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DETOXIFYING THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM:

CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS OF SYSTEMIC RACISM, PERPETUATED POWER,

AND THE WHITE WOMAN TEACHER

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DETOXIFYING THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM:

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AND THE WHITE WOMAN TEACHER

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Abstract

This thesis introduces historical research on the origins and purpose of education, Critical Whiteness Studies, and Critical Race Theory and places them in conversation with each other to decenter power in Whiteness in the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. The history of education is deeply rooted in White, heteropatriarchal norms that perpetuate systemic oppression through White privilege and White fragility. Critical Race Theory provides a framework in which to approach decentering Whiteness in the ELA classroom. All of these components are examined and related to each other through the use of a narrative inquiry of a White woman ELA teacher and her professional and academic experiences. Finally, a guide to decentering Whiteness was created from the conversations and examination of the research and narrative provided within these frameworks.

Keywords: Critical Whiteness, Critical Race Theory, critical education

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I sit perched atop my throne of papers, endlessly grading within the confines of a broken system and perpetually deciding the fate of all students that enter my classroom kingdom. Power drips from my fingertips and bleeds red across the papers I read, subjugating all that appear on my roster. Supported and uplifted by a system that thrives off of my proximity to power, I, the White woman teacher, reign supreme in my classroom and in classrooms across the United States. I, the White woman teacher, am one of the uniting symbols of American education. And I, the White woman teacher, typify the experience of the learning environment. This thesis is the reflection of what I, the White woman teacher, can and must attempt to do to stop the traumatization of students of color that enter my classroom, as well as educate White students that are unaware of the privileges they possess. It is an exploration of the conversations necessary to breakdown the colonial handcuffs that bind our education practices in oppression. And, it is a call to action to White women that are yet again sitting "helplessly" as our brothers and sisters of color fight for the education they deserve.

In examining the toxic system of public education in the United States, understanding the influence of the White woman teacher in and outside of the classroom has grown in to one of my most pressing concerns, as I have realized that I often center the experiences of students that enter the system, for better or worse. My ability to perpetuate systems of oppression from such an unassuming position unknowingly grants me the power to unravel such systems as well, yet far too often, little of this work is done in our public schools. Worse yet, this toxicity is only further propagated in secondary English classrooms, as they become spaces that reaffirm White

culture and norms. To understand how these systems of power function, colonialism and the founding principles of the American education system, the power of the white woman teacher, the racial makeup of classrooms today, and the intentions of the English classroom must be examined.

Chapter I: An Introduction Examining the Work to be Done

Finding Myself in the Narrative

My education experience was one of privilege and tracking. There was never a question of "if" I would graduate high school, or "if" I would attend college; it was a foregone conclusion. Though my family and pocketbooks were both broken, access to resources and an education intended for me to thrive built a future for me that overlooked my monetary restraints. Between scholarships, grants, and student loans, I graduated college and continued on to higher degrees within the University. Education was my "great equalizer"— "my ticket to success"—and my opportunity to learn about the systems that privileged my triumphs over many standing next to me. I did not work harder, fight longer, or desire achievement more than anyone else. Instead, my White, Euro-centered appearance and proximity to White men yielded me my positionality, and ultimately my privilege.

And here I find myself, a secondary English Language Arts public school teacher in the heavily racialized education system of Oklahoma (Franklin, 1982, p. 13). Through my most privileged educational encounters, I have learned about the unwarranted power I possess. Through powerful relationships with professors, colleagues, and students of color, I have been forced to examine myself in the mirror and see the colonial reflection that my Whiteness exudes. And through the [un]educating I have done in White, Eurocentric values, I have been challenged to stop contributing to a system that oppresses. I am not here to save students of color, but

instead to fight for a school system that is founded in equality and education, not as it is was originally intended, but as it should function—a space for opportunity, mobility, and empowerment through learning. And now, in the words of one of my professors, it is time for me to "gather my people."

Understanding Power

Understanding power in education requires an understanding of the different ways in which teachers, especially White women, interact with power in their classrooms. Our Whiteness grants us unparalleled access to power because of our relation to White men. As White women who teach, our proximity to power and White norms contribute to systems of oppression. This White privilege is found within every interaction we have with our minoritized students and their families, and it can be extremely damaging when it exists unnoted and unaddressed, as it is an othering of everything except whiteness (West, 2005, p. 385). In her work, "White Woman Feminist," (1992) Marilyn Frye explains that White women are cast in to a system of Whiteliness, a toxic structure that functions and oppresses similarly to that of masculinity and notions of male privilege. This explanation demystifies what it means to contribute to the system of Whiteliness, as well as the power that is welcomed to those that are associated with any who have such Whiteliness.

Frye (1992) explains that White women continue functioning within the system, as it is deemed acceptable and respectable by White men. The White woman's complicity in the system ensures that White men maintain their position of power at the top, while those at the bottom continue to stand in the inequality. This proximity to power serves White women, as we benefit from the system at the expense of people of color. Frye (1992) explains that Whiteliness exists and functions unannounced, contributing to a structure that infiltrates race relations, as well as

maintains the gender gap in the United States. When unexamined among teachers, the silencing oppression of Whiteliness in the classroom influences relationships, curriculum, and student success (Martin, 2008, p.162). It drives curriculum and the methods teachers use to engage with their students, as well as the systems of care with which they address them and their needs. However, this structure of Whiteliness within classrooms is reinforced by the colonialist foundations upon which the American public-school system was built.

Colonialism and the American School System

Steeped in American history, colonialism and education work in tandem to perpetuate White, heteropatriarchal norms, as they have for centuries. When held to its highest purpose, colonialism in education indoctrinates students through the use of general curriculum and teachings toward mindsets that align with White, Eurocentric values (Kharem, 2006, p. 23). This means of education ensures that all students, regardless of race, religion, and background, are learning Whiteness practices and heteropatriarchal norms, so they, too, can participate in the system that maintains power for those at the top, White men. As such, the foundation of American schools has been used as a means to unravel cultures and push forth White, American nationalistic practices (Kharem, 2006, p. 26). "This colonial education in schools is present K-12, where thousands of Hispanic, African, and Native American children… were and still are taught to live their lives based on a social order that devalues their cultures and people (Kharem, 2006, p. 34). This system still functions today, as the education students receive is intended to maintain the power structures present in society. Currently, we, the White woman teachers, work within this system that still preserves dominant power structures, as our proximity to power places a veil of miseducation upon our eyes, though we cannot rely on this excuse for our continued failure in serving our students of color. This notion of colonialism in schools will be

discussed in more depth throughout this essay, though this patriotism has a distinctly braided history with the English Language Arts classroom, and it has served as a great colonizer in the education system.

The History of the English Classroom and Curriculum

Historically, the English classroom is steeped in White hetero-patriarchal norms, underlying assimilation, and colonization practices. In its inception, the English Language Arts classroom served as a space intended to perpetuate White, patriarchal, American customs. This notion is seen through the curriculum and literature that were presented in the first English courses in the United States. The earliest primer books used in American English classrooms focused on utilizing ethical teachings as dictated by religious texts to model correct grammatical structures. Prayers and lessons of morality ensured Eurocentric norms were demonstrated in the readings within the primer books (Applebee, 1976, p. 1-2). As the classroom and society shifted with the dawn of war and patriotism, so too did the English readings by taking on those tones of patriotism and nationalism and inviting politics and assimilation in to the classroom as well (Applebee, 1976, p. 3). Though the history of English education finds itself at a crossroads with colonialism, the literature that is currently read in the classroom perpetuates diverging notions of empathy and socialization, solidifying English as a humanitarian subject, and further declaring the importance of a carefully and critically constructed curriculum.

The creation of a caring curriculum within the English classroom is all the more important as the English classroom serves as one of the dominant sites of humanities within schools. The subject of English teaches far more than mere language skills, as it perpetuates notions of socialization and empathy through the conveying of human experience and ideas. "Furthermore, because many authors and social psychologists connect the development of

empathy to storytelling, curriculum developers and teachers often turn to English classes in particular as cultivators of compassion," (Mirra, 2018, p. 4). Literature is a tool in which students are presented with differing ideas and experiences, and as such, critical conversations must take place to ensure that students are breaking down notions of privilege, power, and properly built empathy (Mirra, 2018, p. 6-7). Even more importantly, the literature that is read and the surrounding curriculum that is built, must be steeped in a commitment to creating reflective representation of the students that are within the classroom. It must also dedicate itself to inviting diversity in to the classroom even when it is not present within the student body. In order to create such a system, the English curriculum must be deconstructed and rebuilt by us, critical White educators, to ensure equity and equality in opportunity and education for all students who enter the English Language Arts classroom.

Examining Modern Classrooms

The dawn of the White woman teacher has held her grips on education since the early 20th century, and our presence is still prevalent despite an increase of diversity and multiculturalism within the United States public school system. According to the most recently updated information in the *Digest of Education Statistics,* the 2015-16 school year was marked by 80.1 percent of teachers who identified as White, and 76.6 percent of teachers who identified as female in public schools (Number and Percentage, 2017). Yet, the racial makeup of schools looks far different. Comparatively, in 2016, 48.5 percent of students identified as White, while 15.5 percent identified as Black, 26.6 as Hispanic, 5.4 as Pacific Islander, 1 percent as American Indian / Alaska Native, and 2.9 percent as two or more races (Enrollment and percentage, 2018). There is currently a clear underrepresentation by teachers when examining the racial makeup of

students in schools, and future projections suggest that the trend will continue to show population growth of minoritized people.

The United States Census Bureau projects that the ethnic minority population will increase from 38.7 percent in 2016 to 55.7 percent in 2060 (Colby, 2015). These projections underscore the importance of teacher diversity and an education that serves students of color and acknowledges their histories. Ultimately, the White woman school teacher still reigns supreme, shaping what it means to care for children in schools, and crafting curriculum intended to produce the most academically inclined students. Yet, for true student success, public school teachers must be willing to break down the systems of power and privilege that impact their experiences in the classroom (Martin, 2008, p. 161). There are many academicians and theorists laying the groundwork for what must be done in attempting to fix the broken system; it is time to place these conversations in dialog with each other.

Examining the Work to be Done

When examining the systems at work in public education and, more specifically, the secondary English classroom, there is little question of how the education system perpetuates systemic racism, yet we as educators, the White woman teachers of America, find ourselves at a crossroads. Though Whiteness studies, Critical Race Theory, feminism, and the history of education in the United States are widely studied fields, they are not often placed in conversation with one another, yet their scope of influence is ever present within each other. This research is intended to open the conversation between these theories and begin conversations to detoxify English classrooms by challenging the narratives of White woman teachers, while calling for all White teachers to examine how they contribute to a system of racism within public education.

This essay explores the history of education in the United States through a lens of power and examines how the system was founded upon principles of assimilation and nationalism. It investigates how teacher education programs have contributed to systemic oppression and power dynamics within education, as well as answers the question of why we, White women, are the prominent teachers within public schools. An in-depth examination of Whiteness studies will more comprehensively link the power of White women in education and scrutinize the topics of White privilege, White fragility, power, and how they relate to the classroom. Critical Race Theory conversations assess the damage to students of color, importance of representation, current minimizing practices, common recommendations, and the intersections of power. After investigating these key topics, Whiteness studies, Critical Race Theory, and curriculum will all be discussed in relation to the English Language Arts Classroom. A reflection steeped in my educational experiences and academic literature will lay the groundwork for a guide addressing what critical White educators can do. The power of White women teachers and the control they emit over curriculum and care, and their impact upon students of color will open the discussion, soon followed by what Whiteness Studies and Critical Race Theory look like in the English Language Arts classroom. These will question how power can be decentered and why it is important that this work is done and will culminate in the exploration of further research opportunities.

Chapter II: The Methodology

Through the merging conversations of Critical Whiteness studies, Critical Race Theory, and the history of education, we can understand how the public-school system, and more specifically, the English Language Arts classroom protect White fragility, perpetuate White privilege, and what must happen to decenter power within them. This research uses qualitative,

historical approaches of the purpose of education, and Critical Whiteness Studies, as well as

Critical Race Theory examined through personal narrative inquiry, to create a guide for critical

White educators in decentering Whiteness in the English Language Arts classroom.

Fundamentally, qualitative research attempts to make sense of phenomena experienced by people

in their lives (Newman, 2006, p. 16). Through conversations between Critical Whiteness Studies

and Critical Race Theory in the context of the ELA classroom, this research provides insight to

the function of White woman teachers and the curriculum, both explicit and hidden, that

perpetuates systemic oppression for minoritized students. Approaching the ELA classroom as a

site of humanities within the public-school system facilitates the assumption as an effective

vehicle for decentering intrinsic Whiteness within it. "A knowledge of the history of education is

a necessary preliminary to educational reform and improvement," (Knight, 1929, p. 102). In

providing depth and breadth of the histories explained, the sources used were chosen based on

recency and relevancy to the topics discussed.

As a White, English teacher in a public-school system, my positionality is undeniably at

the center of attention in this study. This recognition is not sufficient in eliminating bias, but it is

rather a driver of accountability in the actions I suggest from this study and provides the basis for

the narrative inquiry methods I employ in this research. Narrative inquiry provokes the

exploration of the meanings and purposes of educational practices by incorporating diverse

voices, innovative representations, and considerations of the audience into its validity (Atkinson,

2010, p. 92). Narrative methodology is rooted in the notion that humans, and even more

specifically educators, are a storytelling people (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). As such, the

basis for my research, as well as the guide for critical White educators is formulated from my

personal narrative inquiry, as it intersects with the historical models present within the qualitative

research. The purpose of education is rooted in its history as a tool for assimilation and establishes itself as a source of continued systemic oppression. Critical Whiteness studies establish the White woman teacher as a vehicle of oppression functioning within this system. Critical Race Theory provides the effect of this oppression on minoritized students of color. By placing these objectives in conversation with each other through a personal narrative inquiry, a guide is created for critical White educators to begin addressing the oppression and breaking down the current systemic racism at play.

Chapter III: The Literature Review

Whiteness Studies

Critical Whiteness studies scrutinize how systems of Whiteness are toxic systems that serve as mere perpetuators of racism, and when held in conjunction with Critical Race Theory (CRT,) the pervasiveness and damaging nature of Whiteness is seen, as Whiteness studies are informed from Critical Race Theory (Castagno, 2013, p. 106-107). In understanding the characterizations of Whiteness, Victoria Haviland at the University of Michigan (2008) articulates that "Whiteness is powerful yet power-evasive, that Whiteness uses a wide variety of techniques to maintain its power, and that Whiteness is not monolithic," (p. 41). It is impossible to divorce Whiteness with its distinct connection to maintained power and permeation of assimilatory practices within education. Yet, it also distinctly serves as the foundation upon which White women continue to reassert their gained proximity to power by any means possible.

Power in Whiteness. The indisputable (and far too often disputed by White people) link between Whiteness and power is founded upon the privileges that are inherently available in all realms of life (be it cultural, societal, governmental, etc.) for White people (Haviland, 2008, p. 41). These privileges are gratuitous in nature, and they maintain the Eurocentric hierarchy that

plagues education. Failure to recognize these systems of power merely perpetuates their existence as it runs parallel to the realities facing minoritized populations (Haviland, 2008, p. 41). The power held within Whiteness creates privileges that allows White people to navigate their way through society without ever having to address race or recognize the handcuffs with which it shackles people of color. "Though Whiteness is difficult to define concisely, the vast majority of Whiteness scholars agree that it is directly connected to institutionalized power and privileges that benefit White Americans," (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 303). Central to the notion of Whiteness is that it hinges on the power that is gained at the expense of people and students of color. It is through these undeserved and unearned privileges that Whiteness preserves systems of power and maintains a racial hierarchy where Whiteness is heralded, and people of color are situated at the bottom.

White Privilege. Though White privilege has gained particular recognition in mainstream society, understanding its power within society and the classroom are key. The notion of White privilege asserts that White people have access to unwarranted advantages that benefit them within many aspects of society. From navigating the judicial systems to securing life goals and needs (consider housing, education etc.,) these privileges create an ease of life and system of benefits that are absent for people of color and ignored for their toxicity by those that are White (Prendergast & Shor, 2005, p. 379). However, these privileges are most blatant to people of color as they endure the raw impact of what it is to be seen through a model of oppression and racism (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 304). In her work "Inheriting Footholds and Cushions: Family Legacies and Institutional Racism" (2014), Christine Sleeter uses the metaphors of "footholds" and "cushions" to explain the ways in which privilege resides in Whiteness. Her description ascertains that "footholds enable opportunity," while "cushions

protect misfortune," and these "enable White people as a whole to retain disproportionate control over the nation's resources" (Sleeter, 2014, p. 11). This well-crafted metaphor illuminates the ways in which privilege is inherently injected within the American society, as it is inherited by skin color and implements institutionalized racism that has benefited White people throughout history (Sleeter, 2014, p. 11-12).

White Fragility. In its most basic understanding, White fragility is a defense mechanism in which White people respond to even minimal amounts of racial distress through a variety of emotions and behaviors that are centered in frustration, fear, resentment, guilt, upset, denial, and irrationality (Patton & Jordan, 2017, p. 89). The obligation of White fragility is then passed on to disposed populations, as White people displace their own feelings of discomfort and distress. These operations of Whiteness are mere perpetuators of a system that maintains racism in the inability to adequately listen, sympathize, empathize, or act in attempting to dismantle an oppressive system. Often White fragility is most evidentially witnessed in the distress that is seen when White people are confronted with their privilege (Applebaum, 2017, p. 863). This distress serves as a shield that protects White people from feeling the pain and trauma that has been inflicted upon people of color and further focusing the attention back on to themselves as they react emotionally, and often erratically, and yet again dominate the narrative. Through the overtaking of this narrative, "resources rush back" to White people, as the discomfort is immediately comforted (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 112).

In his book, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism,* author Robin DiAngelo (2018), known for naming White fragility, explains that White people are "insulated" from feeling the impacts of race, while simultaneously benefitting from the very system, feeling a sense of "entitlement" that accompanies it (p. 1). He continues on to explain

that White fragility is not positioned in weakness, as is the definition of 'fragility' that is usually perceived. Instead, White fragility functions from a place of power as it maintains "[W]hite racial control and the protection of [W]hite advantage," (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 2). Further, this lack of sight regarding privilege is due to the tools that are "socially afforded" to White people because they are equipped and comforted by a system that protects and maintains their Whiteness and the privileges that accompany it (Applebaum, 2017, p. 866).

Critical Race Theory

When examining and understanding how race intersects with education, it is important to have a framework that centers on race and experience. Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides this structure, as it hinges on the notions that the understandings and experiences of people differs among races, as race is a social construct, and that the "White" experience is dominating, and other races are secondary and viewed as lesser to the White experience (Vargas, 2003, p.1). It also explores how seemingly neutral systems impact different races in adverse ways, positively affecting the White experience and systematically subordinating other races; these systems are maintained so White people will remain advantaged in society (Vargas, 2003, p. 1). Further, racism and Whiteness are a way to "organize society," so that it maintains the racial hierarchy that benefits the White population (Sleeter, 2017, p. 3).

CRT was first utilized in law by Derrick Bell, exploring how society addresses race and how the system thoroughly maintains a structure of power that advantages and normalizes Whiteness and Anglo norms. In addressing these structures, it is important to note that minorities must contend with race and discrimination daily, while White people feel that race is not a significant issue today (Vargas, 2003, p. 3). This is due to the intrinsic inclusion and systematic framework that recognizes and honors White values, advantaging White people within the

society (Bernal, 2002, p.111). This framework attempts to breakdown systematic issues that are aimed at maintaining a societal structure that benefits White people and disadvantages minorities by focusing on fundamental aspects of how racism thrives. It is no wonder that a system created for racial hierarchy continues to traumatize students in public schools.

   Reclaiming Power through Critical Race Theory. When examining power with CRT, it is key to realize that CRT is one of the ways to decenter power. CRT has the potential to buck the system of Whiteness, inviting in voices from those that have been silenced. "CRT… holds that claims of neutrality and color blindness mask White privilege and power," (Sleeter, 2017, p. 6). To unravel such structures as a White woman involves an abdication of power that not only silences insidious Whiteness already dominating the narrative, but also work to unravel it from the outside in, breaking down toxic structures in spaces that it most often flourishes. CRT renegotiates power and its impact within the school system (Vargas, 2003, p. 1-3). When CRT is used in tandem with understanding Whiteness and the colonial structures upon which the system thrives, it has the power to break down arenas in which the system is present. CRT acknowledges the trauma that is inflicted upon students of color and works to unpack these issues.

   Ways of Knowing. Through the use of curriculum, teachers maintain their power within the classroom that structures a system in which they are the bearers of knowledge, and students are the ones who must receive their information. In Paolo Freire's, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972)*,* he discusses his notion of the banking model in education, where students are considered to be vessels needing the deposit of education, and respectively, teachers are expected to deposit knowledge to their students, much like one would deposit money in to a bank (p. 71-72). Curriculum such as this merely maintains a system of power, as it addresses students from a deficit model, a system in which students are seen as lacking any value or tangible knowledge.

Through deficit perspectives, students who are not achieving at the academic level of their peers are considered to be the ones who are inferior and must take the blame, rather than view and addressing the underachievement as a structural inequity within education (Olivos, 2006, p. 45). Curriculum that merely addresses teachers as the holders of knowledge, rather than valuing the experiences with which students enter the classroom is a system that is designed to maintain White, heteropatriarchal norms.

Deficit perspectives are noted when the teacher addresses students and their families according to the skillsets they do not possess and blames cultural characteristics for the lack of these skills. In doing so, the teacher does not recognize the capital with which the student enters the classroom, disregarding other strengths the student may possess (Irizarry, 2011, p. 39). A common example of this is the way Latina/o students are treated regarding their bilingualism. Far too often in English-only education, bilingual students suffer, as they are not valued for the language they already know, but instead for their lack of strength in the English language (Stritikus & English, 2010, p. 408-409). This deficit model is very traumatizing for students, as they are addressed in a manner that is based on their perceived capital, as it is viewed from a White, monolithic lens. Within this framework, the dominate culture that is valued throughout the teaching is White, Anglo culture (Irizarry, 2011, p. 45). Yet, this deficit lens is transformational when examining the ways in which the system supports "… the possibility that White teachers' dispositions toward race may create internal obstacles to the implementation of both effective pedagogy and curriculum and a transformative response to inequitable practices," (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 302). Ultimately, Whiteness reinforces colorblindness and oppression in addition to functioning as a method that merely uses students as vessels for knowledge (Martin, 2008, p. 162).

These identities and ways of knowing that have been discovered by students play an integral role in allowing students to form their own epistemologies (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 3). This means that students must be given the opportunity within the classroom to explore their identities, as well as center their understandings of their experiences in the knowledge they are receiving in and outside of the classroom (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 3). For teachers to commit to caring about their students, they must be committed to valuing their students for the knowledge they already have, not the concepts they still must gain. This shift in mindset allows students to be the bearers of their own knowledge and experiences, ensuring their experiences are present in the formal education they receive in the classroom. In committing to the valuing of students and their knowledge, teachers simultaneously commit to critically caring for their students.

Students are suffering at the hands of White woman teachers, as their excuses for maintaining toxic classroom practices abound. Race, gender, and power relations within the school setting often go unspoken, merely to be felt, but not heard, seen, and not explained. This system of silencing and denial of experiences are complicit in a system of oppression that permeates classrooms and schools across the United States (Castagno, 2014, p. 84-85). Through the perpetuation of silence in the midst of racial and gendered oppressions, teachers are complacent to the equity problem that plagues schools and the experiences of students. In an attempt to maintain a system that is colorblind, a system that is powerblind as well has been implemented, negatively altering the experiences of those in the classroom (Castagno, 2014, p. 85). Using race as a springboard for discussion is considered contribution to a system of impoliteness and fear, as conversations in topics such as these are outlawed because of the discomfort they might produce to those involved. And yet, even when references to racial disparities and experiences ensue, teachers and students use heavily coded language to merely

infer, but not explicitly state, their racial understandings, contributing to constant silencing on the topics (Castagno, 2014, p. 88). This continued silencing is a means of maintaining White, heteropatriarchal systems that must be unraveled, and teachers must be willing to lead the way. These conversations cannot become mere ghosts in the fabric of oppression, and consequently teachers must be committed to changing the system (Castagno, 2013, p.105).

Recommendations from Critical Race Theory. As the importance of serving all students within education builds, it is fundamental that the research regarding critical teaching within classrooms keeps up with the suggestions. Recommendations within curriculum abound, yet it seems that teachers are failing to implement such lessons within their classrooms. From suggestions of Patrick Camangian's (2015) humanizing pedagogies through critical action to Morrell's (2005) socially just and critical literature, the notions of translanguaging found in the work of de los Rios and Seltzer (2017) and the multicultural teaching of Sleeter (2017), the overwhelming suggestion for teachers is that their students of color will suffer until educators are willing to confront racism in the classroom. It seems there is not a lack of possible ways in which education, especially within the English Language Arts classroom, can be one of social justice and action. Instead there is a lack of willingness and disregard to providing voices to students of color and combatting White supremacy with representation and critical discussions in the classroom. Camangian's (2015) work explains that we must move beyond creating comfortable communities "for dialogue," but instead, as teachers, we must be challenged with creating "classroom cultures that critically nurture the stories, experiences, and "struggles" facing people of color (p. 436). These suggestions will be further explored and implemented into the fabric of the English Language Arts classroom and examined in terms of power and how to decenter it to better serve students.

Chapter IV: A Historical Understanding

The History of Education

The history of education within the United States reads far too similarly to the history of America that is taught within public education classrooms around the country: a history absent of the realities of assimilation, nationalism, and racism. *As a White woman teacher within the classroom, I have come to realize that we must understand the brutal foundations upon which the system was built, in hopes of ever dismantling such toxic structures.* In perpetuating such systems of Eurocentric teachings, "… the history of education [has] tended not to be conscious of methodological issues familiar elsewhere, while it generally privilege[s] a 'top-down' narrative of policy changes based on reports and government committees," (McCulloch, 2016, p. 51). The implication of an education system that functions through such a method of implementation is mere treatment like a business conglomerate; it is a system that is unaware of the realities facing those it is meant to serve. Worse yet, this out-of-touch education has contributed to a system that foundationally eradicates the knowledge and experiences for people of color. This is a process of dehumanization, and "[t]his ha[s] the effect of excluding voices and the views of many such girls and women, working class youth, ethnic minorities, immigrant groups, and indigenous peoples in many countries around the world," (McCulloch, 2016, p. 51). This system in education has systematically excluded voices in the perpetuation of nationalism and assimilation and serves as one of the most prevailing tools used in maintaining White hegemony within the United States.

Assimilation. In fully understanding the presence of power relations of the White woman teacher within education regarding literacy and curriculum, it is fundamental that the aims of assimilation are examined, as assimilation is one of the founding principles upon which education was created in the United States. The definition of colonialism in education, at its core,

is the attempt to indoctrinate all students toward a school of thought that aligns with Eurocentric values and norms (Kharem, 2006, p. 23). In perpetuating this thought process, there is an unraveling of culture, as the dominate White culture and American nationalism is heralded (p. Kharem, 2006, 26). "This colonial education in schools is present [in] K-12 [schools], where thousands of Hispanic, African, and Native American children… were and still are taught to live their lives based on a social order that devalues their cultures and people," (Kharem, 2006, p. 37). When educating minoritized populations, this means of assimilation is purposeful eradication of cultural value and understanding, which is present for immigrants in the public education system as well. Assimilation within education becomes a means of deciding an immigrant's role within the larger fabric of the American society, and even more specifically, educating them in to that role as citizens (Strouse, 1987, p. 105).

In examining school's roles in perpetuating these assimilatory systems, it is fundamental that the colonial practices by which they function are examined, as they are held under the guise that colonialists are "superior" to those that are colonized (de los Rios & Seltzer, 2017, p. 55). Colonialism is an inhabitation or imperial method by which the underlying culture and identity of a people, as well as all possessions are overtaken in the name of the colonizer. Public education systems do just this, devaluing the experiences and identities of disposed students and replacing their identities with White-hegemonic norms. "[I]nstead of the democratic education we claim we have, we really have in place a sophisticated colonial model of education designed primarily to train state functionaries and commissars while denying access to millions, which further exacerbates the equity gap already victimizing a great number of so-called "minority" students," (Macedo, 1993, p. 204). This notion implies that the current education systems functions with the principle intention of maintaining the gap of inequity and inequality, as a

means of preserving White hegemony. White woman teachers uphold this system through the continued work that maintains these practices, both intentionally and accidentally. As such, elements of nationalism are needed to maintain blind patriotism and its foundational roots.

Nationalism. Assimilation and nationalism within education are distinctly related, as assimilation attempts to inculcate students with White, Eurocentric norms and nationalism works to perpetuate a rallying mindset around such programming. Though Americans are often reluctant to consider themselves nationalists or their practices nationalistic, the public-school system is filled with different nationalism-building rituals that contribute to the mindset (Pei, 2003, p. 31). It is these daily routines that unnoticeably build nationalistic viewpoints surrounding American culture and Eurocentric values. Through mindless practices, such as the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance each day in public schools, the presence of flags in each of the classrooms, and the singing of the national anthem at school-sanctioned events, the clear message that is sent is one of patriotism (Pei, 2003, p. 32). This was, and at times still is further propagated in the literature taught within the English classrooms in the early 20th century, as many books push[ed] nationalistic viewpoints during wartimes (Applebee, 1976, p. 3). Yet, what complicates this understanding of nationalism within education is that it remains hidden to most Americans, as it is heralded as mere patriotism, though it nonetheless strips students, namely students of color, from cultures and identities they possess, and it indoctrinates their unknowing support in to a system that is built for White success and power (Pei, 2003, p. 34).

Teacher Education Programs. Diversity, inclusion, and awareness courses within teacher preparation programs have become tokenistic in nature. It seems schools merely include the courses to check a box that allows them to promote the "socially just" awareness in their school, while severely lacking the focus that is needed to stop education systems from continuing

the institutionalization of racism (Sleeter, 2017, p. 4). Additionally, the lack of rigor within program courses, and the subpar attempt at a "multicultural education," simply focuses on the beauty of diversity, while failing to educate new teachers on the systems of oppression that are plaguing their multicultural students (Sleeter, 2017, p. 4-5). Instead, "[c]ourses such as race relations, ethics, and ideology are almost absent from the teacher preparation curriculum. This serious omission is, by its very nature, ideological, and constitutes the foundation for what [is] call[ed] the pedagogy of big lies," (Macedo, 1993, p. 186). This notion implies that teachers are educated in coursework that does not serve students or their needs, but instead maintains the mirage of equality for all that has been painted within America and the educational system (Macedo, 1993, p. 186-187).

It must be noted that even within teacher education programs, the issues of social justice, as well as calls to action and proposed research are lacking within the education. Christine Sleeter (2017) addresses this lack of social justice education despite the presentation that such programs are created to be sites of inclusion, explaining that even when White teachers are educated in social justice classes, they find themselves "fatigued" from the discussions of race. Not to mention, the deficit lens through which they address students of color fails to change (p. 2). When examining the typified experiences of White students instead of students of color, students are addressed through a "cultural deficit model," that only further spreads the notion that students of color are "culturally deprived," (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 31). This places the believed onus on White woman teachers to 'save' students of color from their 'deprivation,' resulting in a cultural demonization and stripping that reasserts White, Eurocentric hegemony in schools.

The shift away from the deficit perspective approach toward a student-centered acknowledgement is foundational in breaking down the inequality within education and society, as it is at the forefront of creating socially just education programs (Sleeter, 2017, p. 5). Yet, this program is further complicated through the realization that "[e]ven the education provided to those with class rights and privileges is devoid of the intellectual dimension of teaching," which is done intentionally, as it perpetuates coloniality through the "deskilling" of teachers and a lack of abilities that will help teachers best serve their students of color (Macedo, 1993, p. 204). These teachers are taught to address the emotional needs of their White students, while failing to understand and address the needs of their students of color in their classrooms (Sleeter, 2017, p. 5). An education system that intentionally subjugates its students is doing little to change the fabric of racism in the United States. Instead, it does the opposite. It protects it.

Perpetuators of Systemic Racism. Though it is clear that the roots of assimilation and nationalism are the foundations upon which systemic racism is derived, the vehicles that ensure the system thrives are found "[w]hen [students] look around their poorly resourced or dilapidated surroundings, when they fail to see themselves in the tests and images they study, when they learn from unqualified teachers, when they are fed a steady diet of low-level, unchallenging skills and content, and when they witness the marginalization of their families and communities…" (Goodwin, 2010, p. 3112). This notion of systemic racism implies that the oppressive and discriminatory structures of racism are infused in to the entire public education system to indoctrinate minoritized students in to believing that their identity is not valued and does not belong within the societal fabric of the United States. Instead, these disposed students are intended to be educated only enough to remain complicit and void of critical thinking capabilities, leading to their mere compliance within a (mis)education system structured to

maintain their current status, (Macedo, 1993, p. 204). This (mis)education is only further pronounced in the curriculum methods and mandated standards that govern both teachers and schools.

The modes through which systemic racism is propagated are found within the toxic curriculum and testing culture that dominates public education. In the attempted elimination of multiculturalism, the creation of state and national standards is a means to eradicate teachings that are not steeped in White-hegemonic norms, and they are seemingly enforced through standardized testing that delineates school assessments and funding (Forbes, 2000, p. 7). This testing structure does little to root students' upbringings and knowledge within their own experiences, but instead selectively disprove their importance. Author Jack Forbes (2000) further expands on this notion in stating that "…there is a reason to believe that the push for 'standards' is actually an attempt to destroy multiculturalism, pluralism, and non-Anglo ethnic-specific curriculum by forcing all public schools to adhere to a curriculum approved by centralized agencies controlled by white people," (p. 7). This structure mandates what students learn and impacts their own advocacy and participation with the education they are receiving. Instead, White, Eurocentric ideals are transposed to disposed students, further alienating them from their communities.

Why White Women? In understanding the implications of curriculum and care in the public-school classroom, it is first necessary to broaden the historical notions of how teaching first became a White woman's profession. Initially built on the idea that [White] women belong in separate spheres than [White] men, women were to be relegated to positions in life that addressed the domestic sphere—tending to the house and keeping the children (Weiler, 1989, p. 15). The differentiation between spheres for men and women began shifting during the Civil

War, as men were fighting in the war, and the education of children still required attention. As this shift occurred, women began finding their way in to the classroom. Yet as industrialization spread through the American society in the mid 1800s, so too did the understanding that schooling for all children was a necessity (Weiler, 1989, p. 16). This shift in mindset required that more teachers be present to account for the influx in school children.

Merely playing in to continued understandings of power and dominance for women, White women were permitted to step in to the classroom, as they could be paid less for the same labor as White men, and the mindset regarding the school system was seen as a continuation of the family and home spheres (Weiler, 1989, p. 16-17). Thus, the assumed maternalistic nature of White women became the standard of care by which the classroom was built (Weiler, 1989, p. 17). The view that school was a mere continuation of home allowed teaching to transition to women's work, as women were intended to be the nurturers of school children until they had children of their own to tend to in their home (Weiler, 1989, p. 18). This view of teaching directly connects to the hetero-patriarchal norms that dominate the American society, only further complicated by the systems of colonization and assimilation that dictate practices in schools and the English classroom.

Today, White woman teachers plague classrooms, generating the educational experiences for all students within the system. These women continue to shape their classrooms through the curriculum they teach, and they continue feeding this notion of teaching as White women's work and the systems of power that have long outlived their careers in the classroom. As Peggy McIntosh (1992) explains, they can use their Whiteness as a means to blend in to society, continually having their experiences justified according to the color of their skin, a privilege far from afforded to those of color. And consequently, in creating their classrooms, they construct

curriculum that reaffirms their very existence and the existence of other White children within their classrooms. As explained by Christine Sleeter (2016,) "…Whites advance interests of people of color only when they converge with and advance White interests," (p. 3). As such, White woman teachers perpetuate the history of oppression that brought them to the teaching profession initially. Just as women were accepted within the classroom because of the cheaper cost of labor, so too, do they propagate the systems of power that have been built out of colonization and assimilation (Weiler, 1989, p.16). Though the systems do not always benefit them, they preserve Whiteness and the structures regardless. In beginning to breakdown these systems, reflections of personal narrative inquiry can lay the foundation for the guide informing critical White educators.

Chapter V: Reflections from an ELA, White, Woman Teacher

As I work to improve myself as a White educator, as well as unravel the toxic Whiteness that plagues the schools, I cannot help but reflect on the different ways I have seen the toxicity of Whiteness and teachings in my own English Language Arts classroom. These reflections are my personal narratives that have informed this research, as well as the different practices I use within the classroom. They are a glimpse in to the structures I see that are present, the ways in which I engage in them, and the work I feel still needs to be done. This section is centered on narrative inquiry, considerate commentary and question-posing, as a means of shaping what critical education components will best serve students. This reflection placed in conversation with Critical Whiteness studies and Critical Race Theory from the literature review, serves as an informant for the guide for Critical White educators that will be discussed later, examining different modes of power and how they are weaponized in the hands of White women, particularly in the English Language Arts classroom.

Finding Myself in the Literature

  Recognizing the History of Racism in My Whiteness. *To look in the mirror and truly face my Whiteness as a White woman teacher is both necessary and humbling. The history through which White women have come to the profession and the ways in which we have played in to a system of oppression and racism is more than simply troubling; it is a representation of all of the ways in which White women have contributed to the racial hierarchy that impacts minoritized populations and the colonial structures that gave way to such a system.* Peggy McIntosh (1992) argues that we are blind to our privilege and Whiteness, but *I must most humbly disagree. Instead of being blind toward our privilege, I believe we choose to live in a state of ignorance regarding the struggles of disposed youth.*

  If part of our task as teachers is to educate our students, we must feel obligated to first educate ourselves in the struggles our students face both in and out of the classroom. It is our job to stop our contribution to these systems, and Whiteness studies provide a framework in which we can begin realizing our positions of power and privilege, as well as work to dismantle the toxicity found within them (Castagno, 2013, 107). *This "ignorance is bliss" mentality must be upset and admonished, as White Women must begin facing their own privilege, power, and function as a vehicle for action. With such deep roots in the foundation upon which the structure thrives, it is no wonder how the current education system continually retraumatizes students, as it was created with the intentions of stripping and indoctrinating students of color in to Whiteness. Yet it is I, the White woman teacher, standing at the helm of such a ship, blind to the pained realities of minoritized students. If I ever hope to end my contribution to such a system, I must first understand how it functions.*

Education's Racialized History. In its very inception, the public education system within the United States was used as a means to maintain Eurocentrism, and this has continued to shape the very basis from which the system operates (Kharem, 2006, p. 23). *In teaching, I have found myself questioning my role as an educator, as well as my ability to challenge the dominate narrative as yet another White woman. In reading Harlem Renaissance literature with students, I cannot help but question the ways in which I am White-washing the works of Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Louis Armstrong. I have watched as my students of color have felt divorced from writers of color, as they feel the history seems detached from their own experiences, and I have most-ashamedly stood by as White students have dominated conversation, emotions, and histories of students of color within my classroom. As White woman teachers, we must understand the system to which we are contributing, so we can begin fighting against it. Yet, we must also examine how we represent and perpetuate White, patriarchal structures as it plays a distinct role in our ability to confront our Whiteness and proximity to power and begin breaking down the structures that target our students of color.*

Such an examination of Whiteness forces me to eliminate the excuses with which I approach my classroom, as they are protectors of my White fragility and perpetuators of my White privilege. I cannot help but realize that the moment we acknowledge the ways in which we oppress others, we must systematically work to change such structures. In doing so, I feel it is my job to begin addressing the ways Whiteness persists in my classroom, not only through my curriculum, but also the means through which I coddle the White fragility of students and grapple with the fear of creating discomfort in such practices. I can feel the ways in which fear typifies the silencing of students within the classroom, as I have found in my experience that it is underscored by both the school administration and the parents of students who are not

comfortable with engaging in such conversations. What does it look like to choose action over fear and to begin steeping the experiences of students in the classroom in the education they deserve? Students of color are being revictimized by my inaction in working to dismantle these systems. Earlier I suggested it was time to gather my people, but perhaps it is time I gather myself as well, learning from educators of color who address the needs of disposed youth.

       My Experiences with Teacher Education. *We all come from this system, in one way or another. We attended institutions of higher education to make our way in to the classroom, regardless of if our degrees were in the education department. Through higher education classes and professional development, we solidified our teaching certificates and became the White woman teachers present within the classroom, and now, the numbers are staggering.* In the 2015-16 school year, secondary public schools across the United States employed 80 percent White teachers, directly correlating to the 80 percent cohort of White teachers that graduated from institutions and entered the teaching force (National Center for Education Statistics; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). However, less than half of the students in K-12 public schools identify as White, disproportionately solidifying an educational experience centered in Whiteness for them (Sleeter, 2017, p. 1). The failure of teacher education programs is currently breeding professionals that are struggling with ill-preparedness in addressing their students of color in the classroom because their education has been rooted in Whiteness (Sleeter, 2017, p. 2). Though these programs are intended to groom teachers to lead students toward success, they are merely perpetuating a system of White privilege and fragility.

       In examining the damage of teacher education programs, we must first realize the ways in which such programs neglect Critical Race Theory frameworks and inclusionary practices to decenter power and debase systemic oppression within the classroom. *I will never forget one of*

my teacher preparation courses in which a professor and previous high school teacher stated the following, "Do not ask students to write about their own stories because it means you're more than likely going to have to contact DHS at some point. You do not want to be in the position to have to be the legal reporter." This has stuck with me for so long because of the power it portrays in being a teacher. Though this statement does not directly address race, to me, his suggestion implies that the experiences with which students enter the classroom are dangerous and, therefore, it is better that we silence them by avoiding the discomfort. If this same mentality is placed under a racial lens, then inevitably we are perpetuating the racist system in which students must comply to the dominating narrative. Admittedly, his experiences are centered in his own educational understanding, and they must be valued for the knowledge they possess. But, I wonder how we, as teachers, can create spaces in which students can feel safe to express their experiences while breaking up the hegemony present within education? How exactly does this system continue to find itself prevalent in schools today? Through the continued practices of teacher education programs that fail to break down the racial implications of Whiteness, nationalism and assimilatory culture in the United States and its schools are disseminated, and students of color must suffer at the hands of us, their [un]educated White woman teachers.

Whiteness in my Classroom. As the ever-privileged and damaging White woman teacher, it seems so much easier to avoid the realization that there is an entire area of research that is dedicated to examining how Whiteness serves as a constant protector of White privilege, power, and fragility, than to grapple with the trauma that is readily inflicted upon students of color. Whiteness is continually used within the classroom to maintain the power dynamic present within systems of racism. Examining such power allows us as White women to confront how Whiteness benefits us, while victimizing our minoritized students. "Oftentimes schooling

environments protect White fragility by providing a seemingly comfortable space where White teachers are neither required, nor expected to deal with difficult or stressful predicaments associated with race and/or racism," (Patton & Jordan, 2017, p. 89). *One of the most toxic ways in which, we, the White woman teachers perpetuate Whiteness and its fragility within the classroom is through the proliferation of silencing practices, as well as the fear of critically discussing and examining race, as they might inflict emotional distress upon White students.* Fear of discomfort and upset for students welcomes White privilege in to the classroom, as it simply reasserts the dominating narrative to White students and forces students of color to feel guilt for their own traumatization (Applebaum, 2018, p. 867).

   Curriculum Practices. *As a White woman teacher in the ELA classroom, I am forced to fight the daily battle of what it is to engage with canonical texts under the guise that they are "some of the most valuable pieces of work" from administration. Contention with limited funding, fragile teachers, and parent pushback has led to a system of literature in schools that is only representative of White, hegemonic norms. Just within my classroom, I have had parents suggesting that I was intentionally thrusting liberal ideology upon their child because our curriculum includes a text that centers the narrative around a Black teenage girl. Additionally, one of my fellow teachers was told that she was encouraging the use of "devil magic" because she is teaching a text that engages with "medicine men" from an indigenous tribal history. And, worse yet, I am being forced to teach a text dealing with race by a Black author in conjunction with a text that addresses race from a White perspective, just in case the book from the Black author makes students and/or their families too uncomfortable. These arguments over race are simply contributing to the notion that Eurocentric literature is what is best for our students when all other sources suggest that our students need to be represented in the texts they read, as well*

as be fed a diet of literature that introduces them to new cultures and ideas. When looking at the school classroom, Whiteness and the fragility it imposes play a key role in how race and racism are addressed.

As teachers empathize with White students and their anxieties found in examining Whiteness, they contribute to the inability to endure such agitation and "pressure people of color… to mollify white discomfort at the sacrifice of their own educational and emotional needs," (Applebaum, 2018, p. 867). At best, this is a blatant hijacking of the narratives and emotional support needed for people of color, and at worst, it is a continuation of the ways in which Whiteness infiltrates schools and preserves systemic racism. This enactment of Whiteness within the classroom also contributes to the narcissistic narrative that sustains such fragility and exists not as weakness, but instead power (Applebaum, 2018, p. 868). The failure to critically examine race and the implications for students of color is a blatant White washing of curriculum and education as a whole and is supported by outdated models of teaching.

Teaching Methods. *As yet another toxic White woman teacher, it is fundamental that I begin examining the research that tells the stories, struggles, and needs of minoritized populations, and begin addressing the ways in which the system can be dismantled. Experts on the subject have laid the groundwork from which teachers can begin paving the way to stop (re)traumatizing students, but we must be willing to follow the path that has been laid before us.* The Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework delineates ways in which we can begin addressing the needs of students, as it is a framework that is dedicated to ending the cycle of oppression within the United States and the public education system. CRT deeply examines the ways in which racism thrives, and it examines how Whiteness retraumatizes and propagates systematic racism in education (Sleeter, 2018, p. 3). The use of Whiteness within the classroom is not only

seen through the White-washed curriculum that is taught, but also through the perspectives by which teachers approach their students. Models of "meritocracy and 'color-blindness' insulate Whites," from having to address the privileged systems from which they benefit (Haviland, 2008, p. 41). These privileged systems shield White teachers from having to examine the pain and trauma that is continually inflected upon their students. They are the protection by which students and teachers avoid the confrontation of racial issues and conversations in the classroom.

The act of ignoring and therefore reasserting positions of power and Whiteness within the classroom perpetuates systemic racism as well. In a study completed by Haviland (2008), she found that "by carefully avoiding acknowledgement of the power that Whiteness conferred on us and instead positioning ourselves as less than powerful, we avoided seeing ourselves as powerful agents with an obligation to down our unearned privileges and fight to reform the institutions that conferred such privileges on us," (p. 44). This system of tip toeing around racial topics and inequities is instead complacent and complicit in a system that is intended to maintain a White-washed societal norm and understanding. In the classroom, the choice to sidestep these conversations is a distinct failure to recognize and legitimize the system that works against minoritized populations in the United States. This is only further propagated in the ELA classroom, as it easily becomes a site of colonization as deemed in its history and earliest function (Applebee, 1976, p. 1-2). *I have found that my understanding of how to address English language learners in my classroom is a distinct way in which I choose both the comfort and understandings of knowledge with which I address my students. In these moments, I have the power to alienate or honor the experiences of these students, choosing to isolate them from their cultures or include them in the knowledge present within the classroom (de los Rios and Seltzer, 2017, p. 58). This choice alone has the power to continue the system of silencing that allows*

White voices to dominate the common narrative. As White teachers, it is our job to serve all students that step into our classrooms and not mute our disposed populations that need their histories told.

Addressing Biases. *Critical race theorists offer innumerable ways in which White teachers can stop victimizing students of color, and yet I feel that far too few of them are actually put in to practice. As I consider my own classroom, I cannot help but think of the ways in which I attempt to engage students and the experiences with which they enter my classroom; however, with the push toward "academically inclined" curriculum it seems all the more difficult to create spaces in which students can share their own narratives. In teacher education programs, we are taught that it is our duty to serve students as best we can by preparing them for a future of success within the world.* However, the biases that teachers present to students of color may in fact break down this higher goal and only make the system worse. This simple reality is that "… White teachers' dispositions toward race may create internal obstacles to the implementation of both effective pedagogy and curriculum and a transformative response to inequitable policies," (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 302). These are biases that prevent teachers from best serving their students, as they only cater to students that look like and have a similar cultural identity to them. In this way, the classroom does not serve as a space for education and learning, but instead a space for reassertion and reaffirmation of White norms and power practices.

I can remember the exact time and space in which I was first asked to process the biases with which I approach my daily life. I was at a conference in Scottsdale, Arizona addressing education for an aging population when a professor presented a lecture on the ways in which our biases make up the racially bound fabric with which we address the world around us. She asked us to write down three biases we hold toward others within our lives and I remember

feeling that I had no biases to address—that is until she began flashing pictures of people upon

the screen and forcing us to make snap judgements about them. My face immediately flashed red

as I realized I was simply kidding myself to believe that I was free from biases. After moving past

my discomfort and realizing another way in which I exude fragility within my life, I began

processing how this might affect a career in education as I was just beginning to consider

teaching at this time.

   Failure to address biases is also a system of enacting Whiteness within my classroom,

and I must realize that I am not simply underscoring systemic racism, but I am contributing to

the daily erosion of culture and identity for students of color, as well as ill-preparing them for

the colonial structures that guide other areas of our society. "Denying disposed youth an

education that prepares them to confront the toxic unjust social conditions of their everyday life

intensifies the colonial conditions they face," (Camangian, 2015, p. 425). *When done well,*

English Language Arts classrooms have the potential to teach students to critically think, as well

as arm them with their empathy, culture, communication skills, and understanding. However,

when led poorly, they reassert colonial structures in the classroom by adhering to hegemonic

norms and failing to provide the education needed to deconstruct systems of racism and

oppression. Every day, we (teachers) are engaged with many different students, and we must

confront our biases in hopes of preventing them from traumatizing our students. It seems to me

that this would be a very impactful opportunity for professional development within schools, so

teachers, the holders of power, can begin addressing the perspectives through which they

approach their classrooms.

   Un-Racializing Care. *It has taken me a long time to see just how racialized care is. In*

first going through my educational experiences in my master's program, I was under the illusion

that care was the proper way to fight the system of oppression facing our students—that is until I was confronted with just what a White savior mentality I had. If we want to care for our students, we must be willing to accept, acknowledge, and honor the different ways in which care can be enacted by teachers, parents, and our students themselves. Care is a truly cultural and highly racialized phenomenon that looks extremely different for everyone (Garad, 2013, p. 69). *Though there is not a right way to enact care, there are certainly wrong ways to do so, and we as educators must be ready to understand this. Better yet, we must not allow ourselves to believe that the care of a White woman is all that is needed to save our students. They do not need saving. They need teachers that are ready to honor, respect, and empower them. Our students are survivors and we are merely there to help pave their way toward success through our ability to break down systemic oppression when we see it.*

Chapter VI: A Guide for Critical White Educators in the English Classroom

In facing my White woman-ness as a teacher, many different conversations have been opened to fully comprehend the pervasiveness of my privilege. Now, it is time to begin bringing these elements of the conversation together, better understanding all of the complexities present in defining what it means to decenter power within education, as well as end the cycle of trauma to students of color. This section will invite Critical Race Theory and Whiteness Studies into the English Language Arts classroom to dialog with one another about the implications of power that are found in them, and some of the practices that are suggested in deconstructing oppression in education. This will serve as a guide for critical White educators. The ELA classroom will be broken in to four main modes of power: the teacher, the curriculum, the methods, and the care. Bringing in CRT and Whiteness studies with these modes of power, instead of leaving them

isolated in ivory towers, is fundamental in changing the current system of racism hiding within schools.

The Teacher as a Mode of Power.

When White woman teachers address race within their classrooms, it is far too often examined through the lens of "the White savior," in which teachers attempt to "save" students of color from their race (Chubbuck, 2004, p. 304). The notion of "the White Savior" within education is one that reasserts White woman teacher's positions of power within the classroom, and it treats students of color as if they are broken and in need of Whiteness to repair the damage that has been ravaged on minoritized students. Additionally, this reaffirms the deficit model through which students of color are addressed, as it engages the notion that they need skills that can only be given from a White teacher. When disposed youth are addressed through such norms, their power is stripped from them, as the White teacher is helping for personal gain and possible assuaging of guilt for the Whiteliness that is inflicted within her classroom. *The antidote to such mindsets is a dose of Critical Race Theory that helps to address the needs of students of color in the classroom.*

White women teachers must begin addressing their positionality and their proximity to power if they are going to make a difference in the experiences their students are having in their classrooms. Merely addressing the system that benefits them is one of the first steps, as teachers can then have eyes that see the ways in which they are privileged, as well as their role in deconstructing and rebuilding the system. Positionality is not a stagnant identity, but instead a shifting standpoint that changes in different relationships, contexts, and experiences based on the positionality of others within the group. And, it is from this perspective that teachers can begin to

address the power dynamics and systems of privilege that modify their interactions with students, as well as their classroom epistemologies (Takacs, 2002, p. 168-169).

By further acknowledging the power with which they step in to the classroom, teachers can begin to understand how their power privileges them and the curriculum they are building. Unfortunately, often these systems of power and perspective are not challenged, as those within the system see themselves as representative of societal norms. Those who lack power are forced to explore their positionality within society constantly, while those with representation are not consciously forced to think about it (Mirra, 2018, p. 6). If teachers can begin processing through their positionality and potential privileges due to their proximity to power, students will greatly benefit from the critical considerations. "Simply acknowledging that one's knowledge claims are not universal truths – that one's positionality can bias one's epistemology – is itself a leap for many people, one that can help to make us more open to the world's possibilities," (Takacs, 200, p. 169).

Biases in Addressing White Students vs. Students of Color. *Admittedly, no matter how reluctantly, biases plague the experiences of teachers and students within education. Every teacher has a set of biases to which they adhere unintentionally as they help in navigating the world.* By addressing the biases and beginning to make steps that allow teachers to limit them, they may have regarding their students, teachers can begin to create a curriculum that limits these stereotypes instead of contributing to them (Hixon, 2010, p. 131). Biases are a part of the human experience and, as such, are unavoidable. Yet, teachers have a responsibility to limit such biases and address them by critically examining the ways in which their biases impact their relationships with students, as well as the general curriculum they are producing (Hixon, 2010, p. 132). *It is when these biases go unaddressed that they can produce a system of silencing of*

students within the classroom, especially those that do not adhere to White, heteropatriarchal norms.

Finding School Allies. *Continuing in my educational journey as a teacher, I have quickly realized that I cannot stand alone in making change within English classrooms, as it does little to address the entire system. It is fundamental that I find allies that I can have critical conversations with regarding systemic racism within education, deepening our understandings of the ways in which we can decenter Whiteness in the English classroom.* Critical hope provides an understanding of the ways in which Whiteness can be deconstructed, as it utilizes vulnerability "to encourage openness toward continued struggle and forefronts discomfort as a signal to be alert for what one does not know about others but also about oneself" (Applebaum, 2017, p. 872). When implemented among teachers, critical hope provides a basis from which teachers can engage with one another and students through a lens of openness. This relationship, continued discussion, and revisiting of systemic oppression is a way that teachers can build their own tolerance and "'psychosocial stamina'" in the midst of White fragility (Applebaum, 2017, p. 866). *Such stamina is fundamental, so I can continue decentering my own Whiteness and power. By finding allies and creating a teacher community that is dedicated to breaking down toxic hegemony, White educators can critically address the dynamics occurring in their own classrooms.*

Admittedly, in my experience thus far, I have found myself intimidated by having such conversations with other White teachers, afraid of isolating myself from the teams of educators with whom I work. However, this fear is yet again a manifestation of my White fragility and a distress that typifies my Whiteness. In beginning to engage with this notion, I am having to recognize the fear within myself and reconcile with sitting in the discomfort and toxicity of my

Whiteness that has plagued my students of color. In having such critical conversations with other teachers, I am learning to exercise my voice in a system that necessitates the "gathering of my people." I feel that the first place to start with creating allies among teachers is by building relationships centered on trust and respect, so we can assist one another in recognizing our fragility and biases. This requires the vulnerability in critical hope, as well as leading by example and standing steadily in the discomfort needed for critical conversations. In doing so, we must find those who are dedicated to our same pedagogy. Discomfort in learning is fundamental in perpetuating the educational process, as it requires critical examination of self and toxicity, key in breaking down Whiteness and fragility (Applebaum, 2017, p. 863). *This discomfort in learning should not just be utilized as a tool with students, but also as a means through which I and other teachers can help one another examine our own biases. In building such relationships, we must craft curriculum that is based in CRT, and use our power as a collective to initiate change within the department, as well as confront teachers who are perpetuating toxic systems within their rooms. We must be allies to one another and to our students of color.*

Curriculum as a Mode of Power.

In my (re)education as a White woman teacher, I have contended with the assimilatory nature of the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. As if my Whiteness has not shielded me enough from feeling the fallout of my privilege, I have found that the practices of the ELA classroom riddle it with the potential to be one of the most toxic spheres within the public-school system. English education serves as a space that reasserts Eurocentric hegemony in the literature that is used, and then reedifies the norms in curriculum to silence instead of educating. This is accomplished through the voices that are eradicated from curriculum major in ELA and has a

deeply rooted history of reaffirmation of White value and nationalistic teachings (Applebee, 1976, pg. 3). Yet at the helm of Whiteness within ELA, is the ELA classroom's distinct connection with coloniality.

Critical conversations. Allowing students to have critical conversations regarding the literature they are reading, the lessons they are learning, and the experiences they are undergoing is imperative to addressing students in a holistic manner. Critical literacy is fundamental in breaking down a continued system of oppression as it encourages students to begin thinking and processing for themselves, as well as challenging dominant mindsets and socialized stigmas throughout the world around them (Petrone & Bullard, 2012, p. 123). In this model, teachers help students to critically process through the material they are presenting, as well as create a critical discussion in which all students are welcome to participate and question how the material contributes to a system of injustices and power, as well as what can be done to promote equality instead of inequality. This system teaches students to critically examine the materials they have been presented, as well as analyze them for their biases and potential perpetuation of an unjust system (Petrone & Bullard, 2012, p. 123).

Acknowledging Histories. Teachers in the classroom must work to create lessons that are indicative of the experiences of their students. Addressing students so that they are valued for the knowledge with which they enter the classroom, instead of the knowledge they must gain, allows teachers to value the experiences of their students (Bernal, 2002, p. 117). One of the many ways teachers can enact caring lessons is using narrative writing and breaking the system of ever-present silencing. Narrative writing in the classroom allows students to better understand their own identities, as well as explore the cultural identities of those within their community by recounting the histories of those who may have been excluded from the larger White,

heteropatriarchal, American narrative (Torre, 2009, p. 111). Through the use of critical theories, such as Critical Race Theory, teachers can begin exploring how knowledge is valued based on those in power and deconstructing these theories and dominating practices (Torre, 2009, p. 111).

Counter-Narratives. One of the most significant ways in which CRT works to dismantle the system of racism is through the counter-stories that run parallel to the master stories of Whiteness that are pervasive perpetuators of White privilege. These stories are a form of "resistance" as they challenge the narrative that perpetuates Whiteness (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). The retelling of stories and reframing of identity and truth has the power to begin breaking down the manipulated truth of heralded Whiteness that dominates society, especially within schools (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 31-32). When brought into the classroom, counter-storytelling has the power to be an act of resistance used by the White woman teacher to break down the dominating narrative of Whiteness. Reinserting the voices of students of color and giving them the space to be the sources of knowledge and experience within the classroom is a fundamental way in which teachers can address the damages of Whiteness (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 37).

Action Based Research. Action based research is another way in which teachers can begin breaking down standard notions of teaching and prevalent systems of power by allowing students to explore the collective histories and identities of those within their communities. In this system of teaching, teachers utilize student narratives and pair them with research from within their community to spark critical conversations and understandings of how their identities and experiences have value in the larger, collective narrative of understanding (Torre, 2009, p. 111). Students develop their own ideas for research based on topics that are meaningful to them and the community surrounding them, and then take on the role of researchers and using their

knowledge and experiences with quantitative and qualitative research methods to better understand their topic, as well as draw meaningful conclusions for future inquiry (Mirra, 2018, p. 53). *In allowing students to formulate their own research, as well as be the bearers of their own knowledge, teachers can begin erasing the history of invisibility that has perpetuated a system of oppression. Yet, critical conversations must take place within the classroom for both students and teachers to grow and better understand the experiences of those around them.*

Literature. As traditional English education was included in schools during the late 19th century, (an education system created for White male students nonetheless,) nationalism and Protestantism were the principle messages woven throughout the books that were studied (Applebee, 1976, p. 3-5). Through the progression of the English classroom, literature was used as a means of curriculum and instruction; however, much of it was pulled from the literary canon, a selection of European standards that were and continue to be proclaimed as "classic" texts (Applebee, 1976, p. 3-6). This use of Eurocentric literature laid the foundation for the texts that are most highly regarded in Anglo understandings. And, unsurprisingly, many of these same texts plague English classrooms today. The defense of the White canon of literature within education is a continued argument that only White contributions to art and literature hold value (Forbes, 2000, p. 11). It serves as an alienation of minoritized populations and it sends a clear message to students of color that their cultures and identities do not matter.

The literature that is presented within the English classroom is one of the most fundamental ways in which teachers address diversity and representation of their students in their curriculum and, often, teachers have some sort of direct control regarding the literature that is taught in their classrooms, the way the literature is taught in their classrooms, or both. Literature taught in the classrooms has sweeping implications for students of color as they

determine whether they see themselves represented in the curricula major within the school. It is not enough to merely offer diverse literature in times of heritage months or "token" units on multiculturalism. Instead, representation and diversity within literature must implicitly find its way into the curriculum just as Eurocentric norms are propagated through it (Schieble, 2012, p. 219). By allowing students to identify with the literature that is taught, as well as better understanding the experiences of those that differ from them, students can begin breaking down Whiteness and its role within literature and the dominant society through reading, narrative writing, research projects, and classroom activities (Durso, 2002, p. 2).

The next question to be addressed is the ways in which literature serves as a means to build certain skills within curriculum minor, such as the understandings of empathy that are byproducts of engaging with reading and literature. In his work, Macedo (1993) explains that students do not often read about racism and systems of oppression that may be impacting them in their communities (p. 189). This runs contrary to what is recommended within the ELA classroom. English education does far more than educating within the confines of reading and writing. It is a mechanism for building empathy when encouraged by the teacher, and it can be a vehicle for encouraging critical thinking, and an opportunity to level the playing field of education (Mirra, 2018; Macedo, 1993). However, "…the development of a critical comprehension between the meaning of words and a more coherent understanding of the meaning of the world is a prerequisite to achieving clarity of reality," (Macedo, 1993, p. 196). Through the art of storytelling and the reading of experiences that differ from one's own, empathetic connections are built with others and the possibilities of sharing and expressing vulnerabilities tied with this work build empathy (Mirra, 2018, p. 6-7).

Teaching Methods as a Mode of Power

It is clear that I, the White Woman teacher, have more power than I know what to do with. And as such, it is up to me to begin wielding that power to make change in the systems that contribute to racist and colonial structures. Addressing teaching methods is one of the ways in which this can be done as it allows me to address aspects of the system that are intentional perpetuators of White privilege and racism. This power is particularly relevant within the English classroom as it serves as a space for engaging with critical thought, the reaffirmation of cultures, and the building of empathy. In the English classroom, it is key that we address the modes through which we teach, in addition to the literature and critical conversations that take place. Yet, this alone is not enough to reshape and redefine the racist system that is facing our minoritized students. We must also engage with the different ways to examine care within schools, as well as what it looks like to address language skills.

Moving Toward Critical English Education. The concept of critical English education by Ernest Morrell (2005) is a structure that works to dismantle current power dynamics amid literacy and language education while making them relevant to students today (p. 313). His call for critical English education hinges on the idea that the subject of English is deeply rooted in politics, as well as the wish to perpetuate change utilizing the subject as its vehicle because it is fundamental to developing students that are citizens and community members, ready to elicit transformation within their spaces (Morrell, 2005, p. 314). "Those who believe in a critical English education see language and literacy learning as political acts, realize literacy as tied to power relations in society, and recognize literacy educators as political agents capable of developing skills which enable academic transformation and social change," (Morrell, 2005, p. 313). Through Morrell's methodology within education, there is a distinct mindset shift of education as a subject that injects power through assimilation and cultural stripping, toward a

subject that empowers students to critically examine their communities and become agents for change (Morrell, 2005, p. 314). This framework requires ELA teachers to be "activists and intellectuals" that shift their methodological power within the classroom from depository structures that Freire criticizes, toward the problem-posing education he suggests that engages students with their learning and allows them to be advocates within the process (Freire, 1972, p. 78-81).

  Multicultural Curriculum. When utilizing a framework that addresses the major issues within the education system, the methods teachers use to instruct their students must change. Christine Sleeter (2000), offers a model of multiculturalism within education that works to re-center the process and viewpoint from which teachers educate their students. She asserts that multiculturalism is fundamental in bringing in different voices and encouraging critical thought and understanding from students, yet it is rooted in first recognizing "whose experience frames" the knowledge that is valued within society (p. 183). She argues that we as teachers must critically examine whose experiences we are centering within the narrative in curriculum (Sleeter, 2000, p. 184). The curriculum we build must not deny the experiences with which students enter the classroom, but instead reaffirm them and use them to contribute to the dismantling of systemic racism. She explains that in order to do so "knowledge must be created with sensitivity to what the community sees as its problems and concerns, build on the strengths and resources of the community, and take account of the actual lived experiences of people in the community," (Sleeter, 2000, p. 186). Her method utilizes Critical Race Theory in the way that it addresses how the narratives of minoritized populations must be utilized in the process of centering experiences within the classroom. Critical Whiteness is engaged within her theory as it pertains to the power with which White teachers address their classrooms. Her curriculum

encourages teachers to ask the following questions about knowledge that she found from another history teacher: "who created it, for what purposes, and who benefits by its creation?" (Sleeter, 2000, p. 187). Multicultural education acknowledges that it has the power to "subjugate" and to "liberate" and it is up to me, the teacher, to guide such modes of power (Sleeter, 2000, p. 190).

Language and accessibility. *As a White woman teacher in the English classroom, language is central to many of the curriculum practices and things we do within that space, yet it is easily one of the most racialized and demanding arenas for English Language Learners within schools. The modes through which teachers address language and its acquisition is fundamental as this space is easily a colonizer to students. Teachers must allow students to be themselves and engage in the languages that have served them. Denying them this is denying them their identity that centers their beings. This eradicates the experiences of students, and it easily diminishes their experiences.*

Coloniality stands as a pillar within schools and many of its policies are still felt in the English classroom considering that the enforcement of "restrictive language policies that do not align with Standard English" are used to scrutinize students and isolating them from their cultures through the systematic administration of English-only education (de los Rios and Seltzer, 2017, p. 58). The devaluing of other languages in an English-only education is a "nationalistic project…" used as a means to differentiate other cultures not centered around Whiteness and its norms (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007, p .1-2). This work becomes increasingly toxic for Latino/a students as the demonization of Spanish is synonymous with the continued racism that faces the students of color who speak it (de los Rios and Seltzer, 2017, p. 55). Yet, language itself is only one facet of the toxicity in English education as the literature that is taught

with certain curricular principles underlines the message that the English classroom is one of assimilatory practices that started with its inception.

Care as a Mode of Power.

It only seems right to attempt to break down the ever-present notions of care and power that are at play in what is valued in education. Care as a mode of power has the ability to reassert White hegemonic norms or break them down within the school system. In believing there is only one correct way to care for students, White woman teachers are examining the ways in which the system reaffirms the identities of only some students. The care of the White woman teacher is one that is centered in notions of Whiteness and hetero-patriarchal mothering. As the White experience is often epitomized as the only valuable, understandable, and supposed "correct" means of caring within education, caring practices of the White woman teacher dominate in the understanding of what it means to care for students. In her article, Brooke Harris Garad (2013) explores some of the literature that deconstructs the findings of one of the dominant scholars in care theory, Nel Noddings. She found that though it attempts to address the importance of care within education, it does so from a perspective that is centered in "colorblindness" (Garad, 2013, p. 68). Care that is centered in nurturing only the individual versus the community, just as care that is centered in colorblindness instead of color consciousness, is a disservice to all students of color (Garad, 2013, p. 69). This heavily racialized notion of care and its intersection with gender in the classroom creates experiences that reenact power struggles and dominant culture. Failure to acknowledge this system and the work to care for students in a culturally relevant way reaffirms privilege centered in the White experience and reasserts social injustice in the classroom (Garad, 2013, p.78).

In its formation, well-circulated care theories address only certain students within the system leaving others to be ghosts within the classroom, unaddressed by the curriculum, and untouched by the care theories enacted. In these instances, Madrid explains that it is not a question of what care is, but instead what it does, who it is for, and who is oppresses (Madrid, 2013, p. 83). "Centered on 'individual nurturing that emerges from the mother-child relationship,' and couched within White ideals of morality and ethics, Noddings's conceptualization of care fails to account for institutionalized racism and structural inequalities that cannot be challenged on an individual level," (Garad, 2013, p. 68). Examining power structures within care as they collide with race instead shows the privilege of care and how it can be used to both enact love and inflict trauma (Madrid, 2013, p. 84). Hetero-normative notions of care dictate dominant notions of what it means to care and why it is to be considered a beneficial system. *Teachers must understand the way care functions within education and begin examining culturally relevant ways they can care for their students in the classroom. Care for students is inherent in the curriculum teachers create and, thus, is a critical component in transforming classrooms to be sites of education instead of assimilation.*

Chapter VII: Concluding the Conversation—Limitations and Implications

Throughout history, "helpless" White women have begged and pleaded for the assistance of women of color and the strength they exude, yet the fragility and helplessness of White women served as their excuses for inaction in uplifting their sisters of color. As White women have been forced to face their traumatizing inaction, they have wielded their tears as protectors and manipulators, their saving grace from truly having to face the anguish they have caused. Worse yet, their inaction has continued, as "… the self-centered strategies of white feminists comforting one another serve to preserve white moral self-image and to deflect attention away from the

concerns and emotions of feminists of color," (Applebaum, 2017, p. 865). White feminists have continually denied assistance and betrayed feminists of color due to their proximity to power with little regard for the dehumanization they are causing and, yet, their emotional response is steeped in guilt and refusal to change the system. "When white discomfort is comforted, white women are relieved from all accountability," (Applebaum, 2017, p. 865). This hyper use of White fragility shields and assuages White women from ever examining how their privilege maintains their power and what steps must be taken to unravel such systems. At the center of this power dynamic, is the need to first decenter Whiteness. *Such complicity in a system of racism stands as the sheer epitome of White women's refusal to fight for women of color throughout history.*

Acknowledging the damaging narrative of White woman teachers necessitates no longer using the tears and guilt of White fragility as a shield from fighting for students of color. This passive aggression is an act of complicity and complacency in a system of racism, as it is distinctly allowing continued oppression to thrive (Sleeter, 2017, p. 5). *When do we cease believing our role is wrapped up in the "damsel in distress" mentality and take up the sword to fight? Our silence has contributed to the systemic racism found within the public schools and, as teachers, this must be our rallying cry. I cannot consider myself a teacher if I am only educating the select few. I cannot knowingly stand in front of my students of color each day and contribute to their oppression. And I cannot idly stand by when the system intended to set students free is merely binding them more. I have found that I stand at a crossroads as a White woman teacher and so do you. The work has been laid before us by strong educators, philosophers, and feminists of color that have been fighting for years. They have been waiting for us to join the*

fight, and we cannot ignore their cries any longer. To do so is to fail those who have always

fought for us.

Further Discussion and Research

      Admittedly, this work is a start in examining the ways in which we as White woman

teachers shield ourselves within our classrooms and work to perpetuate systems of colonialism,

privilege, fragility, and power. It is time that we stop excusing ourselves from the power that we

possess to make change within the system. As was discovered earlier, we make up a majority of

teachers and, consequently, we make up a majority of the teachers that are upholding systemic

racism within public education. How can we start to unravel our Whiteness from our teaching

and address the ways in which we normalize and centralize White norms and practices? Further

research is needed to fully address some of these concerns, but at the heart of the discussion is

the ways in which we, White women, can sidestep our fear and fight for those who need us most.

However, to do such work requires further examinations in the excuses of the White woman

teacher, the impact of decentering power in education, hidden curriculum that might arise, and

the limitations found within this research.

      Excuses of the White Woman Teacher. *The White fragility of women has long since*

paved the path for the excuses of the White woman teacher in the classroom. As the research

cries for action, it too offers ways in which the system can be changed, yet White women still

reign as the queens of excuses. Within schools, each of these excuses has been played out time

and time again, yet again, surviving on the fear of White women. Admittedly, even within my own

experience, I have heard and given some of the excuses and yet that is all they are – excuses,

meaningless justifications for why I, or those around me, have allowed oppression to exist in our

classrooms. Some of these excuses are, but are not limited to, the following: "We must teach the

best literature. Our children deserve it…" "This is the way we have always done it…" "They are classics that I read in school…" "I need to keep my job; I can't afford to lose it…" "We do not have the money for new books…" "parents will be upset…" "my administration does not support me…" "this has nothing to do with race…" and the list continues. Further research must examine what excuses teachers are giving, the work that has been done to combat them, the hidden reasoning behind why these excuses thrive, why White women live in fear of acting, and possible solutions for how to begin ridding the excusatory system.

Impact of decentering power. *More research must be conducted to examine how power can be upset within schools and, better yet, the impact that deconstructing such systems will cause. This decentering of power is key in re-centering the narratives of students of color and beginning to break down current systems of oppression. It is up to teachers to unravel the White, heteropatriarchal systems of power and colonization that shaped education, something that is all the more prevalent in the English Language Arts classroom as it becomes a site of continued oppression and assimilation practices. Only for our students can we begin to challenge a system that prides itself on oppression.* "Perhaps most important, we need to recognize that institutional racism is silently tearing at the fiber of our schools and our society. It is not simply an "inconvenience" for a statistical minority. Until we are able to see its seriousness and pervasiveness, we will not be willing to commit the time and resources needed to confront this overwhelming challenge." (Hanssen, 1998, p. 698).

Possible Other Hidden Curriculum. Just as issues surrounding the inequities within education are addressed, new issues always have the potential to arise. When new curriculum is presented, keen eyes must examine the impact it will make. As presented by Jane R. Martin (1976), "…curriculum proper is failing while hidden curriculum thrives: students do not learn to

read, they do not learn math or science, or any of the other subjects and skills endorsed by all parties to the education enterprise; what they do learn is to be docile and obedient…" (p. 136). When a curriculum of racism is found within the classroom, it is not enough to simply change the issue. Instead, these subjects must be unraveled to ensure that students are not continually traumatized by the system (Garad, 2013, p. 66). As I, the White woman teacher, work to enact critical care within the classroom, as well as a curriculum that critically cares for students, hidden curriculum that might arise must be investigated and consciousness must be raised regarding the issue. It is not enough to solve the issue of inequality in education. Instead, I must be willing to constantly scrutinize the curriculum and classroom for other hidden agendas that might arise and ensure that the system they have created does not continue to disadvantage other students within the school and raising consciousness about it when it does (Martin, 1976, p. 149).

Limitations

Admittedly, this research fails to acknowledge some of the fundamental ways in which racism and racialized practices drive White privilege and White fragility within schools. Yet, this work is intended to serve as a conversation starter in looking at how we, White woman teachers, can not only stop traumatizing our students of color, but work to dismantle the systems that drive oppression. In addition, the ELA classroom was only examined on four sources of power although other sites exist. In looking at the current limitations, it is clear that this does not fully examine the ways in which teachers are already engaging in these practices. Not all teachers are traumatizing students in these ways, and some are working diligently to address these systems. These teachers are enacting transformative practices that cannot be ignored and they are paving the way for further educators such as myself. For that, I am extremely grateful.

Some of these systems of power that are present are beyond teacher control. School districts, site administrators, funding constraints, curriculum mandates, testing cultures, and national expectations are some of the constructs of power operating to maintain current oppressive structures that were not examined within this paper. Instead, this research only looks at the possible ways in which teachers can enact transformative practices within their classrooms through the use of Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness studies. An in-depth examination of the various ways in which power is enacted from the national to the individual level would be key in truly comprehending how enmeshed the system is, as well as what can be done to address such issues.

Finally, another one of the limitations present within this conversation is that I am but another White woman that is discussing race. Though I hope I have brought together many different conversations that can provide the foundation needed for this discussion, I realize that it has been examined through a White lens. *I hope this research can serve as the launching point from which further research can be conducted that is not steeped in Whiteness, but instead the experiences of students within classrooms. White teachers and their toxic practices must be addressed. Feigning blindness to the issue can only work for so long and it is now time that we take up the mantle to fight.*

Why It Matters

It is up to us, the White woman teachers to unravel the White heteropatriarchal systems of power and colonization that have shaped education, something that is all the more prevalent in the English Language Arts classroom as it becomes a site of continued oppression and assimilation. Only for our students can we begin to challenge a system that prides itself on oppression. So, the question becomes, why this research? My answer is simple. I cannot be

another White woman teacher who fails her students. I cannot walk into a classroom with the

continued air of privilege that has failed our brothers and sisters of color for years. I cannot

contribute to the fabric of racism, discrimination, and cultural stripping that plagues the public

education system. And, I cannot serve as another bridge upon which the current White,

Eurocentric, heteropatriarchal system further indoctrinates minoritized students into clear

systems of assimilation and destruction. The research has been done, but now the conversation

must be started. What does it look like when we examine the roots of the education system,

dialog about best practices within Whiteness Studies and Critical Race Theory, and start shifting

the power system that disadvantages anyone lacking a fair complexion? It is time that we as

White woman teachers abdicate our thrones. What is there to lose? Our students of color are

already losing because of us.

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