formal inquiry.

**Formal Inquiry—Theorizing Culturally Competent Leadership**

We met as a collaborative inquiry group for a couple of months into the following school year when the specific staff members and teachers had moved on from CPES to different schools or other jobs entirely. Sara was the only returner to CPES, Melanie went to work for the local school district, Sam left the profession all together, and Eric and Alex took teaching positions at other schools. The purpose of the group was to reflect upon our practice in order to theorize culturally competent teaching and leading. While that was the stated purpose, the group served different purposes for each of the participants. For Sara, the group served to “keep her grounded,” while for the others, the group served as a medium to process the experiences from the year before, specifically the microaggressions members of the group had faced. There were several important shifts to note as the group transitioned from an informal inquiry group to a formal inquiry...
group for this research project. Firstly, we no longer inhabited the same commonplace location as where the initial relational bonds were established. Additionally, we structured two three-hour inquiry sessions. Finally, we complemented our shared cultural text of the no excuses philosophy with an article by Camille Smith (2005) pertaining to culturally competent school leadership.

The first meeting was the first time we had met as an entire group. Though we had talked informally at school, and I had met with each participant for an individual interview, this would be the first time we brought our collective stories together without the fear of being discovered by an administrator. Some group members even spoke of the feeling of relief knowing that CPES no longer had power over them. We began by identifying common threads as they appeared in the interviews and conversations from last year. Most often discussed was the treatment of the children and management of adults in ways that dehumanized both. Early in the first meeting, the topic turned to the microaggressive behavior the leadership exhibited towards various staff members. We spent time discussing and processing these microaggressions, as well as trying to make sense of the ways race impacted perceptions of the larger organization. Eventually, themes emerged which sought to construct notions of culturally competent leadership. Most importantly, culturally competent leaders should have abilities including: an ethic of care for students, communities, and teachers and critical perspectives on race and identity.
Ethic of Care. Central to all of our conversations about teaching, learning, and leadership was the requirement of care. Eric specifically evoked Nodding’s ethic of care (2013) when he discussed the ways care teachers and leaders should approach their work. Care was spoken of as a relational respect for the inherent human dignity we all possess and a nurturance of something natural and innate. Our conversations about care did not feel vague despite the fact that no definition of care was sought and no prescriptions for what it should look like in schools was laid out. Rather, care was spoken about largely in terms of intuition. Centering care as a means and an end in educational settings greatly contrasts with an environment which constructs academic success as performing well on individualized high-stakes standardized tests. Instead, the inquiry group theorized care as a form of communal uplift, wherein care of the entire community is held above individual success by any measure. The ethic of care as expressed by the participants in the inquiry group took three forms: care for students, care for their families and the community, and care for teachers.

Our group discussed at length the ways that care for students should be at the center of a school’s pedagogical and operational decisions. In this sense, we envisioned teacher-as-professional caregiver as the guiding metaphor of our work. A key competency for teacher-as-professional caregiver in urban schools is having high academic expectations for the student learning. This was not simply a reflection of the “high expectations” as it appears in the no excuses philosophy, rather it was a reappropriation and reimagining of the term. Instead of the “sweat the small stuff” approach to control and management of behaviors, the inquiry group imagined high expectations to be the unyielding belief that
all students bring incredible abilities to the classroom which should drive high levels of learning. High expectations for academics are completely decoupled from the behavioral micromanagement as carried out at CPES, as rigorous instruction and deep care for individual students make classroom management a non-issue. This ultimately means that rote memorization and test preparation have no place in a school emphasizing high expectations for student learning and need to be eliminated and replaced with student-centered pedagogies that reflect the value each individual student brings.

To demonstrate high expectations for student learning, teachers must be given the autonomy to craft instruction and curricula to meet the unique needs of their individual students. Scripted curricula and top-down management actually make high expectations impossible because they eliminate the complexity and nuance that goes into a teacher’s decision-making. Narrow conceptions of learning, as reflected by many no excuses schools and particularly CPES, lead to reductive notions of learning. How high can your expectations be if learning, and students’ worth, is measured solely by numbers on a standardized test? Conversely, care for students, according to our inquiry group, means tending to the mental, physical, and spiritual complexity of each individual student; only in taking the whole child into account can teachers hope to achieve the high expectations they have for their students. Moreover, teachers and leaders who have high expectations for student learning also have respect for everything the child brings from home. In that sense, high expectations and respect for family and community are inseparable.
Another key theme the inquiry group developed was the need for community involvement in schools. Students bring cultural tools from their families and communities, and a child’s education is built using those tools. It is impossible to care for a student without taking their culture and where they came from very seriously. Thus, community empowerment and ownership were considered non-negotiable for culturally competent leadership. To do this, much effort and time must be spent building relationships with the families and community in addition to creating a welcoming school environment. Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007) note that empowerment comes from a sense of ownership, and the inquiry group felt that communities should be co-constructors of their children’s school experience. Thus, parents and community members need an active say in all areas of the schooling experience for their children.

By working along-side the community, the school can learn about the unique needs of their children and families and develop specific programming to meet their needs. This should extend beyond regular classroom pedagogy and include programming for adult community members as well. Because schools are a great resource for the community, it is important to leverage its resources to reach as many people as possible especially in urban often times starved for resources. This will look differently depending on the unique needs of the community in which the school exists, but it always means prioritizing the shifting of resources towards community empowerment (e.g., hiring people from within the community to work in the school, running before, during, and after school programs for adult learning, or simply having open door policies for parents.
to interact with school leadership). By opening up our definitions for what a school really means, we strengthen the community in ways that support student learning.

The final theme that emerged from our collaborative inquiry into culturally competent leadership was care for teachers. In order to develop teachers-as-professional caregivers, school leaders must give teachers the autonomy and trust to develop student-centered pedagogy and curricula. Furthermore, care for teachers means making room for the emotional lives of teachers in this work and encouraging self-care as an important aspect of equity work in general. Culturally competent leadership does not use power and hierarchy to manage teachers—instead it develops reciprocal caring relationships with teachers and staff members to ensure accountability to the community becomes more important than accountability to an individual person.

**Inclusive Hiring Practices.** Another way school leaders demonstrate cultural competence is by hiring candidates from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. This inquiry group in particular represented a powerful testament to the effects of having a diverse staff. The relationships teachers and staff members were able to develop with the families of Junction City were perceived as the greatest strength of CPES as an organization. Sadly, the teachers and staff members felt they were not able to capitalize on those connections due to the scripted ways in which they were expected to interact with students and families, as well as the pressure from leadership to limit community involvement. While it is not a given that Teachers of Color will be able to make deeper connections with the students and the community, there is a shared experience between
members of minoritized racial and ethnic groups that makes connections more likely. Diversity must go beyond tokenism and take into account what a diverse teaching corps brings to a school. Therefore, culturally competent leaders embrace diverse cultural styles and ways of knowing as a central part of the learning process and provide appropriate professional development where varied methods and pedagogies can be developed.

Based on our work together, a rich understanding of the definition of culturally competent school leader emerged. However, none of the components of culturally competent leadership discussed would be possible without the leader first going through the emotional process of recognizing the ways his or her worldview is shaped by race. Particularly in the case of White school leaders, it is difficult to lead for equity if we have not interrogated whiteness and its role in shaping our worldviews and the ways we view our students, their families, and their communities. In the next section, I will explore the ways this emotional process has occurred in my life.

**Racial Literacy as Resistance to Whiteness**

One of the most important conclusions drawn from our collaborative inquiry is the need for school leaders, as well as all educators, to be racially literate. Members of the inquiry group agreed that how a person racially identifies does not qualify him or her as a school leader (just identifying as Black or Brown, for example, doesn’t in and of itself make one qualified to lead school of predominantly Black and Brown kids). Rather, the group vocalized the need for educators, and especially leaders, to interrogate their
identity to drive purpose and meaning in their work. The ability to form caring and 
trusting relationships with students is essential to the learning process as well as an 
ethical and professional imperative for all leaders. In this section I will use a racial 
literacy framework to interrogate my own racial identity—my whiteness—to gain a better 
understanding of the ways it shapes my daily reality.

This is not simply a journaling exercise; rather, I am naming whiteness to expose it 
which is an important part of the political process of establishing resistance against it. 
White Fragility (DiAngelo, 2009) is an avoidance strategy which works to keeps us from 
looking at our racial stories. My hope is to call attention to whiteness as a means of 
decentering it. I believe other White educators will find meaning in this work, the work 
of examining whiteness, no matter who, what, and where they teach. I am not sharing this 
work in an attempt to claim that I have reached the racial finish line, to cross over into 
some imaginary designation of culturally competent school leader, or to chart a 
prescribed path for all White educators to follow. This is an unending racial journey, I am 
finding, and my sincere wish is to inspire others to take the racial plunge into their own 
stories (and for them to share their meaning with others!).

According to Stevenson (2014), racial literacy is “the ability to read, recast, and 
resolve racially stressful social interactions” (p. 4). In short, racial encounters are 
stressful when we don’t have the tools to process them (Stevenson, 2014; Harrell, 2000). 
When people are racially stressed, it effects their mind and body in ways that can have 
detrimental effects on health and well-being (Stevenson, 2014). In schools, Black and
Brown students (and Teachers of Color, as this study currently demonstrates) are particularly susceptible to the racial microaggressions of the overwhelmingly White teacher and leader workforce (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). Originally conceptualized by Guinier (2004), racial literacy developed as a racial socialization intervention for People of Color to process racial microaggressions in healthy ways (Bentley-Edwards, Thomas, & Stevenson, 2013; Hughes et al, 2006; Serpell, Hayling, Stevenson, & Kern, 2009; Stevenson, 2014). Though not originally theorized for White racial socialization, I have found the basic tenets of racial literacy and the skills required to read, recast, and resolve racial encounters to be useful to me as a White educator. Because racial literacy is an emotional process, storytelling is an essential element (Stevenson, 2014). Rather than take up countless pages describing the theoretical underpinnings of racial socialization and racial literacy, I will tell the story of my racial journey. Before, I do, however, I will briefly explain why storytelling is so important when doing racial literacy work.

Storytelling is central to the emotional processing of race as everyone has a right to their story. If we can embrace our stories, grow comfortable with them, and listen to what they say about where we come from, then we can begin to confront the ugly racial legacy that exists in America. So many times, White people want to overlook their individual stories and go straight to problem-solving mass incarceration, the school to prison pipeline, or systemic racism in general. We cannot deal with any of those systemic issues until we realize that suspending a child from school, thus sending him or her the message that he or she is not welcome, IS the school to prison pipeline. We must start with our
individual behaviors first before we can ever hope to change the behaviors of others.

Storytelling keeps us grounded in our own lived experience of whiteness:

Through storytelling, we can see ourselves differently, assess our emotions, and find the capacity to change. We can change our responses to the plot, the background, the punch line, and reduce the power of the oppression. In storytelling, individuals can ease into self-reflection and become self-critical without public scrutiny. With practice, one can learn to forgive mistakes and see how context and history matter in racial decision-making and action. In storytelling, individuals and systems can rethink past decisions and take responsibility for their actions. They can also forgive others for being wrong or just confused. Storytelling is like practice for the next time you run into a herd of racial elephants or just one. (Stevenson, 2014, p. 16)

Storytelling eases the discomfort around racial encounters by allowing us to see ourselves and others with empathy, compassion, and hope. Here is my story: I hope the reader finds it helpful.

I was born and raised in Lincoln, NE, in a homogenously White setting where I was never aware of the ways race shaped my experiences. I only became aware of race when my family moved to St. Louis, MO, when I was a young child, and we lived for four years before moving back to Lincoln. There are much broader issues to explore in terms of the difference between the ways race was dealt with in the two locations: one in the north, one in the south; one more rural, the other urban. However, the larger racial politics are not the focus of my story, rather it is the face-to-face nature of racial reality that is truly important (2014). The elementary school I attended was in the suburb of Chesterfield outside of St. Louis, and it was there that I interacted with Children of Color for the first time in my life.
One day I came home from school and told my mother that the Black children at school “talked different than me.” My mom got visibly angry, and I can still remember her face turning beet red. She looked right at me and through her gritted teeth scolded me, “Don’t ever say anything like that ever again!” Now, I grew up in a household where what my mother said was the law of the land, so I was in no position to ask follow-up questions for clarification or for more information. But really all the messages she wanted me to know were apparent. I could tell that for whatever reason my mother grew extremely distressed about what I had said though I didn’t know why. That was the end of the conversation right then and there, and thus the message I received from my mother about race was that it was absolutely never to be mentioned. Despite the brief nature of the conversation about race, a lasting emotional impression was left, and a pattern of racial avoidance was established that would follow me throughout my life.

I have found this story to be incredibly informative as I have tried to make sense of my racial identity and its formation. The events of the story make sense given what we know about the different ways people experience racial conversations coupled with racial stress. I know my mother’s message was ultimately one of protection: she knew that White people who publicly said things about race were often times labeled as racist, and there is nothing worse you can call a White person than racist. She did not want me to say things that exposed me to this risk, so she passed on a very common racial stress coping strategy; avoidance. The fact that she grew visibly stressed and even angry demonstrates the extent of her ability to navigate stressful racial issues. Race made her so uncomfortable that she even demonstrated signs of fight or flight (in this case, per usual
when it comes to my mother’s emotions, she chose fight). It is very likely that in the moment she felt pressure building in her chest and head, her muscles tighten, her throat close, or any number of physical reactions to stress. These physical stress responses are common when faced with the seemingly perilous journey that is navigating a racial moment unprepared.

I do not tell this story to explain how my mother is a closeted racist; she spoke openly about equality for everyone no matter who they were, including those of other races. I am not criticizing her ideology, rather I am pointing out that when it came to the issue of race, she did not have the specific skills required to manage her stress. Ultimately, racial literacy is an issue of competence, not character (Stevenson, 2014). In speaking with other White people about the messages they received about race growing up, I have found that my story is not unique. The particulars might be different—specifically the myriad ways adults shirked, dodged, jumped, or ran away from the conversation—but the end result is often the same; avoidance. Even when our parents give us some shallow platitude that all men are created equal and leave it at that, we are not being sent out into a racially charged world without the tools needed to effectively combat the barrage of messages of Black and Brown inferiority. It is hard to talk about our families like this, because the wrong-headed notion that talking about race is racist is so deeply engrained in our culture. We are afraid this makes our families bad people so we continue burying our racial ineptitude; as a result, the White racial contract (Mills, 1997) is realized again and again.
Often times, White children learn that talking about race is about as appropriate as discussing finances, religion, or our medical history. Unfortunately, this short term stress coping reaction is not very useful in the long haul. Not only can we not avoid racial discomfort, when we try to avoid meaningful conversations about race, we are doing unfathomable harm in maintaining whiteness and racial hierarchy. Until we deal with the uncomfortableness of confronting race, we are much more likely to perpetuate both subtle and not so subtle racial microaggressions against People of Color. When race comes up in conversation, whether that is informally with friends, at an academic conference, or in a meeting with a parent, we are likely to stumble if we are not prepared with the tools and the practice to understand what happens to us in these moments. As White people, avoiding the discomfort of a racial conversation is one of the many privileges afforded us. While we wiggle away from racial conversations, People of Color are crushed by the weight of a White world that offers no such easy escape. We don’t have to understand it, relate to it, or feel it—we can’t—we just have to acknowledge and confront it.

Now, I return to the racial encounter I described in Chapter II during one of my early TFA trainings, but this time I will add more context:

I arrived in Philadelphia ready to teach at one of the school district’s largest comprehensive high schools armed with the dance moves of racial avoidance in one hand and an undergraduate degree in sociology in the other. In other words, I had a head full of knowledge about race with no practical experience to back it up. So
while I had read a great deal about structural racism and its effects on Black and
Brown communities, I joined TFA because of a sense of injustice and a willingness
to contribute to a good cause, I was in no way equipped to handle the racial stress I
was about to encounter.

In my defense, people say that TFA in the mid 2000’s ran some of the worst
diversity trainings on the face of the planet. That said, I would have had a similar
reaction to the following situation had I been sitting in a warm bubble bath with
relaxing music playing in the background. So when a Woman of Color said to the
class of new TFA corps members (really just to the White teachers in the room) that
“joining TFA doesn’t let you off the hook,” I almost had a panic attack. I completely
shut down, my heart beat so fast I thought it might explode, my chest tightened, I
broke out in an immediate sweat, my neck and face were flushed red, and my throat
felt lie it was pinching closed. In other words, it was as if my whole world was
crashing down and I was assuredly going to perish. If you had asked me about my
ideology on racial issues, and the TFA interviewers did, I would have told you all
about racial inequality and the civil rights movement of our generation. Introduce
racial conflict into the equation and all my reading and paper-writing went out the
window—I was stuck in a racial tidal wave. I am not saying that all White people
experience race like this, some people have less of a physiological reaction to racial
stress and others have more. Mine was a reaction born of 20-some-odd years of racial
avoidance. Not having the skills and practice around racial issues left me feeling
unprepared to confront the uncomfortable feelings that arose when racism
(particularly my racism) was the topic of conversation.
DiAngelo (2011) terms the stress reaction I experienced, wherein the smallest amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, White Fragility. Based on the above description of my White Fragility, you can imagine what my classroom felt like throughout my early career. One story in particular demonstrates the ways having low racial literacy impacted my teaching practice:

One student specifically taught me a great deal about my ignorance around racial matters. At the time, I felt as though Dewayne was put on this earth to make my life unbearable. He took every opportunity imaginable to challenge me: constantly questioning my ability to teach and encouraging other students to do the same. I swore every day was the last day I put up with Dewayne’s disruptions. One day Dewayne stopped me in the halls and asked me, “Why do you look so scared?” I am not sure if I even responded, but most likely I tried to come back with a comment about his not being in class on time or something to that effect. But what he said stuck with me because I knew I was scared.

Almost every day I would fill out a pink slip, which in the School District of Philadelphia was a code for an automatic one-day suspension. I would check the boxes for “disrespect towards authority” or “classroom disruption,” but it was often times difficult to put my finger on the nature of Dewayne’s behavior and why I felt it was so inappropriate. My academy leader at the time, Vicky Rivers, had taught at Gratz for decades and had undoubtedly worked with many teachers like me who really couldn’t understand the kids. She would take my pink slip and put it in her desk, then she would tell me to sleep on it and come back and see her in the morning. I would go home and ruminate over the day’s events trying to make sense of my
failings as an educator. The following day, I would see Ms. Rivers and tell her to disregard my pink slip and throw it in the trash. I never followed through on suspending Dewayne because deep down I knew he was right, and, that I was incapable of teaching him.

One day, Ms. Rivers suggested that I observe Dewayne in another class. I chose Mr. Massie’s class because he would shake his head during our academy meetings while other teachers, especially me, complained about Dewayne’s behavior. He would say, “I just don’t have issues with Dewayne.” Mr. Massie not only grew up in North Philadelphia but had also been teaching English and coaching both boys and girls track since the 1970’s. Mr. Massie was the quintessential “ol’ head.” I could hardly believe what I saw as Dewayne worked diligently on an essay throughout most of his class. Of course he was sociable and outgoing as usual, but when it came to his writing I could tell he took it seriously. Having seen how Mr. Massie was able to motivate Dewayne to do, I was deflated and discouraged because after that I knew (as I suppose I had always known) that the problem was me, not Dewayne.

Again, the story I tell about my experiences with Dewayne are not meant to be merely confessional in nature; rather, they are intentional. This particular story serves two key purposes. First, it normalizes the discussion around racial stress and the ways it impacted my practice. To be clear, the racial stress I experienced prevented me from building relationships that would facilitate meaningful learning experiences for my students. It is important to note that while I was unaware that my racial stress, Dewayne was able to identify it and call it out. While it is not easy for anyone to admit they are not capable of
managing stress related to racial encounters, it is even more difficult to hear it from a student who can easily identify our racial illiteracy. Second, it creates a very different narrative than the one most often crafted about Black and Brown students and academic failure. I am careful to spell out the shift in my thinking as I became more aware of my implicit bias and how it shaped my idea of Dewayne. While I problematized the notion of the achievement gap in Chapter VI, I do believe that whiteness operates to marginalize Black and Brown students in ways that impact academic performance.

While I am hopeful for the promise of racial literacy and the ability of educators to change, whiteness remains a powerful foe. There is a growing body of research on implicit bias (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2000; Banks, Eberhardt, & Ross, 2006; Levinson, 2007) and racial threat (Trawalter, Todd, Baird, & Richeson, 2008), some of which is shows that White people have similar fear reactions to black boys and men as they do to spiders and snakes (Öhman, 2005). Racial hierarchy and white supremacy are built into the fabric of US culture; we are constantly inundated with media and cultural messages of Black and Brown inferiority. The result is that we play out the same racial scripts time and time again; these scripts protect whiteness and marginalize Students of Color and are incredibly difficult to divert. If a teacher enacts implicit bias, misinterprets a Student of Color’s actions, and issues a suspension—then the student must have misbehaved. The teacher’s colleagues and even the principal would most likely defend the teacher’s actions and place the blame on the student. But what if were able to call out whiteness in this case? What if we established working environments where racial literacy was a basic competency required of all teachers, and a discourse normalizing
racial talk existed to guide White teachers through these experiences? We have These explanations go a long way towards explaining differential suspension rates and the school to prison pipeline (Skiba et al, 2002; Skiba et al, 2011). Furthermore, the experiences shared throughout this dissertation demonstrate how deeply entrenched whiteness is within US culture, policy, and educational practice. For many of us, beginning the journey to recognizing one’s part in the racial script is the most difficult part.

For me, accepting my implicit bias towards my students, and People of Color broadly, was an important early step in a long process. As I examined my interactions with my students more closely, I began to see the ways I was enacting a very old racial script. Why did I feel so disrespected when my Black male students didn’t follow my every direction? After all, isn’t it age-appropriate for teenagers to test authority? I came to see all of the interactions within the classroom as an opportunity to either enact or reject the racial scripts of whiteness. Furthermore, I vowed to become more like Vicky Rivers, Robert Massie, Deb Singleton, and the other great educators at Gratz working to protect the kids. These teachers and counselors embodied the affection, protection, and correction framework (Stevenson, Davis, & Abdul-Kabir, 2001) that established the foundation for deep connections. Because of my racial biases, I was unable to provide the protective factor for kids—and we all need protection. As an adult, Vicky protected me as she taught me how to treat the kids with dignity and respect, not punishment.
I have coached over twenty, mostly White, teachers in some supervisory capacity over the past four years, and I can say with confidence that the teaching practice of the vast majority was affected by White Fragility, or low levels of racial literacy albeit to varying levels and degrees. We spend so much time talking about classroom management in urban education circles, but when we focus on words like “management” and “control,” we are missing the true cause of discordant learning environments: the teacher’s inability to manage his or her racial stress and form meaningful relationships with students. I see it when teachers won’t look Students of Color in the eye or be assertive about the purpose of what they are teaching. I have seen it when teachers rely heavily on behavior systems and outside interventions such as deans and administrators. I have seen it when administrators rely too heavily on in-school and out-of-school suspensions, or even expulsions, to avoid dealing with the real reason Students of Color are not successful in their schools. It happens whenever we use bureaucratic means to solve a complex and human problem. It happens when we blame the students, their families, their culture, or their neighborhoods. The problem is not in the student; the problem is in us. It is simply impossible to educate those we fear.

**Letter to White Educators**

I am writing you this letter because we are in trouble. We are trying to solve a problem, but we are looking in all the wrong places, you and I. You see, I’m White just like you. Also like your brother, your cousin, and your father and mother. We were probably taught a lot of the same things as far as the way the world works. We have a lot
in common. But, I don’t want to talk to you, per se. I want to talk to the part of you (me) that you (we) wear so blatantly but go to such great lengths to try to hide. That contradiction we carry with us wherever we go. The one that tells us if we work hard we will get ahead but also knows deep down in our bones that many things have been handed to us for free. No, I am not saying we didn’t work hard. Please, don’t get defensive. Breathe and exhale.

I want to talk to our whiteness. I know this breaks the unspoken rule, to talk about it so openly. And just to be clear, I am not trying to discuss difference, diversity, multiculturalism, or equality. I am not trying to talk about the rainbow or the melting pot. I am not talking about “their parents just don’t value education,” or “their home environments aren’t conducive to learning.” I am not talking about word gaps or test score deficits. I am talking about our whiteness. It is a part of me too. Of course, we are more than our whiteness; it isn’t the total of us. But it is really getting in the way of our seeing things clearly. It’s like viewing the world through those drunk goggles we wore in health class back in high school. Similar to the purpose of the exercise back then, I am encouraging us not to imbibe, for there are dangerous side effects to the intoxication of whiteness. I want to examine the whiteness goggles through which we perceive the world. I want to put our whiteness front and center and take a good look at it. But I don’t just want to look at it, I want us to notice what it does to us. How does it make us feel? How does it make us react? Breathe and exhale.
Before we begin, I want you to know that while reading this you will get distracted. Your mind will race and you may even have physical symptoms of stress. If that happens, I want you to take five deep breaths. Don’t stop reading, though, despite the fact that you may want to stop. You may even feel like continuing to read will lead to harm or even death. It won’t. Just breathe and exhale. You will try to come up with all kinds of reasons why you should stop reading. But don’t. Just trust me that this is a conversation that we can no longer avoid. We can’t keep doing that. So no matter what, hold onto the fact that although we may not be directly at fault for the way the world is, we still have a moral imperative to try and make it better. Okay, here we go.

I want to talk to specific parts of our whiteness. First, I want to talk to the part of our whiteness that suspects this whole race thing is being blown a bit out of proportion. I know about that part because I have it too. The part that thinks race is less of a determining factor than class because William Julius Wilson wrote that and it makes sense. The part that feels like race is only a problem because we keep trying to talk about race. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it himself, that we should judge each other by the content of our character, or something like that, right? That part that grew up around a few People of Color who were really nice and never said anything about race. They just worked really hard and now they’re a doctor so racism didn’t affect them like that. That part that thinks if our students just worked a little harder and tried to act politer they would be a lot more successful. That part that blames them.
You see, to us race isn’t really an obstacle, so we have a hard time understanding how it is a roadblock for others. But the simple fact that we cannot imagine it, and thus erase it from being is a tremendous example of the privilege our whiteness grants us. The ability to tell other people what their experience is, and in doing so, erase their own interpretations, is whiteness. That’s what it does. Just because we don’t see it, doesn’t mean it is the same for everyone else; it doesn’t mean it isn’t real. Can you imagine a world where your own self vision, your ideas about who and what you are, were taken away by someone else? Then those very people turned around and said it was your fault you lost yourself? Can you imagine how you could never be good enough or smart enough or polite enough to regain yourself because you weren’t the one who lost you in the first place? That is what whiteness does. It steals the experiences of others and then pretends to help them look for it. So why not try something different and listen for a change, and maybe even believe? Breathe and exhale. Does that make you feel guilty that the world could be such a place?

I want to talk to our white guilt, too; the part of us that is afraid that if we can’t relate to racial oppression, then our own pain isn’t real. But our pains, our traumas, are very real. They are just different. We are not talking about those other pains right now. We are talking about the pain that comes from racial discrimination, and it is okay if you don’t know what that feels like. Rather than try to relate to it, let it sit. Witness it, but know you can never truly feel it. Your pain, your very real pain, your different pain, can be turned into empathy but only once you respect the pain of others. Empathy requires you only to listen, not to interpret and repurpose. This is hard because we feel responsible, we are
responsible. Not because of whether or not our ancestors owned slaves, but because of our actions yesterday, today, and tomorrow. This is not a historical dilemma; this is a current dilemma. Breathe and exhale. Our guilt distracts from the real conversation and makes it all about how we feel, instead of how it feels to face a world that discriminates against you. Your tears are a distraction. Just ponder for a moment, what if what People of Color say is true? We don’t want to live in a world where this is true, but it is. Does this mean we are bad people? No. We inherited this privilege. Breathe and Exhale. Does this mean we don’t have responsibility to change it? No. We must change. Breathe and Exhale.

Now, what I will ask you to do next will be very uncomfortable. I want to talk to that part of you that you don’t talk about in public. You can’t because you know what people would say; they would call you the “R” word, and there is nothing worse than to call us that. I want to talk to the part of your whiteness that is afraid. We are afraid because of the messages we have received throughout our entire lives. These messages (the ones on the television, on the radio, in the advertisements, in the ether) that tell us we should be afraid. At times, we are afraid of our Black and Brown students like we are afraid of spiders and snakes. And we use these fears to justify all types of horrible things. They are the reason we lock the doors of our cars or clutch our purses when a Black man walks by. They are the reasons we suspend Black and Brown students for things we ignore in White students. They are the reason our African-American students are aggressive, but our White students are assertive. These discrepancies just don’t hold up to any kind of close scrutiny. I know, it is a lot to take in. Breathe and exhale. Be aware of the ways the fears
affect you. There is a part of us that believes this fear is warranted, that this fear is earned. But that is a circular argument, indeed. It just doesn’t hold up to scrutiny. Sink into the fears, and breathe through them. Exhale. It’s going to be okay. Now the real work begins. Instead of focusing on the behaviors of others, we can start looking more closely at our own actions. Breathe and exhale every time you start to stress. I promise you, you have nothing to lose but your illusions.

Conclusion

This chapter described how teacher resistance and solidarity were formed through emotional bonding, subversive vulnerability, and collaborative inquiry. The inquiry work in particular served as an opportunity to process microaggressions, as well as theorize practice based upon our shared experience at CPES. Together, we theorized culturally competent leadership as defined by an ethic of care and racial literacy. I provided the theoretical background for racial literacy and used personal storytelling to develop a potential framework to guide White educators to better understandings of their own racial socialization process. The process of coming to recognize my whiteness and the role it plays in my day to day life has often times been a painful one. Moreover, the guilt and shame have been overwhelming at times. Still, the pain that comes from identifying one’s social advantage is nothing compared to the lived experience of marginalization and racial othering of People of Color every day. Therefore, White people in general, and White educators in particular, have a moral obligation to take the perilous journey towards racial literacy. It is truly the only way we can shift the discourses that shape the
schooling experience for traditionally marginalized youth. This shift is not easy and will undoubtedly require the courage to face our racial demons by taking a long, hard look at our attitudes and behaviors. This is essential if we are going to eliminate whiteness and its oppressive nature from driving our schools.
CHAPTER IX: Conclusions

“Power should not be understood as an oppressive system bearing down on individuals from above, smiting them with prohibitions of this or that. Power is a set of relations. What does it mean to exercise power? It does not mean picking up this tape recorder and throwing it on the ground. I have the capacity to do so—materially, physically, sportively. But I would not be exercising power if I did that. However, if I take this tape recorder and throw it on the ground in order to make you mad, or so that you can’t repeat what I’ve said, or to put pressure on so that you’ll behave in such and such a way, or to intimidate you—well, what I’ve done, by shaping your behaviour through certain means, that is power…I’m not forcing you at all and I’m leaving you completely free—that’s when I begin to exercise power. It’s clear that power should not be defined as a constraining force of violence that represses individuals, forcing them to do something or preventing them from doing some other thing. But it takes place when there is a relation between two free subjects, and this relation is unbalanced, so that one can act upon the other, and the other is acted upon, or allows himself to be acted upon. Therefore, power is not always repressive. It can take a certain number of forms. And it is possible to have relations of power that are open.”

-Michel Foucault, as cited by Bess, 1988

In contemporary schools, teachers and students do not know each other well enough to develop relations of care and trust. Of all the domains of continuity, this is the easiest and, perhaps, most important one to change. Students and teachers need each other. Students need competent adults to care; teachers need students to respond to their caring.

-Noddings, 2015, p. 69

Introduction

Chapters I through IV framed this study by introducing inquiry as stance and telling the story of the problem. I examined my career as an educator to chart my intellectual journey and lay out the theoretical and conceptual perspectives used to frame this dissertation project. Next, I reviewed the literature on critical organizational studies and leadership practitioner inquiry: a gap emerged both theoretically and methodologically which this project serves to fill. Following that, I described the narrative methodology
that guided the study including the ways that autoethnographic organizational perspectives and collaborative inquiry shaped my investigation. Lastly, I introduced the participants of the inquiry group in this study: Eric, Sam, Sara, Melanie, and Alex.

In Chapter V, I analyzed the organizational philosophies, policies, and practices using a critical organizational lens to identify the disciplinary frameworks of College Prep Elementary School (CPES). By examining the ways teachers’ and staff members’ minds, bodies, and emotions were disciplined by the surveillance and management of CPES leadership, I demonstrated the effects of organizational power to impact individuals’ behavior. In Chapter VI, I used storytelling to describe the ways staff encountered deficit and ideology at CPES. By describing the staff’s experiences with microaggressive and explicitly racist views from leadership, I mapped out the ways that whiteness is justified and encouraged through organizational policies and practices. I then put forth the metaphor of organization as whiteness as a conceptual framework or understanding the ways whiteness shapes the discourses of the school. In Chapter VII, I explored the political and discursive nature of teacher and staff emotions. I used this discussion to link subversive sharing to emotional resistance which eventually developed into political resistance to oppression. Then, in Chapter VIII, I described my personal experience of participating in collaborative inquiry alongside the staff members. I discussed the ways we troubled notions of race, community, deficit, and leadership, which led me to new conceptions of culturally competent leadership centered around an Ethic of Care (Noddings, 2013) and racial literacy. Finally, in this chapter, I will draw conclusions.
about my experience working at CPES and identify what limitations impacted this dissertation.

**Implications**

Given the above arguments, there are several important implications we can draw from this project. First, schools need to be thoughtful about the ways organizational power is coercive and impacts teachers’, staff members’, and students’ experiences. Organizational power has the ability to dehumanize and humiliate in racialized ways, thus as leaders committed to social justice we should be weary of leveraging power to accomplish our goals. Second, given my conclusions around school as whiteness, this study serves to call into question the claim by educational reformers that corporate education increases equity and serves as a counternarrative to deficit views of Black and Brown Students. Instead, the ways deficit operated within the ideologies of leadership and the policies and practices of the organization demonstrated that the reverse is actually true: CPES does more to perpetuate whiteness than it does to further social justice ends. Third, collaborative practitioner inquiry can serve as a vital source of theorization around organizational and pedagogical practices. This work serves as a contribution to understanding how inquiry groups develop, how critical perspectives can spread in uncritical environments, and how solidarity is shaped by emotions. Giving teachers and staff members space to collaboratively inquire into their practice creates deeper levels of meaning around teaching, learning, and leadership that are unavailable to prescriptive notions of schooling.
Organizational Power is Coercive and Racial

One of the important findings from this study was the ways in which each staff members felt they had to give up something essential about themselves to be successful at CPES. While the parts we felt coerced to give up were different for each of us, they were central to who we are as educators. The disciplinary practices of CPES made teachers and staff feel dehumanized and voiceless. To achieve promotions within the organization it became necessary to completely submit to the educational vision of the organization, it became necessary to implement that vision with unwavering commitment. CPES valued compliance and obedience to authority at all times from students, staff, and teachers. The environment created through the disciplinary practice of CPES aims to accomplish this as efficiently and effectively as possible.

A critical aspect of the organizational experience was the ways power manifested itself as racialized. From my personal perspective as a White educator, I felt uncomfortable with the ways students, families, and communities were deficitized by the organization and its leadership. Each of the participants had many stories about the ways they personally experienced school leaders’ deficit views of People of Color, and some even reported experiencing vicarious microaggression through the treatment of the students. Most importantly, the organization itself perpetuates deficit views of student achievement by using whiteness as a “hidden referent” (Leonardo, 2007) against which Students of Color are judged. In submitting to power, we open ourselves up to the ways
in which power is transmitted through racism, sexism, classism, ableism, etc.; and it is impossible to enact a social justice mission in such a fashion. Given what we know about CPES and other similarly operated charter management organizations (CMO’s), we must ask ourselves what we are willing to inflict on students, teachers, and communities in the name of “education.” To educational reformers, I ask, does any level of “achievement” make it ethical to impose prison-like environments on Children of Color?

**College Prep Charter Schools Are Not a Counternarrative**

The analysis provided in this dissertation makes clear that despite the results heralded by proponents of CMO’s and the social justice rhetoric used within their schools, they operate in ways that perpetuate deficit ideology. One of the most clearly articulated themes from our inquiry community was doubt about the CMO’s and its leaderships’ commitment to social justice. The participants, myself included, felt that the organization was more interested in self-promotion than bettering the lives of children and the community. Most participants voiced concerns around the ends-justifies-the-means approach to obtaining high test scores, and some disputed equating academic success with test scores in the first place. Moreover, the restrictive environment and no excuses philosophy was perceived as antithetical to nurturing human beings, much less facilitating learning in children. The no excuses approach as it was implemented at CPES was often described as prison-like, and participants wondered whether this is the future for which the students were truly being prepared. Consequently, through troubling the “ends question” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) as an inquiry community, we concluded
that the CPES education the children received was far too narrow than we saw fit. Placing academic gains as defined by standardized test scores above the humanity of the children and staff was perceived as having harmful effects on communities. Furthermore, the treatment that resulted from emphasizing test scores above all else was dehumanizing, unethical, and immoral.

There are important implications for literacy researchers who study the ways that language and power operate through literacy to enforce whiteness. One important implication was the ways that College Prep Charter Schools (CPCS) appropriated the language of the civil rights movement. In doing so, the organization claimed the moral authority of social justice which justifies acting in harmful ways towards children and relieving them of the critical analysis required to bring about lasting change. More than anything, the language of social justice was used as part of the disciplinary practice of the organization to coerce teachers and staff to do things they did not want to do. Another way literacy was used to enforce whiteness was by disciplining the language practices of staff and students. The scripted phonics literacy program used by the school enforced a nativist language ideology which subjugates People of Color by marking their language practices as “different.” It is appropriate to return again to Lippi-Green (1997), who states that “a standard language ideology, which proposes that an idealized nation-state has one perfect, homogenous language, becomes the means by which discourse is seized, and provides rationalization for limiting access to discourse” (pp. 64-65). Viewed in this light, we can understand the ways that the organization uses language and literacy to enforce whiteness.
As an inquiry group, we were able to find compassion for the dedicated people who originally built the no excuses model in an attempt to prepare students for a racist world that will judge them unfairly. However, what was appropriate for one community in one city does not mean those practices are “scalable,” to use the corporate rhetoric of CPCS. Something lacking at CPES was localized input that might inform school practices to better serve the community. Instead, the scripted approach to teaching and learning perpetuates colorblind racism and meritocracy further marginalizing Students of Color. CPES, and CPCS more broadly, reinforces whiteness; therefore, it in no way, shape, or form represent a counternarrative.

**Inquiry as an Emotional Process**

As stated above, this project contributes to our understanding of how inquiry groups develop, how critical perspectives can spread in uncritical environments, and how solidarity is shaped by emotions. Given the profound personal and theoretical space opened up by a community of inquiry, this study serves as an example of the power of inquiry. Specifically, this project locates the power of inquiry in its potential to open emotional and political space to form resistance to oppression. Participants used the relationships we developed while working within the organization to make sense of equity and practice—all for the purpose of better serving students. Furthermore, the formal collaborative inquiry brought forth several salient notions of culturally competent leadership which will impact our practice as teacher-leaders moving forward.
Coming together as an inquiry community had two important effects: 1) practices were reoriented and altered in ways that focused on care for children during the school year; and 2) deeper theoretical stances developed through formal collaborative inquiry that will continue to impact practitioners practice (as well as views on practice) throughout our careers. Furthermore, the inquiry process served as a medium to locate a shared position of ethics when unethical treatment was the organizational norm, as a place to process racial microaggressions, and finally it served as a place of empowerment for teachers to draw solid conclusions about their own practice. This serves as a counternarrative to the ways teaching and learning are currently constructed by policy-makers, as discussed in Chapter I, and thus represents a powerful political statement.

Moreover, the effects of the inquiry process on individual participants were profound. Every person in the study referenced feeling as if participating allowed him or her to maintain sanity. Given what we have established about the political nature of emotion, these are far more than dramatic platitudes. Rather, they are important testaments to the effects of treating teachers as if they are disembodied technicians who carry out repetitive and rote tasks day in and day out. In this sense, the community of inquiry had a grounding effect that allowed teachers to recover their humanity and assert the humanity of the students and their community.

In terms of gaining new understandings of school as organizations, inquiry provided a unique methodological lens through which to approach the problem.
able to glean an important first hand perspective of the effects of organizational power. The relational aspect of inquiry made that lens more robust, and the conclusions we drew are far more trustworthy than those of an outside researcher. The intimate portrait of organizational power and deficit are only made possible because of my embeddedness as a practitioner researcher working within a school community. That said, this project would have been much more powerful had we been able to meet more frequently. So much rich theorizing about practice occurred during our few meetings, and I can only imagine how much deeper we could have gone into equitable school practices and culturally competent leadership. Each of the participants was a culturally competent leader in their own right, and the group could have provided a space to explore more aspects of our identities as they relate to our practice.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

There are three particular limitations I wish to discuss further in this section; one pertaining to research design, another with representation, and a final limitation pertaining to the absence of the perspective of Leaders of Color. First, I will return to the issue of validity from Chapter IV and the framework put forth by Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007). Using their framework, I draw conclusions about areas of weakness pertaining to validity as well as ways to strengthen future research designs using more democratic methodologies. Second, I will trouble notions of voice and signature and the perils of speaking for others. This leads me again to the importance of democratic
methodologies to ensure I am not recreating the unequal power dynamics in my research relationships that I critique in organizations.

**Democratic Validity**

I will return now to the conversation around validity from Chapter IV and the ways this project succeeded and failed to meet the validity criteria provided by Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007). Again, here are the criteria:

- Democratic Validity; to what extent is the research done I collaboration with all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation?
- Outcome Validity; does the project lead to conclusions that satisfy the original problem?
- Process Validity; are we able to determine the adequacy of the process and are problems solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system?
- Catalytic Validity; what is the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it?
- Dialogic Validity; To what extent is this work in active conversation with other works of a similar nature? To what extent has this work been made public?

As previously stated, the two areas of validity that I was not able to satisfy were dialogic validity (for now) and democratic validity. The dialogic validity will be increased as I publish this dissertation, present my data and conclusions at various conferences, and publish articles using this data. The primary reason for limiting the dialogic validity thus far has been participant anonymity. Sara is the last remaining
participant working at CPES and widely publicizing our inquiry work might draw 
unwanted attention upon her. She has stated her intentions to leave CPES at the end of 
the school year, at which time I will request her permission to more widely circulate the 
findings of this study.

The criterion for democratic validity is the one that causes me the most hesitation. 
Given the constraints of time and circumstance, the collaborative nature of this 
dissertation study was limited. The theorizing we did as an inquiry group was awe-
inspiring, and I can only imagine how much stronger our conclusions might have been 
had we continued for an extended period of time. Furthermore, the organizational policies 
and practices limited our ability to involve all stakeholders, such as administrators, 
students, and families. At the start of this project, inquiry functioned to carve out spaces 
of solidarity and care for selves and for students. The project continued to develop as a 
space for teachers to be reflective though administrators were not asked to participate. 
We were operating from a perspective of fear and felt they wouldn’t be supportive of our 
efforts. In looking back, I believe we had more agency than we thought. Maybe it is the 
distance from the organization and its power, but I refuse to believe we are as powerless 
as we feel in the face of these organizations. Since leaving CPES, I have facilitated 
trainings at some of the largest CMO’s in Philadelphia with the Racial Empowerment 
Collaborative, and I am finding that the leadership in those organizations is more 
amenable to change than I would have ever previously thought. That said, the mechanism 
of control built into the organizational structures at many CMO’s requires they take a 
hard look before any change can occur from within.
Voice and Signature

Another limitation to this work was my ability to craft narratives that effectively captured the voice and signature of the participants. Throughout the writing process, I was plagued with doubts and questions pertaining to style and the readability. Where should my voice be made more explicit? What is the best way to assert my voice and when should I emphasize the voices of the participants? Will my narratives capture their unique and complicated perspectives? How will I write these perspectives in ways that are respectful? How can I possibly hope to represent the voices of others especially given that the participants are all Educators of Color and I am White? I wrote extensively about these choices in research memos and journals; while I am not sure I ever resolved these tensions, these reflexive research techniques make me confident in the final product.

Again, using more democratic and dialogic methodologies will resolve the tension around representing others. I remain committed to narrative inquiry as a methodology and I believe I will become more comfortable in these tensions as I grow as a researcher and writer. In the future, I will take a more community-based research approach by including participants in the project from the initial stages. Moreover, I will provide increased opportunities for authorship and allow others equal say in the research design and implementation to create more participatory action research.
Absence of the Perspective of Leaders of Color

A potential critique of this project will note the absence of the voices of Leaders of Color from CPCS, or no excuses schools more broadly. This is an important critique and one that will inform future projects. For the purposes of this dissertation, I did not include the perspectives of Leaders of Color for two reasons: 1) there were no Leaders of Color at my site; and 2) my focus was primarily an autoethnographic one which focused on identifying and critiquing whiteness as a part of my own practice. This project is primarily concerned with identifying the enforcement of whiteness as a construct at CPES and its effects on Teachers and Staff of Color.

There are Leaders of Color within the organization who may believe that they are enacting a social justice education for Students of Color, though the findings from this study indicate otherwise. However, I am not focusing my critique on Leaders of Color within the organization because as a White man I do not feel comfortable evaluating their responses to the oppressive force that is whiteness. Rather than critique Black and Brown school leaders’ approaches, I examine educational equity by interrogating the positions of those of us who benefit from whiteness, White practitioners. The purpose of a critique of whiteness is to focus on whiteness as a means of centering it. While there certainly are Leaders of Color who implement a no excuses philosophy, it is only as a response to whiteness. If whiteness is abolished, extreme forms of schooling for Black and Brown children would no longer be conceivable.
Final Thoughts and New Directions

While this project took place within a CMO-operated school and is highly critical of the policies and practices of the organization, my goal was not to make broad policy claims about charters or contribute to the larger debate over school choice. As I stated previously, I do not claim neutrality; however, these policy issues detract from a focus on whiteness as an oppressive force impacting all educational sectors and settings. My goal is to shift the educational conversation to one that locates social problems within whiteness and the ways it perpetuates deficit ideology of people from minoritized backgrounds. As other theorists have stated, much federal policy and current school practices re based in notions of deficit of Students of Color (Valencia, 2010; Leonardo, 2007). Schools as organizations remain an important location of intervention for social justice educators pushing against the political forces of whiteness. I encourage all school leaders to commit to a rigorous critical examination of the policies and practices in their schools and ask difficult questions as to their purpose. Furthermore, we must look at ourselves to better understand our identities, which have been shaped by those same political forces. Schools have the potential to serve as protective spaces for students, but not if we don’t look critically both at ourselves and at larger policy initiatives and question what the purpose of educating students really is.

In the year since leaving CPCS, I have been working at the Racial Empowerment Collaborative facilitating racial literacy workshops for no excuses charter schools in the Philadelphia area. These trainings are designed to teach tools which can help practitioners
lower their racial stress and heal from racial trauma, and in doing so begin to address the ways their organizations perpetuate dangerous forms of deficit ideology. Helping teachers and school leaders identify whiteness as the force which deficitizes People of Color has been extremely rewarding and promising work. Given my unique vision when it comes to race and whiteness, I feel compelled to continue working in White spaces increase awareness and change around these issues as they pertain to school and education more broadly. Schools subscribing to a similar philosophy as the one described in this dissertation are changing their policies due to the individuals within them working to change themselves. These changes would not be possible without a commitment to the deeply emotional work required to better understand racial identity. I remain hopeful that this emotional work can lead to lasting change and a better, more equitable school experience for all students.
REFERENCES


Dawson, P. M. (2007). The road less traveled: A personal reflective journal of leadership practices that influenced learning in three school contexts.


Fischer, K. B. (2013). Fostering Teacher Learning Communities: A Case Study of a School-Based Leadership Team's Action Research.


Gilbert, N. L. (2013). The challenges of starting and leading a charter school: Examining the risks, the resistance, and the role of adaptive leadership---An autoethnography.


Hayward, R. B. (2011). The heart of the matter: Transforming the lives of students through relationships.


Howard, G. R. (2006). We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools. Teachers College Press.


Jones, K. M. (2015). Never been: An exploration of the influence of dis/ability, giftedness, and incarceration on adolescents in adult correctional facilities.


Magness, V. T. (2012). Understanding the meaning of literacy in a school that is linguistically and culturally diverse: A collaborative inquiry.


Pincus, M. (1994). Embracing the dissonance: Looking at audience in students' writing in an urban high school. In *summer conference of the Urban Sites Writing Network of the National Writing Project, Princeton, NJ.*


Stevenson, H. C. (2014). *Promoting racial literacy in schools: Differences that make a difference*. Teachers College Press.


Sztorc, S. (2009). *An action research study to examine leadership practices in meeting academic and social emotional needs of at-risk students in an alternative school*. State University of New York at Buffalo.


