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## Equity Pedagogies, Hidden Curricula: Social-Emotional Wellbeing Among Students Of Color In Elementary School

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EQUITY PEDAGOGIES, HIDDEN CURRICULA:  
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AMONG STUDENTS  
OF COLOR IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Dissertation Presented

by

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## ABSTRACT

The shift in the nation's political climate between 2016-2019 has exacerbated the longstanding pervasive issues of racism and discrimination against People of Color and those marginalized by societal inequity. This has serious implications for teaching and schooling, as it causes children to feel unsafe, question their sense of belonging, and internalize racial oppression. Indicators of inequitable school experiences for Students of Color and students from marginalized identity groups warrant attention to the socially determined facets of public education: specifically a sense of school belonging (SOSB) for Students of Color, the impact of racial trauma, the patterns of social engagement that shape their experiences, as well as the pedagogical practices teachers employ to support their social-emotional wellbeing.

This qualitative case study seeks to illustrate how classroom teachers at Arday Elementary School support the social-emotional wellbeing of Students of Color by examining their understanding of racial trauma and SOSB and their use of equity literate pedagogies in the classroom to effectively support their Students of Color in a public elementary school in Northern New England. Findings include the hidden curriculum, teacher critical consciousness, cultural congruence, learning environment, racial trauma, and resistance. These findings point to a newly conceptualized framework, Equity Pedagogy for Social-Emotional Wellbeing (EPSEW), which applies a social determinants perspective to examinations of educational inequity and considers the social and community contexts that predetermine and influence inequitable outcomes.

*Keywords: equity pedagogy, equity literacy, social determinants, school belonging, racial trauma, internalized racism, social emotional well-being, critical pedagogy, anti-bias education*

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Critical Consciousness:** The ability to recognize, analyze, and challenge systems of inequity; The socio-political awareness of the acquisition of social stereotypes, their dominant tendencies, and the implications for one's own practice; The will to recognize how one's membership in a socially dominant group impacts systems of oppression and marginalization.

(DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010; Freire, 1970; Howard, 2012)

**Equity Pedagogy:** Teaching strategies and learning environments that enable students to “help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society” and question the “assumptions, paradigms, and hegemonic characteristics” that characterize their social and community contexts.

(McGee Banks and Banks, 1995, p.152).

**Equity Pedagogy for Social-Emotional Wellbeing (EPSEW):** Teaching strategies and learning environments that prioritize the social-emotional wellbeing of students marginalized by social inequity. They are grounded in a social determinants perspective that recognizes the social and community contexts embedded in the hidden curriculum that influence inequitable outcomes.

**Marginalization/ Marginalized by Social Inequity:** At the institutional level - Disadvantaged by social and institutional structures such as harmful policies and practices that prioritize the wellbeing of members of socially dominant subgroups. At the socially mediated level - The condition of being minoritized, excluded, devalued, diminished, othered, viewed as an outlier, having one's needs ignored, lacking a sense of belonging, and perceived through a deficit lens.

**People of Color (POC) & Students of Color (SOC):** People or students who identify as members of a race other than White, or as having non-European lineage. This term often emphasizes common experiences with institutional racism. I have chosen to capitalize these phrases, along with other terms used to refer to racial groups such as Black, White, and Asian.

**Racial Trauma/Internalized Racism:** Trauma resulting from experiencing major acts of racism, or the cumulative impact of more insidious occurrences like discrimination, microaggressions, or erasure. The manifestation of internalized racial oppression and the inculcation of racist stereotypes and ideologies that result in self-hatred, self-doubt, fear of violence, isolation, disrespect for oneself and one's race, feelings of inferiority, and subservience. (Lipsky, 2016; Pheterson, 1986; Pyke, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Woodson, 1990).

**Sense of School Belonging:** An individual's perceptions of the extent to which they are included, supported, respected, validated, and affirmed by others in their social environments. (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Also referred to

as: school connectedness, attachment, relatedness, bonding, climate, and engagement (Barber & Schluterman 2008; Brown & Evans 2002; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Hawkins & Weis, 1985; Johnson, 2009; Libbey, 2004; McNeely et al. 2002; Moody & Bearman 2004; O’Brennan & Furlong 2010; Townsend & McWhirter 2005). A belief that school is important, and a positive perception of teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, a safe school environment, and opportunities to be involved in school life (Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Prince & Hadwin, 2013).

**Social and Community Contexts:** One of the five dimensions of the World Health Organization’s Social Determinants of Health framework which includes the subcategories: Social Cohesion; Civic Participation; Discrimination; and Incarceration. This study refers to the social cohesion subcategory, specifically, a sense of school belonging, social norms, congruence through shared identity, values, or understandings, and patterns of engagement.

**Social Determinants of Health (SDOH):** “The conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age” (“Social determinants of health,” 2018). Those conditions impact the health of individuals and communities, and include: social gradient, employment conditions, social exclusion, social support, stress, early childhood development, education, globalization, health care systems and programs, government policies, urbanization, physical environments, addiction, food security, housing, transportation, and gender equity. Socially determined factors that lead to disparate health inequities are shaped by political, social, and economic forces such as unequal distributions of income, wealth, power, social influence, and desirable resources at local, national, and global levels. (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018; Commission on Social determinants of health, 2008).

**Social-Emotional Well-being:** A state of well-being in which the individual is able to recognize their abilities, cope with normal levels of stress, work productively, and contribute to their community. Influenced by interpersonal interactions, community contexts, and policy. Mental health; not just the absence of mental disorder (World Health Organization, 2014).

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The shift in the nation's political climate between 2015 and 2019 has exacerbated the longstanding, pervasive issues of racism and discrimination against People of Color and others marginalized by societal inequity (Bazelon, 2016; Huang & Cornell, 2019). According to FBI Hate Crime statistics, there was a 17% increase in hate crime reports from 2016 to 2017 (Hate Crime Statistics, 2017). The drastic uptick in reported hate crimes during this period is significant – second only to the surge in hate crimes following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (Gould & Klor, 2016; Hanes & Machin, 2014; Müller & Schwarz, 2018; Panagopoulos, 2006; Pollock, 2017; Rushin & Edwards, 2018). Between the day after the 2016 election and February 7, 2017, over 1300 bias incidents were catalogued with anti-immigrant incidents the highest reported, followed by anti-Black incidents. K-12 schools were listed as the most frequently reported hate incident locations – higher than businesses, universities, public spaces, or places of worship (Pollock, 2017). While the presence of racism, both overt and covert, is certainly not a new phenomenon in the United States, the election of Trump was followed by a rise in the open presence of White supremacists, White nationalists, neo-Nazis, racial extremists, and members of organized hate groups who publicly celebrated his election, often invoking his name at Alt-Right rallies and during violent, racially motivated assaults (Bell, 2019). This visibility served to contextualize a “new extremist normal” (Bell, 2019, p. 308), wherein hate groups boldly propagated their White supremacist ideologies and publicly recruited supporters to their cause, particularly on college campuses.

Our nation's current immigration policies and pervasive political rhetoric that seek to dehumanize and devalue People of Color have serious implications for teaching and schooling: they cause children to feel unsafe, make them question their sense of belonging, and lead to feelings of insecurity, withdrawal, and internalized oppression among Students of Color (Apple, 2018; Huang & Cornell, 2019; Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2011; Lee & Leets, 2002; Matsuda, 1989; Nansel et al., 2001). Under these conditions, students' academic engagement and performance suffer (Cornell, Gregory, Huang, & Fan, 2013), further exasperating the achievement gap between White, middle class students and students from socially marginalized groups (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006; Ellis, Rowley, Nellum, & Smith, 2018; Howard, 2010; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

The distributions of social determinants that contribute to a child's social-emotional well-being and sense of school belonging (SOSB) are shaped by public policies that reflect predominant political beliefs in a community (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Huang & Cornell, 2019; Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). People marginalized by social inequity are particularly vulnerable to the disparate outcomes that result. For Students of Color, this vulnerability can manifest as internalized racism, or racial trauma. The effects of internalized racism and internalized racial oppression range from psychological injuries (Speight, 2016) such as self-hatred and self-rejection (Clark & Clark, 1950; Harrell, Hall, & Taliaferro, 2003; Utsey, Giesbrecht, Hook, & Stanard, 2008; Williams & Williams, 2008), to compromised physical health for People of Color (Krieger, 1999; Paradies et al., 2015; Pieterse, Todd, Neville, & Carter, 2011). Additionally, racial trauma contributes to disparate rates in academic achievement in

school (Ogbu, 1979) which in turn contributes to decreased economic prosperity and social mobility (Howard & Navarro, 2016), and higher rates of incarceration (Alexander, 2010). Racial trauma often lies at the root of an individual's ability to reach their potential and achieve success, self-actualization, and healing (hooks, 1994).

These indicators of inequitable school experiences for Students of Color and students from marginalized identity groups warrant attention to the socially determined facets of public education: specifically an SOSB for Students of Color, the impact of racial trauma, the patterns of social engagement that shape their experiences, as well as the pedagogical practices teachers employ to support their social-emotional wellbeing.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative case study sought to understand how classroom teachers at Arday Elementary School supported the social-emotional wellbeing of Students of Color. Through interviews and classroom observations, this study examined teachers' understandings of SOSB for Students of Color, the pedagogical practices they employed, and the impact of racial trauma on social-emotional wellbeing. This three-year study addressed the following research questions:

1) In what ways did the teachers from Arday Elementary School practice equity literate pedagogy to effectively support their Students of Color?

2) How does the application of a Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) perspective reflect teachers' understanding of the systemic nature of educational inequity and the complexity of sense of belonging for Students of Color?

This multi-year, qualitative case study aimed to encourage a consideration of the social determinants, or the many factors that influence a child's social-emotional

wellbeing and sense of belonging at school, which may help broaden perspectives regarding a systemic rather than individualistic approach to understanding and addressing educational inequity.

### **Purpose**

For Students of Color, racial trauma is a significant consideration with regards to their social-emotional experiences in school (Speight, 2016; Utsey et al., 2008). Because the vast majority of the nation's teachers are White compared to less than half the nation's students (Taie & Goldring, 2017), it is important for teachers to gain a better understanding of racial trauma and the manifestations of internalized racial oppression among Students of Color at school (Bivens, 2005; hooks, 1994; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Jones, 2000; Ogbu, 1987; Pyke, 2010). As many schools undergo "trauma training" in order to increase their knowledge about and improve their pedagogical practices with students who have experienced trauma, the inclusion of racial trauma must be considered in faculty and staff professional development (Ko et al., 2008).

Additionally, by highlighting exemplary teaching practices in a small, refugee resettlement city in northern New England with a significant population of Students of Color with a first language other than English, this study will further inform teachers' understanding of inequitable social-emotional school experiences for Students of Color and students from other socially marginalized groups.

Chapter Two of this dissertation draws parallels between the SDOH framework, racial trauma, and the equity literate pedagogical practices that support the social-emotional wellbeing of Students of Color at school. Chapter Three outlines the qualitative research methods used in this multi-year case study. Chapter Four contains

two manuscripts that describe the results of the data analyzed. Chapter Five provides a summary of findings and presents additional findings that supplement those addressed in the two manuscripts, as well as discussion relating the findings to the existing body of literature. Finally, Chapter Six concludes the study by outlining the implications for future research, teaching practice, and educational policy at the local and national levels.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Racially and ethnically diverse students in K-12 public schools have inequitable school experiences compared to their more socially dominant peers, which impact their social emotional health and educational outcomes (Pyke, 2010). These inequitable experiences are rooted in many different factors which influence a student's social-emotional well-being in school including socially determined factors (e.g., patterns of social engagement, social norms and attitudes, and a sense of belonging and well-being), racial trauma, and internalized oppression. While many of these factors exist and occur outside of the classroom, an equity literate approach to classroom instruction and pedagogy is needed in order to mitigate these inequitable experiences and improve the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color in elementary school.

This study seeks to identify and describe the pedagogical practices that mitigate the inequitable experiences for Students of Color in elementary school while considering the social-emotional implications of a sense of school belonging and the influence of racial trauma. As such, this review of the literature is organized into four parts: (1) applying the SDOH framework to identify parallels to inequitable experiences for Students of Color in K-12 schools; (2) examining internalized racial oppression as a form of trauma; (3) describing equity literate pedagogical practices that support the social emotional well-being of Students of Color; and (4) identifying gaps in the research that warrant further investigation as well as possible contributions to the literature this study might offer.

## **Social Determinants of Health**

This section aims to bring the SDOH framework and the factors impacting marginalized students' social-emotional well-being into dialogue with one another in order to contribute to practitioners' conceptualization of educational inequity in K-12 schools.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2018) defines SDOH as “the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age.” While there is no single definition of the SDOH, the WHO, Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as many governmental and non-governmental organizations, recognize the following factors that impact the health of individuals and communities: social gradient, employment conditions, social exclusion, social support, stress, early childhood development, education, globalization, health care systems and programs, government policies, urbanization, physical environments, addiction, food security, housing, transportation, and gender equity.

Healthy People 2020 (2018) presents a “place-based” organizing framework, reflecting five key social determinants of health: (1) Economic stability which includes employment, food insecurity, housing instability, and poverty; (2) Education, which includes high school graduation, enrollment in higher education, language and literacy, and early childhood education and development; (3) Health and Health Care which comprises access to primary care, health care, and Health Literacy; (4) Neighborhood and Built Environment which includes access to healthy foods, quality of housing, crime and violence, and environmental conditions; and (5) Social and Community Context which includes social cohesion, civic participation, discrimination, and incarceration.

**The causes of disparity.** The 2011 World Conference on Social Determinants of Health and the resulting Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health affirm the unacceptability of health inequities and assert that these circumstances are “shaped by political, social, and economic forces” (n.p.) such as unequal distributions of income, wealth, power, social influence, and desirable resources at local, national, and global levels (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008). Further, the WHO makes the distinction between these economic and social conditions and the individual risk factors, genetics, or lifestyle choices that are often mistakenly identified as the root causes of health disparities with regards to vulnerability to disease, injury, or poor health outcomes.

Metzl, Petty, and Olowojoba (2018) describe structural competency as “a conceptual framework for bridging this gap between individual and institutional bias” and “...emphasizes diagnostic recognition of the economic and political conditions that produce health inequities in the first place” (p. 190). Jones (2000) describes this relationship as “codified into our institutions through custom, practice, and law” and “manifests as inherited disadvantage” such as “differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by race” (p. 1212). These outside influences of complex, intertwined social structures and economic systems impact health outcomes in ways that are beyond the scope of any individual’s control, and therefore must be considered in discussions about public health.

While individual habits, behaviors, and choices influence our health, not all Americans have the opportunity to make those choices which will lead to good health. In order to ensure this opportunity, the CDC developed a national agenda for public health.

The online report, Healthy People 2020 (2018), seeks to identify needed advances in health care, education, childcare, housing, business, law, media, community planning, transportation, and agriculture.”

Because the distributions of social determinants are shaped by public policies that reflect prevailing political ideologies in a community (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010), people who experience social marginalization are particularly vulnerable to the disparate outcomes that result from a “toxic combination of poor social policies, unfair economic arrangements, and bad politics” (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008). A goal of the 2008 WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health was to have “public policy based on a vision of the world where people matter and social justice is paramount” (Marmot, 2005, p. 1099). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Healthy People 2020 initiative establishes four overarching goals for the decade, one of which is to “create social and physical environments that promote good health for all,” an emphasis shared by the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health 2008 report Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008).

### **Applying a Social Determinants Perspective to Public Education**

While the SDOH framework is specific to public health, many parallels exist in the literature to K-12 public education and the issue of inequitable school experiences for Students of Color and students from non-dominant social groups. These parallels may help provide an understanding of educational inequity from a social determinants perspective that calls on educators to acknowledge the place-based nature of public education: specifically a sense of school belonging and well-being for Students of Color,

and the patterns of social engagement that shape their experiences in school. This perspective might assist K-12 educators in their efforts to provide a more socially just and equitable schooling experience for all students that takes into account the social context of advantage and disadvantage in a student's everyday schooling experience.

**Sense of school belonging and social emotional well-being.** An SOSB reflects an individual's perceptions of the extent to which they are included, supported, respected, validated, and affirmed by others in their social environments (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). SOSB has a significant influence on how connected one feels to other people and the social outcomes (acceptance or rejection) of those connections (Frederickson & Baxter, 2009; Maslow, 1943). Belonging and social connectedness are fundamental human needs (Maslow, 1943) with potent implications for school success, and therefore schools and educators must attend to the social-emotional needs of students in school (Sulkowski, Demaray, & Lazarus, 2012). Due to the prerequisite nature of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, no academic learning can occur until the need to belong is addressed (Capps, 2004; Hamel, Leclerc, & Lefrancois, 2003; Kunc, 1992).

The construct of SOSB is referred to using various terminology such as school connectedness, attachment, relatedness, bonding, climate, and engagement (Barber & Schluterman 2008; Brown & Evans 2002; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Hawkins & Weis, 1985; Johnson, 2009; Libbey, 2004; McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Moody & Bearman, 2004; O'Brennan & Furlong, 2010; Townsend & McWhirter, 2005). These different conceptions of SOSB share three similar attributes: (1) school-based relationships and experiences; (2) student-teacher relationships; and (3) and students'

general feelings about school as a whole (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, & Waters, 2018). Further, SOSB has been operationalized across studies as a commitment to school and a belief that school is important, a positive perception of teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, a safe school environment, and opportunities to be involved in school life (Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Prince & Hadwin, 2013).

**Benefits of school belonging.** A SOSB has been found to be critical to student success in school and is associated with a range of positive academic and psychosocial outcomes including increased motivation (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013), engagement and interest in school, school completion, reduced likelihood of mental health issues, and health risk behaviors (Bond et al., 2007; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow, 1993; McGraw, Moore, Fuller, & Bates, 2008), and promotion of the development of higher-order functioning, learning, and self-esteem (Cooper, 2004; Kearney, 2005; Osterman, 2000).

For Students of Color and students from historically and socially marginalized identity groups, finding a sense of belonging in school can be challenging due to cultural and linguistic differences, bias, systemic inequities, racism, and discrimination within and beyond the school walls (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Sulkowski et al., 2012). A lack of SOSB is linked with a negative impact on motivation, school engagement, attendance, academic outcomes, school dropout, poor mental health, emotional instability, loneliness, depression, anxiety, anger, maladjustment, substance abuse later in life, and negative self-perceptions (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Benedict, Vivier, & Gjelsvik, 2014; Bond et al., 2007; Bowlby, 1969; Goodenow, 1993; Hong & Espelage, 2012; Huang & Cornell, 2019; Lonczak, Abbott, Hawkins, Kosterman, & Catalano, 2002; Maslow, 1943; McDougall &

Vaillancourt, 2015; Wilson & Elliot, 2003). Because of the social-ecological nature of teasing, bullying, and other forms of social exclusion, a lack of belongingness often manifests in group contexts (Hong & Espelage, 2012). This may cause distress about hostility toward peers and anxiety about being subjected to the same treatment, particularly if one shares the same group identity (such as race or sexual orientation) as those being victimized (Huang & Cornell, 2019).

Belongingness in school serves as a protective factor against negative emotional and psychological experiences, (Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2009; Wilkinson-Lee, Zhang, Nuno, & Wilhelm, 2011) and behavioral outcomes such as drug and alcohol use, truancy, early sexual behavior, violence, and risky behavior (Catalano, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Dornbusch, Erikson, Laird, & Wong, 2001; Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, Harris, Jones, Tabor, 1997), whereas lack of belongingness was shown to be the strongest predictor of depression (McGraw et al., 2008). A 2003 study by Maddox and Prinz showed that school connectedness is a buffer against the negative effects of an unstable or harmful home environment, illustrating how an SOSB can improve a student's social-emotional experience from a social determinants perspective.

**Hidden curriculum and patterns of social engagement.** The SDOH framework provides an opportunity to examine the place-based nature of public education, paying particular attention to the social-emotional well-being of students marginalized by societal inequity. “The school culture and social structure are powerful determinants of how students learn to perceive themselves” (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 153), therefore the patterns of social engagement and pervasive norms within a school will likely impact students' social-emotional experiences in school. Further, a structural

competence perspective calls on educators to consider the ways in which our already marginalized students are disproportionately disadvantaged by inequities embedded in our nation's political, social, and economic public policies, and how that dynamic differs from individual misfortune, control, or inherent deficit.

The hidden curriculum, or the assumptions, skills sets, social norms, expectations, and knowledge “not formally communicated, established, or conveyed within the learning environment” (Alsubaie, 2015, p. 125) and the unstated value associated with certain behavioral standards, professional dispositions, and patterns of social interaction (Miller & Seller, 1990) influence how students from different backgrounds navigate the school system. Differential access to understanding of these unspoken rules serve to perpetuate social inequity. Anyon (1980) found that elementary school teachers based educational opportunities for different students on their social class, including preparation for work and access to information. For Students of Color, the hidden curriculum in a classroom either serves to validate their experiences with racism and social marginalization, or applies a deficit ideology and denies students equitable opportunities based on preconceived ideas about what they can and cannot do. “Becoming aware of the relationship between school culture, the social structure, and the deep structure of schools...can heighten the teacher's awareness of the power of the hidden curriculum” (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 154).

When Students of Color experience low expectations communicated by their teachers, they internalize what Steele and Aronson (1995) call the *stereotype threat*, “being at risk of confirming, as a self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group” (p. 797). Stereotype threat interferes with a student's ability to achieve due to

heightened defenses, diverting attention toward anxiety and self-scrutiny, creating self-consciousness and hesitancy of unnecessary caution, and causes them to underperform or disengage from academic efforts based on allegations or assumptions about their ethnic group's intellectual capacity (Goff, Steele, Davies, & Dovidio, 2008; Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat presents a significant barrier to students' growth mindset and willingness to take academic risks in the classroom – two factors crucial to learning (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2013; Nadler & Komarraju, 2016; Rydell, Shiffrin, Boucher, Van Loo, & Rydell, 2010; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Taylor & Walton, 2011).

Further, Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Doucet (2004) note the detrimental psychological effects of “social mirroring” (p. 428) in which students internalize messages reflected by schools, society, and the media, and have lasting impacts on an individual's sense of self. Because students learn about themselves as they acquire academic knowledge, their understanding of themselves as individuals is inherently tied to their understanding of themselves as learners (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979). The phenomenon of internalized oppression, rooted in social systems of prejudice and discrimination, causes the oppressed to adopt the opinion the oppressors hold of them and thereby develop a sense of shame, inferiority, humiliation, and self-loathing (Foster, 1993; Freire, 1970; Memmi, 1967; Tappan, 2006). These internalized opinions may become ingrained in one's concept of self, making them difficult to resist or counter (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lipsky, 2004).

Stereotype threat, social mirroring, internalized oppression, and traditional modes of learning that do not consider culturally relevant references and considerations have

exacerbated the achievement/opportunity gap over time. According to the Center for Public Education 2016 Research Brief, achievement gaps between White students and Black, Hispanic, and Native American students, and students from low income families have only narrowed slightly but still remain wide (Center for Public Education, 2016).

**Social contexts that support student achievement.** Several scholars conceptualize the achievement gap as an *opportunity gap* (Carter & Welner, 2013; Flores, 2007; Gorski, 2017a; Noguera, 2001). If educators expect all students to succeed at high levels, then we must provide equitable opportunities for all students to meet that expectation. Disparate test scores based on racial and social class are symptoms rather than the causes of inequitable school experiences (Gay, 2000). Many Students of Color are victims of “prejudice, stereotyping, and racism that have negative impacts on their self-esteem, mental health, and academic achievement” (Gay, 2000, p. 19) that affect their ability to learn and succeed in school.

According to 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results, achievement gaps in reading since 1992 between Black and White students narrowed among fourth graders, showed no statistically measurable change among eighth graders, and widened among twelfth graders. From 1992 through 2015, the average reading scores for White fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders were higher than those of their Black and Hispanic peers. Achievement gaps in reading since 1992 between Hispanic and White students narrowed among eighth graders and showed no statistically measurable difference among fourth graders and twelfth graders (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017).

In math, achievement gaps narrowed between Black and White students among fourth graders, and showed no statistically measurable change among eighth graders, or

between Hispanic and White students in fourth or eighth grade. From 1990 through 2015, the average mathematics scores for White fourth and eighth graders were higher than those of their Black and Hispanic peers (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 51). The average mathematics scores for White twelfth grade students were higher than the scores for their Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native peers in every survey year since 2005 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017, p. 52).

Phillippo (2012) pointed to some hopeful data, noting that students who experienced positive teacher support had increased academic performance, attendance, graduation rates, GPA, and school engagement. This highlights the effective ways in which some scholars have interpreted culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical practices, bringing the models into closer alignment with equity pedagogy (Paris, 2012). Gay (2000) noted that positive reflections of students' cultural identities and backgrounds "generate feelings of worth, dignity, competence, and confidence that can facilitate academic, personal, social, and professional achievement" (p. 150). Presenting positive and affirming reflections of students' racial and cultural identities is crucial to culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching relies on students' own frames of reference, cultural histories, and prior experiences to engage and empower individual learners (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In many cases, culturally relevant pedagogical practices have shown to be an effective way to strengthen the student-teacher relationships necessary to provide equal opportunities for success to all students (Gay, 2000; Griner & Stewart, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012; Sleeter, 2012; Toppel, 2015). However, this is not sufficient. It is necessary to extend practitioners' understanding of culturally relevant teaching to include tending to

the social-emotional wellbeing of Students of Color and other students who experience marginalization.

**Teacher identity and connection to the community.** Ladson-Billings (1994) reminded us that “teachers with culturally relevant practices see themselves as part of the community, see teaching as giving back to the community, and encourage their students to do the same” (p. 41). When teachers are not seen as members of the community and there is a mismatch between school culture and home culture, “teachers can easily misread students’ aptitudes, intent, or abilities as a result of the difference in styles of language use and interactional patterns,” often leading to the use of “styles of instruction and/or discipline that are at odds with community norms (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Another study (Phillippo, 2012) described how teachers who made skillful attempts to build relationships with students from backgrounds different from their own raised concern among some African-American students. As teachers tried to learn about their home lives, cultures, values, goals, and fears, some students found this to be intrusive. This mistrust, suspicion, or feelings of loss of privacy or agency were more significant in schools where the socio-cultural or institutional contexts constrained trusting relationships among students and teachers. Teachers need to be cautious not to overstep the personal boundaries that students need in place in order to maintain autonomy, agency, and privacy (Phillippo, 2012.) McGee Banks and Banks (1995) and Banks and Banks (1995) suggest teachers reflect on the extent to which class instruction is meaningful for students, whether they might prefer a different teacher and why, and what gaps exist between what they are teaching and what students are learning (p. 154).

There exists a wide range of teacher experiences around equity pedagogy, most notably those based on the racial and cultural identities of teachers and the students they serve (Irvine, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Scherff, 2005; Schmeichel, 2012; Young, 2010). Teachers across studies reported having shared goals with students to provide safe spaces to talk about race and racism, to recognize the discomfort in talking about racism and privilege, and to honor student voice (Ebersole, Kanahale-Mossman, & Kawakami, 2015; Flynn, 2012; Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010). However, good intentions were not enough; although teachers might philosophically value equity literate approaches to teaching, they may inadvertently neglect issues of racial or cultural significance. Equity pedagogy requires multicultural, pedagogical, and subject area knowledge (Banks, 2004, McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). Ebersole and colleagues (2015) pointed to the difference between theory and lived reality – teachers of color were able to understand the racialized experiences of students experiencing racism and discrimination, make connections to their own racialized experiences, build trust through sharing and empathy building, and thereby gained valuable exposure to multicultural perspectives in their classrooms.

In contrast, Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2010) noted that in their study of a school with a majority of Black students and non-Black teachers, many teachers did not feel comfortable talking about issues of race, culture, identity, and equity in the classroom. Additionally, in some cases, teachers were intimidated by their own lack of cultural knowledge, and in others, failed to see the value in acknowledging the cultures of the students in their care (Ebersole et al., 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This has

implications for the need for teachers to reflect the student demographic in schools, a topic not explored in this study, yet one of great significance.

**Culture gap and school belonging.** Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier (1992) and later, Prince and Hadwin (2013), identified two essential components of belonging: being valued and needed; and congruence with other people through shared characteristics, confirmation, and understanding. According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Teacher and Principal Survey (2015-16) over 80% of the teaching force is White in stark contrast with only 48% of the student population identified as White (Taie & Goldring, 2017). Projections show the trend will continue, with 45% of students identified as White in 2026 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The lack of congruence, or "culture gap" between White teachers and Students of Color, often leads to misunderstandings which result in disproportionately frequent suspension of marginalized students (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002), harsher school discipline (Office of Civil Rights, 2014), and more frequent referrals for special education (Losen & Orfield, 2002) than their more socially dominant peers (Sulkowski, 2012).

**Self reflection.** However, White teachers with racially and ethnically diverse students can effectively employ equity informed pedagogy through "study, practical experience, and reflective self-analysis (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 156). Teachers who understand and examine their own socialized stereotypes, attitudes, and assumptions about students from different social identity groups than themselves are able to acknowledge the ways in which their own privileges have been institutionalized within society and influence it has had on their lives (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010). Ongoing self-

reflection is necessary in order to disentangle the myths and assumptions that perpetuate social privilege and inequity (King, 1992; McIntosh, 1990; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). An understanding of the histories, within-group differences, and characteristics of racial and ethnic groups can provide the conceptual and contextual knowledge that may inform a teacher's equity pedagogy – including when to use knowledge about students' cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Banks, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Nieto, 1999).

Self-reflection also calls on educators to consider how those in dominant social groups have the privilege of being seen as individuals rather than as socialized group members. This key dynamic of social dominance promotes a belief in individual exceptionalism – that one is unaffected by biased messaging, norms, and omissions dictated by dominant culture, and are therefore not part of the narrative of societal inequity (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010). This paradigm allows educators to embrace an approach to equity pedagogy that is reduced to a list of “how to’s” or what DiAngelo and Sensoy (2010) call a “recipe card;” such an approach only serves to reinforce the simplistic approaches that critical discourses such as equity pedagogy seek to problematize.

### **Internalized Racial Oppression as Trauma**

This section substantially explores the implications of internalized racial oppression on students' social emotional well-being and briefly overviews current applications of trauma informed practices in the classroom. It defines internalized racial oppression for People of Color, describes the impacts of oppression with an emphasis on social emotional health, and differentiates between the role of the individual and the

collective role of society in deconstructing internalized racial oppression and politicizing the concept of wellness.

**Racial trauma.** Racial trauma, or internalized racial oppression, is a construct that can be described as the process by which People of Color internalize and accept White dominant culture's oppressive actions and beliefs (Bailey, Chung, Williams, Singh, & Terrell, 2011; Jones, 2000; Taylor & Grundy, 1996). The experience of oppression becomes a part of the core identity, self-concept, and self-knowledge that subordinate group members hold about themselves and others who share that identity (Morris, 1987; Pharr, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Woodson, 1990). Speaking as a Black woman, Lipsky (2004) states, "Some patterns of internalized racism have become so familiar that we, ourselves, accept them as part of our 'black culture.' We attribute them to 'the way we are'" (p. 144). Pheterson (1986) adds:

Internalized oppression is likely to consist of self-hatred, self-concealment, fear of violence and feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness, and gratefulness for being allowed to survive. Internalized oppression is the mechanism within an oppressive system for perpetuating domination not only by external control but also by building subservience into the minds of the oppressed groups. (p. 146)

Hall (1986) refers to internalized racism as one of the most common, yet least studied features of racism. Most recently conceptualized in the field of psychology, it can be defined as:

The situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominant group by

maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, and ideologies that undergird the dominant group's power and privilege and limits the oppressed group's own advantages. (Bivens, 2005, p. 46).

This under-emphasized phenomenon has significant implications for Students of Color, and can manifest as internalized racism or racial trauma.

However, this acceptance of subordination to White dominant ideology is “not the result of some cultural or biological characteristic of the subjugated. Nor is it the consequence of any weakness, ignorance, inferiority, psychological defect, gullibility, or other shortcoming of the oppressed” (Pyke, 2010, p. 553). Rather, it is the insidious manifestation of internalized racial oppression that conditions People of Color to identify with the negative messaging promulgated by society about who we are (Lipsky, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The burden of “double consciousness” coined by W.E.B. Du Bois to describe the experience of Black people in America who view themselves from their own unique perspectives as individuals, as well as how they are perceived by White people within a society that has historically oppressed, devalued, and dehumanized them, presents an involuntary duality of existence. Du Bois describes this as the “sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity,” (Du Bois, 1989, p. 2). The pervasive stereotypes perpetuated by the media and mainstream culture can lead to internalized anti-Black sentiment, self-doubt, lowering of ideals, and self-disparagement (Du Bois, 1989).

**The psychological impacts of racial trauma.** The psychological injuries and health repercussions of internalized racial oppression are many. Pyke (2010) describes

these as the “psychic costs” and defines them as “the individual inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images and ideologies perpetuated by the White dominant society about one’s racial group, leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one’s race and or oneself” (p. 553). Even among communities of color there exists an internalized skin tone bias that positions and privileges lighter skinned non-Whites over their darker skinned counterparts (Golden, 2004; Hunter, 2007; Morrison, 1970; Thurman, 1929; Walker, 1984). Such impacts as self-hatred and self-rejection (Clark & Clark, 1950; Harrell et al., 2003; Utsey et al., 2008; Williams & Williams, 2008) are what hooks (2003) refers to as the “indoctrination” and “mental colonization” of the oppressed.

The effects of internalized racism and internalized racial oppression range from psychological injuries (Speight, 2016) such as self-hatred and self-rejection (Clark & Clark, 1950; Harrell et al., 2003; Utsey et al., 2008; Williams & Williams, 2008), to compromised physical health for People of Color (Krieger, 1999; Paradies et al., 2015; Pieterse, Todd, Neville, & Carter, 2011). Additionally, racial trauma contributes to disparate rates in academic achievement in school (Ogbu, 1979) which in turn contributes to decreased economic prosperity and social mobility (Howard & Navarro, 2016), and higher rates of incarceration (Alexander, 2010). Internalized racial oppression, or racial trauma, often lies at the root of an individual’s ability to reach their potential and achieve success, self-actualization, and healing (hooks, 1994). These psychological implications point to an urgent need for educators to understand the racialized context of inequitable social emotional experiences of children in school (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005).

**The physical impacts of racial trauma.** Internalized racial oppression can also lead to compromised physical health for People of Color (Krieger, 1999; Paradies et al.,

2015; Pieterse et al., 2011). A 1999 study by Tull and colleagues found a significant correlation between internalized racism and waist circumference among Black Caribbean women, even when controlling for age, education, anxiety, and depression pointing to increased odds for abdominal obesity, as well as increased blood pressure. Racism can also affect the disproportionate rates of cardiovascular disease in African-Americans. Medical health professionals and researchers Calvin et al. (2003) assert that the following factors negatively affect cardiovascular health: 1) *Institutional racism*, socio-economic immobility, differential access to desirable resources, and poor living conditions; 2) *Perceived/personally mediated racism* and the psychophysiological reactions that result; 3) *Internalized racism*, the negative self-evaluations and acceptance of negative cultural stereotypes as true (p. 315). These three levels of racism (Jones, 2000) are necessary to consider in examinations of racial trauma, as perpetrators and mitigating factors alike can be identified at each level to address the social-emotional well-being of People of Color.

**Trauma informed practices in the classroom.** Mental health concerns are on the rise among school-age children (Olofson, Druss, & Marcus, 2015; Twenge, 2015; Weissman, Pratt, Miller, & Parker, 2015). A study by Sacks and Murphey (2018) reported 45% of children in the US have experienced at least one kind of childhood trauma, or Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) such as verbal, physical, sexual abuse or incarceration, mental illness, death or incarceration of a parent, divorce, violence, substance abuse, or sustained economic hardship (Bailey, 2015; Danese et al., 2009; Felitti et al., 1998). One in 10 children in the nation have experienced three or more ACEs, placing them at significant risk of negative outcomes later in life (Bailey, 2015; Ko et al., 2018).

Many researchers and social scientists are currently advocating for racism to be added to the list of ACEs. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 National Survey of Children's Health, 61% of Black children, 51% of Latinx children, 40% White children, and 23% of Asian children have experienced at least one adverse experience (Sacks & Murphey, 2018).

School is the primary point of access for mental health services for children (Ko et al., 2008; Farmer, Burns, Phillips, Angold, & Costello, 2003). In response, some K-12 schools are currently undergoing training in trauma informed practices. Teachers are learning about the brain science of trauma, signs to watch for in the classroom, and effective strategies to support students dealing with trauma. Trauma informed practices in school have shown to improve the quality of interactions between students and teachers, improve the social and emotional behavior of students and teachers, reduce aggression, impulsivity, and hyperactivity in children, increase students' academic achievement, and improve the classroom and school climate (Bailey, 2015; Barfield & Gaskill, 2005; Hoffman, Hutchinson, & Reiss, 2009; Rain, 2014).

**Racial trauma and academic achievement.** Internalized racial oppression also has implications for the disparate rates in academic achievement among White students and Students of Color (Ogbu, 1979). The common practices of tracking students into ability groups that predetermine future opportunities, grade level retention which leads to increased rates of dropouts, and high stakes standardized testing continue to limit the opportunities for Students of Color (Nieto, 2000). Nieto (2000) notes that the Marxist Social Reproduction Theory of schooling, which serves to replicate the class and social status of students and their families, directly impacts students from marginalized identity

groups and constrains their opportunities for social mobility (Collins, 2009; Nieto & Bode, 2008). The pervasive gap in opportunities in schools for Students of Color and students from marginalized communities lead to lower rates of high school graduation and academic achievement, ultimately contributing to decreased economic prosperity (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

More theoretically and personally, Woodson (1990), Malcolm X (1965), and hooks (2001) speak to their own experiences in school as “a place entrenched with White supremacy where Students of Color are socialized towards a negative self and racial group perception” (Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006, n.p.). Woodson (1990) aims to demonstrate how the racism deeply embedded in schools serves as a tool to maintain racial hierarchy, “socializ[ing] Whites to the notion of superiority while simultaneously, internalizing a self-hatred within Black students” (Huber et al., 2006, n.p.). Internalized racial oppression often lies at the root of an individual’s ability to reach their potential and achieve success, self-actualization, and healing (hooks, 1994).

**Politicizing the context of wellness and a decolonial response to oppression.**

Social psychologists Phillips, Adams, and Salter (2015) argue that many in their field embrace an “understanding of well-being that abstracts persons from social and historical context” and in doing so, reflect and reproduce an unjust, dominant status quo by examining how individuals cope with marginalization and oppression “rather than acting to dismantle the oppressive structures that are the source of their marginalization” (p. 380). Berila (2016) calls for politicizing the context of wellness, noting that it is “important to situate the wellness for marginalized groups within the context of structural oppression and violence,” stating that “for members of marginalized groups, self-healing

and wellness is never just an individual thing, because what they need to heal from includes structural oppression that targets their whole group... broader cultural ideologies devalue their worth, so they need to come to healing and self-empowerment over and against this devaluation” (p. 8).

The *coloniality of power*, or the living legacy of European colonialism that identifies racial, social, and political hierarchies in modern post-colonial societies, perpetuates the societal valuing of some and disenfranchisement of others (Quijano, 2000). Paired with the *coloniality of knowledge* (Mignolo, 2002) which serves to “reflect perspectives of the powerful, pathologize experiences of the oppressed, and reinforce domination,” (Phillips et al., 2015, p. 371), these two constructs present a context that is inherently political and necessitates a decolonizing approach to understanding oppression, self-actualization, and wellness for People of Color. Healing, self-recovery, and political resistance are innately linked. For those whose emotional health is impacted by oppression, a liberatory approach is needed in order to achieve self-actualization.

Describing the experience of Black women, hooks (2015) writes, “We have resisted continued devaluation by countering the dominant stereotypes about us that prevail in white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy by decolonizing our minds,” (p. ix). In order to effectively deconstruct internalized oppression and respond to structural and epistemic oppression, People of Color and people with marginalized identities must engage in mental decolonization, countering the dominant narratives and redefining our own reality based on our lived experience and the liberatory knowledge we create and claim as our own (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2015; Phillips et al., 2015).

**Individual vs. collective responsibility.** An emerging theme in the literature around deconstructing internalized racism is the need to differentiate that which lies in the realm of the individual, and that which lies in the societal, contextual, or collective realm. Because White domination and the oppression of People of Color are social phenomena rooted in the history of the US and continue to be reinforced by systems of structural, institutional, and systemic racism, it is necessary to also situate the work of deconstructing internalized racial oppression within the realm of the broad social context of living in a racist society, and less about the individual experience.

Social Identity Theory tells us that members of an identity group tend to see themselves in a more positive light than members of the “out group;” however, in the case of highly stratified societies, it is very difficult for those marginalized by inequity to embrace their stigmatized group membership. As a result, individuals tend to regard themselves as members of their identity group relative to other groups rather than as individuals (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

It is commonly held that race is a social construct, invented by humans to categorize and ultimately to oppress groups of people (Bell, 1995; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Coates, 2013; Delgado, 2011; Du Bois, 1987, 2011; Painter, 2011). But, races are socially rather than biologically real (McIntosh, 2013) and reenacted in the everyday life of individuals in their encounters with others (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Further, Liberation Psychologist Martín-Baró says that “if the individual is a human individual, it is because he or she is shaped by society; if a human society exists, it is because there are individuals who make it up” (Martín-Baró, 1996, p. 69). Since it is the socialization into White supremacist thinking, the internalization of racial self-hatred, that is the

psychological groundwork which prepares many Black folk to see themselves as always and only victims, it is further mental colonization to then blame the individuals who succumb to powerful forces of indoctrination (hooks, 2003, p. 78).

Tappan (2006) argues that both internalized oppression and internalized domination “have been viewed almost exclusively as internal, deep, unchanging, psychological qualities or characteristics of the oppressed, on the one hand, and the privileged, on the other” (p. 2116). He argues that this internal, individualized view serves to obscure “the role that systemic, structural, and institutionalized forces play in the production and reproduction of oppression,” stating that “privilege and oppression are the result of forces and mechanisms that go far beyond the individual psychological level” (p. 2117). Anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000) seeks to challenge an inequitable status quo, namely, oppression, marginalization, and domination, which necessitates a shared focus on the individual and the “social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts in which the individual lives” (Tappan, 2006, p. 2122).

In the context of schooling, Freire (1970) makes clear the connection between individuals and the context in which we operate. “Education as the practice of freedom - as opposed to education as the practice of domination - denies that [humans are] abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from [humans]” (p. 69). In his writings about humanisation, Freire’s (1970) concept of conscientization, or the development of a critical consciousness, is essential to understanding one’s social reality including the impacts of oppression and marginalization. Instead of locating the problem of racial trauma within the individual, one must also consider the “schools - the teachers, curriculum, and unequal resources -

accountable for internalization of negative self and racial-group perceptions, as well as the acceptance of a racial hierarchy founded in white supremacy” (Huber et al., 2006, p. 4).

The historical, societal impact on oppression is perhaps best illustrated by the concept of hegemony, where the dominant group or ruling class dictates the values of the society (Gramsci, 1971), controlling the construction of reality through the production of “knowledge” (Foucault, 1977). Oppressed groups accept the dominant group’s interests, including the negative stereotypes about themselves and the internalized oppression that results. This “mental colonization” (hooks, 2003) or indoctrination influences the perspectives and beliefs of the oppressed, often without their conscious participation (Pyke, 2010). “This conceptualization allows scholars to consider the involuntary aspects of internalized racial oppression and the limits of individual resistance” (Pyke, 2010, p. 556). An apt analogy might be that racial oppression and domination is the water in which we swim; it is difficult to see or notice, and even more difficult to undermine.

Broadly speaking, school is the hub of social interaction for students. The socialization of Students of Color toward a negative self-perception paired with the socialization of White students toward a notion of superiority perpetuate racial hierarchy and marginalization in school (hooks, 2001; Huber et al., 2006; Woodson, 1990). Social marginalization among Students of Color often leads to the trauma of internalized racial oppression, posing significant barriers to students’ ability to succeed academically and thrive socially and emotionally (hooks, 1994). This calls for a broader view of the context of wellness, one that acknowledges the impact of structural oppression which targets groups minoritized and marginalized by societal inequity, and the broader cultural

ideologies that undermine the sense of self-worth among Students of Color.

### **Equity Pedagogies Over Time**

Paris (2012) addressed a needed shift in Ladson-Billings' (1995) foundational theory of culturally relevant pedagogy and Gay's (2000) theory of culturally responsive pedagogy by articulating a stance of "culturally sustaining pedagogy" which brings to the forefront the "languages and literacies and other cultural practices of communities marginalized by systemic inequalities to ensure the valuing and maintenance of our multiethnic and multilingual society" (p. 93). Paris questioned whether the last 30 years of scholarship and related pedagogical practices centered on cultural relevance and responsiveness resulted in "a critical stance toward and critical action against unequal power relations" that continue to oppress and marginalize Students of Color in school (pp. 94-95) and draws the parallel to the insufficiency of the term "tolerance" in discourse about multicultural education and diverse people.

Paris (2012) asserts that relevance and responsiveness do not go far enough to address inequity, as neither guarantee in theory nor practice that teachers will be willing and able to recognize the ways in which our students historically and currently are marginalized by systemic inequity experience school differently than their White and socially dominant peers. Instead, Paris (2012) articulates the explicit goal of culturally sustaining pedagogy as "supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers... to sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the demographic process of schooling" (p. 95).

Ladson-Billings (2014) offered an update to her theory of culturally relevant pedagogy that "explicitly engages questions of equity and justice" (p. 74) and reflects the

fluidity of the dynamic and ever-evolving view of culture. She acknowledges the need for teachers not only to consider the fluidity of culture and variety within cultural groups, but more importantly, to attend to the sociopolitical and critical dimensions rooted in systemic inequity that directly impact students' lives, communities, and experiences in school. Ladson-Billings, in responding to Paris's critique of culturally relevant pedagogy, describes Paris's (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy as a layering of the ways in which pedagogy "shifts, changes, adapts, recycles, and recreates instructional spaces to ensure that consistently marginalized students are repositioned into a place of normativity" (p. 76) and that recognizes the need to center Students of Color as subjects rather than objects when talking about how to most effectively support their success in school. This approach differs from previous conceptualizations and operationalizations of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies in that it prioritizes the role of societal inequity over a focus on students' culture, home lives, community, heritage, and language (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Banks (2004) identified *equity pedagogy* as one of the five dimensions of multicultural education. Since then, the focus of implementation has largely and mistakenly focused on the first dimension, *content integration*, as the core of multicultural education (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Sleeter, 2012) while overlooking other important factors such as the hidden curriculum, the social emotional well-being of students in the context of societal inequity, and the dispositions of the teacher. McGee Banks and Banks (1995) define Equity Pedagogy as "teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and

perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society” and to “question the “assumptions, paradigms, and hegemonic characteristics” of mainstream, public education (p. 152). Adding in a unit on Martin Luther King Jr. having a multicultural potluck dinner, and hanging flags from different countries in the hallway, will not address issues of inequity and racism at school; “It cannot occur within a social and political context embedded with racism, sexism, and inequality” (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 153). Culturally relevant or responsive teaching as they have been widely interpreted will not result in equity pedagogy as long as those practices are situated in existing structures that perpetuate inequity (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995).

An equity literacy approach that “relies more on teachers’ understandings of equity and inequity and of justice and injustice” than on any particular culture, and places “*equity* rather than *culture* at the center of the diversity conversation” (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015, p. 36) is a higher bar and a heavier lift for educators than simply celebrating diversity. It is grounded in teachers’ understandings of equity and justice rather than understanding any particular culture and includes paying purposeful attention to issues like racism, homophobia, sexism, and economic inequality. Equity literacy acknowledges the lived realities of those who are forced to contend with such issues and focuses on decreasing marginalizing experiences in school. By attending to the conditions that shape the way students experience the world, the challenges and inequities they and their families face, educators can consider how these factors inform the ways students experience school (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Gorski & Pothini, 2018). Instead of surface level celebrations of culture or basic acknowledgements of cultural difference, equity literate teachers acknowledge the conditions of racism and systems of oppression that

underlie the resulting opportunity and achievement gaps, (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Sleeter, 2012).

**Equity pedagogy for social-emotional well-being.** Building on the work of Paris (2012) and Ladson-Billings (2014), I offer the term *Equity Pedagogy for Social-Emotional Well-being* (EPSEW) that extends McGee Banks and Banks' (1995) conception of equity pedagogy situated within their framework of multicultural education, drawn upon Gorski and Swalwell's (2015) Equity Literacy framework which centers systemic inequity rather than culture, and focuses on the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color. Whereas Paris's (2012) theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy focuses on linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism, EPSEW requires that classroom practices and curricular foci go beyond content integration, relevance, responsiveness, and the cultural experiences of students in order to address the negative social-emotional experiences in school for students marginalized by societal inequities. Instead, educators need an updated approach that will refocus our attention on the social and community contexts that predetermine and influence inequitable outcomes, and prioritize an examination of the root causes of societal inequity over a surface level understanding of culture. An EPSEW calls on teachers to do the ongoing work of acknowledging the influences of social dominance and marginalization, institutionalized racism, stereotype threat, and the insidious nature of implicit bias. These socially determined factors creep into our classroom practices, become embedded in our hidden curricula, and negatively impact the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color.

Instead, EPSEW embraces Gorski and Swalwell's (2015) approach to equity literacy and asserts that educators need to be "a threat to inequity," to be honest and

historically accurate in their assessment of the systems and patterns that they perpetuate, and to attend to the relationships, learning environment, and pedagogical approaches that both affirm the realities of marginalized students while at the same time provide opportunities to counter the inequitable social dynamics and messaging that negatively impact their social emotional well-being. In order to do so effectively, teachers must hone their critical consciousness, or the ability to understand and examine their own socialized stereotypes, attitudes, and assumptions about students from different social identity groups than themselves. They must acknowledge the ways in which their own privileges have been institutionalized within society and influenced their lives (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010).

**Curricular add-ons.** Banks (1988) identifies several different approaches to effective integration of multicultural education through culturally relevant pedagogy. A *contributions approach* involves minimal additions of “heroes and holidays” into existing curricula without any deep exploration of the global or historical roles of ethnic and cultural groups throughout history. Presenting multicultural or ethnic issues as an “appendage to the main story of the development of the nation and to the core curriculum” (p. 17) teaches students to view them as such, reinforcing the marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities. This approach also tends to center the myth of meritocracy while neglecting issues of inequity, racism, poverty, and oppression, often resulting in the further trivialization of ethnic cultures, exoticization of difference, and reinforcing stereotypes and misconceptions (Banks, 1988; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). Conversely, equity pedagogy requires transformative approaches to curricula that are student focused and promote knowledge construction in a context that is pragmatic,

relevant, and meaningful to students (Ladson-Billings, 2014; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995).

Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2010) and Flynn (2012) highlighted a challenge: multicultural education needs to be integrated and embedded into the core curriculum for all students. When presented as a separate component ancillary to the core curricula it serves to further alienate students of color, sending the message that the inclusion of their histories and perspectives is merely ancillary, tokenizing, perhaps even for show so the teacher or the school can feel good about having included something multicultural (Banks, 1988; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2010) asked African American high school students in Colorado to describe their feelings about having culturally relevant lessons in school. They reported wanting them consistently integrated into existing curriculum, equating their own capacity to learn as equals with their White peers with their need to be “treated equally, not differently” through inclusive curriculum (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010, p. 294).

**Essentialization of culture.** Ladson-Billings (2006b) explains how an overemphasis on culture is a detour around equity, and that it “is randomly and regularly used to explain everything” (p. 104). Culture is often used as coded language for race and difference, particularly by White, middle class teachers when struggling to identify a lack of connection with or understanding of Students of Color; it is also used to explain the misbehavior of Black boys, the academic disengagement of students living in poverty, and the reason why some students cannot achieve success in the classroom (DiAngelo, 2011; Gay, 2000; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006b; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Sleeter, 2012; Yosso, 2005). The term is applied exclusively to Students of Color,

while White students' culture is not often identified as the culprit of school failure, discipline issues, or poor academic performance.

Centering equity rather than culture lies at the heart of equity pedagogy. This is an important distinction, as the terminology of culturally responsive and relevant teaching may suggest otherwise. Principles of equity and social justice that acknowledge the inequitable context of our country's socio-economic and racial divides must be considered, and prioritized over an essentialized idea of culture often used to explain the unequal outcomes that result.

*Beyond celebrations of diversity.* Ladson-Billings (2014) laments that her original conception of culturally relevant pedagogy has been misinterpreted by many scholars and practitioners alike, and that “the idea that adding some books about People of Color, having a classroom Kwanzaa celebration, or posting ‘diverse’ images makes one ‘culturally relevant’ seem to be what the pedagogy has been reduced to (p. 82). The misunderstanding of culture manifests in classrooms as surface level acknowledgements of diversity, holiday celebrations, and a contributions approach to curricula (Banks, 1988). The essentialization of culture, or overemphasis on the homogeneity of a group based on stereotypes results in a trivialization of the importance of student identity and lived experiences (González, 2006).

School events like the multicultural potluck and diversity parade, which are aimed at celebrations of diversity rather than addressing inequity, can have an unexpected negative impact on students who experience marginalization and oppression in school. To many, it feels like the school's response to their suffering is to further exploit them by asking them and their families to participate in surface level celebrations of diversity in

order to allow students who do not experience marginalization to grow their knowledge, while the inequities themselves remain unaddressed (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Further, students may perceive such celebratory efforts as “a purposeful avoidance of a more serious reality” that demonstrate the complicity of teachers and the school in perpetuating inequity (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015, p. 40).

An over emphasis on culture and multicultural celebrations in the classroom call into question the extent to which educators are focused on equity, or the conditions that cause and perpetuate inequitable access, opportunity, and outcomes.

**Deficit ideology.** Deficit ideology is one of the more prevalent forms of contemporary racism in U.S. schools. It blames those who are socially marginalized by inequitable policies and socially determined factors for their low academic performance, attributing their challenges to the assumption that People of Color lack the values, social and cultural capital, and funds of knowledge deemed valuable by dominant society (Gorski, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Deficit ideology is supported by the pervasive myth of meritocracy which tells us that “what one achieves is directly proportional to how hard one works” (Gorski, 2016, p. 378) and disregards the barriers to opportunity and access that persist despite individual efforts to remove them.

An example is Payne’s (2005) claim that there exists a discernable *culture of poverty* and that those experiencing poverty share a common mindset, characteristics, and (lack of) values, such as violence and criminality, that educators can fix by convincing them to care more about education (Gorski, 2016). Adoption of a deficit ideology supports the belief that an equitable context exists, and that it is simply the fault, or perhaps choice, of individuals who are not thriving academically, economically, or

socially. In his writing about poverty and deficit ideology, Gorski (2016) asks, “As a teacher, can I believe a student’s mindset is deficient, that she is lazy, unmotivated, and disinterested in school and *also* build a positive, high-expectations relationship with her?” (p. 382). A deficit perspective allows teachers to excuse themselves of the responsibility and obligation to provide equitable learning experiences to all students, and instead, pre-determine their life trajectories for better or worse.

Deficit thinking often leads to what Freire (1970) calls the “banking model” of education wherein the goal of education becomes the filling up of intellectually deprived minds with cultural wealth that will help solve the problem of cultural deficit. Deficit ideology and racialized assumptions allow educators to believe that the flaws underlying disparate rates of student achievement are not situated within the institution of schooling, but rather results from a lack of conformity to an already sufficient and equitable system on behalf of individual students, their families, and communities (Yosso, 2005). Further, educators who subscribe to deficit thinking tend to disregard the structural barriers to equitable outcomes in order to attribute them to the mindsets of those who suffer from them, making it easier to believe that the deficit lies within the child, and excusing themselves of the responsibility to address the outcomes (Gorski, 2016).

This section describes some of the equity informed pedagogical practices that support social-emotional wellbeing among Students of Color, their reactions to different approaches, and the skills and dispositions embodied by equity literate educators who embrace EPSEW.

**Classroom application of equity pedagogies.** Equity pedagogy is social and interactive. Using a conversational teaching style instead of lecturing allows students to

be active rather than passive learners. Frequent back and forth, question and answer discourse enables teachers to be in constant interaction with students, providing and receiving feedback about their learning (Gay, 2010). This is particularly important for students who may need extra support, as the conversational approach provides constant scaffolding and opportunities for support from peers and teachers (Rajagopal, 2011).

Cooperative, constructivist, and experiential learning are effective methods of culturally relevant teaching (Byrd, 2016; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), but are not sufficient in and of themselves in addressing inequities embedded in the hidden curriculum (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). Teachers must consider aspects of the *deep structure* of the school, such as student-teacher ratio, physical space, scheduling, and also address the “social-class, racial, and ethnic inequalities embedded in the differential levels of support given to different classes and schools” (Banks & Banks, 1995).

In a synthesis of studies examining the effectiveness of arts integration in the success of economically disadvantaged students, English learners, and students with disabilities, Robinson (2013) found that drama integration can increase students’ academic performance in “reading and math, as well as social skills, expressive/receptive language, and creative thinking” (p. 200). Other art forms that showed to have positive effects on student learning outcomes included dance integration, visual art integration, and multi-arts integration had overwhelmingly positive effects for math achievement, creativity/critical thinking, self-efficacy, motivation, cooperation, and student engagement (Brouillette, Burge, Fitzgerald, & Walker, 2008; Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Ingram & Riedel, 2003; Lorimer, 2011; Robinson, 2013; Smith & McKnight, 2009).

Incorporating small group and large group discussions, physical movement, music, and the arts more actively engage students in their learning. Music can act as a “vehicle, tool, doorway, or catalyst” (Cortés Santiago, 2012, p. 57) that enables learners of all ages and language backgrounds to engage with reading comprehension, storytelling, vocabulary acquisition, genre familiarity, language learning, cultural learning, and mathematics (Cortés Santiago, 2012; Medina, 2003). Drumming in particular has been used as a teaching tool that builds a sense of community, engagement in learning, academic risk taking in a group setting, and in some cases, increased students’ content knowledge in geography, history, and multicultural awareness (Bassett, 2010).

McGee Banks and Banks (1995) emphasize the importance of peer relationships and their role in the hidden curriculum of a classroom, calling on teachers to consider the dynamics of peer interactions and take a thoughtful approach to assigning group work. When teachers structure group work without considering and accommodating for the differences in social status among students based on race, gender, or social class, the result may be further marginalizing for students with lower status rather than a positive opportunity to learn with and from peers (Cohen, 1994; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995).

**Student perceptions of EPSEW.** Students of Color across studies felt engaged and validated during episodes of culturally responsive and equity literate teaching (Flynn, 2012; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Phillippo, 2012; Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010) and reported that teachers’ knowledge about students’ cultures and communities, caring attitudes, genuine interest, and own efforts to create ties to the community were of particular importance. Phillippo (2012) found that Students of Color

were adamant that teachers held them to high expectations and felt disrespected when this was not the case. Delpit (2012) defined this notion as “warm demanders,” or “teachers who hold students to high expectations, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them to reach their potential in a disciplined and structured environment” (p. 77).

One study found Black students were particularly eager to hear about their White peers’ experiences with guilt regarding the racial history of the US. Students appreciated topics of discussion that were personally relevant, including those that acknowledged the role of inequity in their daily lives (Flynn, 2012). High school students were interested in talking about their experiences with oppression, and having honest conversations with other students to learn about their perspectives (Au, 2017; Banks & Banks, 1995; Delgado, 1998; Fine, 1997; Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Lipsitz, Sanchez, Taylor, & Williams, 1995; Tillman, 2002).

White students generally had a different reaction to equity pedagogy, such as expressing resistance to discussions about race, feelings of guilt, and a desire to deflect to other identity markers such as age, gender, or religion (Flynn, 2012). The guilt expressed by some of the White students may have been rooted in a genuine desire to envision an equitable world free of racism. She also found some White students felt that these learning opportunities were influential, inspiring them to advocate against racism and societal inequities. Additionally, while some were interested in preserving White privilege, others were simply unwilling to acknowledge modern racism (Fine, 1997; Glazier & Seo, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2011; LeCompte & McCray, 2002; Pollock, Deckman, Mira, & Shalaby, 2010; Trainor, 2005).

Students reported enthusiasm around lessons that were designed to challenge their thinking and stimulate their political and social consciousness (Gay, 2000). Engaging in this kind of learning helped to garner student interest and increase engagement (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010). Further, students experienced improvements in their cross-cultural relationships with peers, noting that engaging in well-structured conversations about race and privilege helped them consider the perspectives of others and better understand each other (Sleeter & Grant, 2000). Black students enjoyed the opportunity to share about their racialized experiences with peers, and also felt encouraged by White teachers' efforts to invite conversations about race into the classroom (Flynn, 2012). African American students reported a high level of enjoyment learning about their own history and noted how it helped them engage in learning about others' cultures (Dixson & Dingus, 2007; Flynn, 2012; Howard, 2001; Phillippo, 2012; Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010).

**Teacher skills and dispositions that support equity pedagogies.** A classroom culture that supports academic risk taking is essential to equity pedagogy. Both warmth and rigor are necessary traits of an effective teacher (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ogbu, 1987; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Students need to feel comfortable enough to step outside of their comfort zone and learn in their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). To provide effective scaffolding and enable students to tackle challenging work, teachers must provide a warm environment that encourages a growth mindset, and also holds students to high expectations for success and rigor. Effective instruction includes multiple entry points for different learners, differentiated

instruction with multiple approaches to content, process, and product (Tomlinson, 2001), and a high ceiling paired with high expectations to succeed (Boaler, 2013).

Ladson-Billings (1995) asked African American parents to identify the qualities that they believed enabled teachers to be exceptionally successful in teaching African-American students. Among the qualities listed were:

The enthusiasm their children showed in school and learning while in their classrooms, the consistent level of respect they received from the teachers, and their perception that their teachers understood the need for the students to operate in the dual worlds of their home community and the White community. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162)

These qualities highlight the importance of teacher knowledge about the values of the community they serve, effective ways to engage and earn the trust of parents, and a genuine belief that each and every child can and must succeed (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 163).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Jones' (2000) Levels of Racism framework is a critical framework interested in the race-associated differences in health outcomes and the development of interventions that may eliminate those differences. The current study applies Jones' theory to the field of education through an examination of the race-associated differences that students experience within the institution of public schooling and the pedagogical practices and teacher dispositions that may narrow or eliminate those differences. Jones' framework articulates the following three levels of racism:

1) *Institutional Racism* refers to the socially normalized, differential access to opportunity such as secure housing, quality education, gainful employment, wealth, and a clean environment, based on race. Institutional racism operates without an “identifiable perpetrator,” is structural in nature, is codified into practice, and reflects and perpetuates systems of social privilege. It includes differential access to information such as one’s own history, lack of voice and representation. Often times it manifests as inaction in the face of need.

2) *Personally Mediated Racism* refers to individually held beliefs and prejudices that differ by race. Race-based assumptions may be in regard to the abilities, motives, and intentions of others and manifest as bias and discrimination, both intentional and unintentional. This includes a lack of respect, suspicion, devaluation, scapegoating, dehumanization, or deficit thinking based on race. *Personally Mediated Racism* maintains structural barriers to equity and is often condoned by social norms.

3) *Internalized Racism* is the acceptance of negative messages and beliefs about the intelligence, potential, and intrinsic worth of oneself and members of one’s own racial identity group. It manifests as an embracing of “whiteness” as an ideal, and an acceptance of limitations to one’s own aspirations, self-efficacy, and self-expression based on race. Although located within an individual, it reflects systems of privilege and pervasive societal values. Internalized racism often results in self-devaluation; resignation, and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness that undermine collective action. (p. 1212)

Jones' framework is particularly fitting for this study as it provides a structure within which to identify barriers to the social-emotional well-being for Students of Color, and to examine how teachers' use of EPSEW may serve to address them.

Here I will draw parallels between Jones' (2000) Levels of Racism framework and the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color in elementary school in order to contextualize the relationship between the socially mediated factors that contribute to the marginalization of Students of Color in school, and the pedagogical practices employed by teachers to tend to their marginalization.

Table 1.

*Jones' (2000) Levels of Racism Framework and Parallels to School Experiences of Students of Color that Impact their Social-Emotional Well-being*

	Jones' (2000) Levels of Racism Framework	Parallels to the Social-Emotional Wellbeing of Students of Color in Elementary School
Institutional Racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Structural in nature, codified into practice</li> <li>● Socially normalized</li> <li>● Reflects and perpetuates systems of social privilege</li> <li>● Differential access to opportunity</li> <li>● Differential access to information</li> <li>● Lack of voice and representation</li> <li>● Inaction in the face of need</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Segregation of schools (racially, socio-economically, environmentally)</li> <li>● Normalizing of social dominant patterns of engagement</li> <li>● Failure to equalize resources and opportunities across schools</li> <li>● Lack of affirming representation in literature, imagery, curricula, teaching faculty, leadership</li> <li>● Racial trauma as a collective experience</li> <li>● Inaction in the face of need</li> </ul>
Personally Mediated Racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rooted in individual beliefs and prejudices</li> <li>● Assumptions about abilities, motives, and intentions</li> <li>● Implicit and explicit bias and discrimination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher's implicit and explicit bias about intrinsic ability of students based on their race or other marginalized social status</li> <li>● Socially marginalized students denied opportunities for</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Suspicion, devaluation, scapegoating, dehumanization, deficit thinking</li> <li>● Condoned by social norms</li> </ul>	<p>challenging tasks with high rigor; their place is questioned in settings geared toward more successful students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● On a national scale, Black and African American students in K-12 are more than three times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers (Scott &amp; Nadler, 2018)</li> </ul>
Internalized Racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● People of Color accept and believe negative messages about the intelligence, potential, and intrinsic worth of themselves and other People of Color, embracing Whiteness as an ideal and rejecting their own racial identity</li> <li>● People of Color devalue their own aspirations, self-efficacy, and self-expression</li> <li>● Reflects systems of privilege and pervasive societal values</li> <li>● Results in hopelessness and helplessness that undermine collective action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students of Color reject and invalidate their own racial identity</li> <li>● Students of Color develop a lack of respect for one's self and other People of Color (Clark &amp; Clark, 1950; Harrell, Hall, &amp; Taliaferro, 2003; Utsey, Giesbrecht, Hook, &amp; Stanard, 2008; Speight, 2016; Williams &amp; Williams, 2008)</li> <li>● Students of Color have a lower sense of school belonging and question their place in the school community</li> <li>● Students of Color feel unsafe and insecure, often withdrawing socially (Apple, 2018; Lee &amp; Leets, 2002; Matsuda, 1989)</li> <li>● Students of Color experience lower rates of academic engagement and achievement in school (Ogbu, 1987; Steele, 1997; Steele &amp; Aronson, 1995)</li> <li>● Students of Color experience worse health outcomes (Krieger, 1999; Paradies et al., 2015; Pieterse et al., 2011)</li> <li>● Students of Color experience decreased economic prosperity and social mobility later in life (Howard &amp; Navarro, 2016), and higher rates of incarceration (Alexander, 2010)</li> </ul>

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Jones emphasizes the priority of addressing racism at the institutional level more so than at the personally mediated or internalized levels. As illustrated above, addressing institutional racism is necessary in order to systematically address the conditions, sources, social determinants, and contexts of inequity. Without this, simply addressing racism at the personally mediated and internalized levels will fall far short of mitigating inequitable outcomes for Students of Color in elementary school.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

### **Research Design**

This three year multiple case study enabled me to address my research questions using an applied research approach to “understand the nature and sources of human and societal problems” (Patton, 2002b, p. 224). This multiple case study in a real-life, present-day context (Yin, 2009) had specific boundaries of time and place (Creswell, 2013). As this study examined the equity literate teaching practices of two exemplary teachers, the findings from this applied qualitative research study may enable educators to better understand what equity pedagogy looks like in the classroom and the factors that contribute to its success in supporting the social emotional well-being of marginalized students through detailed description of observed pedagogies and analysis of interview data about teacher perceptions, understandings, and other influences on their pedagogical choices and teaching styles.

### **Setting, Context, and Unit of Analysis**

In this three-year multiple case study, the unit of analysis included two teachers at the study site, Arday Elementary School. Arday, a Pre-K-5 public magnet school in a refugee resettlement city in northern New England, hosts a diverse student population from over 30 countries, 55% of whom qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. This study explored the depth of the teachers’ perspectives, experiences, and reflections on their use of EPSEW (Patton, 2002b) over the course of three years.

**Sampling.** In selecting my unit of analysis, I chose two teachers for this multiple case study, an intentional choice to work with a small sample “nested in their context and studied in depth” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 31). Focusing on just two

subjects allowed me to pursue depth over breadth, focusing on information-rich data sources from which I was able to produce “voluminous data with multiple observation notes...or a few highly informative files, cases, or participants” (Biddix, 2018, p. 84). These two cases were selected based on the research questions and what they might reveal about the social emotional well-being of Students of Color in their classrooms (Merriam, 1998). This purposeful sampling is nonrandom, chosen based on guidelines aligned with the needs of the study (Coyne, 1997) with a deliberate selection of the setting, people, and events (Maxwell, 2008; Patton, 2002b).

I used criterion sampling to select two data-rich cases (Biddix, 2018; Patton, 2002b) that exemplified aspects of equity pedagogy and culturally relevant teaching as related to the work of Gay (2000), Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2006a, 2006b, 2017), Scharf (2014), Sleeter (2012), and Howard (2001). These two teachers:

- a) Considered the cultural background of their students intentionally;
- b) Made deliberate efforts to connect students’ life experiences to their new learning in school;
- c) Sought out and used teaching materials that reflect the demographics and experiences of students;
- d) Employed strategies to learn about students’ lives and affirm the contributions of each individual to the class;
- e) Differentiated instruction;
- f) Encouraged student voice, shared inquiry, and dialogue;
- g) Enacted a high level of engagement with families and the community; and

- h) Demonstrated awareness of their own biases and a willingness to question them.

These specific criteria, or delimiters, allowed me to identify my two cases, Amber and Lucille, for this study. All names used in this study are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

*Access.* In addition to my data collection, I worked in the same school district with both teachers for 14 years and became familiar with their passions for social justice and equity. In my role as a classroom teacher at Arday Elementary, I got to know both teachers, Amber and Lucille, by spending time talking with them at weekly staff meetings, consulting about curriculum, and partnering on district-wide initiatives. In addition to teaching at Arday I had worked with several groups of teachers, including Amber and Lucille, to design integrated units of study to share with other teachers in my role as the school district's K-5 Social Studies instructional coach. Both teachers' contributions stood out to me as particularly impactful, as they shared their own classroom techniques and lessons, talked about the levels of student engagement in their classrooms, and shared their own personal reflections about the value of EPSEW in their classrooms.

Additionally, in my most recent role as the school district's K-12 equity integration coach, I was able to collaborate with both Amber and Lucille, as well as the principal at Arday Elementary, John, to share resources, attend their classroom performances and events, and continue to get their input on district-wide curricular implementation with regards to equity and inclusion. This varied and longstanding

knowledge of these two teachers influenced my criterion-based sampling and contributed to the depth of my analysis over time (Patton, 2002a).

Amber taught a traditional fourth grade classroom, and Lucille taught an English immersion class specifically designed for English Learners (EL) new to the country. Selecting the English immersion class along with the typical fourth grade class provided variation in this small-scale case study. Both teachers self-identified as female, so I have used the gender pronouns *she/her* throughout this paper.

***Description of participants.*** Amber was a White woman in her mid-forties. In her 23rd year of teaching, she had a strong physical presence, a booming voice, and exuded confidence. She incorporated the arts into her teaching across content areas in her fourth grade class. Amber described diversity as “the beauty of life.” Her husband was West African, and their three children were biracial, which influenced her family culture and beliefs about racial equity. She belonged to an African drumming group which performed and taught in her community. Before classroom teaching, Amber taught French for a decade and served as the Spanish teacher at Arday Elementary School.

Lucille was a White, Jewish woman in her sixties, and at the time of this study, had been teaching for 27 years. She was an experienced teacher of English Learners at Arday Elementary School. Lucille’s classroom was unlike other classrooms, as it was specifically designed for students who were new to the country and needed intensive English language instruction. The children in her class ranged in age from 8 to 12, typically third through fifth grade. Lucille played a large part in the design and establishment of this program as she recognized the growing need for an English immersion class as the refugee population in the community expanded over the last 15

years. As the granddaughter of immigrants and a self-described “former lesbian,” she identified as someone who knows what it feels like to be socially marginalized.

### **Data Collection**

According to Glesne (2011), it is crucial to note detailed descriptions of “people, places, events, activities, and conversations,” and also “ideas, reflections, hunches, and notes about patterns that seem to be emerging” (p. 71). Over the course of three years, I conducted six formal research observations each ranging from 30 minutes to two hours. Additionally, I conducted six semi-structured interviews with each teacher. Both data collection methods are described below.

**Observations.** Throughout this three year study, I conducted a total of 12 classroom observations, six in each teacher’s classroom. I took field notes on teachers’ use of EPSEW including their behaviors, language, interactions with students, communication styles, teaching delivery methods, structure of lessons and learning experiences, classroom management, choice of teaching materials and content, cultural knowledge, frames of reference, connections to students’ prior knowledge, classroom climate and culture, behavioral interventions, de-escalation techniques for dysregulated students, and use of strategies to ensure all students understood new academic language.

I followed a consistent process when conducting classroom observations (see Appendix A: Observation Protocol). My observation protocol included the date, place, length, and time of the observation, as well as my descriptive and reflective notes (Angrosino, 2007; Creswell, 2013). To the extent possible, I was a non-participant observer as an outsider of the group, watching and taking field notes from a distance without direct involvement with the people or activity (Creswell, 2013, p. 167). I entered

the classroom silently, drawing as little attention to myself as possible. At times, I acted as a participant-observer, responding briefly when students greeted me and engaging in informal conversation. Teachers and students at Arday were accustomed to having visitors, familiar and unfamiliar, throughout their day due to several factors including Arday's status as a magnet school that is of interest to many outsiders, frequent partnerships with community members, and the school's generally welcoming climate. For each observation, I carefully chose a place in the classroom where I was out of the way but able to see and hear classroom instruction, conversations, and interactions.

When I first arrived in the classroom, I tried to observe everything, making notes without specific regard for my research questions, and instead, focusing on describing the setting (Glesne, 2011.) I noted the physical space, classroom layout, location of the students in relation to the teacher, instructional materials that were visible, the volume in the room, and whether the room generally felt calm, busy, structured, or chaotic. Noticing and taking field notes on the ordinary is what Glesne (2011) calls "making the familiar strange" (p. 69). I also noted the participants' demographics including perceived age, social class, race, and gender, as well as how many students were in the room.

I looked for social interactions among students, specifically how they grouped themselves when they had agency to do so, with whom they interacted, and how they communicated verbally and non-verbally with each other. In some cases, I noted some material ways in which students expressed themselves such as their clothing, hair styles, and accessories, as well as non-material aspects such as proxemics, gestures, facial expressions, body language, and social norms. I consciously observed "the research setting; its participants; and the events, acts, and gestures that occur within them"

(Glesne, 2011, p. 70) noting what I saw, heard, felt, and thought. This allowed me to look for patterns and start to identify similarities and differences in behavior. After my initial observations from each class, I became more focused, looking more specifically at the Students of Color, their social interactions, emotional affect, and how the teacher's use of EPSEW helped to keep them feeling engaged and connected.

Each time I observed, I brought my laptop with a keyboard silencer and took field notes on my computer. I took what Lofland and Lofland (1995) describe as full field notes, written in the setting in the moment quickly and carefully. I made intentional choices to be descriptive, noting what I observed while withholding judgement (Glesne, 2011). That same day or the following day I reviewed my field notes in order to add in details I remembered and start to reflect on my observations. This process was invaluable in my ability to focus the next observations and interviews. My exit from the classroom was quiet and without fanfare, with a silent wave to the teacher followed later by my expressions of gratitude for allowing me to observe in their classrooms.

**Interviews.** I conducted a total of 12 semi-structured interviews, six with each of the two teachers over three years in order to gain insight into their decisions to embrace equity pedagogy as an essential component of their practice. I believed they would be comfortable sharing their thoughts about what is often a nuanced and somewhat vulnerable conversation. Creswell (2013) said that one-on-one interviews work best with “individuals who are not hesitant to speak and share ideas” (p. 164). I designed my interview questions in order to contextualize my observations. Interview questions were designed to learn more about Amber and Lucille's use of EPSEW to support their Students of Color. In my first interview, I asked them what factors they considered when

planning and delivering lessons, what drove and framed their relationships and communications with students and families, how they learned about each child's culture and background, and how their teaching practice had shifted since the 2016 presidential election (Appendix B). In my second interview, I asked about their perceptions about student marginalization, sense of belonging, and trauma informed practices (Appendix C). In my third interview, I asked if and how their teaching practice had changed as a result of the increase in race-based hate incidents, and how it impacted their students' sense of belonging or well-being at school. I also asked Amber and Lucille to describe the extent to which they include politically charged issues in their curricula (Appendix D). In my fourth interview, I asked about student demographics and revisited questions from my second interview in order to understand any changes in the data, such as their perceptions of student marginalization and belonging, and trauma in the classroom (Appendix E). In my fifth interview, I revisited some of the questions from my first interview, as well as some of the prior questions about racial trauma in order to triangulate the data (Appendix F). And finally, in my sixth interview, I asked about the influences that have informed their understanding of racial trauma, as well as the social determinants they believed to contribute to it (Appendix G).

Much like my process for observations, I wrote analytical memos after each interview in order to reflect, record my ideas and questions, and note anything else of significance along the way. This helped with my own subjectivity, as I wanted to monitor my own bias and assumptions that come with familiarity with my research subjects.

Due to the vast amount of interview data collected, I did not cite each personal communication where Amber and Lucille's quotes appear throughout this study. Instead,

I have included this acknowledgement here in order to preserve the readability in subsequent sections.

### **Data Analysis**

For my analysis, I began with what Creswell (2013) described as the “first loop in the spiral” (p. 182), data management. I transcribed all my interviews and observation notes and imported them into HyperRESEARCH in order to manage the large volume of data I collected. Agar (1980) suggests that researchers read the transcripts in their entirety several times to “immerse [one’s] self in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts” (p. 103). As I read through my transcripts, I made margin notes, particularly as I noticed key concepts emerging.

I analyzed observation and interview data through descriptive coding and identified themes that aligned with my conceptual framework, a priori, (Saldaña, 2015) as well as those that emerged in the coding process, in vivo (Creswell, 2013). I developed in vivo codes during the process of reading through my transcriptions and memos, and began to interpret the data based on my codes as well as from the context of my literature review and conceptual framework. I coded data as thought units, segments of text organized around focal ideas or themes (Patton, 2002a). To do this effectively, I used what Miles et al. (2014) referred to as descriptive coding. “A descriptive code assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase,” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74). I also used HyperRESEARCH to check for coding drift. Next, I sorted my data into categories of information, grouping relevant data together. This enabled me to sort my data into broader categories which I used to construct a narrative about my case study.

Creswell (2013) suggested identifying five to seven general themes that “consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 186). Clustering my codes around common ideas helped me make sense of my findings. I fine-tuned my themes by identifying subthemes in each category. I also revisited my original research questions as I worked to refine my themes to determine which ones best addressed the purpose of my study. I created a conceptually clustered matrix to display and compare my data. This enabled me to “bring together major roles, research subtopics, variables, concepts, and themes for at-a-glance summative documentation and analysis” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 173). Finally, I created vignettes in order to provide what Miles and colleagues (2014) call “contextual richness,” which also serve to preserve a sense of chronology as the researcher tells the narrative story. Creswell (2013) identified both rich description and chronology among key features of case studies.

**Limitations.** The most significant limitation of this study was the small unit of analysis. This case study only had two participants, therefore it cannot be generalized to a larger audience. Because my focus was on teachers and their use of EPSEW in the classroom, I chose not to interview or directly interact with students, which would have provided valuable insight into their thoughts and perceptions of the teacher’s use of equity pedagogy to support their social emotional well-being; this would be an entirely different study. Instead, this study focused on the teachers’ actions, thoughts, reflections, and approaches with regard to the social-emotional wellbeing of their Students of Color.

**Trustworthiness and rigor.** In this section, I address issues of trustworthiness and rigor by describing the use of multiple case sampling, time sampling, triangulation,

member checks, peer examination, reflexivity, the issue of applicability, and role of researcher identity in order to establish the credibility of this study.

***Sampling.*** Multiple case sampling adds confidence to the findings (Miles et al., 2014) through replication if the findings are similar across cases and settings (Yin, 2009). Further, multiple case sampling increases confidence that an emerging theory is generic (although not generalizable) if the researcher sees it apply or not apply in predictable ways (Saldaña, 2018). Trustworthiness is also supported by the use of purposeful criterion sampling (Biddix, 2018; Coyne, 1997; Maxwell, 2008; Patton, 2002a) as well as the small sample size which allows me to focus on deep, detailed, descriptive data (Biddix, 2018; Miles et al., 2014).

This three-year case study also employed time sampling, observing and interviewing subjects across years, seasons, days of the week, times of day, settings, and interactions among different social groupings (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989; Krefting, 1991). Time sampling helped establish credibility, as it highlighted the importance of the environment in which the data are collected (Krefting, 1991).

Prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) through several interviews and observation periods allowed me to increase the worth of my findings by documenting recurrent factors, patterns, and themes in my study (Leininger, 1985). Immersion in the research setting over time helped establish credibility by considering the neutrality of the data rather than neutrality of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as several scholars argue that researcher objectivity is largely unattainable (Agar, 1986; Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pillow, 2003; Stake, 1995). Additionally, prolonged engagement and time sampling helped me determine whether the “content of the interviews, the

behaviors, and observed events are typical or atypical” (Krefting, 1991, p. 221) across cases. I addressed the credibility of my study within the interview process, reframing similar questions from one interview to the next over the course of three years (May, 1989).

***Triangulation.*** This study used what Krefting (1991) and Knafl and Breitmayer (1989) call *triangulation of data methods*, comparing data from multiple interviews with the two teachers and several classroom observations over three years, as well as *triangulation of data sources*, including time sampling and multiple case sampling. Triangulation was used to cross-check my interpretation and analysis of the data, decreasing my own bias and increasing dependability by referencing multiple sources.

***Member checks and peer examination.*** I employed peer examination in order to check my research plan and implementation as it evolves (Glesne, 2011), discussing my “process and findings with impartial colleagues who have experience with qualitative methods (Krefting, 1991, p. 219). I had access to academic peers as well as substantial opportunities to engage in peer examination through my coursework as a doctoral student, the timing of which was compatible with my data collection and analysis.

Six member checks with Amber and Lucille were conducted throughout my data gathering phase, sharing descriptive accounts of my observations and interpretations of my interview data in order to ensure that they accurately represented the experiences under study (Stake, 1995). Additionally, I conducted a final member check near the conclusion of my study sharing excerpts of my findings in order to ensure the truth value (Sandelowski, 1986) and credibility of my final presentation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

*Applicability and transferability.* In the qualitative research tradition, Krefling (1991) argues that applicability is irrelevant because the nature and purpose of a qualitative case study is to “describe a particular phenomenon or experience, not to generalize to others” (p. 216). Although this case study is not generalizable to a larger context, it may be generalizable from case to case within this study (Miles et al., 2014, p. 34) if evidenced by recurrent patterns and themes that emerge. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that as long as the original researcher presents sufficient descriptive data to allow comparison, they have addressed the problem of applicability and transferability, phrases qualitative researchers prefer over the terms reliability and validity, which are more commonly associated with quantitative studies (Creswell, 2013; Krefling, 1991).

Variability in a qualitative study is to be expected, as it is grounded in the lived realities and interpretations of individuals. Although any one subject may not be representative of a broader group, their experience is still considered important and valid; in this way, consistency in qualitative research is more about the ability to track variability back to the source (Krefling, 1991). My study established consistency and confirmability by making available the following records for audit: raw data such as my field notes and audio recordings of interviews; “data reconstruction and synthesis products” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 319-320) such as thematic categories, analytical memos, and interpretations; process notes on my data collection, analysis procedures, and considerations for trustworthiness; and my study proposal (Krefling, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this section, I have provided a detailed description of my methods for data collection, analysis, and interpretation in a way that could guide replication and auditability of my process (Glesne, 2011; Guba, 1981; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

*Authority of the researcher, positionality, and reflexivity.* In this examination of teachers' use of EPSEW to support Students of Color in elementary school, my own degree of familiarity with the topic under study increased the trustworthiness of the researcher as a human instrument (Miles et al., 2014). As a nationally recognized educator of 14 years within K-12, a statewide consultant and trainer for educational equity with a focus on racial justice, a faculty instructor in the teacher education department at a small, private college in northern New England, and a Person of Color, I believe my own professional and personal experiences with educational inequity and racial trauma provide me with the credibility to approach these topics with authority.

In order to further enhance my skills as a researcher, I have taken six courses in research methods through my doctoral program including qualitative, advanced qualitative, quantitative, applied quantitative, survey, and mixed methods which support my technical competence (Krefting, 1991).

To strengthen the trustworthiness of this study and ensure that my “interpretation and analysis appropriately represent the experiences and stories of diverse study participants” (Biddix, 2018, p. 83), I engaged in ongoing reflexive practice. Danielewicz (2001) describes reflexivity as:

An act of self-conscious consideration that can lead people to a deepened understanding of themselves and others, not in the abstract, but in relation to specific social environments...with the inherent goals of critique and revision for the for the explicit purpose of achieving an understanding that can lead to change in thought or behavior. (p. 155)

Reflexive analysis helped raise my awareness of my own influence on the data (Krefting, 1991) as it required me to consider my own background, biases, perceptions, and interests, as they pertain to my study (Ruby, 1980). A reflexive practice also helped ensure that I did not become over involved as the researcher in my study (Glesne, 2011; Good, Herrera, Good, & Cooper, 1985), particularly given my continued partnership with Arday Elementary School in my roles as a professor of teacher education and a former colleague of the study's participants.

It was crucial to analyze myself in the context of the research, acknowledging that my own background did, in large part, determine the vantage point from which I organized, studied, and analyzed the findings (Agar, 1986; Krefting, 1991; Pillow, 2003). Similar to Freire's concept of conscientization, or critical consciousness, reflexivity raised my awareness of the acquisition of social myths over time, their dominant tendencies, and the implications for my own analysis (1970). Gay and Kirkland (2003) advocate for the pairing of critical racial and cultural consciousness with self-reflection in order to know one's self as a person, situate that knowledge in the context of the study, and question existing knowledge and assumptions. Reflexivity also contributed to the trustworthiness of this study by applying a critical lens when determining neutrality, or whether the findings were influenced by my assumptions, motivations, and perspectives (Guba, 1981).

Throughout my data collection and analysis, I engaged in reflexivity as a methodological tool to better represent, legitimize, or critique my data (Pillow, 2003). My reflexive practice included writing analytical memos or margin notes throughout my

research process which helped me analyze the data and discover things I may not have been aware of (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Maxwell, 2005; Watt, 2007).

## CHAPTER 4: ALTERNATIVE DISSERTATION FORMAT

This chapter contains two manuscripts which address my two research questions, respectively. The first, *Countering the Effects of Racial Trauma in Elementary School: A Social Determinants Perspective*, draws parallels between the Social Determinants of Health framework as outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO), and the social-emotional wellbeing of Students of Color in elementary school in order to broaden pedagogical perspectives regarding systemic rather than individualistic approaches to address educational inequity. The second, *A Multi-Year Case Study of Equity Literate Approaches in Elementary School*, examines best practices in equity literate pedagogy with diverse student populations in two classrooms at a public elementary school in northern New England in order to improve the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color.

## **Manuscript 1:**

### **Countering the Effects of Racial Trauma in Elementary School:**

#### **A Social Determinants Perspective**

##### **Abstract**

Despite over 80 years of discourse about internalized racism as educational inequity, the role of the school as a social context for understanding the detrimental effects of internalized racism is still lacking in the literature around educational theory and practice, particularly studies that focus on the school experiences of elementary age students. Internalized racial oppression often lies at the root of an individual's ability to reach their potential and achieve success, self-actualization, and healing. These indicators of inequitable school experiences for Students of Color warrant attention to the socially determined facets of public education: specifically the manifestations of racial trauma at the institutional, personally mediated, and internalized levels, a sense of school belonging (SOSB) for Students of Color, and the patterns of social engagement that shape their experiences in school.

The purpose of this study is to draw parallels between the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) framework as outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO), and the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color in elementary school in order to broaden pedagogical perspectives regarding systemic rather than individualistic approaches to address educational inequity. Findings include supporting a sense of school belonging, learning environments for student engagement, understanding and addressing racial trauma and secondary racial trauma, trauma informed practices in schools, and teachers' personal connections to racial trauma.

*Keywords: racial trauma, internalized racism, school belonging, critical pedagogy, social determinants of health, social emotional well-being*

##### **Introduction**

Despite over 80 years of discourse about internalized racism as educational inequity, the role of the school as a social context for understanding the detrimental effects of internalized racism is still lacking in the literature around educational theory and practice (Huber, Johnson, & Kohli, 2006; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Pyke, 2010; Shim, 2018; Suarez-Orozco, 2004), particularly studies that focus on the school

experiences of elementary age students. Recently conceptualized in the field of psychology, it can be defined as:

The situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy of the dominant group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, and ideologies that undergird the dominant group's power and privilege and limits the oppressed group's own advantages. (Bivens, 2005, p.45-46)

It is important to note that internalized racism is structural in nature and systemically reinforces the social privilege of White people while actively undermining the self-efficacy of People of Color as they internalize the oppression they experience.

Further, the distributions of social determinants that contribute to a child's social-emotional well-being are shaped by public policies that reflect predominant political beliefs in a community (Hong & Garbarino, 2012; Huang & Cornell, 2019; Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010). These patterns of social engagement and dominance which include racism and discrimination contribute to race-based inequity in schools. People of Color and those marginalized by social inequity are particularly vulnerable to the disparate outcomes that result.

Current research does not draw a direct connection among a SDOH perspective with regards to a sense of school belonging, the trauma of racial oppression, and the social emotional experiences of Students of Color in school. This study aims to do so in order to help educators better understand the broad context of social-emotional well-being in school for Students of Color. Possible contributions of this study include the application of the SDOH model to K-12 education with a specific focus on the social and

community contexts that underlie a student's social-emotional experiences in school, an understanding of internalized racial oppression as a form of trauma, and highlight the ways in which two teachers at Arday Elementary School understood the systemic nature of race-based inequity in order to support Students of Color in their classrooms.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to draw parallels between the SDOH model as outlined by the WHO, and the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color in elementary school in order to broaden pedagogical perspectives regarding systemic rather than individualistic approaches to address educational inequity. These parallels may help provide an understanding of educational inequity and racial trauma from a social determinants perspective that compels educators to acknowledge the place-based nature of public education: specifically a SOSB and well-being for Students of Color, and the patterns of social engagement that shape their experiences in school. Applying a social determinants perspective may assist K-12 educators in their efforts to provide a more socially just and equitable schooling experience for all students that takes into account the social context of advantage and disadvantage in a student's everyday schooling experience.

This study addressed the following research question: How does the application of a Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) perspective reflect teachers' understanding of the systemic nature of educational inequity and the complexity of sense of belonging for Students of Color?

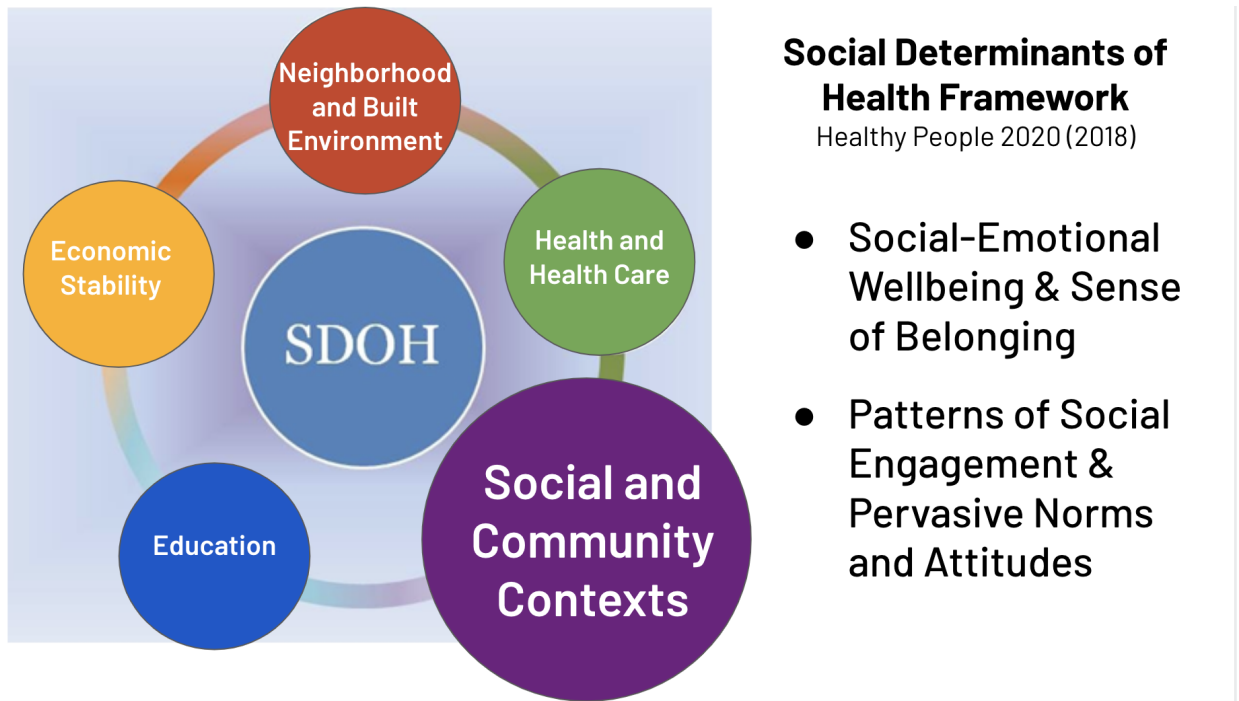
In order to examine the socially determined factors that influence the well-being and SOSB of Students of Color at Arday Elementary, and to identify and describe the

racial-trauma informed pedagogical practices that support their success, it is necessary to consider how the SDOH framework contributes to educators' understanding of educational inequity. This review of literature is organized into the following subtopics that frame my study: First, it describes the WHO's definition of the SDOH framework and highlights the structural and systemic causes of disparity. Second, it draws parallels between the SDOH framework and K-12 education, examining the construct of school belonging among Students of Color and related pedagogical supports and challenges. Third, it explores internalized racism as a form of trauma and examines the relationships among racial trauma, adverse childhood experiences, and social determinants of health. Below, I discuss how these subtopics contribute to understanding of the role of school belonging and racial trauma when considering systemic approaches to addressing race-based inequity in schools. I conclude by identifying gaps in the research that warrant further investigation.

## **Literature Review**

### **Social Determinants of Health**

The WHO defines SDOH as “the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age” (WHO, 2018). While there is no single definition of the SDOH, the WHO, Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as many governmental and non-governmental organizations recognize the following factors that impact the health of individuals and communities: social gradient, employment conditions, social exclusion, social support, stress, early childhood development, education, globalization, health care systems and programs, policy, urbanization, physical environments, addiction, food security, housing, transportation, and gender equity (Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Social Determinants of Health Framework

Healthy People 2020 (2018) presents a “place-based” organizing framework, reflecting five key SDOH: (1) Economic stability which includes employment, food insecurity, housing instability, and poverty; (2) Education, which includes high school graduation, enrollment in higher education, language and literacy, and early childhood education and development; (3) Health and Health Care which comprises access to primary care, health care, and Health Literacy; (4) Neighborhood and Built Environment which includes access to healthy foods, quality of housing, crime and violence, and environmental conditions; and (5) Social and Community Context which includes social cohesion, civic participation, discrimination, and incarceration.

**Social and community contexts.** The WHO recognizes social and community contexts as one of the major categories of SDOH (Healthy People 2020, 2018). While the

original study on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) focused on the adverse childhood experiences within the immediate family and home environment that impact health and wellbeing outcomes (Felitti et al., 2019), new developments in the field of public health are focusing on the social determinants and other supportive factors in a child's life, particularly with regard to their social and community contexts (Bruner, 2017). Socially determined factors outside of the home that contribute to a disparate level of well-being among children include racism, oppression, denigration, and the cumulative stresses caused by continuous exposure to discrimination and marginalization including racism at the institutional, interpersonal, and personal levels (Bruner, 2017; Collins, David, Handler, Wall, & Andes, 2004). Community-based and socially mediated ACEs impact all children; however, those most marginalized by social inequity are particularly vulnerable to the harms that result.

**The causes of disparity.** The 2011 World Conference on Social Determinants of Health and the resulting Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health affirm the unacceptability of health inequities and assert that “political, social, and economic forces” such as unequal distributions of income, wealth, power, social influence, and desirable resources at local, national, and global levels shape these circumstances (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008). Further, the WHO holds SDOH responsible for health inequities that disproportionately disadvantage people from historically marginalized demographic identity groups. The WHO makes the distinction between these economic and social conditions, and the individual risk factors, genetics, or lifestyle choices that are often mistakenly identified as the root causes of health disparities with regards to vulnerability to disease, injury or poor health outcomes.

Metzl, Petty, and Olowojoba (2018) describe structural competency as “a conceptual framework for bridging this gap between individual and institutional bias” and “...emphasizes diagnostic recognition of the economic and political conditions that produce health inequities in the first place” (p. 190). Jones (2000) describes this relationship as “codified into our institutions through custom, practice, and law” and one which “manifests as inherited disadvantage” such as “differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by race” (p. 1212). These outside influences of complex, intertwined social structures and economic systems impact health outcomes in ways that are beyond the scope of any individual’s control, and therefore must be considered in discussions about public health.

While individual habits, behaviors, and choices influence our health, not all Americans have the opportunity to make choices which will lead to good health. In order to ensure everyone has this opportunity, the CDC national agenda for public health, Healthy People 2020, sought to identify needed advances in health care, education, childcare, housing, business, law, media, community planning, transportation, and agriculture” (Healthy People 2020, 2018).

Because the distributions of social determinants are shaped by public policies that reflect prevailing political ideologies in a community (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010) people with socially marginalized identity markers are subject to a “toxic combination of poor social policies, unfair economic arrangements, and bad politics” (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008). A goal of the 2008 WHO Commission on SDOH was to have “public policy based on a vision of the world where people matter and social justice is paramount” (Marmot, 2005, p. 1099). The CDC Healthy People 2020 initiative

establishes four overarching goals for the decade, one of which is to “create social and physical environments that promote good health for all,” an emphasis shared by the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health 2008 report *Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health* (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008).

### **Parallels to K-12 Education**

While the SDOH framework is specific to public health, many parallels exist in the literature to K-12 public education and the issue of inequitable school experiences for students of color and students from non-dominant social groups. These parallels may help provide an understanding of educational inequity from a social determinants perspective that calls on educators to acknowledge the place-based nature of public education: specifically a sense of belonging and well-being for Students of Color, and the patterns of social engagement that shape their experiences. This perspective might assist K-12 educators in their efforts to provide a more socially just and equitable schooling experience for all students that takes into account the social context of advantage and disadvantage in a student’s everyday life.

**Sense of school belonging and social emotional well-being.** A sense of belonging reflects an individual’s perceptions of the extent to which they are included, supported, respected, validated, and affirmed by others in their social environments (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Goodenow & Grady, 1993) and is a significant influence on how connected one feels to other people and the social outcomes (acceptance or rejection) of those connections (Frederickson & Baxter, 2009; Maslow, 1943). Belonging and social connectedness are fundamental human needs (Maslow, 1943) with potent

implications for school success, and therefore schools and educators must attend to the social-emotional needs of students in school (Sulkowski, Demaray, & Lazarus, 2012). Due to the prerequisite nature of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, no academic learning can occur until the need to belong is addressed (Capps, 2004; Hamel, Leclerc, & Lefrancois, 2003; Kunc, 1992; Maslow, 1943).

The construct of SOSB is referred to using various terminology such as school connectedness, attachment, relatedness, bonding, climate, and engagement (Barber & Schluterman, 2008; Brown & Evans, 2002; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Hawkins & Weis, 1985; Johnson, 2009; Libbey, 2004; McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Moody & Bearman, 2004; O'Brennan & Furlong, 2010; Townsend & McWhirter, 2005). The terms stated above to describe SOSB share three similar operational attributes: (1) school-based peer relationships and experiences; (2) student-teacher relationships; and (3) students' general feelings about school as a whole (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, & Waters, 2018). Further, SOSB has been operationalized across studies as a commitment to school and a belief that school is important, a positive perception of teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, a safe school environment, and opportunities to be involved in school life (Murray & Greenberg, 2000; Prince & Hadwin, 2013).

**Benefits of school belonging.** An SOSB has been found to be critical to student success in school and is associated with a range of positive academic and psychosocial outcomes including increased motivation (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013), engagement and interest in school, school completion, reduced likelihood of mental health issues, and health risk behaviors (Bond et al., 2007; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; McGraw, Moore, Fuller, & Bates, 2008) and promotion of the development

of higher-order functioning, learning, and self-esteem (Cooper, 2004; Kearney, 2005; Osterman, 2000).

For Students of Color and students from historically and socially marginalized identity groups, finding a sense of belonging in school can be challenging due to cultural and linguistic differences, bias, systemic inequities, racism, and discrimination within and beyond the school walls (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Sulkowski et al., 2012). A lack of SOSB is linked with a negative impact on motivation, school engagement, attendance, academic outcomes, school dropout, poor mental health, emotional instability, loneliness, depression, anxiety, anger, maladjustment, substance abuse later in life, and negative self-perceptions (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bond et al., 2007; Bowlby, 1969; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Lonczak, Abbot, Hawkins, Kosterman, & Catalano, 2002; Maslow, 1943; Wilson & Elliot, 2003). Because of the social-ecological nature of teasing, bullying, and other forms of social exclusion, a lack of belongingness often manifests in group contexts (Hong & Espelage, 2012). This may cause distress about hostility toward peers and anxiety about being subjected to the same treatment, particularly if one shares the same group identity (such as race or sexual orientation) as those being victimized (Huang & Cornell, 2019).

Relatedly, belongingness in school serves as a protective factor (Browne, 2014) against negative emotional and psychological experiences, (Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2009; Wilkinson-Lee, Zhang, Nuno, & Wilhelm, 2011) and behavioral outcomes such as drug and alcohol use, truancy, early sexual behavior, violence, and risky behavior (Catalano, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Dornbusch, Erikson, Laird, & Wong, 2001; Resnick et al., 1997), whereas lack of belongingness was shown to be the strongest

predictor of depression (McGraw et al., 2008). A 2003 study by Maddox and Prinz (2003) also showed school connectedness to be a buffer against the negative effects of an unstable or harmful home environment and illustrated how a sense of school belonging can improve a student's social-emotional experience from a social determinants perspective.

### **Cultural Congruence and Sense of Belonging**

Ebersole, Kanahale-Mossman, and Kawakami (2015) pointed to the difference between theory and lived reality – Teachers of Color were able to understand the racialized experiences of students experiencing racism and discrimination, made connections to their own racialized experiences, built trust through sharing and empathy building, and thereby gained valuable exposure to multicultural perspectives in their classrooms.

Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier (1992) and later, Prince and Hadwin (2013), identified two essential components of belonging: being valued and needed, and congruence with other people through shared characteristics, confirmation, and understanding (Prince & Hadwin, 2013). According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Teacher and Principal Survey (2015-16), over 80% of the teaching force is White (Taie & Goldring, 2017) in stark contrast with only 48% of the student population identified as White. Projections show the trend will continue (Shim, 2018), with 45% of students identified as White in 2026 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The lack of congruence, or *culture gap*, between White teachers and students of color often leads to misunderstandings which result in disproportionately frequent suspension of marginalized students (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002), harsher school

discipline (Office of Civil Rights, 2014), and more frequent referrals for special education (Losen & Orfield, 2002) than their more socially dominant peers (Sulkowski et al., 2012).

There exists a wide range of teacher experiences with equity pedagogy, most notably those based on the racial and cultural identities of teachers and the students they serve (Irvine, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Monroe & Obidah, 2004; Scherff, 2005; Schmeichel, 2012; Young, 2010). Teachers across studies reported having shared goals with students to provide safe spaces to talk about race and racism, to recognize the discomfort in talking about racism and privilege, and to honor student voice (Ebersole et al., 2015; Flynn, 2012; Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010). However, good intentions were not enough; although teachers might philosophically value equity literate approaches to teaching, they may inadvertently neglect issues of racial or cultural significance.

Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2010) noted that in their study of a school with a majority of Black students and non-Black teachers, many teachers did not feel comfortable talking about issues of race, culture, identity, and equity in the classroom. Additionally, in some cases, teachers were intimidated by their own lack of cultural knowledge, and in others, failed to see the value in acknowledging the cultures of the students in their care (Ebersole, et al., 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This has implications for the need for teachers to reflect the student demographic in schools, a topic not explored in this study, yet one of great significance.

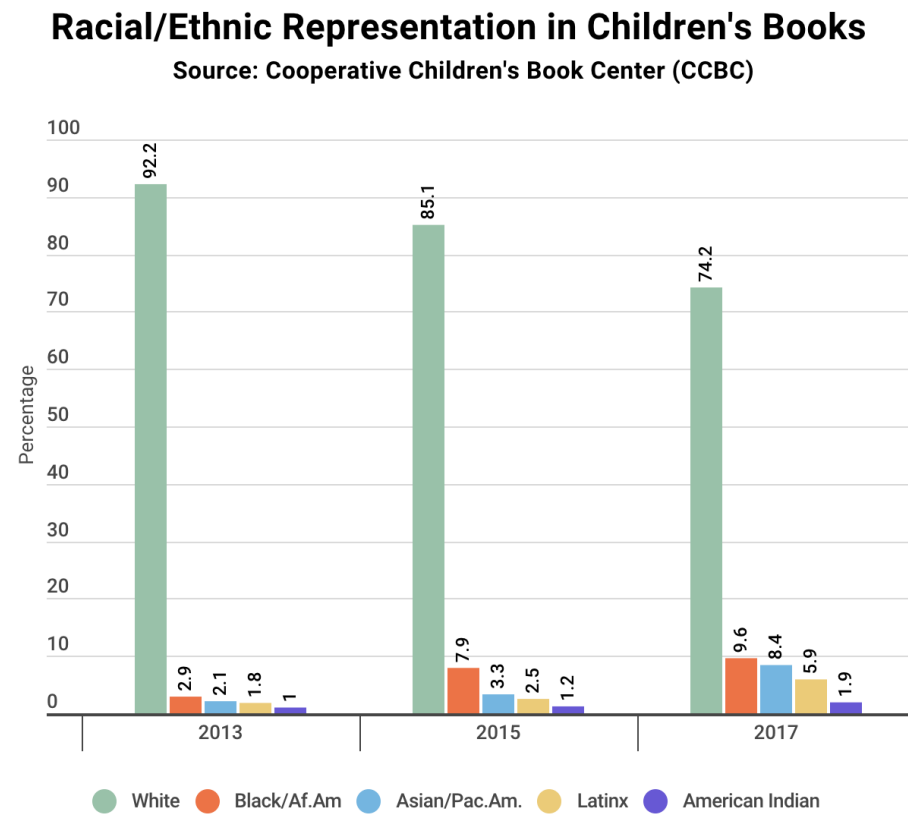
Another study (Phillippo, 2012) described how teachers who made skillful attempts to build relationships with students from backgrounds different from their own

raised concern among some African American students. As teachers tried to learn about their home lives, cultures, values, goals, and fears, some students found this to be intrusive. This mistrust, suspicion, or feelings of loss of privacy or agency were more significant in schools where the socio-cultural or institutional contexts constrained trusting relationships among students and teachers. Teachers must be cautious not to overstep the personal boundaries that students need in place in order to maintain autonomy, agency, and privacy (Phillippo, 2012). At the same time, they need to be able to intentionally and thoughtfully reflect student diversity through the inclusion of affirming representation in their curriculum and physical space.

**Affirming representation.** Gay (2000) noted that positive reflections of students' cultural identities and backgrounds "generate feelings of worth, dignity, competence, and confidence that can facilitate academic, personal, social, and professional achievement" (p. 150). Presenting positive and affirming reflections of students' racial and cultural identities is crucial to a SOSB. Relevant, affirming representations that reflect the identities of children provide opportunities for personal connections to their own learning (Brooks & McNair, 2015; St. Amour, 2003) and support students' belief that school is a place where they belong. They need to see mirrors, windows, and doors in their curriculum – mirrors of their own identities and relatable experiences, windows into the lives and perspectives of others, and doors to opportunities, possibilities, and uncharted territory (Bishop, 1990; Thomas, 2016).

Although representation of People of Color in children's literature has grown in recent years, the vast majority of books still center White characters and perspectives (Horning, 2019) (see Figure 2). A recent study by Cartledge, Keesey, Bennett, Ramnath,

& Council (2016) revealed that African American and Black students primarily preferred stories that reflected their own identities, familiar contexts, and life experiences. In contrast, many books that include representation of People of Color do so in ways that are unaffirming and problematic, including depictions of smiling slaves (Schoenberg, 2016), stereotypes, and harmful tropes (Bradford, 2001; Forest, Garrison, & Kimmel, 2015; MacCann, 2013; McGillis, 1999; Thomas, 2016).



Retrieved from <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp>

Figure 2. Racial/Ethnic Representation in Children's Books 2013-2017

## **Critical Consciousness and Decolonizing Pedagogies**

White teachers with racially and ethnically diverse students can effectively employ equity informed pedagogy through “study, practical experience, and reflective self-analysis (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 156). Teachers who understand and examine their own socialized stereotypes, attitudes, and assumptions about students from different social identity groups than themselves are able to acknowledge the ways in which their own privileges have been institutionalized within society and influence it has had on their lives (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010). Ongoing self-reflection is necessary in order to disentangle the myths and assumptions that perpetuate social privilege and inequity (King, 1992; McIntosh, 2013; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). An understanding of the histories, within-group differences, and characteristics of racial and ethnic groups can provide the conceptual and contextual knowledge that may inform a teacher’s equity pedagogy – including when to use knowledge about students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Banks, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Nieto, 1999).

Self-reflection also calls on educators to consider how those in dominant social groups have the privilege of being seen as individuals rather than as socialized group members. This key dynamic of social dominance promotes a belief in individual exceptionalism – that one is unaffected by biased messaging, norms and omissions dictated by dominant culture, and are therefore not part of the narrative of societal inequity (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010). This paradigm allows educators to embrace an approach to equity pedagogy that is reduced to a list of “how to’s” or what DiAngelo and Sensoy (2010) call a “recipe card;” such an approach only serves to reinforce the

simplistic approaches that critical discourses such as equity pedagogy seek to problematize.

Phillippo (2012) pointed to some hopeful data, noting that students who experienced positive teacher support had increased academic performance, attendance, graduation rates, GPA, and school engagement. This highlights the effective ways in which some scholars have interpreted culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical practices, bringing the models into closer alignment with equity pedagogy (Paris, 2012). In many cases, culturally relevant pedagogies have shown to be an effective way to strengthen the student-teacher relationships necessary to provide equal opportunities for success to all students (Gay, 2000; Griner & Stewart, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012; Sleeter, 2012; Toppel, 2015). However, this is not sufficient. It is necessary to extend practitioners' understanding of equity pedagogies to include tending to the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color and other students who experience marginalization.

### **Social and Community Contexts**

The SDOH framework provides an opportunity to examine the place-based nature of public education, paying particular attention to the social and community contexts that shape a student's experience in school. "The school culture and social structure are powerful determinants of how students learn to perceive themselves" (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 153), therefore the patterns of social engagement and pervasive norms within a school will likely impact students' social emotional experiences in school. Further, a structural competence perspective (Metzl et al., 2018) calls on educators to consider the ways in which our already marginalized students are disproportionately

disadvantaged by inequities embedded in our nation's political, social, and economic public policies, and how that dynamic differs from individual misfortune, choice, or inherent deficit.

**Hidden curriculum.** The hidden curriculum, or the assumptions, skills sets, social norms, expectations, and knowledge “not formally communicated, established, or conveyed within the learning environment” (Alsubaie, 2015, p. 125) and the unstated value associated with certain behavioral standards, professional dispositions, and patterns of social interaction (Miller & Seller, 1990) influence how students from different backgrounds navigate the school system. Differential access to understanding of these unspoken rules serve to perpetuate social inequity. Anyon (1980) found that elementary school teachers based educational opportunities for different students based on their social class, including preparation for work and access to information. For Students of Color, the hidden curriculum in a classroom either serves to validate their experiences with racism and social marginalization, or apply a deficit ideology and deny students equitable opportunities based on preconceived ideas about what they can and cannot do. “Becoming aware of the relationship between school culture, the social structure, and the deep structure of schools...can heighten the teacher's awareness of the power of the hidden curriculum” (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 154).

### **Trauma Informed Practices in Schools**

Mental health concerns are on the rise among school-age children (Olofson, Druss, & Marcus, 2015; Twenge, 2015; Weissman, Pratt, Miller, & Parker, 2015). A study by Sacks and Murphey (2018) reported 45% of children in the US have experienced at least one kind of childhood trauma, or Adverse Childhood Experience

(ACE) such as verbal, physical, sexual abuse or incarceration, mental illness, death or incarceration of a parent, divorce, violence, substance abuse, or sustained economic hardship (Bailey, 2015; Danese et al., 2009; Felitti et al., 1998). One in 10 children in the nation have experienced three or more ACEs, placing them at significant risk of negative outcomes later in life (Bailey, 2015; Ko et al., 2008; Kowalski, 2018).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 National Survey of Children's Health, 61% of Black children, 51% of Latinx children, 40% of White children, and 23% of Asian children have experienced at least one adverse experience (Sacks & Murphey, 2018).

School is the primary point of access for mental health services for children (Farmer, Burns, Phillips, Angold, & Costello, 2003; Ko et al., 2008). In response, some K-12 schools are currently undergoing training in trauma informed practices. Teachers are learning about the brain science of trauma, signs to watch for in the classroom, and effective strategies to support students dealing with trauma. Trauma informed practices in school have shown to improve the quality of interactions between students and teachers, improve the social and emotional behavior of students and teachers, reduce aggression, impulsivity, and hyperactivity in children, increase students' academic achievement, and improve the classroom and school climate (Bailey, 2015; Barfield & Gaskill, 2005; Hoffman, Hutchinson, & Reiss, 2009; Rain, 2014).

### **Internalized Racism and Racial Trauma**

Internalized racial oppression is a construct that can be described as the process by which People of Color internalize and accept White dominant culture's oppressive actions and beliefs (Bailey, Chung, Williams, Singh & Terrell, 2011; Taylor & Grundy,

1996) wherein the experience of oppression becomes a part of the core identity, self-concept, and self-knowledge that subordinate group members hold about themselves and others who share that identity (Morris, 1987; Pharr, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Woodson, 1990). Speaking as a Black woman, Lipsky (2016) states, “Some patterns of internalized racism have become so familiar that we, ourselves, accept them as part of our ‘black culture.’ We attribute them to “the way we are” (p. 144). Pheterson (1986) adds:

Internalized oppression is likely to consist of self-hatred, self-concealment, fear of violence and feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness, and gratefulness for being allowed to survive. Internalized oppression is the mechanism within an oppressive system for perpetuating domination not only by external control but also by building subservience into the minds of the oppressed groups. (p. 146)

Most recently conceptualized in the field of psychology, it can be defined as:

The situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominant group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, and ideologies that undergird the dominant group’s power and privilege and limits the oppressed group’s own advantages. (Bivens, 2005, p. 46)

This under-emphasized phenomenon has significant implications for Students of Color, and can manifest as internalized racism or racial trauma.

However, this acceptance of subordination to White dominant ideology is “not the result of some cultural or biological characteristic of the subjugated. Nor is it the consequence of any weakness, ignorance, inferiority, psychological defect, gullibility, or

other shortcoming of the oppressed” (Pyke, 2010, p. 553). Rather, it is the insidious manifestation of internalized racial oppression that conditions People of Color to identify with the negative messaging promulgated by society about who we are (Lipsky, 2016; Padilla, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The burden of “double consciousness” coined by W.E.B. Du Bois to describe the experience of Black people in America who view themselves from their own unique perspectives as individuals, and also as they are perceived by White people within a society that has historically oppressed, devalued, and dehumanized them, presents an involuntary duality of existence. Du Bois describes this as the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois, 1989, p. 2). The pervasive stereotypes perpetuated by the media and mainstream culture can lead to internalized anti-Black sentiment, self-doubt, lowering of ideals, and self-disparagement (Du Bois, 1903/1989).

**The psychological impacts of racial trauma.** The psychological injuries of internalized racial oppression are many. Pyke (2010) describes these as the “psychic costs” and defines them as “the individual inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images and ideologies perpetuated by the White dominant society about one’s racial group, leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one’s race and or oneself” (p. 553). Even among communities of color there exists an internalized skin tone bias that positions and privileges lighter skinned People of Color over their darker skinned counterparts (Golden, 2004; Hunter, 2007; Morrison, 1970; Thurman, 1929; Walker, 1984).

The effects of internalized racism and internalized racial oppression range from psychological injuries (Speight, 2016) such as self-hatred and self-rejection (Clark & Clark, 1950; Harrell, Hall, & Taliaferro, 2003; Utsey, Giesbrecht, Hook, & Stanard, 2008; Williams & Williams, 2008), to compromised physical health for People of Color (Krieger, 1999; Paradies et al., 2015; Pieterse, Tood, Neville, & Carter, 2011). hooks (2003) refers to this as the “indoctrination” and “mental colonization” of the oppressed. Additionally, racial trauma contributes to disparate rates in academic achievement in school (Ogbu, 1979) which in turn contributes to decreased economic prosperity and social mobility (Howard & Navarro, 2016), and higher rates of incarceration (Alexander, 2010). These psychological implications point to an urgent need for educators to understand the racialized context of inequitable social emotional experiences of children in school (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005).

**The physical impacts of racial trauma.** Internalized racial oppression can also lead to compromised physical health for People of Color (Krieger, 1999; Paradies et al., 2015; Pieterse, 2011). A 1999 study by Tull and colleagues found a significant correlation between internalized racism and waist circumference among Black Caribbean women, even when controlling for age, education, anxiety, and depression pointing to increased odds for abdominal obesity, as well as increased blood pressure. Racism can also affect the disproportionate rates of cardiovascular disease in African Americans. Medical health professionals and researchers Calvin et al. (2003) assert that the following factors negatively affect cardiovascular health: 1) *Institutional racism*, socio-economic immobility, differential access to desirable resources, and poor living conditions; 2) *Perceived/personally mediated racism* and the psychophysiological reactions that result;

3) *Internalized racism*, the negative self-evaluations and acceptance of negative cultural stereotypes as true (p. 315). These three levels of racism (Jones, 2000) are necessary to consider in examinations of racial trauma, as perpetrators and mitigating factors alike can be identified at each level to address the social-emotional well-being of People of Color.

### **Addressing Theory and Practice**

Social psychologists Phillips, Adams, and Salter (2015) argue that many in their field embrace an “understanding of well-being that abstracts persons from social and historical context” and in doing so, reflect and reproduce an unjust, dominant status quo by examining how individuals cope with marginalization and oppression “rather than acting to dismantle the oppressive structures that are the source of their marginalization” (p. 380). This lack of attention to the systemic and structural nature of racism and oppression often allows for a hyper-focus on the individual rather than the social and community contexts of school.

**Decolonial response.** Berila (2016) calls for a politicizing of the context of wellness, noting that it is “important to situate the wellness for marginalized groups within the context of structural oppression and violence,” stating that “for members of marginalized groups, self-healing and wellness is never just an individual thing, because what they need to heal from includes structural oppression that targets their whole group... broader cultural ideologies devalue their worth, so they need to come to healing and self-empowerment over and against this devaluation” (p. 8).

The *coloniality of power*, or the living legacy of European colonialism that identifies racial, social, and political hierarchies in modern post-colonial societies perpetuates the societal valuing of some and disenfranchisement of others (Quijano,

2000). Paired with the *coloniality of knowledge* (Mignolo, 2002) which serves to “reflect perspectives of the powerful, pathologize experiences of the oppressed, and reinforce domination,” (Phillips et al., 2015, p. 371). These two constructs present a context that is inherently political and necessitates a decolonizing approach to understanding oppression, self-actualization, and wellness for People of Color. Healing, self-recovery, and political resistance are innately linked. For those whose emotional health is impacted by oppression, a liberatory approach is needed in order to achieve self-actualization.

Describing the experience of Black women, hooks (2015) writes, “We have resisted continued devaluation by countering the dominant stereotypes about us that prevail in white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy by decolonizing our minds,” (p. ix). In order to effectively deconstruct internalized oppression and respond to structural and epistemic oppression, People of Color and people with marginalized identities must engage in mental decolonization, countering the dominant narratives and redefining our own reality based on our lived experience and the liberatory knowledge we create and claim as our own (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2015; Phillips et al., 2015).

### **Social Context of Internalized Racism**

An emerging theme in the literature around deconstructing internalized racism is the need to differentiate that which lies in the realm of individual, and that which lies in the societal, contextual, or collective realm. Because White domination and the oppression of People of Color are social phenomena rooted in the country’s history and continue to be reinforced by systems of structural, institutional, and systemic racism, it is necessary to also situate the work of deconstructing internalized racial oppression within

the realm of the broad social context of living in a racist society, and less about the individual experience.

Tappan (2006) argues that both internalized oppression and internalized domination “have been viewed almost exclusively as internal, deep, unchanging, psychological qualities or characteristics of the oppressed, on the one hand, and the privileged, on the other” (p. 2116). He argues that this internal, individualized view serves to obscure “the role that systemic, structural, and institutionalized forces play in the production and reproduction of oppression,” stating that “privilege and oppression are the result of forces and mechanisms that go far beyond the individual psychological level” (Tappan, 2006, p. 2117).

It is commonly held that race is a social construct, invented by humans to categorize and ultimately, to oppress groups of people (Bell, 1995; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Coates, 2013; Delgado, 2011; Du Bois, 2011; Painter, 2011). But, races are socially rather than biologically real (McIntosh, 2013), and reenacted in the everyday life of individuals in their encounters with others (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Further, Liberation Psychologist Martín-Baró says that “if the individual is a human individual, it is because he or she is shaped by society; if a human society exists, it is because there are individuals who make it up” (Martín-Baró, Aron, & Corne, 1996, p. 69).

Since it is the socialization into White supremacist thinking, the internalization of racial self-hatred, that is the psychological groundwork which prepares many Black folk to see themselves as always and only victims, it is further mental colonization to then blame the individuals who succumb to powerful forces of indoctrination. (hooks, 2003, p. 78)

It is essential to locate blame not on the individual student being marginalized by their social contexts, but rather within the systems that continue to oppress them.

Anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000) seeks to challenge an inequitable status quo, namely, oppression, marginalization, and domination, which necessitates a shared focus on the individual and the “social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts in which the individual lives” (Tappan, 2006, p. 2122). With regards to schooling, Freire (1970) makes clear the connection between individuals and the context in which we operate:

Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that [humans are] abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from [humans]. (p. 69)

In his writings about humanisation, Freire’s (1970) concept of conscientization, or the development of a critical consciousness, is essential to understanding one’s social reality, including the impacts of oppression and marginalization. Instead of locating the problem of racial trauma within the individual, one must also consider holding the “schools—the teachers, curriculum, and unequal resources—accountable for internalization of negative self and racial-group perceptions, as well as the acceptance of a racial hierarchy founded in white supremacy” (Huber et al., 2006, p. 4).

The historical, societal impact on oppression is perhaps best illustrated by the concept of hegemony, where the dominant group or ruling class dictates the values of the society (Gramsci, 1971), controlling the construction of reality through the production of “knowledge” (Foucault, 1977). Oppressed groups accept the dominant group’s interests,

including the negative stereotypes about themselves and internalize oppression. This “mental colonization” (hooks, 2003) or indoctrination influences the perspectives and beliefs of the oppressed, often without their conscious participation (Pyke, 2010). “This conceptualization allows scholars to consider the involuntary aspects of internalized racial oppression and the limits of individual resistance” (Pyke, 2010, p. 556). An apt analogy might be that racial oppression and domination is the water in which we swim; it is difficult to see or notice, and even more difficult to undermine.

Broadly speaking, school is the hub of social interaction for students. The socialization of Students of Color toward a negative self-perception paired with the socialization of White students toward a notion of superiority perpetuate racial hierarchy and marginalization in school (hooks, 2003; Huber et al., 2006; Woodson, 1990). Social marginalization among Students of Color often leads to the trauma of internalized racial oppression, posing significant barriers to students’ ability to succeed academically and thrive socially and emotionally (hooks, 1994). This calls for a broader view of the context of wellness, one that acknowledges the impact of structural oppression which targets groups minoritized and marginalized by societal inequity, and the broader cultural ideologies that devalue the sense of self-worth among Students of Color. In the next section I describe my study design and methods of data collection and analysis.

## **Methods**

### **Context**

This case study is part of a larger three year study that employed an applied qualitative approach to “understand the nature and sources of human and societal problems” (Patton, 2002, p. 224). The unit of analysis included two teachers at the study

site, Arday Elementary School. Arday, a Pre-K-5 public magnet school in a refugee resettlement city in northern New England which hosts a diverse student population from over 30 countries, 55% of whom qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. The overall study explored the depth of two teachers' perspectives, experiences, and reflections on their pedagogical practices (Patton, 2002). This manuscript highlights the ways in which their understanding of institutional inequity informed their hidden curriculum and supported social-emotional wellbeing among their Students of Color.

In addition, I worked in the same school district with both teachers for 14 years and became familiar with their passions for social justice and equity. In my role as a classroom teacher at Arday Elementary, I got to know both teachers as colleagues. I had regular interactions with them, talking with them at staff meetings, consulting about curriculum, and partnering on district-wide initiatives. In addition to teaching at Arday I had worked with several groups of teachers, including my participants, to design integrated units of study to share with other teachers in my role as the school district's K-5 Social Studies instructional coach. Both teachers' contributions stood out to me as particularly impactful as they shared their own pedagogical techniques and approaches, talked about the levels of student engagement in their classrooms, and shared their own personal reflections about their practice.

### **Participants**

I chose two teachers, Amber and Lucille, for this multiple case study, an intentional choice to work with a small sample "nested in their context and studied in depth" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 31). Focusing on just two participants allowed me to pursue depth over breadth, concentrating on information-rich data sources from which I was able

to produce “voluminous data with multiple observation notes...or a few highly informative files, cases, or participants” (Biddix, 2018, p. 84). These two cases were selected based on the research question and what they might reveal about their use of EPSEW in their classrooms (Merriam, 1998). I also used criterion sampling to select the two data-rich cases (Biddix, 2018; Patton, 2002b) that exemplified aspects of equity pedagogy and CRP as related to the work of Gay (2000), Howard (2001), Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2006, 2017), Scharf (2014), and Sleeter (2012) (Appendix A).

**Amber.** Amber was a White woman in her mid-forties. She had a strong physical presence, a booming voice, and exuded confidence. She incorporated the arts into her teaching across content areas in her fourth grade class. Amber described diversity as “the beauty of life.” Her husband is West African and their three children are biracial, which influenced her family culture and core beliefs about racial equity. She belonged to an African drumming group which performed and taught in her community. Her students addressed her as Señora, as she served as the Spanish teacher at Arday prior to teaching fourth grade. Amber’s passion for cultural diversity was influenced by her own personal and professional background. Before classroom teaching, Amber also taught French for a decade. When asked about her own understanding of equity pedagogy, Amber said, “To me, it means a lot of awareness. It’s awareness of self, it’s awareness of White privilege, and it’s awareness of institutional racism.” Her ability and willingness to confront her own privilege and the dynamics that contribute to inequity and marginalization for her Students of Color showed a deep level of commitment to her own reflective practice, and led her to take responsibility for the relationships she built with her students.

**Lucille.** Lucille was a White Jewish woman in her sixties. She was an experienced teacher of English Learners at Arday Elementary School. Lucille's classroom was unlike other classrooms, as it was specifically designed for students who were new to the country and needed intensive English language instruction. The children in her class ranged in age from 8 to 12, typically third through fifth grade. Lucille held a crucial role in the design and establishment of the program, as she recognized the growing need for an English immersion class as the refugee population in the community expanded over the last 15 years. As the granddaughter of immigrants and a self-described "former lesbian," she identified as someone who knows what it feels like to be socially marginalized. Some of Lucille's students had schooling in their home countries or in a refugee camp, and most had experienced significant trauma. She stated, "It takes a lot longer for refugee kids to stop feeling that marginalization and start feeling accepted by the entire school. All of my students are coping with learning a new language, navigating a new culture, and being "other" for the first time in their lives." Lucille believed that having them all together in her English immersion program supported their sense of safety, belonging, and confidence in an unfamiliar setting.

### **Data Collection**

I conducted 12 formal observations, six in each teacher's classroom, each ranging from 30 minutes to two hours. I took field notes on teachers' behaviors, language, interactions with students, communication styles, teaching delivery methods, structure of lessons and learning experiences, classroom management, choice of teaching materials and content, cultural knowledge, frames of reference, connections to students' prior knowledge, classroom climate and culture, behavioral interventions, de-escalation

techniques for dysregulated students, and use of strategies to ensure all students understood new academic language.

In addition, I conducted a total of 12 semi-structured interviews, six with each of the two teachers over three years in order to gain insight into their decisions to embrace equity pedagogy as an essential component of their practice. The interviews were useful for revisiting my classroom observations of the teachers and for clarifying behaviors, language interactions with students, and communication styles.

### **Data Analysis**

My semi-structured interviews included questions about Amber and Lucille's understanding of the social and community contexts that impact students' SOSB, such as:

1. Are there students in your class whom you would consider socially marginalized?  
How do you know?
2. What do you believe is the relationship between trauma and racism?
3. Talk about your students' social emotional health and affect in the classroom. Do you notice any patterns of difference among students?
4. How do you design learning experiences that support the social emotional well-being of students who are marginalized by societal inequity?
5. Do you talk about social inequality in your class? Why? How?

My analysis was guided by organizing the data based on the social and community contexts of the SDOH framework: social-emotional well-being; SOSB; patterns of engagement; and pervasive norms and attitudes. I transcribed all my interviews and observation notes and imported them into HyperRESEARCH in order to manage the large volume of data I collected. I analyzed observation and interview data through

descriptive coding and identified themes that aligned with these contexts, a priori, (Saldaña, 2015) as well as those that emerged in the coding process, in vivo (Creswell, 2013). Finally, I created vignettes in order to provide what Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) call “contextual richness,” which also serve to preserve a sense of chronology as the researcher tells the narrative story. Creswell (2013) identified both rich description and chronology among key features of case studies (pp. 98-99). Member checks with Amber and Lucille were conducted throughout my data gathering phase, sharing descriptive accounts of my observations and interpretations of my interview data in order to ensure that they accurately represented the experiences under study (Stake, 1995). Additionally, I conducted a final member check near the conclusion of my study in order to ensure the truth value (Sandelowski, 1986) and credibility of my final presentation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Limitations**

The most significant limitation of this study was the small unit of analysis. This case study only had two participants, therefore it cannot be generalized to a larger audience. Because my focus was on teachers and their use of equity pedagogy in the classroom, I chose not to interview or directly interact with students, which would have provided valuable insight into their thoughts and perceptions of the teacher’s use of equity pedagogy to support their social emotional well-being; this would be an entirely different study. Instead, this study focused on the teachers’ actions and approaches with regard to the social-emotional well-being of their Students of Color.

## Findings

The purpose of this study was to answer the question: How does the application of an SDOH perspective reflect teachers' understanding of the systemic nature of educational inequity and the complexity of sense of belonging for Students of Color? Findings aligned with the social and community contexts of the SDOH Framework: social-emotional well-being, SOSB, patterns of engagement, and pervasive norms and attitudes.

The following section describes how Amber and Lucille supported an SOSB in their classrooms, their considerations around the social norms and patterns of engagement that supported a sense of belonging and well-being, descriptions of how racial trauma manifested in their classrooms, the strategies they used to address racial trauma, and their own personal connections to racial trauma.

### **Supporting Social-Emotional Wellbeing through a Sense of School Belonging**

Students' perceptions of themselves are influenced in large part by the social structure and culture of their school environment. Lucille and Amber's understanding of belongingness as a fundamental human need influenced their relationships with students at school and their approaches to their hidden curricula.

**Relationships.** Amber said "school belonging and relationships are the most important thing about teaching. You cannot learn in a place that you feel you don't belong." She believed that a sense of safety, belongingness, and love were prerequisite to a person's ability to learn and thrive (Maslow, 1943). Amber started each school year by building community in order to support a sense of school belonging among all her students. They explored issues of identity and shared their name origin stories. Amber

encouraged each student to explore the cultural histories of their names; for some of her students, this included writing their names in Arabic, and looking up the meaning of names for others. Amber spoke about how this exploration of names and cultural heritage also benefited her White students and helped them connect with their own cultural identity. “It’s also a sense of belonging for the White students who sometimes think they lack a specific cultural identity just being American...like they say ‘I’m Irish’ but they’re not.” Amber helped students unpack how their own sense of cultural identity converged or diverged from their nationality or ethnic lineage (Ladson-Billings, 2006), and encouraged them to identify the cultural expressions that made them who they were.

Both Amber and Lucille asserted that building relationships with their students was the most important facet of equity pedagogy. Amber noted that her informal conversations with students showed them she was paying attention to their lives in and outside of school and “go a long way in building rapport.” An example she shared was when she asked her students things like, “How is your mom feeling after hip surgery?” or “How’s your big brother doing in middle school?” Amber showed her students that she genuinely cared about them and was interested in their experiences (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

**Student grouping.** Amber reflected on the connections between comfort in the classroom and confidence at school, both socially and academically. Amber reconsidered her prior assumptions about how students chose to group themselves during unstructured times like lunch and recess. “I used to be really judgmental about what I consider cliqueness among my Nepali kids, like they’re all together and they’re not blending with other kids like some great Benetton ad, and then I realized it’s about that sense of belonging.”

Amber understood how humans tend to gravitate toward others with whom we share commonalities, and how being together as part of an identity-based group can help those marginalized by social inequity feel safe and at ease (Tatum, 2017). “They have connections and cultural histories and backgrounds, and many of them are cousins and hang out on the weekends. Their families are connected, so of course it makes sense that they want to be together... it’s about identity and their safety with each other.”

In order to support a sense of school belonging for her Students of Color, Amber advocates for intentional class placement that takes into account the impact of social isolation. “Teachers who are intentionally separating kids, like one Somali here, one Somali here, one Nepali here, it’s not good teaching.” Many school-based efforts that aim to “diversify” groupings across school settings are centered around adults’ desire to enter a room and see students all connected across difference. This well-intended goal, however, neglects the experiences of those most marginalized being forced to sit with their oppressors. While Amber recognized the value of encouraging students to connect with those different than themselves, her approach was balanced with a strong belief in the need for students to feel comfortable with familiar peers in order to support their feelings of safety and belonging in the classroom.

Lucille also noticed her students grouping themselves based on their status as English Learners (EL). She described many of her students with refugee experiences as “not well blended into the fabric of the rest of the school,” noting that they shared similarities around learning English and simply being new to the country. She frequently observed her Nepali, Burmese, and Somali girls playing together at recess, some who wore hijabs, and some who did not, and noted that “it takes a lot longer for refugee kids

to stop feeling that marginalization and start feeling accepted by the entire school.”

Lucille shared that one of her new students who had difficulty connecting with others knew a student from the refugee camp where they both lived prior to arriving in the US, which helped greatly in her ability to feel comfortable in school. Lucille believed that having them all together in her English immersion program was beneficial in supporting their confidence and sense of safety in an unfamiliar setting.

**Inclusive and affirming representation in curricula.** When considering the impact of her curriculum on her students, Amber reflected on the experiences of her Black students in class. “Who are my Black students? I don’t have African Americans in my class, so for these students, slavery is not their history. So as we’re learning about U.S. history and emphasizing slavery and segregation, is that marginalizing for them?” Amber raised an important concern here with regards to the need for affirming representation in her curriculum. Many of her African students cannot relate to stories of the enslavement of African Americans, and Amber worried that they might internalize these stories in ways that undermined their sense of self-efficacy. Further, Amber was concerned that other students might assume those stories do in fact reflect the experiences of all Black students in the class, thinking, “oh, that was probably your experience,” and possibly confirming stereotypes already present in their schema. Amber wondered whether her African students were experiencing this kind of distress during classroom conversations about the victimization of African Americans and the extreme prejudice and discrimination with which they contend.

Arday Elementary hung a Black Lives Matter flag in their school during the course of this study. Amber reported that many of her Black students responded with

enthusiasm and had heard about the local high school's raising of the flag, one of the first high schools in the nation to do so. Amber invited a friend of her son's to come speak to her class about the student efforts and leadership at the high school. Khalil came along with three other Students of Color from the student-led Social Justice Union, one of whom was a young woman who wore a hijab. Amber recalled, "You should have seen how my students looked at them with such worship and admiration!" Amber spoke about how powerful it was for her students, particularly her Students of Color, to see young activists and hear them speak about their work. She addressed the culture gap between teacher and student demographics at Arday. This collaboration with the high school Social Justice Union provided Amber's Students of Color access to role models who reflected their racial and cultural identities, relatively close in age to themselves, and members of the local community. "We don't really have them in our teaching staff, at least not yet." Finding affirming representation and congruence among other people in the community was impactful for her students.

Lucille was troubled about the lack of books with content relevant for her students, noting that the vocabulary was often irrelevant, and therefore not indicative of her students' reading abilities on district-wide literacy assessments. To address this problem, she created books using her students' own images and names and included tier one vocabulary words that she believed were relevant and accessible for her students like "lion, giraffe, dog, cat, zebra," instead of "jellyfish" or "scorpion." She described her ideal job after retirement, which would be "to write books for emerging EL students" so they could have appropriately relevant texts to support their emergent reading skills through familiar context and connections to existing schema.

In a lesson about holiday traditions around the world, Lucille and her students had a discussion about the books in their school library. One of Lucille's Catholic students enjoyed sharing her connection with the images in a book, shouting the word, "baptismo!" in reference to an image of baptism, and later, "Catholic line leader!" in reference to the Pope. Lucille was proud of this child's ability to share this connection with her peers. In another book about praying in a mosque, one boy started imitating the familiar sounds and movements people make when at mosque. Lucille found this uplifting, noting, "It was so powerful for them to see these images that they knew about... I tell them, 'this is who you are. Everything about you is important.' Let's make that relevant in school."

During one classroom observation, Lucille read her students, *Four Feet, Two Sandals* (Williams & Mohammed, 2007), a book about two girls living in a refugee camp in Pakistan. As Lucille showed the illustrations, asking if the tents, aid trucks, clothing, and long lines for water look familiar, students were enthusiastically engaged and eager to share their personal connections. Each had to leave their home country and live in a refugee camp somewhere else, "Your mom and dad had to leave Congo and go to Uganda, Tanzania, your family left Somalia and went to Kenya, and your mom and dad had to leave Bhutan and go to Nepal." As Lucille read the book about the girls who shared a pair of sandals until it was time for one of them to head to the US, another boy shared his own story of walking from his home to the camp. "I didn't have any shoes and it was hot and hot and I was ow ow ow!" His peers enthusiastically concurred.

The children also connected over their stories of carrying water, often the boys in their hands and the girls and women on their heads and hips. One boy suggested the

people in the story make lines instead of waiting in a crowd for water, telling the class that is what he used to do, “and we saw our shadows.” This image was a powerful one, perhaps that allows those of us who did not share this experience to see a bit of it through his eyes. Last, they shared their connections to finally seeing their name on the board, signaling it was their turn to be relocated.

One girl shared that the character in the book whose mother had passed away “has her grandmother so she won’t be alone.” The other students did not have a strong reaction to this comment, perhaps because it was a familiar sentiment. Lucille teared up when two boys shouted, “Yes, like this!” laughing and pointing to the image of the family reading their own name on the board and looking jubilant. This intentional book choice supported a sense of belonging in the classroom through camaraderie and provided opportunities to talk about their hardships and celebrate their triumphs. By presenting them with this reflection of their own experiences and bringing this conversation to life in her classroom, students were able to find several connections with each other across religions, countries of origin, and languages. Lucille ensured her students knew there were other people who also understood their experience. “This was not in Africa. This was in a place called Pakistan. So all over the world there are people living in refugee camps waiting to come to America, to Ms. Lucille’s class!” She communicated a sense of hopefulness that was evidenced by her smiling students.

### **Social Norms and Patterns of Engagement**

Amber and Lucille recognized the impact of the hidden curriculum on students marginalized by social inequity. They made decisions about how to set up their physical space and establish norms for social interactions based on their own and their students’

backgrounds, identities, and values. These considerations are referred to in the literature as “hidden,” or not formally communicated as part of the learning (Alsubaie, 2015; Banks & Banks, 1995), but rather, contextualize the learning by communicating values such as cultural relevance, affirming representation, shared ownership, accessibility, and collaborative engagement.

Amber and Lucille also considered the importance of inclusive and affirming representation in their physical spaces in order to support a sense of belonging among their racially diverse students. They structured learning experiences in ways that supported student engagement and applied a restorative and trauma-informed lens to their approaches to classroom management.

**Physical space and cultural congruence.** Amber’s and Lucille’s classrooms were both set up to reflect their students’ identities, evidenced by their pictures on the walls, biographical work, passions projects, spaces labeled with their names, and contributions to anchor charts and student-created displays. In Amber’s classroom, her own identity was also present in the physical space. Two African tapestries hung over a storage closet. On one, brown, brick red, and navy blue colors depicted fish swimming in an ocean. When asked, Amber shared that the tapestries were both from West Africa where her husband was from. She brought these, as well as a sarong from Bali and other objects passed down to her from her grandmother, into her classroom to share her family identity with her students. At Arday Elementary School, 40% of students were from families new to the country, many with refugee status. Amber had students from Somalia, South Africa, Nepal, Burma, Egypt, Vietnam, and Iraq. She wanted her students to have

access to beautiful and affirming windows and mirrors in her classroom; windows into other cultures, and mirrors that reflected something familiar or relatable (Bishop, 1990).

Amber believed in the importance of representation of heritages other than White and Eurocentric in her classroom, particularly those to which she or her students have a personal connection. When asked about how her own culture influences her teaching practice, she stated, “I think of my parents and how they raised me. They were hippies and Vietnam war protesters, and really exposed me to a lot of music that was revolutionary, Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, and really taught me how to respect people from other cultures. And then, deep-rooted, my husband is from West Africa, my children are West African, so that’s just my family. That’s how my culture has evolved even though I’m a White person.” Amber’s choices about the physical space in her classroom reflect her desire to support students’ sense of comfort and belonging in the classroom. By sharing parts of her own identity, she hoped her students might feel more comfortable embracing and sharing theirs at school.

**Learning environments for student engagement.** Amber’s classroom had tables instead of individual desks. Each time I visited her classroom the tables and chairs were in a different configuration. She shared that many of her students came from cultures that valued collective discourse over Western views of individualism, and that she set up her classroom in ways that deliberately facilitated students’ ability to work together. Amber often had students pull their chairs into a circle, pushing the tables out of the way, so students could interact and engage in discussions together. In these discussions, Amber preferred to serve as a facilitator rather than the one doing most of the talking.

Anchor charts and instructional materials hung on clotheslines; student work, watercolors, posters, and small decorative flags filled the room. Her classroom felt busy, not overly neat, but organized in a way that seemed to make sense to students and set a tone of comfort and ease. Amber shared that she was comfortable with a lot of noise and movement in class partly because it characterized her family life at home. On one visit, Amber had half of her head shaved and wore accessories that covered her forearms. Her personal style seemed to match the informal tone in her class. Amber valued a classroom environment where students felt comfortable and relaxed. Amber explained, “I think culture is beautiful and I think that honoring the cultures of my classroom, even if I had an all-White classroom, adding that kind of beauty of different cultures is really something that’s just important for everything. Because diversity is life. It’s the beauty of life.”

Lucille’s students were all new to the country. Some had schooling in their home countries or in a refugee camp, and most had experienced significant trauma. Lucille’s students came from Somalia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Tanzania, Burundi, Vietnam, Bhutan, Nepal, Syria, and Iran. She organized her space methodically in order to facilitate clarity of instruction, as she was teaching English language and American social norms as well as academic content. Many things in her classroom were labeled with words like “clock” and “sink,” providing opportunities for students to learn vocabulary through environmental print. Each day, Lucille presented a visual schedule so students knew what to expect as they gained familiarity with the American school system. This included images of digital and analog clocks next to each part of the school day, as well as hand movements (like a painting motion for Art and

eating motion for lunch) to support students' sense of self-efficacy and safety in predictability.

Lucille used a lot of images to assist with language acquisition and was “always looking for clip art that reflects Children of Color, children who are Asian, children who just don't look like your typical White, middle class, little kid.” Lucille valued having pictures of her students hanging on her walls, and had students' chairs labeled with their names at brightly colored tables. Books displayed on shelves, posters, puppets, and instructional charts depicted children with black and brown skin, providing the affirming and inclusive representation that helps foster a sense of belonging and connectedness in the classroom (Banks & Banks, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006). Both Amber and Lucille considered the identities of their students and themselves when making decisions about their physical classroom space, their classroom culture, and their social curriculum.

**Restorative approaches to classroom management.** Amber believed teachers are “servants of love” and that it takes a lot of time to invest in relationships with students. Amber shared that the school climate at Arday “relies strongly on intense emotional support and teaching as an act of love,” particularly due to the high numbers of children learning English, experiencing poverty, who qualify for support services, or who have experienced significant trauma. When Amber needed to redirect student behavior, her approach was restorative. She told them, “I love you. I'm here for you. What do you need? It looks like you might need a break right now.” Her interventions were focused on healing, self-regulation, and problem solving, and not on punishment or blame.

Amber also recognized how students' own social-emotional well-being, or lack thereof, may have caused them to be disengaged in the classroom. In one example,

instead of responding in a punitive way, she recognized that there was more she could be doing to engage the student. She reconnected with him on a personal level, spent some focused time with him to get a better sense of what he needed, and shifted her teaching approach accordingly.

Lucille also saw her practice as one rooted in love and service. When one of her students arrived late and was disruptive as she joined the group, Lucille's response was, "Nurto, keep paying attention. We're so glad you're here today! This is what we're learning and we want you to learn it too." Once reassured that she was welcome to join the group and that her inclusion was important to everyone else, the student became engaged. She was also quickly embraced by her peers, which further reinforced her sense of belonging.

Lucille valued her personal connections with children. She wanted them to "feel safe and welcome and know that this is going to be a place where they can be relaxed." When asked about the reasons she employed equity literate teaching practices, she responded, "I mean, one of the whole things about teaching language is that if people have their affective filter up, if they're on guard or they're feeling scared or they're going to be criticized – they're not going to learn... So, whether I'm teaching them language or teaching them to read or teaching them math, I want them to know it's safe to make mistakes, that no one's going to laugh at them, and that I see them. That I see who they are." Lucille made a point to learn a few words in each of her students' languages, which she believed helped to show students their identities and strengths were important, and also to share in the language learning that happened in her classroom. She found that

making connections with students every day helped her build trust and rapport with her diverse groups of students (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

### **Racial Trauma and the Classroom**

Racial trauma is a socially mediated experience and has implications at the institutional, personal, and internalized levels (Jones, 2000). The following section illustrates how Amber and Lucille addressed the social context of advantage and disadvantage in their classrooms and provided opportunities for a more socially just and equitable schooling experience for Students of Color. It is organized into the following sections: how racial trauma manifested in their classrooms including the impact of secondary racial trauma; the trauma-informed practices they employed to support the social-emotional well-being of their Students of Color; and how their personal experiences with and connections to racial trauma have influenced their understanding of the institutional, personally mediated, and internalized impacts of racial trauma.

**What trauma looks like in the classroom.** Amber and Lucille were asked how trauma manifests in their classrooms. Describing her understanding of racial trauma among her Students of Color, Amber said, “Experiencing racism causes trauma. Schools have so much work to do to eradicate institutional racism, so students still experience subtle forms of racism every day, which in turn feeds into their trauma.” Amber believed that in her traditional fourth grade class roughly 15-30% of her students in any given year had experienced some form of trauma, but she believed the number was likely higher than that “because some students are incredibly resilient and hide trauma well.” Her estimate was based on her knowledge of specific incidents such as parental incarceration,

death of a parent, a parent with severe illness, parental drug abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, homelessness, extreme poverty, or food insecurity.

With regards to racial trauma, Amber described the “fight or flight” response exhibited by one of her Nepali students when something in the classroom triggered a trauma response. “She will curl into a ball and lay on the floor and won’t respond to anything.” Amber knew that her student had been exposed to domestic violence at the hands of her alcoholic father and had come with her family from a refugee camp in Nepal. This illustrates the complexity of trauma, and how it is often difficult to determine the root cause with so many layered, intersectional adverse experiences in play.

Despite uncertainty about the cause of trauma for any given student, Amber knew what a trauma response looked like. “Well it looks like students spinning, like mentally spinning but also physically spinning.” She described one student who “runs about the world in such a way that he hits, like not even on purpose will run into somebody. He’s run into me, stepped on my feet and like spins, and would do things like accidentally hit someone with a zipper of his jacket.” Amber was aware that some of her students’ behaviors were an attempt to control their environment by seeking negative attention. “Sometimes trauma perks itself up in misbehavior. Actually, often it does in terms of like poking fun at other kids, teasing, bullying, or harassing other kids, or unkindness or meanness towards me or other educators in the classroom.”

Lucille’s perspective working with students who all had refugee and immigrant experiences and were new to the country, was different. “I think any child coming out of a refugee camp has experienced trauma. I don’t think you can ever separate that. You don’t live in a refugee camp and not experience trauma.” On the third day of school I had

a child curled up in the fetal position crying for 45 minutes. I had kids swearing at me in their native languages telling me really unkind things. I had lots of tears... it was one day early in September when we had five adults trying to support four kids in here, all hysterically crying.” Similar to Amber, it was hard for Lucille to determine the specific triggers for her students’ traumatic responses or fully understand the impact of the traumatic experiences they had endured throughout their lifetimes, but was able to recognize the role of trauma in her observations of student behavior.

Lucille commented on the ways in which her students embodied their internalized racial oppression at school. Many of her students had left countries where their minoritized ethnic or religious group membership alienated them from others in the community. In one example, Lucille heard a Somali student telling a Sudanese student, “You so Black! You so Black,” referencing the color-based social hierarchy present in many racially homogenous areas. Lucille reported that students were aware of “who were the more primitive cultures, the people who were not living in the refugee camps, not wearing westernized clothes, people wearing more traditional clothing” and how some of her students would react with a sense of superiority and social positionality relative to members of more marginalized groups. This is one way internalized racism manifests – as resentment, shame, or depreciation of members of one’s own racial in-group.

Lucille said that for this reason, she always addressed racism in her classroom. “My kids are coming from places where they experienced racism, or they’re also coming from extremely homogenous cultures, so they’re not used to being around people who look different than them.” Lucille also noted her students often internalized the racism their parents had experienced, or shared the racist views they embraced about members of

racial, cultural, linguistic, or religious groups different from their own.

**Secondary racial trauma.** Both Amber and Lucille spoke about the presence of secondary racial trauma among their Students of Color. Amber asserted that “there’s trauma associated with being a refugee, even for students who were born here but are children of refugee parents.” Amber believed secondary trauma occurs often in many refugee families. “There are so many examples where the children’s lives have been stable, but they are deeply affected by the trauma their parents have experienced.” She spoke strongly about her beliefs about the impacts of secondary racial trauma in a broader context as well as in her own classroom. “African-American families are still recovering from the trauma of slavery. Many immigrant families are still recovering from the trauma of war. Habitual exposure to racism every day at school causes students to lose trust in the system.” Additionally, Amber acknowledged that the fear of discrimination and acute awareness of being “other” makes it harder for Students of Color to feel comfortable and safe enough to focus on learning at school.

Lucille also spoke about the impact of secondary racial trauma her students had on each other. She described classroom a dynamic in which one student’s reaction would trigger others’ and cause them to respond to each other’s stress. After multiple unsuccessful efforts to establish healthier patterns of engagement, the school exited some students from her English immersion classroom because the social dynamic was “just way too disruptive.” Acknowledging this solution was far from ideal, Lucille lamented, “I just know that one child can really traumatize a whole group. And then when you have five kids with a lot of trauma in a classroom together it’s really hard.”

Lucille was concerned about the amount of learning time lost as a result of trauma

in the classroom. “I had some really, really bright kids last year and they lost out on learning because of trauma. And this year I have kids that are really struggling academically and their progress has been slow.” She noted this was likely also influenced by her students’ limited or interrupted formal education prior to arriving in the US.

**Racial trauma informed practices.** Amber felt strongly that undesirable student behaviors were embodiment of trauma. “While it may feel frustrating to try to teach when students act out, being trauma informed has helped me to help students see school as a place of structure and healing.” Lucille shared Amber’s sentiment. “I had a really, really trauma laden classroom that was, that just for a long time, I wasn’t really teaching. I was teaching at like 50% capacity because I spend so much time dealing with trauma.”

**Training.** Arday Elementary School has support systems in place for students experiencing trauma, including school-based training with mental health professionals, in-house experts including a full-time psychologist and school counselor focused on supporting students coping with trauma, as well as a visiting private therapist who specializes in supporting Students of Color. Amber noted that these institutional supports allow her and other teachers to remain focused on teaching with the reassurance that her students needing specialized assistance are having their needs met by highly qualified professionals.

Yet, Amber felt like she needed more comprehensive training in trauma-informed practices. She reported this was a missing piece in her teacher licensure program at the University she attended. She describes students experiencing trauma or post-traumatic symptoms as “almost disability level... like they may not be on [Individualized Education Plans] IEPs but their needs are so extensive.”

The school district had recently started providing trauma training to faculty and staff; some sessions were auditorium-style with hundreds of people in attendance, and others were school-based. Lucille had a mixed reaction to these efforts. Describing the initial trainings, Lucille reported the content focused mostly on the brain science of trauma and did not help teachers build their skill sets for addressing student trauma in the classroom. “Don’t keep telling me what happens to the amygdala in the brain because that’s not really helping me get it into my teaching! Don’t keep just telling me what trauma looks like. I need to know what to do with students.”

**Strategies.** Lucille also attended a more practitioner focused training which she felt offered her some concrete tools and strategies to implement in her classroom, which are described here.

***Providing consistency.*** Lucille felt validated learning that many of the pedagogies she regularly employed in her classroom were well-aligned with the workshop recommendations, particularly those which were geared toward providing predictability and structure in the school day. “One of the things she talked about was lowering anxiety for kids who had experienced a lot of uncertainty in their lives. Lucille noted some of the specific strategies such as providing and reviewing a visual schedule of each day, making explicit anything that departed from the normal routines. A sense of predictability helped her students develop their self-efficacy with other important skills that were aligned with the learning objectives in her classroom.

Transitions were often difficult for Lucille’s students, as many struggled with abrupt changes during their school day. In response, Lucille shifted the way she handled these often unstructured and potentially chaotic times. “Every time we made a transition

back into the classroom after specials or lunch, I turned the lights off. I had soothing music on and we had to start every lesson by doing belly breathing and calming ourselves down.” This investment in time was often an effective way to reduce student anxiety, re-establish a sense of safety within a predictable context, and proactively address the needs of dysregulated students.

*Compassion and reassurance of safety.* Lucille ensured her students felt welcome by starting each day with a personal connection. “Greeting children with compassion every morning as they walk through our door is so important. Too often we don’t know what’s happened in someone’s house. We don’t know if Mom got hit in the face last night. We don’t know if the child got hit. We don’t know if somebody came home drunk last night. We don’t know any of those things.” Lucille wanted her students to be able to feel a sense of safety and stability at school. She understood that for many of her students, school was the only place that provided this sense of security in their lives. Because the vast majority of her students had come from refugee camps, Lucille also considered the implications of more extreme traumatic experiences such as witnessing, experiencing, or losing a family member to violence, fleeing from war, coping with resource scarcity even for the most basic needs, and adjusting to a new country, language, and culture while disconnected from their social support networks and sense of community.

She acknowledged that it was often challenging to deal with the manifestations of trauma in her classroom, and noted the importance of empathy and patience. “It’s hard because I have kids who walk in here carrying all that trauma and that’s how they present.” She explained that many of her students arrive grumpy in the morning, or so

tired they come in and immediately lie down. Instead of reacting punitively, Lucille asked herself, “What is going on that this is how you’re presenting yourself to me every morning?” Her efforts to understand and approach each interaction with compassion characterized her response to trauma in the classroom.

Amber described how she supported a student with an incarcerated parent who was exhibiting signs of trauma at school. “I had to think about getting her what she needed every day to help her feel successful, and in turn make our whole classroom environment more successful. We had a weekly meeting with the guardian and the school social worker and we were able to celebrate many successes.” This example illustrates Amber’s systemic rather than individualistic approach which acknowledges the socially determined, place-specific aspects of educational inequity and patterns of social engagement in school.

***Trauma and belonging.*** Lucille shared an example from her practice, describing an incident when a student was yelling at her because she did not want to go outside for recess. Not understanding the challenge of lack of adult supervision, she became angry about being required to go outside, “and as she was getting her snow pants on she kicked another student. So of course I reacted and said, ‘go and take a break. We don’t hit people or kick people in our classroom.’ But then I processed with her. All this stuff came out that it wasn’t really about her being sick or anything, but that the kids were saying she couldn’t play soccer with them.” Lucille described her as a student who took a lot of pride in her soccer abilities that year and knew that social exclusion was likely a trigger for her. Social alienation, rejection, and a lack of a sense of belonging were significant factors in the school lives of Lucille’s refugee and immigrant students.

As they spoke, Lucille realized that “this wasn’t just about her being pissed at me, and this wasn’t just about her being angry at another student. There was an underlying reason, but it took her a long time to articulate it. And how human is that? That we often lash out, we often aren’t clear what’s really going on.” The level of compassion and empathy Lucille was able to bring to this interaction, even in a moment of frustration where the student’s behavior might have been interpreted as stubborn defiance, Lucille’s trauma-informed response allowed her to strengthen her relationship with the student while supporting her re-integration among peers. A less trauma-informed response might have resulted in an office referral or other disciplinary measure that would have likely exacerbated the situation, undermined her sense of trust in her teacher, or further alienated her from her peers. Lucille said it takes vigilance, extra compassion, awareness, and time to process with students in order to successfully implement trauma-informed pedagogies in her classroom.

***Response to re-traumatization.*** In October of 2017, a grisly murder occurred just five blocks from Arday Elementary. A member of the Nepali community killed his wife with a meat cleaver and attempted to kill her mother as well. The struggle spilled out of their home and into the street, where it was witnessed by several neighbors. Their child attended a nearby elementary school and was known to many at Arday, particularly other Nepali families. Lucille was aware her Nepali students were significantly distressed by this tragedy, “That clearly impacted my Nepali students who were hearing all kinds of rumors and, and didn’t have an avenue for how to speak about their trauma and so I had to work with some of my kids to make sure they had opportunities to have an interpreter and they had time and chances to speak and to identify stuff they needed to process.” It

was difficult to think about how such an event might have been handled differently had it involved a White, English proficient family. Lucille's steadfast advocacy ensured her students had access to the resources they needed to be able to share their concerns, re-establish a sense of safety, and work toward healing.

**Healing.** One of Lucille's former students who was graduating high school wrote the winning essay for a competition honoring youth who had faced significant challenges, demonstrated exceptional character, and accomplished remarkable success despite adversity. In her essay, she recounted the violence she was subjected to when she lived in a refugee camp in Tanzania. Lucille was struck by her story, which she had been unable to share as a student in Lucille's class for two years with limited English proficiency. Lucille reflected on how eye opening it was to bear witness to the profoundly traumatic struggles that undergird the school experiences of so many of her students. "I wonder how many of my children are coming from places where they were beaten in school. I mean, this woman was writing about being whipped by the police every night in the refugee camps in Tanzania. And it just makes you wonder why. It's just so sad and shocking."

### **Personal Connection to Racial Trauma**

Amber's own family background and personal experiences gave her insight into the implications of racial trauma. She shared, "I've done a lot of reflection, particularly with my son who struggled in school as a young Black boy. I've done a lot of thinking about how the educational system teaches students that they're like bad kids and the school to prison pipeline and what that means. When I see kids break down who are Students of Color and say, 'I hate school' or something like that, it breaks my heart."

Amber described Students of Color adopting a negative mindset about school in general, perhaps due to their perceptions of the racially disparate responses to student behavior that characterize public schools across the nation. Amber added, “I would guess that it’s because they’re experiencing racism inside and outside of school.”

She described how many of her son’s Somali American friends have ended up at a nearby residential juvenile detention center for minor incidents at the local high school, and labeled “the bad kids” by school administrators. The high school principal, a Black man, told Amber’s son, “You can’t hang around with those bad kids,” referring to the Somali American boys and other Students of Color. Amber recounted her conversations with one of the mothers of a child sent to the detention center, her son’s best friend. “She barely spoke English. I just couldn’t help but think how it must feel for her.” Amber shared that she, herself, has had the police knock on her door at night but “I have all this privilege and power, I know the system here.” She also reflected on the parents’ perspectives. “They work nights. They have to, so they’re not able to be around when their kids might get into trouble – normal kid stuff. And to have a cop show up at your door when you’ve just left a country that was war torn and wasn’t safe, that’s scary.”

Amber’s stepson, whom she identified as Black and ethnically Ghanaian, attended the local high school near Arday. The school had recently decided to raise the Black Lives Matter flag, an effort initiated by students and supported by the school board. That year, during the first week of Black History Month, a Republican student group had posted fliers around the school that read, “All Lives Matter.” Amber’s step son told her that the principal “had signed off on it,” condoning the message that sought to undermine the efforts to affirm the safety and equality of Black students at the high school. This

escalated into a citywide controversy as some recognized the harm this caused Students of Color at the high school, while others argued the principal should sign off on all such requests under premise of free speech. This tension caused rifts within the high school community and resulted in a precarious sense of belonging and safety at school for many Students of Color. Additionally, the administrative endorsement of this meme widely recognized as racist, whether supported by policy or not, communicated an unwillingness of school leadership to advocate for Students of Color, perpetuated a school culture that prioritized the comfort of the socially advantaged, and contributed to the harms of internalized racism at the internalized personally mediated, and institutional levels.

In addition to her own connections to racial oppression, Amber's ongoing self-reflection allowed her to consider how members of socially dominant groups have the privilege of being perceived as individuals rather than members of a socially marginalized group. She was able to recognize how as a White, English proficient, professional woman, she was inherently part of the social context of inequity and a participant in the dynamics of social domination. This self-reflective awareness led her to reject deficit ideologies that may have otherwise caused her to disregard structural barriers to equity and instead locate the problem within the individual student experiencing marginalization.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The purpose of this study was to draw parallels between the SDOH model as outlined by the WHO, and the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color in elementary school in order to broaden pedagogical perspectives regarding systemic rather than individualistic approaches to address race-based educational inequity. While the

SDOH framework was developed in order to identify the socially determined factors that influence the health of individuals and communities and lead to health inequities that further oppressed those already marginalized by social inequity, this study applied the SDOH framework to identify the social and community contexts that influenced the social-emotional school experiences among Students of Color.

The following discussion addresses the need for teachers to develop and apply a critical consciousness and consider the role of racial trauma in their classrooms. Implications include recommendations for policy and practice guided by the social and community contexts of the SDOH framework.

### **Teacher Critical Consciousness**

Teacher critical consciousness, or the ability to recognize, analyze, and challenge systems of inequity is crucial to the success of Students of Color and students marginalized by social inequity (El-Amin et al., 2017; Freire, 1970). With this ability comes a willingness to engage in the self-reflection necessary to recognize how one's membership in a socially dominant group impacts systems of oppression and marginalization. This requires teachers to be able to hold themselves, their pedagogical practices, and their explicit and hidden curriculum accountable for the "internalization of negative self and racial-group perceptions, as well as the acceptance of a racial hierarchy founded in white supremacy" (Huber et al., 2006, p. 4).

As White women with many Students of Color, both made intentional efforts to address the culture gap between their students and themselves. Both were not only willing, but passionate about doing their own self-reflective work to check their stereotypes, attitudes, and assumptions (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995), acknowledge

their own levels of privilege (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010), and question the ingrained biases that perpetuate myths about the causes of inequity (King, 1992; McIntosh, 1990; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). In these ways, they addressed what Prince and Hadwin (2013) identify as central to one's ability to feel a sense of belonging: congruence through understanding, even despite the lack of congruence through shared identity.

An awareness of institutional and systemic inequities, including the social structures in the classroom that perpetuate them, is prerequisite to a teacher's ability to effectively employ equity pedagogy in the classroom in ways that positively impact the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color in their care.

**Application.** Amber and Lucille applied their own critical consciousness and self-awareness to their implementation of EPSEW in their classrooms. When Amber reconsidered her assumptions about the reasons her students appeared to be racially self-segregating, she was able to better understand the importance of cultural congruence based on shared identity among peers. Often when teachers see Students of Color grouped together, their default reaction is one of concern. Tatum (2017) explains that students from similar racial backgrounds often want to connect with others who can share their experiences and affirm their identity. Further, cultural congruence serves as a protective factor (Browne, 2014) against the socially mitigated harms of racism and racial trauma, makes one feel less alone, and bolsters their sense of belonging and love (Browne, 2014; Ryzin et al., 2009; Wilkinson-Lee et al., 2011). Conversely, a lack of SOSB will contribute to internalized racial trauma and sustain the social and cultural norms that continue to disproportionately disadvantage Students of Color in school (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Huang & Cornell, 2019). Amber and Lucille's understanding

of the importance of peer relationships and intentional student groupings reflect the hidden curriculum of their classrooms (Alsubaie, 2015) as well as the values and norms associated with different behavioral standards, specifically the patterns of social interaction (Banks & Banks, 1995; Cohen, 1994; Miller & Seller, 2010).

The normalizing of social dominance has successfully kept marginalized populations in a position of disadvantage through the propagation of inequitable political, social, and economic policies at the national and local levels. In school, this may look like erasure or omission of the histories and perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, or lack of affirming representation in literature, imagery, curricula, physical space, teaching faculty, school or district leadership. Additionally, policies about school calendars, student discipline, academic tracking systems, and resource allocation can reflect institutional inequity in school. Oftentimes, the nomenclature of “the way we’ve always done it here” serves as rationale for sustaining the dynamics of oppression and social dominance and resisting efforts to address the disparity. There instead needs to be a shift in school-based approaches to addressing race-based inequity in schools, one which moves away from the norms of social dominance and toward a prioritization of the needs of the most marginalized students (Gorski, 2019).

Students need to see positive reflections of themselves, successful role models, and relevance to their own life experiences in their classroom contexts in order to feel connected to their learning (Tschida, Ryan, & Tichnor, 2014). Affirming and inclusive representation in the physical space and across the curricula helps foster a sense of belonging and connectedness in the classroom (Banks & Banks, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006). Lucille’s intentional choice to read her students a book about children’s

experiences in refugee camps allowed her to present them with opportunities for affirming, personal connections that validated their lived experiences (Banks & Banks, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006) and helped increase empathy and understanding. This supported their sense of belonging in the classroom through camaraderie and provided opportunities to talk about their hardships and celebrate their triumphs. By presenting them with this reflection of their own experiences and bringing this conversation to life in her classroom, students were able to find commonalities with each other across religions, countries of origin, and languages.

### **Racial Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences**

The original study on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Felitti et al., 2019) represented a largely homogenous sample of White, middle and upper-middle class, educated people between the ages of 55-57 years. This sample did not allow for the consideration of confounding factors such as racism, poverty, or discrimination. In addition, the study omitted predictors of long term health outcomes such as peer rejection, exposure to community based violence (outside of the family), poverty, or poor academic performance, all widely recognized by many developmental researchers as important predictors of long term health outcomes. Many researchers now argue in favor of adding racism to the list of ACEs (Bradshaw, Oehme, & Perko, 2019; Bruner, 2017; Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2013; Kelly-Irving & Delpierre, 2019; Liu et al., 2015; Pachter, Lieberman, Bloom, & Fein, 2017).

Several studies show that the more adverse childhood experiences one has, the higher the chances are of long term, negative consequences throughout their lifetime (Felitti et al., 2019). Students marginalized by social inequity are already

disproportionately disadvantaged by inequities embedded in our nation's political, social, and economic public policies. Institutional level racism, including a combination of racial trauma and adverse childhood experiences, places our most marginalized students at the greatest risk of impaired physical, cognitive, and mental health development (Felitti et al., 2019; Walkley & Cox, 2013).

Trauma informed practices in school support the social-emotional well-being of students, improve school climate, and strengthen the relationships between teachers and students most in need of their care (Bailey, 2015; Barfield & Gaskill, 2005; Hoffman et al., 2009; Rain, 2014). Both Amber and Lucille embraced trauma-informed practices in order to support their Students of Color, which were not necessarily influenced by their understanding of racial trauma. Assessment of the causes of childhood trauma “must include a thorough explanation of an individual's early childhood experiences” (Walkley & Cox, 2013, p. 124), making it difficult to catalog and analyze. A compounding factor is the lack of information about a refugee or immigrant child's educational and psychological experiences prior to relocation (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Reyes, in press). While the root cause of trauma is often unknown and therefore inextricable from other compounding factors including intersectional marginalization (Walkley & Cox, 2013), racism must be included in conversations about adverse childhood experiences (Bradshaw et al., 2019; Williams, Metzger, Leins, & DeLapp, 2018). Training around racial trauma informed practices that account for internalized racism are lacking in schools and in the ACEs literature, and suggest a need for thoughtful implementation and further study.

**Secondary racial trauma.** Secondary trauma, also called vicarious trauma, is the distress an individual experiences as a result of empathetic engagement with another person's trauma (Jenkins & Baird, 2002). Secondary trauma has been widely studied among mental health practitioners and humanitarian workers, but is largely missing from the literature with regard to education. When a mental health professional experiences vicarious trauma, it changes their cognitive frames of reference about themselves and others including trust, safety, control, esteem, identity, world view, "fundamental psychological needs, deeply held beliefs about self and others, interpersonal relationships, internal imagery, and... physical presence in the world" (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995).

Vicarious racism, or the indirect experiencing of racism through family, friends, and culturally congruent others, can also affect those not directly involved but who racially identify with the victims of racism (Heard-Garris, 2016). An example of vicarious racism at the national level is the reaction of many Black Americans to the spate of murders of Black people at the hands of police including Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Alton Sterling, and Philando Castile and the Black Lives Matter movement that followed. Secondary racial trauma, or vicarious racism, must be further studied from a social determinants perspective in order to identify the implications for policy and practice with regard to educators' approaches to supporting Children of Color in school. Amber and Lucille described how many of their students with refugee and immigrant experiences who were born in the US and had not been exposed to the horrors of war themselves, were influenced by their parents' trauma as survivors of war and other significant hardship. An awareness of intergenerational trauma is needed,

particularly regarding a teacher's ability to avoid deficit thinking about families with refugee or immigrant experiences. A family's acculturation into a new social context is influenced by several factors, some nested in bio-ecological environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), and others relevant to the multidimensional expressions of culture, including how family dynamics change as a result of the instability of forced migration (Falicov, 2012; Reyes, in press). Teachers' awareness of intergenerational trauma must be holistic, and include "listening with cultural humility and fostering more awareness of how the outside world impacts the classroom historically, socially, and politically" (Reyes, in press).

Racial trauma is a socially mediated experience which suggests a need for a holistic approach to understanding trauma, and intersectional analyses of the proactive and responsive measures needed to mitigate its harms in the classroom. Holistic approaches to responding to trauma in the classroom must consider the role of families. Despite the seemingly negative portrayal of parents as potential causes of trauma or even perpetrators of physical abuse at home, Lucille's focus was on the social-emotional wellbeing of the children in her care. Considerations of the family-based contributors to trauma must be viewed as significant, while at the same time, teachers must be careful not to apply deficit ideologies to the home lives and experiences of students. This points to the need for teachers to reflect on their own perceptions of parents and families, and to grow their own capacity to address trauma in sustainable ways.

### **Conclusion**

A social determinants perspective is largely missing from research and practice with regard to the social and community contexts of racial trauma, as well as the

relationship between racial trauma and ACEs. Furthermore, racial trauma is not currently included in the list of ACEs, which might encourage its inclusion in the vast body of research, funding, and prioritization for teacher training and ongoing professional development.

This perspective could expand educators' understanding of trauma informed practices in the classroom in order to support their Students of Color at the personally mediated level. At the same time, it may encourage educators to shift their mindset about their own complicity within an institution that sustains the dynamics of social dominance and oppression, including their responsibility to respond to manifestations of racism in the classroom through restorative and trauma informed practices. Racial trauma must be addressed at the institutional level by embedding racial trauma informed practices into the school culture, interpersonal norms, patterns of engagement, and schoolwide responses to students' social, emotional, affective, and academic struggles.

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## **Appendix A: Criterion Sampling**

The following criteria were used to select two cases for this study which exemplified aspects of equity pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy as related to the work of Gay (2000), Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2006a, 2006b, 2017), Scharf (2014), Sleeter (2012), and Howard (2001).

- a) Considered the cultural backgrounds of their students;
- b) Made deliberate efforts to connect students' life experiences to their new learning in school;
- c) Sought out and used teaching materials that reflect the demographics and experiences of students;
- d) Employed strategies to learn about students' lives and affirm the contributions of each individual to the class;
- e) Differentiated instruction;
- f) Encouraged student voice, shared inquiry, and dialogue;
- g) Enacted a high level of engagement with families and the community; and
- h) Demonstrated awareness of their own biases and a willingness to question them.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Manuscript 2:**

#### **Manuscript: A Multi-Year Case Study of Equity Literate Approaches in Elementary School**

##### **Abstract**

The shift in the nation's political climate between 2016-2019 has exacerbated the longstanding pervasive issues of racism and discrimination against People of Color and those marginalized by societal inequity. This has serious implications for teaching and schooling, as it causes children to feel unsafe, question their sense of belonging, and internalize racial oppression. These indicators of inequitable school experiences for Students of Color warrant attention to the pedagogical practices employed by classroom teachers that support the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color.

This study aimed to examine best practices in equity literate pedagogy with diverse student populations in two classrooms at a public elementary school in northern New England in order to improve the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color. Findings include teachers' efforts to strengthen their own equity literacy, adapting their pedagogical approaches, examining their curricular content, engaging with issues of racism and marginalization in the classroom, encouraging critical consciousness, employing socially engaging pedagogies, and advocating for marginalized students and families.

*Keywords: equity literacy, equity pedagogy, critical pedagogy, anti-bias education*

##### **Introduction**

The shift in the nation's political climate between 2015 and 2019 exacerbated the longstanding, pervasive issues of racism and discrimination against People of Color and those marginalized by societal inequity (Bazelon, 2016; Huang & Cornell, 2019). The drastic uptick in reported hate crimes during this period is significant – second only to the surge in hate crimes following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (Edwards & Rushin, 2018; Gould & Klor, 2016; Hanes & Machin, 2014; Müller & Schwarz, 2018;

Panagopoulos, 2006; Pollock, 2017). Between the day after the 2016 election and February 7, 2017, over 1300 bias incidents were catalogued with anti-immigrant incidents the highest reported, followed by anti-Black incidents. K-12 schools were listed as the most frequently reported hate incident locations – higher than businesses, universities, in public spaces, and in places of worship (Pollock, 2017).

Our nation’s current immigration policies and pervasive political rhetoric that seek to dehumanize and devalue People of Color have serious implications for teaching and schooling; they cause children to feel unsafe, make them question their sense of belonging, and lead to feelings of insecurity, withdrawal, and internalized oppression among Students of Color (Apple, 2018; Huang & Cornell, 2019; Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2011; Lee & Leets, 2002; Matsuda, 1989; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morten, & Scheidt, 2001). Pyke (2010) describes these outcomes as the “psychic costs” and defines them as “the individual inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images and ideologies perpetuated by the White dominant society about one’s racial group, leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one’s race and or oneself” (p. 553). Under these conditions, students’ academic engagement and performance suffer, (Cornell, Gregory, Huang, & Fan, 2013) further exasperating the achievement gap between White, middle class students and students from socially marginalized groups (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006; Ellis, Rowley, Nellum, & Smith, 2018; Howard, 2010; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

### **Purpose and Research Question**

Attention to the issue of inequity in schools must extend beyond a hyper-focus on culture or celebrations of diversity and instead examine the systems, policies, and

practices that continue to marginalize Students of Color. Concrete examples of how equity pedagogy can be operationalized in the classroom are needed in order to enable teachers to effectively threaten inequity and combat the bias, racism, and discrimination faced by students marginalized by social inequity (Fiedler, Chiang, Van Haren, Jorgensen, Halberg, & Bereson, 2008; Gorski, 2017a; Griner & Stewart, 2013; Phuntsog, 2001). To that end, the purpose of this case study was to examine equity literate pedagogy with a diverse student population in two classrooms at Arday Elementary school, a public magnet school in northern New England.

This study addressed the research question: In what ways did the teachers from Arday Elementary School practice equity literate pedagogy to effectively support their Students of Color? In the following section, I examine the definition and operationalization of *Equity Literacy* based on Gorski and Swalwell's (2015) framework.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Gorski and Swalwell (2015) differentiate cultural competence, from cultural proficiency, from equity literacy, stating that where cultural competence establishes a low bar of acknowledging difference, interacting with people from diverse cultures, and celebrating diversity, cultural proficiency calls for a deeper understanding of culture by getting to know individual students, their home lives, values, and experiences. Cultural proficiency also requires educators to consider the vast diversity within a cultural group, thus relying less on stereotypical understandings than cultural competence calls for. However, neither cultural competence nor cultural proficiency sufficiently address inequity.

Equity literacy, or equity pedagogy, focuses on institutional and societal inequity rather than on an understanding of culture. Rejecting the idea that any one definition of culture for a group of people is consistent or universal, equity pedagogy focuses on creating and sustaining anti-oppressive learning environments in which the social, political, and structural conditions that marginalize people and lead to disparate outcomes are acknowledged and challenged (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Gorski 2017b). Where cultural competence and cultural proficiency approaches to school reform allow schools to ignore the presence of racism and other forms of oppression, equity literacy and equity pedagogy seek to threaten them.

This study applied Gorski's Equity Literacy framework (Figure 1) to examine how two teachers at Arday Elementary school developed and sustained equity literate pedagogical approaches to effectively support their Students of Color.

Abilities	Examples of Associated Knowledge and Skills
1. Ability to <b>Recognize</b> even the subtlest biases and inequities	<p><b>Equity literate educators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>notice subtle bias in learning materials and classroom interactions;</li> <li>show curiosity about ways school policy and practice might disadvantage some students in unintentional (or intentional) ways; and</li> <li>reject deficit views that outcome inequalities (like test score disparities) are the result of the cultures or mindsets of students of color, students experiencing poverty, or other marginalized-identity students.</li> </ul>
2. Ability to <b>Respond</b> to biases and inequities in the immediate term	<p><b>Equity literate educators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop the facilitation skills and content knowledge necessary to intervene effectively when biases or inequities arise in a classroom or school;</li> <li>cultivate in students the ability to analyze bias and inequity in classroom materials, classroom interactions, and school policies; and</li> <li>foster conversations with colleagues about equity concerns in their schools.</li> </ul>
3. Ability to <b>Redress</b> biases and inequities in the long term	<p><b>Equity literate educators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>advocate against inequitable school practices like racially or economically biased tracking and advocate for equitable practices;</li> <li>never confuse <i>celebrating diversity</i> with <i>equity</i>, such as by responding to racial conflict with cultural celebrations; and</li> <li>teach about sexism, poverty, racism, ableism, transphobia, and heterosexism.</li> </ul>
4. Ability to <b>Create and Sustain</b> bias-free and equitable classrooms, schools, and institutional cultures	<p><b>Equity literate educators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>express high expectations for through higher-order pedagogies;</li> <li>consider how they assign homework and communicate with families, understanding that students have different levels of access to resources like computers and the Internet; and</li> <li>prioritize consideration of the needs, challenges, and barriers experienced by students who are from marginalized groups in each discussion and each decision about classroom, school, or district policy and practice.</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Equity Literacy for Educators: Definition and Abilities

Gorski, P. C. (2017b). Equity literacy for educators: Definition and abilities [PDF file]. Retrieved from <http://www.edchange.org/handouts/Equity-Literacy-Intro-Abilities.pdf>

## Literature Review

### Equity Pedagogies Over Time

Ladson-Billings (1994) conceptualized culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogical practice that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 20). Relatedly, Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically

diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). While culturally responsive pedagogy, which consists of various approaches and characteristics (Gay, 2010), is not the same thing as culturally relevant pedagogy, the two are closely interconnected and share many commonalities. Therefore, I use the terms interchangeably (CRP) in order to refer to the practices that enable teachers to effectively promote student engagement and achievement in diverse classrooms; encourage student voice, shared inquiry, dialogue, and empowerment; and support student learning and success in school through the use of strategies that affirm the contributions of each individual to the class and greater community at large (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The existing research supports CRP as a way to improve student engagement and achievement, particularly in diverse classrooms (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Au & Jordan, 1981; Banks, 2004; Banks & Banks, 1995; Boykin, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Edmonds, 1986; Gay, 2000; Griner & Stewart, 2013; Howard, 2012; Jordan, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2011; Mohatt & Erikson, 1981; Nieto, 2000; Parsons, 2005; Ramirez & Castañeda, 1974; Sleeter, 2012). Teachers who implement CRP make deliberate efforts to connect students’ life experiences to their learning in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994). For many Students of Color, those life experiences include pervasive racism, bias, discrimination, hate speech, and violence. To respond to this injustice, educators need to validate the life experiences and funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994) of students marginalized by social inequity, provide affirming representation in curricula and physical space, offer windows into other people’s lives that enable students to view difference through an asset based perspective, and provide

positive counter narratives to the hateful and biased messaging Students of Color often encounter.

Paris (2012) addressed a needed shift in Ladson-Billings (1995) foundational theory of culturally relevant pedagogy and Gay's (2000) theory of culturally responsive pedagogy by articulating a stance of "culturally sustaining pedagogy" which brings to the forefront the "languages and literacies and other cultural practices of communities marginalized by systemic inequalities to ensure the valuing and maintenance of our multiethnic and multilingual society" (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Paris (2012) questioned whether the last 30 years of scholarship and related pedagogical practices centered on cultural relevance and responsiveness resulted in "a critical stance toward and critical action against unequal power relations" that continue to oppress and marginalize students of color in school (pp. 94-95) and draws the parallel to the insufficiency of the term "tolerance" in discourses about multicultural education and diverse populations.

Paris (2012) asserts that relevance and responsiveness do not go far enough to address inequity as neither guarantee in theory nor practice that teachers will be willing and able to recognize the ways in which students historically and currently are marginalized by systemic inequity experiences in school differently than their White and more socially dominant peers. Instead, Paris articulates the explicit goal of culturally sustaining pedagogy as "supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers... to sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the demographic process of schooling" (2012, p. 95).

Ladson-Billings (2014) offered an update to her theory of culturally relevant pedagogy that "explicitly engages questions of equity and justice" (p. 74) and reflects the

fluidity of the dynamic and ever-evolving view of culture. She acknowledged the need for teachers not only to consider the fluidity of culture and variety within cultural groups, but more importantly, to attend to the sociopolitical and critical dimensions rooted in systemic inequity that directly impact students' lives, communities, and experiences in school. Ladson-Billings (2014), in responding to Paris' critique of culturally relevant teaching, describes Paris' (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy as a layering of the ways in which pedagogy "shifts, changes, adapts, recycles, and recreates instructional spaces to ensure that consistently marginalized students are repositioned into a place of normativity" (p. 76) and that recognizes the need to center Students of Color as subjects rather than objects when talking about how to most effectively support their success in school. This approach differs from previous conceptualizations and operationalizations of CRP in that it prioritizes the role of societal inequity over a focus on students' culture, home lives, community, heritage, and language (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Banks and Banks (1995) identified *equity pedagogy* as one of the five dimensions of multicultural education. Since then, the focus of implementation has largely and mistakenly focused on the first dimension, *content integration*, as the core of multicultural education (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Sleeter, 2012) while overlooking other important factors such as the hidden curriculum (Alsubaie, 2015), the social emotional well-being of students in the context of societal inequity, and the dispositions of the teacher. McGee Banks and Banks (1995) define equity pedagogy as "teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society" and to

“question the “assumptions, paradigms, and hegemonic characteristics” of mainstream, public education (p. 152). Aligned with Ladson-Billings (2014) and Paris (2012), McGee Banks and Banks’ (1995) conceptualization of equity pedagogy aimed to acknowledge inequity at the institutional level.

However, the reduction of their model to content integration resulted in classroom practices such as adding in a unit on Martin Luther King Jr. every January, hosting a multicultural potluck dinner, and hanging flags from different countries in the hallway, none of which address issues of inequity and racism at school, as “it cannot occur within a social and political context embedded with racism, sexism, and inequality” (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 153). The same flawed operationalization often characterizes culturally relevant or responsive pedagogies which, as they have been widely interpreted, will not result in educational equity as long as those practices are situated in existing structures that perpetuate inequity (Freire, 1970; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006b, 2014; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Paris, 2012).

### **Equity Pedagogy: What it is Not**

Common operationalizations of equity pedagogy miss the mark, often skirting the margins of addressing racism and inequity and instead allowing school systems to congratulate themselves for their efforts while avoiding actions that might result in more equitable outcomes for Students of Color. This section describes some pervasive counter-examples of equity pedagogy, including an over-emphasis on celebrations of diversity, the essentialization of culture, deficit thinking, and an add-on approach to curriculum.

**Celebrating diversity.** School events like the multicultural potluck dinner and diversity parade, which are aimed at celebrations of diversity rather than addressing

inequity, can have an unexpected negative impact on students who experience marginalization and oppression in school. To many, it feels like the school's response to their suffering is to further exploit them by asking them and their families to participate in surface level celebrations of diversity in order to allow students who do not experience marginalization to grow their knowledge, while the inequities themselves remain unaddressed (Gorski, 2019; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Further, students may perceive such celebratory efforts as “a purposeful avoidance of a more serious reality” that demonstrate the complicity of teachers and the school in perpetuating inequity (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015, p. 40). For some Students of Color, these school events feel like spectacles – tokenizing, reductionist, and often cause them to feel more alienated, othered, or exotified in school (Au, 2017; Endo, 2014; Gorski, 2019). An overemphasis on multicultural celebrations in the classroom call into question the extent to which educators are focused on equity, or the conditions that cause and perpetuate inequitable access, opportunity, and outcomes.

**Essentialization of culture.** Culture is often used as coded language for race and difference, particularly by White, middle class teachers when struggling to identify a lack of connection with, or understanding of, their Students of Color. It is also used to explain the misbehavior of Black boys, the academic disengagement of students living in poverty, and the reason why some students cannot achieve success in the classroom (DiAngelo, 2011; Gay, 2000; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006b; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Sleeter, 2012; Yosso, 2005). The term is applied exclusively to Students of Color, while White students' culture is not often identified as the culprit of school failure, discipline issues, or poor academic performance. An overemphasis on culture is a detour

around equity (Gorski, 2019), and “is randomly and regularly used to explain everything” (Ladson-Billings, 2006b, p. 104). The essentialization of culture, or overemphasis on the homogeneity of a group based on stereotypes, results in a trivialization of the importance of student identity and lived experiences (González, 2006).

***Deficit ideology.*** An example is Payne’s (2005) claim that there exists a discernable *culture of poverty* and that those experiencing poverty share a common mindset, characteristics, and (lack of) values, such as violence and criminality, that educators can fix by convincing them to care more about education (Gorski, 2016b). Adoption of a deficit ideology supports the belief that an equitable context exists, and that it is simply the fault, or perhaps choice, of individuals who are not thriving academically, economically, or socially. Approaches grounded in this belief serve to reinforce stereotypes that perpetuate the inequity they seek to address (Gorski, 2016b; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Redeaux, 2011). In his writing about poverty and deficit ideology, Gorski (2017a) asks, “As a teacher, can I believe a student’s mindset is deficient, that she is lazy, unmotivated, and disinterested in school and *also* build a positive, high-expectations relationship with her?” (p. 61). If a school’s racial equity initiatives are focused more on “fixing” Students of Color, building grit, and teaching them coping mechanisms instead of changing the conditions that continue to marginalize them, those initiatives “locate the source of educational outcome disparity within communities of color while often ignoring the role of racism—the clearest sign of *deficit ideology*” (Gorski, 2016b; Gorski, 2019).

Centering equity rather than culture lies at the heart of equity pedagogy. This is an important distinction, as the terminology of culturally responsive and culturally relevant

teaching may suggest otherwise. Principles of equity and social justice that acknowledge the inequitable context of our country's socio-economic and racial divides must be considered and prioritized over an essentialized idea of culture often used to explain the disparate educational outcomes among Students of Color and their more socially dominant peers.

**Curricular add-ons.** Ladson-Billings (2014) laments that her original conception of culturally relevant pedagogy has been misinterpreted by many scholars and practitioners alike, and that “the idea that adding some books about People of Color, having a classroom Kwanzaa celebration, or posting diverse images makes one culturally relevant seem to be what the pedagogy has been reduced to” (p. 82). The misunderstanding of culture manifests in classrooms as surface level acknowledgements of diversity, holiday celebrations, and a contributions approach to curricula (Banks, 1988). Banks identifies several different approaches to effective integration of multicultural education through CRP. A *contributions approach* involves minimal additions of “heroes and holidays” into existing curricula without any deep exploration of the global or historical roles of ethnic and cultural groups throughout history. Presenting multicultural or ethnic issues as an “appendage to the main story of the development of the nation and to the core curriculum” (p. 17) teaches students to view them as such, reinforcing the marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities. This approach also tends to center the myth of meritocracy while neglecting issues of inequity, racism, poverty, and oppression, often resulting in the further trivialization of ethnic cultures, exoticization of difference, and reinforcing stereotypes and misconceptions (Banks, 1988; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). Conversely, equity pedagogy requires transformative

approaches to curricula that are student focused and promote knowledge construction in a context that is pragmatic, relevant, and meaningful to students (Ladson-Billings, 2014; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995).

Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2010) and Flynn (2012) highlighted a challenge: multicultural education needs to be integrated and embedded into the core curriculum for all students. When presented as a separate component ancillary to the core curricula it serves to further alienate Students of Color, sending the message that the inclusion of their histories and perspectives is merely ornamental or tokenizing, perhaps so the teacher or the school can feel good about having included something multicultural (Banks, 1988; Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2010) asked African American high school students in Colorado to describe their feelings about culturally relevant pedagogy in school. They reported wanting consistent integration into existing curricula and policies, equating their own capacity to learn as equals with their White peers with their need to be “treated equally, not differently” through inclusive curriculum (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010, p. 294).

Much of the existing literature focuses on essentializing and celebrating culture while disconnecting such celebrations from academic learning. When CRP is misunderstood, simplified to a “heroes and holidays” approach, centered around cultural celebrations, and disconnected from learning, an acknowledgement of culture remains at the margins of instruction. This interpretation of CRP is common among teachers who focus on learning about “other” cultural traditions as an end in itself instead of reflecting on their academic expectations for historically marginalized and underachieving students (Sleeter, 2012). Ladson-Billings (2014) describes “classroom death” as the result of

teaching practices that are dehumanizing and deskilling (Apple, 1993), fail to reach and teach every student and prepare them for meaningful civic participation in a democratic society, and often lead to “academic death” for students in the classroom, or “disengagement, academic failure, dropout, suspension, and expulsion” (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

### **Equity Pedagogy: What It Is**

This section outlines some of the effective pedagogical practices that address inequity at school including an emphasis on equity rather than culture and considerations for the hidden curriculum in a classroom.

**Equity at the center.** An equity pedagogy approach that “relies more on teachers’ understandings of equity and inequity and of justice and injustice” than on any particular culture, and places “equity rather than culture at the center of the diversity conversation” (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015, p. 36) is a higher bar and a heavier lift for educators than simply celebrating diversity. It is grounded in teachers’ understandings of equity and justice rather than superficial familiarity with any particular culture and includes paying purposeful attention to issues like racism, homophobia, sexism, and economic inequality. Equity pedagogy acknowledges the lived realities of those who are forced to contend with such issues and focuses on decreasing marginalizing experiences in school. By attending to the conditions that shape the way students experience the world, the challenges and inequities they and their families face, educators can consider how these factors inform the ways students experience school (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Gorski & Pothini, 2018). Instead of surface level celebrations of culture or basic acknowledgements of cultural difference, equity literate teachers acknowledge the

conditions of racism and systems of oppression that underlie the resulting opportunity and achievement gaps, (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Sleeter, 2012).

**Hidden curriculum.** The hidden curriculum, or the assumptions, skills sets, social norms, expectations, and knowledge “not formally communicated, established, or conveyed within the learning environment” (Alsubaie, 2015, p. 125) and the unstated value associated with certain behavioral standards, professional dispositions, and patterns of social interaction (Miller & Seller, 1990) influence how students from different backgrounds navigate the school system. Differential access to understanding of these unspoken rules serve to perpetuate social inequity. Anyon (1980), and later Hattie (2012), found that elementary school teachers determined educational opportunities for different students based on their social class, including preparation for work and access to information.

For Students of Color, the hidden curriculum in a classroom either serves to acknowledge their experiences with racism and social marginalization, or applies a deficit ideology which ultimately denies students equitable opportunities based on preconceived ideas about what they can and cannot do. “Becoming aware of the relationship between school culture, the social structure, and the deep structure of schools...can heighten the teacher’s awareness of the power of the hidden curriculum” (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 154). Teachers must consider aspects of the *deep structure* of the school, such as student-teacher ratio, physical space, scheduling, and also address the inequalities based on race and class embedded in the differential levels of support within a school or district (Banks & Banks, 1995).

McGee Banks and Banks (1995) emphasize the importance of peer relationships and their role in the hidden curriculum of a classroom, calling on teachers to consider the dynamics of peer interactions and take a thoughtful approach to assigning group work. When teachers structure group work without considering and accommodating for the differences in social status among students based on race, gender, or social class, the result may be further marginalizing for students with lower status rather than a positive opportunity to learn with and from peers (Cohen, 1994; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995).

*Arts integration.* In a synthesis of studies examining the effectiveness of arts integration for economically marginalized students, English learners, and students with disabilities, Robinson (2013) found that drama integration can increase students' academic performance in "reading and math, as well as social skills, expressive/receptive language, and creative thinking" (p. 200). Other art forms that showed to have positive effects on student learning outcomes included dance, visual arts, and multi-arts integration, all of which had overwhelmingly positive effects for math achievement, creativity/critical thinking, self-efficacy, motivation, cooperation, and student engagement (Brouillette, Burge, Fitzgerald, & Walker, 2008; Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Ingram & Riedel, 2007; Lorimer, 2011; Robinson, 2013; Smith & McKnight, 2009). Several studies have found that the arts help mitigate student disciplinary issues, improve academic writing, enhance students' empathy for others, improve overall student engagement, and also benefit students learning English more so than other subgroups (Bowen & Kisida, 2019).

Incorporating small group and large group discussions, physical movement, music, and the arts more actively engage students in their learning. Music can act as a

“vehicle, tool, doorway, or catalyst” (Cortés-Santiago, 2012, p. 57) that enables learners of all ages and language backgrounds to engage with reading comprehension, storytelling, vocabulary acquisition, genre familiarity, language learning, cultural learning, and mathematics (Cortés-Santiago, 2012; Medina, 2003). Drumming in particular has been used as a teaching tool that builds a sense of community, engagement in learning, academic risk taking in a group setting, and in some cases, increased students’ content knowledge in geography, history, and multicultural awareness (Bassett, 2010).

*Classroom environment.* A classroom environment that supports academic risk taking is essential to equity pedagogy. Both warmth and rigor are necessary traits of an effective teacher (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ogbu, 1987; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Students need to feel safe enough to step outside of their comfort zone and learn in their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). To provide effective scaffolding and enable students to tackle challenging work, teachers must provide a warm environment that encourages a growth mindset, and also holds students to high expectations for success. Effective instruction includes multiple entry points for different learners, differentiated instruction with varied approaches to content, process, and product (Tomlinson, 2001), and a high ceiling paired with high expectations to succeed (Boaler, 2013).

In the next section, I describe the methods used to design the study, select participants, and collect and analyze the data.

## **Methods**

### **Context**

This case study is part of a larger three year study that employed an applied qualitative approach to “understand the nature and sources of human and societal problems” (Patton, 2002b, p. 224). This multiple case study in a real-life, present-day context (Yin, 2009) had specific boundaries of time and place (Creswell, 2013). The unit of analysis included two teachers at the study site, Arday Elementary School. Arday, a Pre-K-5 public magnet school in a refugee resettlement city in northern New England hosted a very diverse student population from over 30 countries, 55% of whom qualified for free or reduced price lunch. This study explored the depth of two teachers’ perspectives, experiences, and reflections on their pedagogical practices (Patton, 2002b).

In addition, I worked in the same school district with both teachers for 14 years and became familiar with their passions for social justice and equity. In my role as a classroom teacher at Arday Elementary, I got to know both teachers as colleagues. I had regular interactions with them, talking with them at staff meetings, consulting about curriculum, and partnering on district-wide initiatives. In addition to teaching at Arday, I had worked with several groups of teachers, including my participants, to design integrated units of study to share with other teachers in my role as the school district’s K-5 Social Studies instructional coach. Both teachers’ contributions stood out to me as particularly impactful, as they shared their own pedagogical techniques and approaches, talked about the levels of student engagement in their classrooms, and shared their own personal reflections about their practice.

## **Participants**

I chose two teachers, Amber and Lucille, for this multiple case study, an intentional choice to work with a small sample “nested in their context and studied in depth” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 31). Focusing on just two participants allowed me to pursue depth over breadth, concentrating on information-rich data sources from which I was able to produce “voluminous data with multiple observation notes...or a few highly informative files, cases, or participants” (Biddix, 2018, p. 84). These two cases were selected based on the research question and what they might reveal about their pedagogical practices that support the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color in their classrooms (Merriam, 1998). I also used criterion sampling to select the two data-rich cases (Biddix, 2018; Patton, 2002b) that exemplified aspects of equity pedagogy and CRP as related to the work of Gay (2000), Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2006a, 2006b, 2017), Scharf (2014), Sleeter (2012), and Howard (2010) (Appendix A).

**Amber.** Amber was a White woman in her mid-forties with 23 years of teaching experience. She had a strong physical presence, a booming voice, and exuded confidence. She incorporated the arts into her teaching across content areas in her fourth grade class. Amber described diversity as “the beauty of life.” Her husband was West African and their three children were biracial, which influenced her family culture and core beliefs about racial equity. She belonged to an African drumming group which performed and taught in her community. Her students addressed her as Señora, as she served as the Spanish teacher at Arday prior to teaching fourth grade. Amber’s passion for cultural diversity was influenced by her own personal and professional background. Before classroom teaching, Amber also taught French for a decade. Her ability and willingness

to confront her own privilege and the dynamics that contribute to inequity and marginalization for her Students of Color showed a deep level of commitment to her own reflective practice and led her to take responsibility for the relationships she built with her students.

**Lucille.** Lucille was a White, Jewish woman in her sixties with 27 years of teaching experience at the time of this study. She was an experienced teacher of English Learners at Arday Elementary School. Lucille's classroom was unlike other classrooms, as it was specifically designed for students who were new to the country and needed intensive English language instruction. The children in her class ranged in age from 8 to 12, typically third through fifth grade. Lucille held a crucial role in the design and establishment of the program, as she recognized the growing need for an English immersion class as the refugee population in the community expanded over the last 15 years. As the granddaughter of immigrants and a self-described "former lesbian," she identified as someone who knows what it feels like to be socially marginalized. Some of Lucille's students had schooling in their home countries or in a refugee camp, and most had experienced significant trauma. She stated, "It takes a lot longer for refugee kids to stop feeling that marginalization and start feeling accepted by the entire school. All of my students are coping with learning a new language, navigating a new culture, and being "other" for the first time in their lives." Lucille believed that having them all together in her English immersion program supported their sense of safety, belonging, and confidence in an unfamiliar setting.

### **Data Collection**

I conducted 12 formal observations, six in each teacher's classroom, each ranging

from 30 minutes to two hours. I took field notes on teachers' use of equity pedagogy that supports the social-emotional well-being of their Students of Color (EPSEW) including their behaviors, language, interactions with students, communication styles, teaching delivery methods, structure of lessons and learning experiences, classroom management, choice of teaching materials and content, cultural knowledge, frames of reference, connections to students' prior knowledge, classroom climate and culture, behavioral interventions, de-escalation techniques for dysregulated students, and use of strategies to ensure all students understood new academic language. In addition, I conducted a total of 12 semi-structured interviews, six with each of the two teachers over three years in order to gain insight into their decisions to embrace equity pedagogy as an essential component of their practice. The interviews were useful for revisiting my classroom observations of the teachers and for clarifying behaviors, language interactions with students, and communication styles.

### **Data Analysis**

I transcribed all my interviews and observation notes and imported them into HyperRESEARCH in order to manage the large volume of data I collected. I coded data as thought units, segments of text organized around focal ideas or themes (Patton, 2002a, 2002b). Finally, I created vignettes in order to provide what Miles et al. (2014) call "contextual richness," which also serves to preserve a sense of chronology as the researcher tells the narrative story. Creswell (2013) identified both rich description and chronology among key features of case studies. Member checks with Amber and Lucille were conducted throughout my data gathering phase, sharing descriptive accounts of my observations and interpretations of my interview data in order to ensure that they

accurately represented the experiences under study (Stake, 1995). Additionally, I conducted a final member check at or near the conclusion of my study in order to ensure the truth value (Sandelowski, 1986) and credibility of my final presentation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I analyzed observation and interview data through descriptive coding and identified themes that aligned with my conceptual framework, a priori, (Saldaña, 2015) as well as those that emerged in the coding process, in vivo (Creswell, 2013).

### **Limitations**

The most significant limitation of this study was the small unit of analysis. This case study only had two participants, therefore it cannot be generalized to a larger audience. Because my focus was on teachers and their use of equity pedagogy in the classroom, I chose not to interview or directly interact with students, which would have provided valuable insight into their thoughts and perceptions of the teacher's use of equity pedagogy to support their social emotional well-being; this would be an entirely different study. Instead, this study focused on the teachers' actions and approaches with regard to the social-emotional wellbeing of their Students of Color.

### **Positionality and Reflexivity**

In this examination of EPSEW, my own degree of familiarity with the topic under study increased the trustworthiness of the researcher as a human instrument (Miles et al., 2014). Reflexive analysis helped raise my awareness of my own influence on the data (Krefting, 1991) as it required me to consider my own background, biases, perceptions, and interests, as they pertain to my study (Ruby, 1980). A reflexive practice also helped ensure that I did not become over involved as the researcher in my study (Glesne, 2011;

Good, Herrera, Good, & Cooper, 1985), particularly given my continued partnership with Arday Elementary in my role as a professor of teacher education and a former colleague of the study's participants.

It was crucial to analyze myself in the context of the research, acknowledging that my own background did, in large part, determine the vantage point from which I organized, studied and analyzed the findings (Agar, 1986; Krefling, 1991; Pillow, 2003). Similar to Freire's (1970) concept of conscientization, or critical consciousness, reflexivity raised my awareness of the acquisition of social myths over time, their dominant tendencies, and the implications for my own analysis. Gay and Kirkland (2003) advocate for the pairing of critical racial and cultural consciousness with self-reflection in order to know one's self as a person, situate that knowledge in the context of the study, and question existing knowledge and assumptions.

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to address the research question, How did teachers at Arday Elementary School practice equity literate pedagogy to effectively support their Students of Color? In the following section, I explain how teacher awareness of institutional inequity can mobilize teaching that embodies Gorski's (2017b) Equity Literacy Framework. These specific practices, which I describe in detail below, influence curricular decisions, acknowledge students' struggles with inequity, apply a decolonizing analysis, and consider social engagement through arts integration, language considerations, restorative approaches, and advocacy. In general, the findings emphasize the concept of equity pedagogy, which I highlight further in the Discussion section.

## **Awareness of Institutional Inequity**

Equity literate educators must “pose a threat to the existence of inequity” (Gorski, 2017b, n.p.) in order to address the pervasive consequences of inequitable school experiences for Students of Color. Both Amber’s and Lucille’s instructional approaches were grounded in their core values around educational equity and their understanding of the dynamics of social marginalization. When asked about her own understanding of equity pedagogy, Amber said, “To me, it means a lot of awareness. It’s awareness of self, it’s awareness of White privilege, and it’s awareness of institutional racism.” Her ability and willingness to confront her own privilege and the dynamics that contributed to inequity and marginalization for her Students of Color showed a deep level of commitment to her own reflective practice, and led her to take responsibility for the relationships she built with her students.

Amber pointed to the importance of questioning her interactions with, and assumptions about children. When asked how this level of awareness and ongoing reflection informed her use of EPSEW in the classroom, she replied, “Really thinking about every interaction. Really thinking about myself and how I interact with students. Am I employing enough wait time? Or am I disciplining students with justice and not based on little nuances because of institutional biases that are deep inside me, even though I strive not to be like that?” Gorski’s (2017b) Equity Literacy Framework articulates the need for teachers to recognize and respond to bias, even in its subtlest forms, including within themselves. Amber’s understanding of the ways in which her own socialized stereotypes and privileges have been institutionalized and normalized

over time allowed her to take a critical look at her own biases and assumptions with regards to her relationships with students.

### **Acknowledging Students' Struggles**

As Students of Color encountered news, current events, and topics that were particularly relevant to them, it was important for Amber and Lucille to provide opportunities for them to form and express their ideas, interpretations, and analysis with a critical lens. Knowledge of their students' backgrounds, family histories, struggles, and life experiences was crucial for Lucille and Amber to design and deliver learning experiences that supported the success and well-being of their Students of Color.

**Self-Education.** Lucille made intentional efforts to educate herself about the cultures and backgrounds of her students, many of whom had come from refugee camps. She stated, "Recently, I just found out that one of my kid's father was killed in an attack in this market called Bakasara, in Somalia in Mogadishu. He went to the market and he never came home. I went online. There are pictures of what that market looks like. So, for me, it's really important to have some idea of the level of poverty and the level of trauma that my kids have dealt with." Lucille worked closely with home-school multilingual liaisons to learn about students' families and to communicate with parents. She sought out videos and news sources to learn more about the experiences of her students prior to arriving in the US, including what their schools looked like in refugee camps, the role of stratification by social class, the prevalence of poverty, the social norms in their home countries, and how she could bridge those familiar contexts with her own use of EPSEW.

While a teacher might not be able to fully understand the lived experiences of their students, concrete efforts such as self-education and self-reflection helped her better understand the struggles, strengths, and needs of her students.

**Adapting curriculum.** When considering the implications of Gorski's (2017b) Equity Literacy Framework for her teaching, Lucille gave the following example: "We write autobiographies every year and ask them about their families. I do not assume that they have two living parents, that someone in their family hasn't died." Lucille considered the social-emotional implications of each child's lived experiences, recognized that writing autobiographies might trigger a trauma response for some students, and sought out the information that she needed to make informed decisions about her instruction. In another example, Lucille stated, "I was supposed to be doing my puppet performances and it was the first day of Ramadan, so I checked out with the liaisons, is that going to be an issue? No it won't be till Eid at the end, that would be a day that they take off." Lucille was able to recognize the inherent bias present in this example, that school events are often scheduled around Christian holidays without regard for other religious observances, and took responsibility for knowing enough about her students' backgrounds, home lives, and families to provide meaningful learning experiences that were inclusive, affirming, and culturally appropriate for all.

As both teachers considered what content they were going to teach and how they would do so, they made intentional decisions to support their students who frequently experienced social marginalization. This included modifying existing plans and units of study in order to present relevant content for students to think deeply about, engage in discussion with their peers, and form their own analysis. In order to approach these

higher order thinking skills, students needed several entry points into the lessons. The next sections describe how Amber and Lucille provided these opportunities by facilitating student discussions about issues they felt were relevant and significant beyond the four walls of their classroom. These included lessons on racist hate speech in the era of Trump, voting rights, the Black Lives Matter movement, the American Revolution, and immigration.

*The Trump effect.* Amber spoke about teaching in the era of Trump, and how her teaching had shifted as a result. Right after the 2016 presidential election, some of Amber's students had expressed fear. Many of her students were Muslim and came from the countries listed in Trump's first immigration ban. She spoke of the need to balance her personal politics and activism with being a teacher in a public school, "As an educator, I constantly have to ask myself, is this like a moral thing, like is this morally right?" She cited the pervasive anti-immigration rhetoric, Islamophobia, calls to build a wall along the Mexico border, threats of deportation, and Trump's reference to "shithole countries" like Haiti and several African nations, from where many of her students came. Her students were fearful about possible deportation of people they know and love, and disturbed by the hateful rhetoric they were hearing in the media.

With regards to the Trump presidency and increased incidents of bias and hate since his election (Bazelon, 2016; Huang & Cornell, 2019; Pollock, 2017), Amber adjusted her approaches to curriculum accordingly. Amber said that "it takes a lot of thought and reflection, but I've completely changed my teaching as a result...this may be controversial, but to the deep human core it is right to say, "White supremacy is real, and it's a problem... and I'm going to teach those values because it's so critically important."

Amber found that approaching these topics in age-appropriate ways, such as through song lyrics and carefully selected media, addressed her students' fears and helped them better understand some of the issues, perspectives, and emotionally charged debates they were witnessing.

***Black Lives Matter.*** Amber described her decision to teach about the Black Lives Matter movement in her fourth grade class, "I did a lot of research like, who are Black Lives Matter, and what is the counter argument like, who are these people calling them *antifa* or a terrorist group and what's their argument, where's this coming from, and what's the history of this movement? And then I discovered that deep, deep, deep, deep, deep within myself and my moral convictions, I decided that it was morally right - that it was deeply to the human core, right to say Black Lives Matter." Amber contrasted this conviction with promoting a specific political candidate or even taking a political stance on immigration reform, "I'm not going to toot that to my fourth graders. They're highly impressionable. They admire me as their educator, so I have to think about, like, okay I can say women's rights are really important, and I can say Black Lives Matter." Amber recognized the impacts of the current political climate on her students' ability to feel safe in the school and the community. Her fourth graders, aware of many of the current events, had many questions and wanted to talk about issues that felt relevant to them. She facilitated class discussions about racism, acts of hate, and discrimination, and allowed them to share some of their fears and questions in class. In doing so, she was able to grow their Equity Literacy, cultivating students' ability to analyze heavy political topics through an equity lens, and helping all students understand that the issues causing some to feel unsafe impacted everyone, either directly or indirectly.

Amber was influenced by an African American community member's son who told her school district's Equity Council he was "really, really sick of teachers just teaching Black history as if it's over, like the movement is over, and there's this warm, feel-good, anti-segregation, 1960s, fight-is-over kind of message." This helped Amber see Black Lives Matter as the new civil rights movement. "I'm going to teach this. This is part of modern history. It's kind of amazing. It's awful." She believed the sense of indignation many Students of Color expressed in discussions about the Black Lives Matter movement were indicative of the injustices they regularly experienced. "It's sad and intense, and I acknowledge those feelings with them." She believed these conversations helped them feel hopeful and empowered, noting how her Students of Color listened to their White, middle class peers share in their indignation, agree that social mistreatment and systemic inequity were unjust, and recognize the ways in which their own privileges influenced their experiences. By taking on authentic and oftentimes difficult topics in class, Amber created the space for students to have deep conversations about issues that were personally relevant, and unfortunately pragmatic, to analyze.

***Revolution.*** Amber described her recent experience teaching a social studies unit about the American Revolution. She spoke about her colleague's more traditional approach, using the district-provided curriculum. Amber's approach was different. "I decided to do Black history through the ages as a revolution. So looking at different parts of Black history, the underground railroad, the desegregation movement, highlighting some heroes like Rosa Parks." Amber's decision to adapt the district-wide, fourth grade social studies unit to extend the concept of revolution in this way was powerful for her students, colleagues, and community members alike. She organized a play at a local

theater in which her students used song, spoken word, dance, movement, and visual art to share their learning about the meaning of revolution throughout American history and the parallels to current events like the Black Lives Matter movement.

Amber's class worked closely with the Music teacher during an integrated social studies unit on social justice right around the time of the 2016 presidential election. Students learned about the process of voting and observed it firsthand, as Arday Elementary served as a local polling place. After a short conversation about voting rights, students quickly segued into sharing their own views on the possible outcomes of the upcoming presidential election. As students expressed their fears and distaste for some of the biased and hateful rhetoric they were hearing, Amber listened, opened up the space for students to dialogue with each other, and provided a sense of safety and reassurance.

Some of her students' comments included, "Donald Trump makes people feel scared. He doesn't like Mexicans and wants to build a wall, he thinks Native Americans shouldn't be here, and he wants to send all Muslims back to Africa!" Many of Amber's Muslim students and their friends reacted with anger and fear. She told them not to worry, that "one of the things about a democracy is that we don't have one person in control of everything," and that "you are safe. No one here is going to get sent away. I acknowledge this feels uncomfortable and I feel a little angry and scared too, but there are processes for these things and they usually take a really long time to figure out."

As students continued to share about the things they had heard at home, on the news, and via social media, Amber refocused them on their learning about voting and voting rights. She did not cut off the conversation, but rather, allowed students to voice their concerns and opinions while she provided reassurance of safety and helped them

make connections between the injustices they were witnessing and experiencing, and the importance of voting in a democratic society. She expanded the learning opportunity by engaging them in conversations about suffrage for different groups over time, further highlighting the role of social dominance and marginalization in American history.

She and the music teacher then introduced the song, “Revolution” by the Beatles. Amber taught students the different vocabulary words that were relevant to their learning about voting rights: revolution, institution, constitution, contribution, evolution, and solution. Pairing each with an explanation and a movement to reinforce student understanding, she engaged them in a sing along with the original video playing on a screen. Afterward, she invited them to “turn and talk” about the core messages in the song. She asked them to consider the connections they could make to current events in their lives and in the broader community. She wrapped up this lesson by focusing on the chorus of the song, “it’s gonna be alright,” asking students about their own interpretations of these lyrics. Students were eager to share, “It’s like two opposing forces, the institution and the revolution.” One student said, “It’s not going to stay like this forever. Things change, and we’re going to find justice.” Another student said, in choppy English, “We will be okay, like changing the world for a better way.” Amber provided positive feedback to students’ contributions to the discussion in order to ensure they knew their voices mattered and allowed other students to respect the perspectives of their peers while they considered their own.

*Safety.* Lucille focused on helping her English learners to feel welcome, safe, and secure in her classroom. She chose not to talk about the national school walkout against gun violence or the social media driven “Punish a Muslim Day” that had many

community members on edge. Arday Elementary held a schoolwide assembly using a universal greeting to share messages of peace and friendship, but included high level vocabulary words that Lucille did not feel were accessible for most of her students. Instead, Lucille prioritized helping them cope with stress in general, “I try to keep my kids as innocent as long as I possibly can, while giving them skills to cope with stress, like using breathing when we feel stressed out. I ask them to think about what they can do when they are stressed or how can they speak respectfully to others even if they are feeling stressed.” Lucille was unsure of the best way to approach such heavy topics with her unique population of students, but was certain that “everyone who’s lived in a refugee camp has experienced some form of trauma.” She did not want to reinforce any feelings of fear, and instead, was determined to create and sustain a classroom environment where everyone belonged and was safe.

*A decolonizing approach to teaching immigration.* After the 2016 presidential election, Amber was teaching an integrated unit on immigration. Instead of focusing on just European immigrants and Ellis Island, she took a decolonized approach to the curriculum. She introduced perspectives that centered the experiences and funds of knowledge of those marginalized by social inequity, and challenged the colonizing influences historically focused on forced assimilation, still present in today’s power relations and institutional structures in school (Asher, 2009; Battiste, 2019). “We focused on slavery as forced immigration, then we did Chinese immigration because Chinese immigrants were also facing a lot of racial prejudice... and then we did this kinda Ellis Island, European mashup thing, and then later came Mexican immigration and migrant workers.” In describing her decision to decentralize the experience of Europeans in the

history of immigration she said, “It’s like, oh, we’re all European. We all came from Europe. It seems to be like, that’s what’s real. That’s what we teach in the history books... I just feel like we have to rewrite the history books and we have to like, adjust our teaching to address these issues because everything is so biased. I hate scanning through the library sometimes, and even though our librarians work hard to diversify the texts, I always am like, ew! This is all we have for historical fiction? It’s like westward expansion, that’s it? Come on people! Like let’s get the *Little House on the Prairie* outta here. Let’s hear about some deeper stuff!”

In a separate lesson, Amber referred to the “founding fathers,” clarifying the term by stating, “When we say the founding fathers, they were all White men. So even though we honor the constitution, we acknowledge that many of these White men owned slaves. They’re not the epitome of everything great.” Amber invites her students to consider this term with a critical lens. In this way, she was able to acknowledge the real life implications of the historical idolization of some of the cultural heroes propagated by one-sided retellings of history which glorify the American ideals of conquest and individualism. Aligned with the Equity Literacy Framework, Amber was able to prioritize the needs of her most marginalized students when making instructional decisions in her class.

### **Socially Engaging Pedagogies**

Classroom practices that support social interaction among students and draw upon the collective learning experiences familiar to many Students of Color were beneficial in order to support a sense of belonging in school. These included arts integration, language considerations, restorative approaches to classroom management, and advocacy.

**Arts integration.** In both Lucille’s and Amber’s classes, students seemed to be highly engaged and eagerly participating. Amber used African drums to get students’ attention during transition times. Her students knew the routine – she drummed a familiar rhythm and they clapped until the end. She repeated it more softly, and they clapped more softly. She did it a third time, and by the time they clapped, all students were where they needed to be, ready for the directions. Amber then used a method called “turn and talk,” where discussion partners were accountable to each other for their learning. She also presented engaging, relevant material – talking about solving conflicts with peers and working with someone whom they might not like. Students used the “turn and talk” format to discuss some strategies they use when involuntarily paired with someone, and were eager to share their ideas with the whole class afterward. She knew that incorporating music, patterned call-and-response strategies, and social interaction were all effective ways to keep her students engaged and focused. Had she expected students to sit silently in rows while she lectured, she would have been faced with disengaged students instead. Amber integrated the arts throughout her curricula as she believed in the potential to positively impact students’ social-emotional wellbeing and enhance their academic engagement.

Amber allowed students to participate at their own comfort and ability levels. In one activity where she had students pair up to design and perform short, dramatic skits, she acknowledged the challenges of collaborating with other people. She held her students accountable for respectful interactions with others who were different from them, and offered them some tools and language to problem solve any conflicts that arose. With regards to working together across difference, Amber told them, “this is life!

It happens to fourth graders and adults too,” in order to normalize the conversation about conflict resolution.

With her hand drum and positive reinforcement tokens ready, Amber elicited student input about what respectful partnership should look and sound like. Students offered suggestions like, “listen to everyone’s ideas,” “work with them anyway and just don’t make a big deal,” “combine your ideas,” “don’t automatically go to frustration,” “ask for help if you need it but give it a try first,” and “choose a different part and figure out a way to participate.” Amber made space for student expertise, allowing them to take ownership for their own interactions and set the tone for respectful engagement. She then moved them into a “*yes, and*” activity, positioned as the opposite of a “*no, but*” response, where each partnership would use the term “*yes, and*” to communicate their acceptance of multiple perspectives, willingness to compromise, and ability to engage in collaborative problem solving.

She had established a classroom culture in which it was safe to take social risks, and where students felt supported participating at their own level. Amber planned her learning experiences with her most vulnerable students in mind, and proactively addressed student marginalization in order to avoid some students feeling shunned or undesired as students paired up. Her understanding of the dynamics among her socially marginalized students and their more dominant peers influenced her approaches to curricular design and implementation.

Lucille used songs to transition between activities, to get students’ attention, and to engage them in a phonics activity. She incorporated each student’s name into a song, which increased their engagement and prompted a lot of smiles and laughter. This was

also an opportunity for the class to pronounce everyone's names carefully without making anyone feel singled out; she even engaged her student teachers and other classroom visitors in the activity. Lucille made it safe for students to take the social risk of correcting incorrect pronunciations of their name – an important affirmation of their cultural identity.

**Language.** Lucille encouraged her students to speak their first languages with each other socially, but insisted on English during their academic lessons and work time. “I would never say to my kids, “don't speak your own language.” I've seen ELL teachers who do that - English only. I do encourage my kids to practice English because this is their time to practice.” She facilitated this by seating students together based on their native language and proficiency levels. “These four all speak Nepali, so they sit together. These two, one speaks Arabic and one speaks Maay-Maay, so they have to use English to communicate.” Her students chatted comfortably in several languages with each other during transition times and a bit during work times. On their way to the carpet, three boys gathered together, giggling, smiling, and interacting with their linguistically diverse peers. They looked happy, comfortable, and engaged. They sat close to each other, arms and knees touching, while they waited for the lesson to begin.

Because Lucille's program was specifically for English Learners she addressed belonging differently than Amber. “It's challenging because of language barriers. It's challenging because kids have come and gone.” Many of Lucille's students move during the school year for various reasons, making it more difficult for students to form lasting relationships with one another. Lucille wanted her students to know that “they are a part of this class and everybody matters here,” and created what she described as a microcosm

of the larger community. Lucille noted the importance of forming trusting relationships with her students, finding ways to connect with them, and reassuring them they are safe and welcome. Lucille described a time when a student had come to visit her English immersion class from a mainstream classroom. At the end of the hour-long program when another teacher came to retrieve the student, her reply was, “Uh uh. I’m staying here. I’m coming back here.” Lucille believed this was because the student was able to feel like she was part of the group; she shared similar struggles, hopes, and life experiences with several students in the room. She could tell the space was set up for her success with environmental print, visual aids, and representation in the physical space and curriculum.

Lucille acknowledged that her students’ experiences varied greatly, both within her classroom and in comparison to English proficient students born in the US.

**Restorative approaches to classroom management.** Amber was adamant that she “address issues right away if unkind things are said,” noting the impact on students who are harmed. This is aligned with Gorski’s Equity Literacy framework which calls on teachers to recognize acts of bias in the moment and respond immediately. Lucille concurred. She described an incident where some of her Somali Bantu students were teasing her Sudanese students, saying, “You so Black!” and invoking the cultural hierarchy of colorism pervasive in many parts of Africa. Lucille described her efforts to address this with her English learners as often reactive at first, then more effective when she was able to remind herself that their context with racism and racial hierarchy was very different than her own. Lucille used very basic language to explain complex topics

to her students, asking them if they “would feel happy or sad” if another student were to exclude them.

Amber often used Restorative Practices in her classroom, specifically restorative circles, to provide structured opportunities for all voices to be heard and included in discussions. She spent time engaging students in conversations about social inequity with her students and took a slow, intentional approach in order to enable them to ask questions, listen to each others’ perspectives, and develop empathy and understanding across differences.

An example Amber shared was when her students were complaining that one boy got a special chair during strings class. Amber used a restorative circle to talk about how his “sensitivity and inflexibility with his social thinking skills” were at the root of his often aggressive and unexpected behaviors. A premise of restorative practices is that everyone who is impacted by an incident has an opportunity to share how the incident affected them, with the ultimate goal of redressing harm and restoring relationships (Pranis & Boyes-Watson, 2015). As his peers spoke, Amber noticed the child was “nodding extensively,” listening to how his behavior had made others feel. Amber helped her students understand why a student with an emotional disturbance might hit or throw things because “of the way his brain is working when he’s feeling upset.” This helped them to better understand his behavior, develop empathy, and acknowledge that he was experiencing challenges that they did not fully understand. Amber said that without this kind of structure other students “might have gotten up in his face, like yelling about the injustice of it.” Those who have caused harm also have equal opportunity to voice their own perspectives and share about what they might need to heal and move forward.

Restorative circles, or healing circles, take time. Amber saw this is an important investment in her students' ability to collaborate, and more importantly, to recognize aspects of social inequity.

During a classroom observation one student crawled under a table during a math performance. Amber went over to her, knelt down, and quietly said, "Rukiya, you need to come out, and you need to find a good audience place to be." Rukiya came out, unhappy but compliant, and chose to sit right next to Amber. This indicated that Amber had likely earned this student's trust and had invested in their relationship enough that the student preferred to be close to Amber rather than avoid her after redirection. A less equity literate teacher might have demanded the student come out for a punitive consequence, ignored the behavior, sending the message to Rukiya that she did not care, or alienated the student by causing her to become the focus of her peers during a humiliating intervention in the middle of the math performance. Amber had invested in her relationship with this student, establishing a high level of trust. Without this, the student might have refused to come out, become withdrawn or shut down, fled the room, or escalated her undesirable behavior.

When students were dysregulated and displaying undesirable behaviors, Amber's students heard her tell them, "I'm on your side." She took special care to preserve the dignity of her students when she needed to redirect behavior. During the same observation, another student was throwing a coin in the back of the room. Amber calmly asked him to please hand it to his assistant, which he did happily. Amber read her student's affect and knew that a more authoritarian redirection may have triggered a power struggle or defiant reaction. Shortly afterward, the child had rejoined the group but

was kneeling in front of a round, cushioned chair, face down in it. Amber went and sat near him, providing gentle, nonverbal redirection with a touch on the back and a smile. When he did not respond, she left him alone. He was quiet, safe, and calm with his face in the chair. This indicated that Amber knew this student well, was familiar with his social-emotional needs and felt confident that he was okay on his own. It became clear that she was right, as he emerged from the chair after about ten minutes and rejoined his peers watching the math performance.

A lack of equity informed pedagogy may have led Amber to insist he sit up in his chair before he was ready, face the group, and demonstrate a higher level of compliance, which would have likely led to a much less desirable outcome involving a power struggle, feelings of humiliation and loss of agency, a heightened emotional response, or disciplinary action such as an office referral or suspension. Any of these outcomes would ultimately serve to further exacerbate the achievement/opportunity gap and damage the trusting relationships essential for student engagement and success.

**Advocacy.** Lucille’s advocacy for students and families extended beyond the walls of her own classroom. She felt like the school district was not adequately addressing the experiences of refugee families and she was steadfast in her advocacy, “I mean, are we doing teas for Nepali families? Are we having a night to have them come in, with translators, and know that this is a safe community? Are we having, you know, events that are targeted towards them to say, ‘Do you have questions? Who do you need to talk to?’ We’re not doing that.”

Lucille also pushes hard for translation so the parents of her students can access information from school and participate in district-wide events. In response to the school

district's 2018 Black History Month event in which schools were asked to participate with a performance or other product to share with the public, Lucille let her grievances be known, "I was just like, so you're not providing me translators and you're not giving me an opportunity to talk to parents one-on-one... therefore I cannot speak to these parents, and I'm not going to ask parents to take time off of work to come do something, so I just never even did anything and didn't plan anything so I don't even know. It was ridiculous and, you know, the people who came were White, middle-class, educated, English speaking parents, of course." Lucille found it offensive to be asked to have her students and their families participate in this event, as many "are in survival mode economically," and asking them to take time off from work for such an event would be highly insensitive. "But I will go to parent's homes. I will meet with them at 6 o'clock at night. I will meet with them at 7 o'clock in the morning. I'll do whatever I can so that I'm not impacting on their ability to go to work. I would never ask them to do that."

Lucille's commitment to providing equitable access to information for her students' families is consistent. She also shared her thoughts on the (four page, single-spaced) weekly school newsletter that is sent home to all families, specifically a survey that a staff member conducted asking parents what they thought of it. "She said, 'oh my God we had 77 respondents and they raved about the newsletter,' and I was like, 'who were your respondents? How did you attempt to do that survey?' Did anybody attempt to contact, you know, non-English-speaking parents and say to them, have you received this letter that your kids bring home? Do you know that it's in your kids' backpack? Do you try to read it? No? Of course not!" Lucille does not hide her passion or frustration. Other examples of her advocacy for families included a modified report card she created to

ensure that parents who could not read in English could still understand how their child was doing in school. She advocated for district-wide adoption of her report card in hopes that other families could also benefit.

Lucille also advocated for English learners city-wide. As part of regular mandated practice, Arday Elementary School held lockdown drills each month. Lucille found the process to be alarming and confusing for her English learners and was eager to help her students, and all students in the city, better understand the purpose. “I really pushed the police department to create something, and then I ended up doing it for them; I made a slideshow with pictures that explained what a lockdown is. I said to our school officer, ‘if this is important and you really think this is going to save people’s lives, then the kids who don’t speak English need to understand!’ And their families need to understand this. We can’t just have an officer standing in front of 300 kids going *blah blah blah miktidaa dabadaa* and think that they now know what this is about.”

Much like her unrelenting advocacy for the establishment of the English immersion program, Lucille does not hesitate to take initiative and advocate for English learners and their families. Lucille exemplified what Gorski describes as the third component of Equity Literacy, “to redress bias and inequities in the long term,” (2017b) by advocating against inequitable school and district-wide practices and policies.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The ultimate goal of Gorski’s (2017b) Equity Literacy Framework is to create and sustain actively anti-bias, equitable “classrooms, schools, and educational cultures” (n.p.). An awareness of institutional and systemic inequities, including the social structures in the classroom that perpetuate them, is prerequisite to a teacher’s ability to

effectively employ equity pedagogy in the classroom in ways that positively impact the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color in their care. This study's findings identified the ways in which Amber and Lucille challenged the social and structural conditions that marginalized Students of Color by providing examples of how they operationalized Gorski's Equity Literacy framework in their classrooms.

### **Enhancing Teacher Equity Awareness**

First, Amber and Lucille were able to recognize bias and inequities, subtle and overt, in their curricula and school policies, and also within themselves (Gorski, 2017b). A teacher's own values and beliefs come into the classroom and influence their instructional decisions and approaches to curricula (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Their ability to be self-reflective about their own background, identity, associated degrees of privilege, and the pedagogical practices they employ was essential in order to provide equitable experiences for Students of Color in school (King, 1992; McIntosh, 2013; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). These two equity literate teachers were able to consider their own socialized stereotypes, particularly about students whose race or ethnicity differed from their own, reject deficit thinking, and acknowledge the ways in which social dominance and marginalization have been institutionalized within a broader societal context (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010).

Educators must consider the ways in which institutional inequity impacts the school experiences and social-emotional wellbeing of Students of Color and other marginalized identities in their classrooms (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010). White teachers in particular must engage in the "study, practical experience, and reflective self-analysis" necessary to effectively employ equity informed pedagogy with racially and ethnically

diverse students (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 156). This requires an effort to seek out the multicultural, pedagogical, and subject area knowledge needed to inform their understandings, (Banks, 2004, McGee Banks & Banks, 1995) and the willingness and ability to consider how their own perspectives, biases, and privileges influence their positionality within the institution of schooling (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

### **Discomfort and Authenticity**

Second, Amber and Lucille “prioritized consideration of the needs, challenges, and barriers experienced by students from marginalized groups” (Gorski, 2017b, n.p.) when making decisions about their curricula, instructional methods, classroom management policies, parent communication, and advocacy. Teachers must recognize the value in taking on uncomfortable, yet relevant topics in the classroom including racism, marginalization, and oppression. Much like other studies that focused on the experiences of high school students (Au, 2017; Banks & Banks, 1995; Delgado, 1998; Fine, 1997; Flynn, 2012; Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Lipsitz, Sanchez, Taylor, & Williams, 1995; Tillman, 2002), this study found that Students of Color at Arday Elementary were interested in talking about their experiences with oppression and learning about other students’ perspectives about the inequity they experienced in their daily lives.

Instead of shying away from teaching about current events, particularly those with racially charged political implications, educators must not assume children lack the knowledge or skills to engage. Instead, teachers should assume children are being exposed to information about racism and social marginalization, often as a matter of survival for People of Color (Gorski, 2019; Kohn, 2014), and consider to whom they are referring if they believe students are not ready to think about such heavy issues. At the

same time, White and other socially dominant students are also being exposed to information about inequity, often through inaccurate information heavily influenced by bias and nested within the context of institutionalized oppression. This points to the need for teachers to approach such topics in ways that empower students to find their voice and make sense of the world (Maughan, 2017).

Freire's (1970) concept of conscientization, or the development of a critical consciousness, is essential to understanding one's social reality including the impacts of oppression and marginalization. Equity pedagogies promote critical consciousness in learners, which is tied to the socio-political awareness around equity issues relevant to students' lives and contexts (Howard, 2012). Teachers must do more than simply acknowledge difference or celebrate diversity. Equity literate pedagogy requires teachers to be able to recognize the ways in which students are currently and historically marginalized by systemic inequity. Teaching students about issues that matter to them and that have real-world applications encourages learners to be critical thinkers about potential solutions, and encourages them to transform their communities in positive ways (Howard, 2012; Sleeter, 2012). Further, when students can assess and challenge assumptions about controversial topics, they develop skills that enable them to be critical consumers of information, questioning the status quo, assessing sources of information and encouraging them to be empowered, informed, engaged, responsible citizens (Dajani, 2015).

### **Decolonizing Approaches to Curricular Design and Implementation**

Third, a decolonizing approach requires educators to engage in continual reflection around the power dynamics present in the institution of schooling, the

privileging of certain ways of knowing, and the systems and curricula that perpetuate inequity (Asher, 2009). This may require examining existing curricula through an equity lens in order to make visible whose perspectives are represented and whose are missing and analyze the ways in which different racial, cultural, religious, and other social groups are depicted.

Amber's frustration about the prevalence of Eurocentric experiences, characters, and histories in the district-wide curricula and library collections speak to the importance of providing instructional materials that reflected her students' identities, lives, and experiences. By explicitly addressing the sociopolitical context, teachers prepare students to "engage civically and peacefully across difference, but also to become the changemakers and leaders we need" (Simmons, 2019, n.p.). Providing affirming representations of different racial and ethnic groups of people, including their stories, and acknowledging the impacts of societal oppression in the current political climate are important components of an equity framework that supports a sense of school belonging and well-being among Students of Color.

Teachers must problematize "the way we've always done it" and start to question some of the school-based cultural norms around curricula, assessment, behavior management, and patterns of social engagement. Those who seek to preserve comfort and familiarity within the institution of schooling must consider who benefits when equity work is "paced for privilege" (Gorski, 2019).

### **Barriers to Implementation**

Barriers to equity pedagogy include the fact that it is so multidimensional, encompassing student relationships, family collaboration, curricular materials,

instructional practices, discursive practices, and sociopolitical consciousness (Powell, Cantrell, Malo-Juvera, & Correll, 2016). Howard and Rodriguez-Minkoff (2017) believe many teachers struggle with translating theory into practice, a gap which this study helps to address. This is largely due to the growing chasm in the US between the racial and ethnic demographics of classroom teachers and their students. According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Teacher and Principal Survey (2015-16), over 80% of the teaching force is White (Taie & Goldring, 2017) in stark contrast with only 48% of the student population identified as White. Projections show the trend will continue, with 45% of students identified as White in 2026 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Despite best intentions, these data imply that many teachers remain unaware of the “cultural knowledge, practices, and dispositions that their students bring from their homes and communities” (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017, p.8). This *demographic divide*, (Gay & Howard, 2001; Milner, 2010) or cultural knowledge gap between students and their teachers, can be addressed by helping educators understand that equity pedagogy is not a program, or a set of steps to follow, and instead see it as a mindset that considers a social consciousness with regards to student identity, social dominance and marginalization, home culture, diversity, and pedagogy (Foster, 1993). Particularly when a teacher's racial, ethnic, or cultural background differs from her students', a deep level of critical consciousness is needed in order to embrace and embody an authentic appreciation of cultural diversity, different modes of learning, different ways of knowing, and which is connected to an historical and socio-political context (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). When asked about the barriers to widespread implementation of equity informed pedagogies, Amber noted the need for critical consciousness. “It's just the

ingrained mentality of White privilege and institutional racism. It's just the way we always do things." In order to address inequity at the institutional level, educators must be willing to get uncomfortable, to uproot some of the ingrained privileges many enjoy, and to re-examine their pedagogy through an equity lens (Haslam, 2018).

Lucille identified another institutional challenge to implementation of equity-informed pedagogy. The school rules were not well-aligned to her classroom expectations, and not worded in a way that was accessible to her students. This, in addition to the issues she identified with parent communication and engagement, lockdowns, and district-level policies illustrate equity literacy gaps that are needed in order for educators to create and sustain equitable learning environments. Challenges that exist at the systemic or institutional levels such as these often feel out of reach for individual teachers. Lucille's advocacy at the school, district, and city wide levels, helped address some of the gaps.

### **Conclusions**

In order to improve the level of social-emotional wellbeing, sense of belonging, relevance, and engagement in school among Students of Color, teachers must provide equitable opportunities for all students to succeed. In the context of a socially tense and politically divisive national landscape following the 2016 presidential election, it is essential that educators' own equity-informed pedagogies are well-developed (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). In order to be able to view students through a holistic lens and support their learning to the fullest extent possible, teachers must acknowledge the inequities and oppression students face in and outside of school.

This study's participants supported their Students of Color by learning about their experiences with racism and marginalization; adapting their curricular approaches to address the racial and social challenges with which their Students of Color contend: examining their curricular content to decolonize the historical perspectives and social norms that permeate existing units of study; directly addressing issues of racism, discrimination, social dominance, and marginalization in the classroom; encouraging critical consciousness about relevant and often uncomfortable topics; employing socially engaging pedagogies such as conversational interaction and integrating the arts; and advocating for their most marginalized students and their families.

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## **Appendix A: Criterion Sampling**

The following criteria were used to select two cases for this study which exemplified aspects of equity pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy as related to the work of Gay (2000), Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2006a, 2006b, 2017), Scharf (2014), Sleeter (2012), and Howard (2001).

- a) Considered the cultural backgrounds of their students;
- b) Made deliberate efforts to connect students' life experiences to their new learning in school;
- c) Sought out and used teaching materials that reflect the demographics and experiences of students;
- d) Employed strategies to learn about students' lives and affirm the contributions of each individual to the class;
- e) Differentiated instruction;
- f) Encouraged student voice, shared inquiry, and dialogue;
- g) Enacted a high level of engagement with families and the community; and
- h) Demonstrated awareness of their own biases and a willingness to question them.

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

### Summary of Manuscript Findings

This section outlines findings from the two manuscripts in Chapter 4 which focus on systemic and pedagogical approaches to mitigate the inequitable social-emotional school experiences of Students of Color. First, I provide a brief summary of the two conceptual frameworks (Gorski, 2017b; Healthy People 2020, 2018) applied in this dissertation and apply them to the research questions and findings. Then, I address the goals of this study as they relate to the two frameworks: to apply a social determinants perspective to an examination of racial trauma and a sense of school belonging among Students of Color in two classrooms at Arday Elementary; and to broaden pedagogical perspectives regarding systemic rather than individualistic approaches to address educational inequity through an examination of the hidden curriculum.

### Application of Conceptual Frameworks

This dissertation study employs two different frameworks: Equity Literacy (Gorski, 2017b) and Social Determinants of Health (Healthy People 2020, 2018) to examine race-based inequity in school.

**Gorski's Equity Literacy Framework.** Gorski's (2017b) Equity Literacy Framework, grounded in the field of education, calls on educators to threaten the existence of inequity, to recognize it when present, to respond effectively in the moment, to redress harm in the long term, and to sustain actively anti-bias classrooms, schools, and institutional cultures. In order for teachers to effectively employ equity pedagogies in the classroom and positively impact the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color in their care, an awareness of institutional and systemic inequities, including the social

structures in the classroom that perpetuate them, is prerequisite (Fiedler et al., 2008; Gorski, 2017a; Griner & Stewart, 2012; Phuntsog, 2001). This study's findings identified the ways in which Amber and Lucille challenged the social and structural conditions that marginalized Students of Color by providing examples of how they operationalized Gorski's (2017b) Equity Literacy framework in their classrooms.

**Social determinants of health.** The WHO recognizes social and community contexts as one of the major categories of SDOH (Healthy People 2020, 2018). I used this framework to draw parallels between the SDOH model as outlined by the WHO, and the social-emotional wellbeing of Students of Color in elementary school in order to expand on systemic rather than individualistic responses to race-based educational inequity. While the SDOH framework was developed in order to identify the socially determined factors that influence the health of individuals and communities, this study applied the SDOH framework to identify the social and community contexts that influenced social-emotional school experiences among Students of Color .

**Synthesis and application.** Gorski's (2017b) framework highlights the institutional level of racism and inequity as a priority. Whereas many teachers wish to focus their attention at the personally mediated level – the actions and lessons they can implement immediately in their classrooms, Gorski reminds us that curricular add-ons, celebratory events, and lessons about diversity and equity will not succeed as long as those practices are situated in existing structures that perpetuate inequity (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). Gorski's (2017b) framing of the institutional level as “top tier,” emphasizes the importance of socially determined aspects of schooling.

In the remainder of this section, I provide a list of the findings from the two manuscripts from Chapter 4. What follows is a brief description of each theme.

### **Awareness of the Hidden Curriculum**

The hidden curriculum, or informally established assumptions, skills sets, social norms, expectations, and knowledge (Alsubaie, 2015, p. 125) and the unstated value associated with certain behavioral standards, professional dispositions, and patterns of social interaction (Miller & Seller, 1990) influence how students from different backgrounds navigate the school system. The hidden curricula in Amber and Lucille's classrooms reflected their own values, awareness of structural inequity, expectations for social interaction, interactions with students (Alsubaie, 2015; Banks & Banks, 1995; Miller & Seller, 1990), and were communicated through the classroom environment, both social and physical (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). The ways in which both teachers demonstrated awareness of the hidden curriculum included such notions like teaching as an act of love and fostering a sense of school belonging for students of color.

**Teaching as an act of love.** Amber shared that the school climate at Arday “relies strongly on intense emotional support and teaching as an act of love,” particularly due to the high numbers of children learning English, experiencing poverty, who qualify for support services, or who have experienced significant trauma. When her students were struggling, Amber told them, “I’m on your side.” Her interventions were focused on healing, self-regulation, and problem solving, and not on punishment or blame. She checked in with them every morning, conversationally asking about their families, soccer game, mother’s surgery, or other topics that showed them she cared about their lives, even outside of the classroom. Lucille valued her personal connections with children. She

wanted them to “feel safe and welcome and know that this is going to be a place where they can be relaxed.” Amber and Lucille’s understanding of the importance of peer relationships reflected the hidden curriculum of their classrooms (Alsubaie, 2015) as well as the values and norms associated with different behavioral standards, specifically the patterns of social interaction (Banks & Banks, 1995; Cohen, 1994; Miller & Seller, 2010).

**Sense of school belonging.** Amber reflected on the importance of belongingness in school. “School belonging and relationships are the most important things about teaching. You cannot learn in a place that you feel you don’t belong.” She believed that a sense of safety, belongingness, and love were prerequisite to a person’s ability to learn and thrive (Maslow, 1943). Lucille’s students, all refugees and immigrants new to the country and the English language, came with several languages, cultures, degrees of trauma, and levels of formal schooling.

An SOSB can serve as a protective factor against internalized racism and racial trauma (Browne, 2014; Ryzin et al., 2009; Wilkinson-Lee et al., 2011). Conversely, a lack of SOSB will contribute to internalized racial trauma and sustain the social and cultural norms that continue to disproportionately disadvantage Students of Color in school (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Huang & Cornell, 2019). The following section describes the equity-informed pedagogical approaches within the hidden curriculum that support an SOSB among Students of Color: teacher awareness; cultural congruence; socially engaging pedagogies; social and physical environment; curricular considerations; structural competence; and trauma informed practices.

## **Enhancing Teacher Critical Consciousness**

An awareness of institutional and systemic inequities, including the social structures in the classroom that perpetuate them, is prerequisite to a teacher's ability to effectively employ equity pedagogy in the classroom in ways that positively impact the social-emotional well-being of Students of Color in their care. A teacher's own values and beliefs come into the classroom and influence their instructional decisions and approaches to curricula (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Amber and Lucille's ability to be self-reflective about their own backgrounds, identities, associated degrees of privilege, and the pedagogical practices they employed was essential in order to provide equitable experiences for their Students of Color (King, 1992; McIntosh, 1990; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995).

When asked about her own understanding of equity pedagogy, Amber said, "To me, it means a lot of awareness. It's awareness of self, it's awareness of White privilege, and it's awareness of institutional racism." Her ability and willingness to confront her own privilege and the dynamics that contributed to inequity and marginalization for her Students of Color showed a deep level of commitment to her own reflective practice, and led her to take responsibility for the relationships she built with her students. "Becoming aware of the relationship between school culture, the social structure, and the deep structure of schools...can heighten the teacher's awareness of the power of the hidden curriculum" (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 154).

Equity literate educators must "pose a threat to the existence of inequity" (Gorski, 2017b, n.p.) in order to address the pervasive consequences of inequitable school experiences for Students of Color. Both Amber's and Lucille's instructional approaches

were grounded in their core values around educational equity and their understanding of the dynamics of social marginalization. Amber and Lucille were able to recognize bias and inequities, subtle and overt, in their curricula and school policies, and also within themselves (Gorski, 2017b). These two equity literate teachers were able to consider their own socialized stereotypes, particularly about students whose race or ethnicity differed from their own, reject deficit thinking, and acknowledge the ways in which social dominance and marginalization have been institutionalized within a broader societal context (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010).

Educators must consider the ways in which institutional inequity impacts the school experiences and social-emotional well-being of Students of Color and other marginalized identities in their classrooms (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010). White teachers in particular must engage in the “study, practical experience, and reflective self-analysis” necessary to effectively employ equity informed pedagogy with racially and ethnically diverse students (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 156). This requires an effort to seek out the multicultural, pedagogical, and subject area knowledge needed to inform their understandings, (Banks, 2004, McGee Banks & Banks, 1995) and the willingness and ability to consider how their own perspectives, biases, and privileges influence their positionality within the institution of schooling (Ladson-Billings, 1994). While Amber and Lucille were not able to fully understand the lived experiences of their socially and racially marginalized students, concrete efforts such as self-education helped them better understand the struggles, strengths, and needs of their students. Furthermore, both teachers reflected on their interactions with students and were intentional in their

approaches to thinking critically about how their own social contexts differed from those of their students.

Equity pedagogy requires teachers to consider their own level of awareness of systemic inequities as they pertain to education and beyond, including the role of Whiteness, privilege, and Eurocentric thinking in a diverse setting. Both Amber and Lucille examined their own teaching practices through an equity lens, were reflective about their own values and perceptions, and were willing to shift their thinking and their practice to better meet the needs of their diverse learners. Equity literate teachers' personal commitment to their own awareness and reflective practice included their intentional efforts to educate themselves about the backgrounds and current experiences of their students, and apply those understandings to their classroom pedagogy.

### **Cultural Congruence**

Both Amber and Lucille noted the importance of forming trusting relationships with their students, particularly those with whom they did not share identity markers such as race or social class (Ladson-Billings, 1994). As White women with many Students of Color, both made intentional efforts to address the culture gap between their students and themselves. Both were not only willing, but passionate about doing their own self-reflective work to check their stereotypes, attitudes, and assumptions (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995), acknowledge their own levels of privilege (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010), and question the ingrained biases that perpetuate myths about the causes of inequity (King, 1992; ; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; McIntosh, 1990). In these ways, they addressed what Prince and Hadwin (2013) identify as central to one's ability to feel a sense of belonging: congruence through understanding.

Additionally, Prince and Hadwin (2013) identified another key component of SOSB, which is congruence through shared identity. Students also need cultural congruence among their peers. Amber commented on how her thinking had evolved over time with regards to what she had previously perceived as self-segregation. Often when teachers see Students of Color grouped together, their default reaction is one of concerns. Tatum (2017) explains that students from similar racial backgrounds often want to connect with others who can share their experiences and affirm their identity. Further, cultural congruence serves as a protective factor (Browne, 2014) against the socially mitigated harms of racism and racial trauma, makes one feel less alone, and bolsters their sense of belonging and love (Browne, 2014; Ryzin et al., 2009; Wilkinson-Lee et al., 2011). Conversely, a lack of SOSB will contribute to internalized racial trauma and sustain the social and cultural norms that continue to disproportionately disadvantage Students of Color in school (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Huang & Cornell, 2019).

### **Social and Physical Environment**

Diverse groups of students should have equally diverse learning environments that reflect their identities, their families, stories, life experiences, dreams, and aspirations (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann; Cuellar; & Arellano, 2012). Amber's and Lucille's classrooms were both set up to reflect their students' identities, evidenced by their pictures on the walls, biographical work, and individual passion projects.

In Amber's classroom, anchor charts and instructional materials hung on clotheslines; student work, watercolors, posters, and small decorative flags filled the room. Her classroom felt busy, not overly neat, but organized in a way that seemed to make sense to students and set a tone of comfort and ease. Amber valued a classroom

environment where students felt comfortable and relaxed. The warm, inviting classroom environment in Amber's classroom supported academic risk-taking among her students, laying the foundation for rigorous academic engagement (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ogbu, 1987; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Connecting identity and physical space increased student interest and engagement, helped students make connections between new learning and existing schema, and supported their sense of belonging in school.

Lucille organized her space methodically in order to facilitate clarity of instruction for her English learners, as she was supporting their language acquisition, acclimating them to the American school system, teaching academic content, and supporting their sense of belonging, all with a consideration of the trauma most of them had experienced living in refugee camps. Each day, Lucille presented a visual schedule so students knew what to expect as they gained familiarity with the American school system. This included images of digital and analog clocks next to each part of the school day, as well as hand movements (like a painting motion for Art and eating motion for lunch) to support students' sense of self-efficacy and safety through predictable routines. Books displayed on shelves, posters, puppets, and instructional charts depicted children with black and brown skin, providing the affirming and inclusive representation that helps foster a sense of belonging and connectedness in the classroom (Banks & Banks, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2006a).

### **Socially Engaging Pedagogies**

Classroom practices that support social interaction and draw upon the collective learning experiences familiar to many Students of Color were beneficial in order to

support a sense of belonging in school. These included arts integration, language considerations, restorative approaches to classroom management, and advocacy. Amber and Lucille's understanding of the importance of peer relationships and intentional student groupings reflect the hidden curriculum of their classrooms (Alsubaie, 2015). Amber understood how humans tend to gravitate toward others with whom we share commonalities, and how being together as part of an identity-based group can help those marginalized by social inequity feel safe and at ease (Tatum, 2017). "They have connections and cultural histories and backgrounds, and many of them are cousins and hang out on the weekends. Their families are connected, so of course it makes sense that they want to be together... it's about identity and their safety with each other."

### **Resisting Colorblind Curriculum**

Jones (2000) describes institutional racism as structural in nature and codified into practice. The normalizing of social dominance has successfully kept marginalized populations in a position of disadvantage through the propagation of inequitable political, social, and economic policies at the national and local levels. In school, this may look like erasure or omission of the histories and perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, or lack of affirming representation in literature, imagery, curricula, physical space, teaching faculty, school or district leadership. As both teachers considered the content they were going to teach and how they would do so, they made intentional decisions to support their students who frequently experienced social marginalization. This included modifying existing plans and units of study in order to present relevant content for students ponder engage in discussion with their peers, and form their own analysis.

Equity pedagogy for social-emotional well-being (EPSEW) requires teachers to be able to recognize the ways in which students are currently and historically marginalized by systemic inequity. Teaching students about issues that matter to them and that have real-world applications encourages learners to be critical thinkers about potential solutions, and encourages them to transform their communities in positive ways (Howard, 2012; Sleeter, 2012).

**Acknowledging student struggles.** Amber and Lucille understood the importance of acknowledging the real life struggles with social inequity their students experienced on a daily basis, and considered these differences when designing their curricula. As Students of Color encountered news, current events, and topics that were particularly relevant to them, it was important for Amber and Lucille to provide opportunities for them to form and express their ideas, interpretations, and analysis with a critical lens. Knowledge of their students' backgrounds, family histories, struggles, and life experiences was crucial for Lucille and Amber to design and deliver learning experiences that supported the success and well-being of their Students of Color. When students can assess and challenge assumptions about controversial topics, they develop skills that enable them to be critical consumers of information, questioning the status quo, assessing sources of information and encouraging them to be empowered, informed, engaged, responsible citizens (Dajani, 2015).

Amber recognized the impacts of the current political climate on her students' ability to feel safe in the school and the community. Her fourth graders, aware of many of the current events, had many questions and wanted to talk about issues that felt relevant to them. She facilitated class discussions about racism, acts of hate, and discrimination,

and allowed them to share some of their fears and questions in class. In doing so, she was able to grow their Equity Literacy, cultivating students' ability to analyze heavy political topics through an equity lens, and helping all students understand that the issues causing some to feel unsafe impacted everyone, either directly or indirectly.

**Curricular representation and belonging.** Students need to see positive reflections of themselves, successful role models, and relevance to their own life experiences in their classroom contexts in order to feel connected to their learning (Tschida, Ryan, & Tichnor, 2014). Affirming and inclusive representation in the physical space and across the curricula helps foster a sense of belonging and connectedness in the classroom (Banks & Banks, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2006a). Lucille's intentional choice to read her students a book about children's experiences in refugee camps allowed her to present them with opportunities for affirming, personal connections that validated their lived experiences (Banks & Banks, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006a) and helped increase empathy and understanding. This supported their sense of belonging in the classroom through camaraderie and provided opportunities to talk about their hardships and celebrate their triumphs. By presenting them with this reflection of their own experiences and bringing this conversation to life in her classroom, students were able to find commonalities with each other across religions, countries of origin, and languages.

### **Racial Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences**

Several studies show that the more adverse childhood experiences one has, the higher the chances are of long term, negative consequences throughout their lifetime (Felitti et al., 2019). Students marginalized by social inequity are already disproportionately disadvantaged by inequities embedded in our nation's political, social,

and economic public policies. Institutional level racism, including a combination of racial trauma and adverse childhood experiences, places our most marginalized students at the greatest risk of impaired physical, cognitive, and mental health development (Felitti et al., 2019; ; Shonkoff & Richmond, 2008; Walkley & Cox, 2013).

**Structural competency.** Structural Competency in the field of health care refers to the practitioner’s ability to recognize that symptoms of poor health often represent the “downstream implications” of socially determined factors such as social stigma, unequal access to treatment, discriminatory laws and policies, oppression, racism, and debt (Metzl & Hansen, 2014). In the field of education, structural competency can be conceptualized as a teacher’s ability to recognize that symptoms of negative school experiences often represent the effects of systems that perpetuate marginalization and social stratification. These include socially determined factors such as a lack of belonging, internalized racism, and inequitable school policies and practices. In order to enact equity pedagogies in the classroom, teachers must develop their own structural competency, particularly with regards to their Students of Color.

**Trauma informed pedagogy.** Amber and Lucille addressed the social context of advantage and disadvantage in their classrooms and provided opportunities for a more socially just and equitable schooling experience for Students of Color. They described examples of what they believed to be trauma-related behaviors in their classrooms, each noting the socially determined factors that they believed contributed to students’ presentation at school. Amber described the “fight or flight” response exhibited by one of her Nepali students when something in the classroom triggered a trauma response. “She will curl into a ball and lay on the floor and won’t respond to anything.” Amber knew

that her student had been exposed to domestic violence at the hands of her alcoholic father, and had come with her family from a refugee camp in Nepal. Amber understood the complexity of trauma, and how it is often difficult to determine the root cause with so many layered, intersectional adverse experiences in play. Instead of perceiving this as an act of defiance and responding with a punitive consequence, Amber took a restorative, trauma-informed approach.

She was aware that some of her students' behaviors were an attempt to control their environment by seeking negative attention. She reminded them she was on their side, allowed them to take space away from the group and rejoin when they felt ready, and at times, allowed them to express their distress without a lot of intervention. In one example, Amber's student had crawled under a table. Instead of engaging in a power struggle or insisting she come out, Amber let her remain there, as the student was being safe, quiet, and calm. When the student emerged, Amber spoke with her quietly, patting her gently on the back. The student responded by hugging Amber tightly and then chose to sit next to her for the rest of the lesson.

Trauma informed practices in school support the social-emotional well-being of students, improve school climate, and strengthen the relationships between teachers and students most in need of their care (Bailey, 2015; Barfield & Gaskill, 2005; Hoffman et al., 2009; Rain, 2014).

School is a significant social context in a child's life, one which influences their emerging sense of self based on the extent of their sense of belonging and the patterns of engagement that characterize their interactions with others. These place-based aspects of schooling are considered "social determinants" of a child's social-emotional well-being

in school. Socially determined factors that contribute to a disparate level of wellbeing among Students of Color include racism, oppression, denigration, and the cumulative stresses caused by continuous exposure to discrimination and marginalization including racism at the institutional, interpersonal, and personal levels. Differential access to understanding of these unspoken rules serve to perpetuate social inequity. For Students of Color, the hidden curriculum in a classroom either serves to acknowledge and redress their experiences with racism and social marginalization, or deny them equitable opportunities based on preconceived ideas about what they can and cannot do.

The hidden curricula in both classrooms reflected the teachers' own values, awareness of structural inequity, and expectations for social interaction.

### **Additional Findings**

The data revealed additional themes that contributed to a deeper understanding of how Amber and Lucille supported their Students of Color through classroom pedagogies informed by their understanding of the broader context of social inequity. These include student marginalization and patterns of difference, the Trump effect, and support and resistance within the school community.

### **Student Marginalization and Patterns of Difference**

Amber and Lucille both noted patterns of difference with regards to whom among their students experienced marginalization. In one interview, Amber spoke about her Muslim Iraqi student whom she perceived to be gay. He was very interested in belly dancing and chose to perform at Arday Elementary's talent show one year. Amber noticed other students laughing and teasing, partly due to what she described as "toxic masculinity" and partly due to the "huge culture clash" with regards to the way many

Muslims view homosexuality and gender roles. While many members of the community practice Islam or are close with people who do, some of the myths that essentialize “Muslim culture” are still present at Arday. Grounded in stereotypes or a homogenous perspective about a group of individuals, this essentialization of culture minimizes the importance of a student’s identity, passions, and lived experiences (González, 2006; Gorski, 2016a).

Reflecting on the engagement level of her Students of Color, Amber stated that she has “eliminated raised hands in discussions, using partner talks, table talks, and other strategies” after noticing that “White, middle-class, male voices” were dominating class participation. “My White students dominate conversations about Black history... and I’ve started to think, like, why is this uncomfortable? Like what’s really going on in the minds of my Black students?” In her self-reflections, Amber considered the impacts of institutional inequity on the social-emotional well-being of her Students of Color (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010). She stated, “I try to reflect deeply on my teaching every day and think about how disengagement means that I need to adjust my teaching and make it more engaging.” Amber’s critical consciousness, her capacity to examine her own practices and reflect on the influence that institutional racism has on her unconscious biases, was crucial to her ability to be an effective teacher with her diverse group of students and central to her implementation of EPSEW.

Lucille described many of her students as socially marginalized, hesitant to participate at times, and unsure of their positionality as English learners who were new to the country. In order to amplify their contributions to the class, she paid careful attention to when the cultural norms or assumed knowledge in the room were misaligned with a

student's existing schema (Gay, 2010). During an author study lesson, students were talking about animals and the sounds they made. Lucille noticed one of her quiet boys imitating the animal sounds under his breath, and invited his voice into the conversation. "In the United States we say, 'cock-a-doodle-doo!' In your language, what do you say?" This simple invitation honored different *ways of knowing* (Milner & Ford, 2007), and resulted in many of her students trilling and chattering, imitating the sound of a rooster in a way that felt familiar and engaging.

### **The Trump Effect**

Lucille's students, all with refugee or immigrant status, new to the country, and with limited English proficiency, did not meet her maximum classroom capacity. In 2016, the first year of this study, she had 12 students mostly from Nepal and different parts of Africa. "I have the capacity for 15 and every year I exceed that number as long as I have enough chairs." In 2018 she again had 12 students, however only five were new to the country. When asked if this was a result of Trump's immigration policies, she said, "Yes, that's totally what it is. I mean, I would get a steady stream of new kids all the time and that's just not happening." By 2019, Lucille had just seven students, five from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who came from refugee camps in Malawi, Tanzania, and Burundi, one Bhutanese student who came from a camp in Nepal, and one student who immigrated from Vietnam. Lucille shared that she felt "ashamed of the country I live in." Reflecting on her decreasing enrollment she lamented, "Only 11 Syrians have been allowed into the US so far this year (as of April, 2018), and I see what's going on and I see this classroom could be a safe haven for a handful of Syrian children and their families, and we're not utilizing that." As Lucille planned to retire soon, she worried

about the viability of her English immersion program. Because she had been the one to create the program and spent years advocating for resources to sustain it, she worried that her absence might result in its elimination. Further, given the drop in enrollment in her program, she feared the school district might deem it unnecessary.

When asked about the Trump effect in her classroom, Amber said, “I guess this activist work feels critically more important. It’s a sad time right now, and I know that racism and bias already exist but with social media and people’s access to wrong information, I just feel like there are bullies and haters crawling from beneath the rocks and showing themselves proudly. So I’ve just started to embed it into my teaching all the time.” An example she provided was her writing unit on argument essays which required students to make a claim and support it with evidence. She introduced many of the contemporary social justice movements receiving media attention at the time, finding age-appropriate video clips and media sources, and also addressing the counter arguments - a requirement of the essays. She engaged her students in explorations of the issues, and allowed them to choose a topic for their argument essays. “I had Black Lives Matter essays, hashtag take a knee, some about gender expression, LGQBT issues, women’s rights, equal pay, access to education, and stopping gun violence.” Amber felt that exposing her students to these relevant issues increased their learning engagement and deepened their capacity for critical thinking.

### **Support and Resistance**

As she broached topics such as immigration and the Black Lives Matter movement, Amber had the strong support of her building administrator and her students’ parents. She recognized the importance of taking a thoughtful approach to this work, as

well as the potential risks. “I told my student teacher, look, you need to keep doing this social justice work, but you need to be incredibly cautious.” Amber stated that in other places, she might be fired for teaching about such divisive topics but “I know that I have clearance here.” She consulted with her principal and was open about her equity centered pedagogical approaches with her students’ families. “It’s one of the first things I say at open house, that social justice is critically important to me and I am raising global citizens in my classroom.” She tells them she will “breach controversial subjects” and says she is usually met with nodding heads and gratitude for her approach.

Amber also described resistance among some of her colleagues. “I know there are staff in this building who challenge what I do, or don’t like it because they think I’m too controversial or I’m pushing a political agenda if you want to use those words.” She drew a clear distinction between telling students which political candidate to support and her desire to “raise good people, like basic good people to the core!” Amber questioned the reasons why more teachers did not share her bold approach to social justice in the curriculum. “Should you be afraid to do these things because they’re so sensitive you might offend somebody? Anybody? One person? Or should you be more courageous?” She noted that many educators who reject her approach do so because they are fearful of backlash. When asked about how she might handle negative feedback she replied, “I would probably correct my teaching and make it better. But that fear is stopping more people than it should.”

Amber prioritized her core values around social justice and racial equity over her own comfort at school. During her unit on voting rights, she brought her students to the school gymnasium where community members were casting their votes. Knowing it was

against regulations, she brought her class inside the room and narrated while they observed the voting process in action. An official swiftly approached her and asked her and her students to leave, informing her that it was against policy to have spectators present. Amber knew this, but had weighed the risk and discomfort against the benefit to her students' learning and first-hand experience with the voting process. It was more important to her that her students had this opportunity than it was for her to conform to school rules about students in the polling area, to cover her planned lesson for that day, or to stick to a prescribed schedule.

These findings illustrate the ways in which Amber and Lucille effectively supported the social-emotional well-being of their Students of Color through pedagogical approaches that accounted for the institutionalized and socially mediated factors that influence a child's experiences in school. Altogether, these findings highlight the importance of the social and community contexts in which inequity occurs. As such, the following chapter discusses contributions of this study to the existing body of literature, and identifies implications for the effective implementation of EPSEW of Students of Color in elementary school.

## CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The goals of this study were to apply a social determinants perspective to an examination of racial trauma and a sense of school belonging among Students of Color, and to broaden pedagogical perspectives regarding systemic rather than individualistic approaches to address educational inequity through an examination of the hidden curriculum. Through multiple interviews and observations over three years in two classrooms at Arday Elementary, this study sought to answer the questions:

1) In what ways did the teachers from Arday Elementary School practice equity literate pedagogy to effectively support their Students of Color?

2) How does the application of a Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) perspective reflect teachers' understanding of the systemic nature of educational inequity and the complexity of sense of belonging for Students of Color?

In this process, I hoped to learn how teachers supported the social-emotional well-being of their Students of Color, particularly those who had experienced racial trauma, and how their pedagogical approaches influenced their analysis of inequity in students' social and community contexts. I was interested in understanding the extent to which their considerations of socially determined factors, including ACEs and racial trauma, informed their instructional and affective approaches in their classrooms. As a result of this study, I gained a deeper understanding of the social and community contexts in which the social determinants of health emerged and intersected with teaching and learning, and learned how Amber and Lucille operationalized equity pedagogies in their classrooms through several aspects of their hidden curriculum. Additionally, I gained insight as to how their own core values about social-emotional well-being and their

commitments to ensuring all children felt a sense of belonging shaped their pedagogical approaches. In the following section, I describe implications for teaching practice including an understanding of social determinants and the role of critical consciousness.

### **Implications for Practice**

#### **Understanding Social Determinants: Implications for Teacher Education**

The WHO recognizes social and community contexts as one of the major categories of SDOH (Healthy People 2020, 2018). As teachers consider the many factors which influence a child's social-emotional well-being, a discussion of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is likely part of the discussion. While the original study on ACEs focused on the immediate family and home environment that impact health and well-being outcomes (Felitti et al., 1998), new developments in the field of public health are focusing on the social determinants and other supportive factors in a child's life, particularly with regard to their social and community contexts (Bruner, 2017). Community-based and socially mediated ACEs impact all children; however, those most marginalized by social inequity are particularly vulnerable to the harms that result.

Further, the original ACEs study represented a largely homogenous sample of White, middle and upper-middle class, educated people between the ages of 55-57 years. This sample did not allow for the consideration of confounding factors such as racism, poverty, or discrimination. In addition, the study omitted predictors of long term health outcomes such as peer rejection, exposure to community based violence (outside of the family), poverty, or poor academic performance, all widely recognized by many developmental researchers as important predictors of long term health outcomes. These same researchers now argue in favor of adding racism to the list of ACEs (Bradshaw,

Oehme, & Perko, 2019; Bruner, 2017; Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2013; Kelly-Irving & Delpierre, 2019; Liu et al., 2015; Pachter et al., 2017; Williams, Metzger, Leins, & DeLapp, 2018). As such, this current study aims to highlight the importance of health determinants in the context of school belonging for Students of Color.

My interviews with these teachers have motivated me to use the term Equity Pedagogy for Social-Emotional Wellbeing (EPSEW) with particular attention to Students of Color. This conceptualization differs from its earlier cousins: culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant teaching, culturally sustaining pedagogy, equity pedagogy, and equity literacy, in its application of a social determinants perspective to examine educational equity<sup>1</sup>. This perspective, grounded in a child's social and community context influences their holistic well-being through the hidden curriculum and patterns of social engagement that either serve to support or obscure their sense of school belonging.

Findings from this current study suggest a social determinants perspective is largely missing from research and practice with regard to the social and community contexts of racial trauma, as well as the relationship between racial trauma and ACEs. This perspective could augment educators' understanding of trauma informed practices in the classroom in order to support the social-emotional well-being of their Students of Color at school. More importantly, it may motivate educators to shift their mindset about their own complicity within an institution that sustains the dynamics of social dominance

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<sup>1</sup> At the outset of this study, I included Jones (2000) Levels of Racism as my conceptual framework, which helped me design my interview questions in order to explore the socially determined influences of racism at the internalized, personally mediated, and institutional levels. As the study progressed, I applied Jones' framework as a filter through which to collect and analyze the data, however it did not end up aligning well enough with my research questions in order to illuminate my findings. Future studies might apply Jones' framework more specifically to the study of EPSEW, which would benefit from an examination of student experiences with racism at Jones' three levels.

and oppression, including their responsibility to respond to manifestations of racism in the classroom through restorative and trauma informed practices. Racial trauma must be addressed at the institutional level by embedding racial trauma informed practices into the school culture, interpersonal norms, patterns of engagement, and schoolwide responses to students' social, emotional, affective, and academic struggles.

The inclusion of racial trauma in the list of ACEs suggests a more compelling need for more extensive research, funding and prioritization for teacher training and ongoing professional development, all of which would directly benefit students most marginalized by social inequity.

### **Critical Consciousness and Decolonizing Curriculum**

Teachers who understand and examine their own socialized stereotypes, attitudes, and assumptions about students from different social identity groups than themselves are able to acknowledge the ways in which their own privileges have been institutionalized within society and influence it has had on their lives (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010).

Ongoing self-reflection is necessary in order to disentangle the myths and assumptions that perpetuate social privilege and inequity (King, 1992; McIntosh, 1990; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995).

Teachers must recognize the value in taking on uncomfortable, yet relevant topics in the classroom including racism, marginalization, and oppression. Much like other studies that focused on the experiences of high school students (Au, 2007; Banks & Banks, 1995; Delgado, 1998; Fine, 1997; Flynn, 2012; Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Lipsitz et al., 1995; Tillman, 2002), this study found that Students of Color at Arday Elementary were interested in talking about their experiences with oppression and

learning about other students' perspectives about the inequity they experienced in their daily lives.

Instead of shying away from teaching about current events, particularly those with racially charged political implications, educators must not assume children lack the knowledge or skills to engage. Instead, teachers should assume children are being exposed to information about racism and social marginalization, often as a matter of survival for People of Color (Gorski, 2019; Kohn, 2014), and consider to whom they are referring if they believe students are not already aware of, or ready to think about these issues. At the same time, students are also being exposed to information about inequity, often through inaccurate information heavily influenced by bias and nested within the context of institutionalized oppression. This points to the need for teachers to approach such topics in ways that empower students to find their voice and make sense of the world (Maughan, 2017).

A decolonizing approach to curriculum requires educators to engage in continual reflection around the power dynamics present in the institution of schooling, the privileging of certain ways of knowing, and the systems and curricula that perpetuate inequity (Asher, 2009). This may require examining existing curricula through an equity lens in order to make visible whose perspectives are represented and whose are missing and analyze the ways in which different racial, cultural, religious, and other social groups are depicted.

Amber's frustration about the prevalence of Eurocentric experiences, characters, and histories in the district-wide curricula and library collections speak to the importance of providing instructional materials that reflected her students' identities, lives, and

experiences. By explicitly addressing the sociopolitical context, teachers prepare students to “engage civically and peacefully across difference, but also to become the changemakers and leaders we need” (Simmons, 2019, n.p.). Providing affirming representations of different racial and ethnic groups of people, including their stories, and acknowledging the impacts of societal oppression in the current political climate are important components of an equity framework that supports a sense of school belonging and well-being among Students of Color.

Teachers must problematize “the way we’ve always done it” and start to question some of the school-based cultural norms around curricula, assessment, behavior management, and patterns of social engagement. Those who seek to preserve comfort and familiarity within the institution of schooling must consider who benefits when equity work is “paced for privilege,” (Gorski, 2019). This shift in teacher thinking is foundational to changing practice. I have considered implications for practice that begins with teacher critical consciousness, and in the following sections I offer potential implications at a broader level based on the findings from this study.

### **Implications for Policy**

In addition to the implications for teacher education, this study’s findings also identify policy and practice related implications at the local and national levels. These are illustrated by efforts to pass an Ethnic Studies Bill in one Northern New England state, as well as other states considering similar bills (i.e., California). With the recent passing of an Ethnic Studies Bill in one Northern New England state, a task force is now tasked with recommending changes to the statewide academic standards in order to accurately and sufficiently represent the histories, contributions, and perspectives of people of diverse

ethnic and social groups in pre-K through grade 12 curricula – Curricula that enable students to explore issues of identity, race, and racism are paramount. Advocates assert that the omission of non-dominant racial, ethnic, and social groups in school curricula contributes to the marginalization of members of these groups, contributing to their internalized oppression through the message that their histories, contributions, and perspectives are not relevant or significant.

In addition to broader representation in curricula, the bill also seeks to address racial bias and guide policies around inclusive access to extracurricular programs with religious and cultural considerations in mind. With widespread support from civil rights, racial justice, indigenous, LGBTQIA+, community, and school groups, the bill also instructs the State Board of Education to collect data on bullying, hazing, and harassment disaggregated by race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability status, and English proficiency status. These new reporting requirements are intended to provide the state with information about the school climate with regards to equitable opportunities and school experiences for minoritized students.

Ethnic studies bills such as this one serve to highlight the significance of cultural erasure and omission within the social context of public schooling, and the ways in which it perpetuates a lack of school belonging for students already marginalized by social inequity. As the national population of school aged children continues to grow more racially and ethnically diverse, conversations around the need for inclusive and affirming curricula in all schools will continue. An understanding of the importance of belonging and the harms of racism as SDOH and holistic well-being is important for educators and

policy makers alike. Similar studies that explore the intersection of the SDOH and learning for Students of Color may lead the way to well-informed and developed policies.

## **Conclusion**

### **Advancement and Stagnation in and Discussions of Racism in the US**

I am in the midst of writing this dissertation on June 19, or Juneteenth, which marks the end of slavery in the US, and also in 2019, the 400th anniversary of the first documented arrival of enslaved Africans to Jamestown. This Juneteenth has fueled national debates about whether the U.S. government should pay reparations to the descendants of enslaved Black people. Senate hearing for H.R. 40, named with reference to the “40 acres and a mule” promised to freed Black Americans after the Civil War, seeks to “establish a commission to study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery, its subsequent de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African Americans, and the impact of these, forces on living African Americans, to make recommendations to the Congress on appropriate remedies, and for other purposes” (H.R. 40, 2019). Proponents are calling for the recognition that American institutions throughout history have stolen resources and wealth from African Americans through discriminatory housing laws, predatory lending practices, indentured servitude, property and land theft, corrupt sharecropping, segregation, incarceration, the destruction of families, lynchings, arson, terrorism, sanctioned dehumanization with no consequence or accountability, codifying institutional racism into the fabric of our country and systematically enabling racial oppression even to this day (Coates, 2014).

According to the Federal Reserve's 2016 Survey of Consumer Finances (Dettling, Hsu, Jacobs, Moore, & Thompson, 2017), the average net worth for a Black family stands at \$17,100, a tenth of the average net worth of a White family, and roughly the same as it was in 1970 (Coates, 2014). Economists commonly attribute this massive wealth gap to slavery and the lack of opportunity for social mobility that followed (Anderson, 2016; Rothstein, 2017). Coates (2014) argues that reparations will serve to document the crimes of slavery and racism, necessitating a reckoning with the ugly truth of our nation's history, and an obligation to educate ourselves and our children accordingly (Stolberg, 2019).

Despite the fact that discussions of reparations have been ongoing since the end of the Civil War, and Congressman Conyers has called for the introduction of such a study of the effects of slavery for the last 30 years, H.R.40 has never made it to the House floor. The inability of national leaders to concur on the irreparable harm of racism is in stark contrast to the ability of teachers on the ground, such as my participants, who continue to seek equitable practices to help their students succeed in school. The national discussions sometimes reflect the slow, grinding and painful nature of confronting the history of institutional racism in the US, and influence the conversations that occur at the local level. As such, I offer this study to challenge the gap between theory and practice. While the term *reparations* might not directly parallel the efforts of educators to provide more equitable school experiences for Students of Color, teachers in this study were poised and ready to confront the institutional racism embedded in the social contexts of school. More educational policies at the local and national level need to espouse clear and concrete goals for supporting Students of Color in school, and more intentional educational studies

can better inform these goals. This study calls on educators to apply a social determinants perspective to their analysis of educational inequity and the factors which negatively impact the SOSB and social-emotional well-being among Students of Color. When the government sanctions institutional oppression of People of Color, we can expect people to internalize that oppression, which in turn contributes to the perpetuation of the systems that seek to dominate and oppress them. The national political rhetoric continues to address racial structures, or diminishes them depending on the source, but the divisiveness around race issues and White supremacy continues to challenge the mental health and well-being of our most marginalized students.

Racial trauma is a socially mediated experience which suggests a need for a holistic approach to understanding trauma and intersectional analyses of the proactive and responsive measures needed to mitigate the harms of racial trauma in the classroom. Internalized racism is the result of a child's exposure to institutional and personally mediated racism. Holistic perspectives that consider the socially determined aspects of school experiences among Students of Color and the implications for their social-emotional well-being are needed in order to address educational inequity at a systemic level. Inequity manifests in their social and community contexts, and therefore requires responses that are systemic and holistic rather than individualistic and technical in nature. Interventions and pedagogical approaches rooted in deficit ideologies will not result in improved experiences for the students these approaches are intended to benefit. Instead, considerations for the schoolwide policy, institutional structures, staffing, training, curricular support, and cultural congruence among students and teachers must also be considered.

Internalized racism results from social interactions at the personally mediated level and more significantly, reflects systems of oppression and marginalization at the institutional level. When left unattended, internalized racism leads to feelings of self-hatred, self-doubt, self-concealment, self-rejection, fear of violence, and feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness, (Clark & Clark, 1950; Harrell et al., 2003; Lipsky, 2004; Pheterson, 1986; Pyke, 2010; Utsey et al., 2008; Williams & Williams, 2008). This study identifies the hidden curriculum and sense of belonging as significant factors in a teacher's ability to support the social-emotional well-being among Students of Color, and argues that EPSEW occurs within the socially determined contexts of school. However, a social determinants perspective is absent from the literature around the social-emotional health of Students of Color in school. For these reasons, educators must develop their critical consciousness, including an analysis of inequity at the institutional and systemic levels, in order to effectively support the holistic well-being and sense of belonging (SOSB) of their Students of Color.

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**APPENDIX A: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROTOCOL**

**Research Study: Toward an Equity Pedagogy for Social Emotional Well-being among Students of Color in Elementary School: A Case Study**

**Focus of Observations: I will be observing and taking field notes on teachers’ behaviors, language, interactions with students, interactions with families, communication style, teaching delivery models, structure of lessons and learning experiences, classroom management, choice of teaching materials and content, cultural knowledge, frames of reference, connections to students’ prior knowledge, classroom climate and culture, and use of strategies to ensure EL students understand academic language.**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time:</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Duration:</b>
<b>Descriptive Notes</b>	<b>Reflective Notes</b>

**APPENDIX B: DISSERTATION STUDY INTERVIEW 1**

**Research Study:** Toward an Equity Pedagogy for Social-Emotional Wellbeing among Students of Color in Elementary School: A Case Study

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time:</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Duration:</b>
<b>Interviewer:</b>	<b>Interviewee:</b>
<p><b>Questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Describe the demographic makeup of your class (race, culture, countries of origin, language, socio-economic status, gender, age).</b></li> <li><b>2. Describe any other factors that influence your class (span of academic abilities, social-emotional levels of need, significant behaviors, level of disruption, level of parental involvement)</b></li> <li><b>3. How do you learn about each child’s culture and background?</b></li> <li><b>4. What drives your relationships and communications with students and families?</b></li> <li><b>5. Has your teaching practice changed since the 2016 presidential election?</b></li> <li><b>6. To what extent do you discuss current political issues with your students? How do you decide whether or not to address divisive issues? How do class discussions impact your students who experience social marginalization?</b></li> <li><b>7. How has the increase in hate incidents across the nation impacted you?</b></li> <li><b>8. Has it impacted your students, their sense of school belonging, or their social emotional well-being at school? How do you know?</b></li> <li><b>9. Is there anything else you’d like to share about the pedagogical practices you use to support the social emotional well-being among students of color and other marginalized students at school?</b></li> </ol>	

## APPENDIX C: DISSERTATION STUDY INTERVIEW 2

**Research Study:** Toward an Equity Pedagogy for Social-Emotional Wellbeing among Students of Color in Elementary School: A Case Study

**Note:** This interview will be conducted prior to classroom observations.

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time:</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Duration:</b>
<b>Interviewer:</b>	<b>Interviewee:</b>
<b>Questions:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Are there students in your class whom you would consider socially marginalized? How do you know?</li><li>2. Is a sense of school belonging important to you? Why? Is it important to your students? How do you know?</li><li>3. What do you do to support a sense of school belonging?</li><li>4. Describe your experiences with trauma-informed practices.</li><li>5. What does trauma look like in your classroom?</li><li>6. What do you believe is the relationship between trauma and racism?</li><li>7. Talk about your perceptions about students' social emotional health and affect in the classroom. Do you notice any patterns of difference among students?</li><li>8. Please describe your understanding of pedagogical practices to bring equity into the classroom.</li><li>9. Do you talk about social inequality in your class? Why? How?</li><li>10. Is there anything else related that you'd like to share?</li></ol>	

### APPENDIX D: DISSERTATION STUDY INTERVIEW 3

#### Research Study: Toward an Equity Pedagogy for Social Emotional Wellbeing among Students of Color in Elementary School: A Case Study

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time:</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Duration:</b>
<b>Interviewer:</b>	<b>Interviewee:</b>
<b>Questions:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Has your teaching practice changed over the last three years as incidents of bias and discrimination against People of Color, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, and women are on the rise?</li><li>2. How has the increase in hate incidents across the nation impacted you?</li><li>3. Has it impacted your students, their sense of school belonging, or their social emotional well-being at school? How do you know?</li><li>4. To what extent do you discuss current political issues with your students such as the Black Lives Matter movement, anti-immigrant policies, and hate incidents? How do you decide whether or not to address divisive issues? How do class discussions impact your students who experience social marginalization?</li><li>5. Is there anything else you'd like to share about the pedagogical practices you use to support the social emotional well-being among students of color and other marginalized students at school?</li></ol>	

**APPENDIX E: DISSERTATION STUDY INTERVIEW 4**

**Research Study: Toward an Equity Pedagogy for Social Emotional Wellbeing  
among Students of Color in Elementary School: A Case Study**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time:</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Duration:</b>
<b>Interviewer:</b>	<b>Interviewee:</b>
<b>Questions:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Describe the demographic makeup of your class (race, culture, countries of origin, language, socio-economic status, gender, age).</li><li>2. Are there students in your class whom you would consider socially marginalized? How do you know?</li><li>3. Is a sense of school belonging important to you? Why? Your students? How do you know?</li><li>4. What do you do to support a sense of school belonging?</li><li>5. Describe your experiences with trauma-informed practices.</li><li>6. What does trauma look like in your classroom?</li><li>7. Talk about your students' social emotional health and affect in the classroom. Do you notice any patterns of difference among students?</li><li>8. Please describe your understanding of equity pedagogy.</li><li>9. Do you talk about social inequality in your class? Why? How?</li><li>10. Is there anything else related that you'd like to share?</li></ol>	

**APPENDIX F: DISSERTATION STUDY INTERVIEW 5**

**Research Study: Toward an Equity Pedagogy for Social Emotional Well-being among Students of Color in Elementary School: A Case Study**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time:</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Duration:</b>
<b>Interviewer:</b>	<b>Interviewee:</b>
<b>Questions:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How does your own culture influence your teaching practice?</li><li>2. How do you learn about each child's culture and background?</li><li>3. What drives your relationships and communications with students and families?</li><li>4. What is your perception of the level of student engagement, comfort, and enthusiasm in your class? Does this differ among White students, Students of Color and students with refugee or immigrant status?</li><li>5. How do you design learning experiences that support the social emotional well-being of students who are marginalized by societal inequity?</li><li>6. How do trauma informed practices address the needs of students struggling with trauma in school?</li><li>7. What do you believe is the relationship between trauma and racism?</li><li>8. What do all teachers need to know about supporting the social-emotional well-being of students of color in elementary school? Any recommendations?</li><li>9. Is there anything else related that you'd like to share?</li></ol>	

**APPENDIX G: DISSERTATION STUDY INTERVIEW 6**

**Research Study: Toward an Equity Pedagogy for Social Emotional Well-being  
among Students of Color in Elementary School: A Case Study**

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Time:</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Duration:</b>
<b>Interviewer:</b>	<b>Interviewee:</b>
<b>Questions:</b>  <b>1. Over the past few years, what would you say is the percentage of your students whom you know have experienced some sort of significant trauma in their lives? How do you know?</b>  <b>2. What has influenced your understanding of racial trauma and its impact on students?</b>  <b>3. What social and community contexts influence a sense of school belonging among Students of Color?</b>	