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Stories Read and Told in an Antiracist Teaching Book Club

Jennifer Ervin

University of Georgia, jennifer.ervin@uga.edu

Madison Gannon

University of Georgia, madison.gannon@uga.edu

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Cover Page Footnote

The authors would like to express their gratitude for the third graduate student member of our book club, Lemell Overton, for his commitment and support during the planning and facilitating of book club meetings. Lemell's contributions to our conversations provided an invaluable perspective, and we have gained and grown a great deal by working together with him.

Stories Read and Told in an Antiracist Teaching Book Club

Introduction

“I’m a little like, I’m a little scared, in all honesty, about trying to, I guess, bring up these conversations in my classroom.”

This quotation, from a preservice teacher working in her placement classroom in the spring of 2021 resonates with the concerns we have heard and continue to hear from preservice teachers working in the southeastern U.S. state where our study took place. Later that year, the state passed legislation against the teaching of what are considered to be *divisive* concepts in K-12 schools, and concerns like this became tangible barriers for teachers hoping to engage students in conversations around racial identity and racism. In an attempt to support these preservice teachers in learning how antiracist pedagogical strategies might lead to productive conversations on race in English language arts (ELA) classrooms, we, graduate students and university supervisors working closely with these students, decided to host an antiracist teaching book club. In this article, we consider their stories and our own while working to understand preservice teachers’ concerns more deeply, along with how we might support them in working through concerns as they commit to an engagement with antiracist pedagogical practices in various school contexts.

This article explores the stories lived and told in this book club space. Three graduate students hosted the meetings and had three undergraduate preservice teachers as participants. We read and discussed *Letting Go of Literary Whiteness: Antiracist Literature Instruction for White Students* by Carlin Borsheim-Black and Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides (2019), *Not Light, But Fire: How to Lead Meaningful Race Conversations in the Classroom* by Matthew R. Kay (2018), and *White Fragility: Why it's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin DiAngelo (2018). Motivated by Freire's (1968) critical pedagogy and bell hooks' (1994) engaged pedagogy, we wanted to create the book club as a way to study and lean into antiracist pedagogy in community with others. It became a place that invited us to share and learn from our classroom stories alongside the stories told in our monthly readings. And so we used narrative inquiry as a methodology to better understand how sharing stories in a community influences preservice teachers who are developing ideas around antiracist pedagogy in ELA classrooms.

Literature Review

When we invited preservice teachers to participate in our book club, we hoped to provide an informal environment where we could discuss antiracist pedagogies in ELA instruction in a supportive and collaborative way. We also hoped to model for preservice teachers what professional collaboration with their future colleagues could look like, so that as they prepared to work in new schools, they might feel better equipped to seek out communities that may support them if they choose to engage with antiracist or racial literacy instruction in their classrooms. Previous literature has shown that participating in book club discussions of professional texts can provide teachers with opportunities to extend their professional development with literature they are personally interested and invested in (Burbank et al., 2010). Burbank et al.'s study on preservice and in-service teacher participation in book clubs found that they provided several

advantages as a model of professional development, including increased opportunities to reflect on classroom practices, promoting teacher dialogue and collaboration, and providing a “nonthreatening” place to discuss professional issues (p. 63). Book clubs can also provide productive opportunities for teachers to engage in critical conversations specifically on race (Johnson, 2016).

Building Community Through Book Clubs

Book clubs have been found to be a particularly useful place for preservice teachers to develop their emerging pedagogical beliefs (Burbank et al., 2010; Robertson & Smith, 2017). As preservice teachers work to build praxis through applying the theories they have learned in their studies to teaching in their placement classrooms, book clubs can allow them to discuss both their practical challenges and pedagogical concerns. In Burbank et al.’s study, preservice teachers found concrete solutions to classroom problems through book club discussions, and they said that their book club participation was “critical to their development as educators” (p. 63). One preservice teacher shared that they planned to “continue to use dialogue and research to inform (their) practice,” (p. 64), and another found it to be a good example of how to collaborate with other teachers. This is particularly valuable in building a supportive community for antiracist work, and the need for this community was reflected in the concerns that emerged in our own book club conversations.

The need for a sense of community among peers is particularly valuable when it comes to conversations about race. These conversations can be challenging for educators working to reflect on their positionalities and how their identities might impact the way they present literature to students, but discussions with peers can allow for reflection and critical

conversations on racial literacy practices (Gutiérrez, 2008; McIntyre, 1997; Tatum, 1994). These reflective conversations with peers can have long-lasting impacts on classroom practices, influencing preservice teachers' future lesson plans and interactions with students (Robertson & Smith, 2017).

Antiracist Pedagogies with Preservice Teachers

Our book club texts focused on antiracist pedagogies, which gave the preservice teacher participants an opportunity to discuss these pedagogical approaches and reflect on their new experiences in the classroom with these in mind. We built from understandings in previous scholarship on the importance of engaging preservice teachers with antiracist pedagogy. Mosley (2010) conducted a study focused on one preservice teacher's experience developing critical race literacy pedagogy by analyzing the teacher's participation in a book club. Mosley centers the importance of developing antiracist pedagogies with White preservice teachers in particular, explaining that "many of our pedagogies privilege the literacy practices of the White, economically privileged" (p. 453). Neville (2020) writes about the Adichi's concept of "refusing secondly" (as cited in Neville, p. 197) in her work with preservice teachers, arguing that literature can provide a "unique space of (un)learning" for teachers and preservice teachers working within an antiracist English education framework. Crowley and Smith (2020) write about using White privilege pedagogy with preservice teachers as a way to promote antiracist dispositions. We also drew from Lachuk and Mosley's (2012) study on teacher educators' engagement in a narrative space with preservice teachers, which calls on teacher educators to engage with narratives "as a medium through which pre-service teachers might delve into and unpack the social, cultural, historical and political natures of their personal and professional experiences" (p. 311-312). This helped us to better understand how sharing about our own

teaching experiences in relation to the preservice teachers' stories and questions about what was happening in their classroom placements could support them in imagining antiracist pedagogies in their future work as educators.

Theoretical Framework & Guiding Question

This project explored the beliefs, feelings, and stories that White preservice teachers bring to antiracist pedagogy. In this project, we considered Picower's (2009) writing on how teacher educators might encourage White preservice teachers to develop critical understandings of how their race and racial experiences impact their teaching practices, and how they are implicated in relationships among race, power, and systems of oppression. Using narrative inquiry as a methodological tool to unearth the "stories lived and told" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) in a book club space, the researchers make sense of the participants' lived experiences pertaining to antiracist pedagogy in order to better understand how to integrate such pedagogy into teacher education. This non-traditional teacher preparation setting integrated concepts of Freire's (1968) critical pedagogy and hooks's (1994) engaged pedagogy. Additionally, the books we read made use of critical race theory (CRT), so this theory inevitably showed up in our thinking and discussion. The following question guided our study:

How can sharing stories in a community support preservice teachers' developing ideas around antiracist pedagogy in English language arts classrooms?

Critical Pedagogy

Born out of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968/2014), critical pedagogy explains that those concerned with teaching and learning are inevitably tied to justice and democracy. The

book club was created and facilitated to pursue antiracist pedagogy within English classrooms. This inquiry acted within critical consciousness to equip preservice teachers to implement critical pedagogy in their future classrooms to support students of racially marginalized groups. Freire (1968/2014) described critical consciousness in saying,

The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own. The role of the problem-posing educator is to create; together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the *doxa* is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the *logos*. (p. 81)

We worked to co-investigate the ideas in the books alongside the teacher candidates, interweaving their narratives and our own. Freire's critical pedagogy guided the close attention to choosing books that worked towards emancipatory uses of education. The questions we prepared for the meetings aligned with CRT to stimulate reflection and growth towards teaching in antiracist ways.

Engaged Pedagogy

As a student of Freire's works, hooks (1994) contributed *engaged pedagogy* to the field of liberatory education, recognizing that teaching needs to nurture the teacher as well as the student to self-actualization. This theory is crucial to this inquiry's method because our vulnerable narratives as graduate students were presented alongside our participants, adding to our communal lived experience that would both heal and disturb our beliefs as we worked together towards a deeper grasp of antiracist pedagogy. By enacting engaged pedagogy in this

space, we as graduate students had to be honest with our shortcomings and victories related to the concepts and strategies presented in our books. We reflected on our own sometimes problematic experiences of schooling and teaching to model the discomfort that is tied to antiracist pedagogy, working towards nurturing our own pedagogy as well as that of the teacher candidates to hopefully sustain similar work in their future classrooms and teaching communities. Being vulnerable about our experiences, which occurred in varying classroom contexts across the country, allowed the preservice teachers to get a glimpse at the evolution of our pedagogy as we deliberately pursued antiracist pedagogies. We hope these teacher candidates will continue to explore their own beliefs in critical ways throughout their careers, beyond their teacher preparation courses.

Critical Race Theory

While Freire (1968/2014) and hooks (1994) provide the main theoretical framework for this study, it is important to name the theory that guided the readings we discussed in the book club. As our conversations were centered around bringing attention to the race of characters in the literature we read with students, a key framework for our conversations and in analyzing the data was critical race theory (CRT; Bell, 1980). We discussed the way race operates in a narrative to convey power, privilege, and authority to some at the expense of others, and how to negotiate these conversations with middle and secondary students. CRT, currently under attack in many states by those who misunderstand it as a pedagogy that promotes one race over another or encourages guilt among White students (Ladson-Billings, 2021), is a framework that brings attention to the way that race, racism, and racial hierarchies operate throughout the systems of our society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT grew out of critical legal studies into a framework that can be used to analyze systemic racism, including the

racial inequities that persist among students and within schools through various educational policies (Dixson et al., 2017, Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Analyzing systems of racism while reading literature with students is important because, as Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019) argue, “literature is often complicit in constructing and reinforcing ideologies that disguise, deny, minimize, and justify racism” (p. 8). Literature also provides an entryway for students to begin to understand how race might impact the lives of individuals, which may help to nurture a perhaps new sense of empathy for the racial experiences of others. Through the lens of CRT, it is clear that Whiteness and racism are embedded aspects of literature (Morrison, 1992), constructing and then reinforcing the norms of Whiteness through narratives (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019).

Methods

The book club was offered as an opportunity for preservice teachers in the English Education department of a large southeastern university in the U.S. The graduate students who founded the book club work with the department as graduate research and teaching assistants and therefore had some prior relationships with the preservice teachers in coursework and observation capacities. The participants in our book club, June, Brianna, and Sophia¹, were three White women, which reflects the majority identities within the teacher education program at the university. They joined in response to an open invitation to all preservice teachers in the English Education program currently working in placement classrooms. The graduate students who facilitated the book club include the authors of this paper, who both identify as White, cisgender women, and the third graduate student, who identifies as a Black, cisgender male. The stories

¹ All names, aside from the authors', are pseudonyms.

focused on in this study pull from the conversations among the three of us as we met for the book club. While additional data were collected in the form of researcher memos, interviews, and surveys, the focus of this narrative analysis are the transcripts of two book club meetings.

As graduate students in the university, we had been engaging with coursework that pushed us to consider how our positionalities place us in the classroom, shaping our perspectives and pedagogical approaches. We were working intentionally to reflect on our identities and how they had shaped our own teaching practices, a process we have written about elsewhere (Gannon et al., 2022). These experiences led us to deeper understandings of how our own training in teacher education could have better prepared us to enact responsive pedagogical approaches, to engage in meaningful conversations on race, and to decenter the dominance of Whiteness in our curricula. During these book club conversations, we were learning alongside the preservice teachers through an iterative process of reflecting on our experiences, learning intentional antiracist pedagogical practices, and thinking concretely about how these might play out in the preservice teachers' classrooms.

Our meetings took place during the spring semester in 2021. We planned on reading one book per month and elected to hold meetings over Zoom due to the continuing Covid-19 pandemic. For February, the graduate students chose to start our conversations with the book *Letting Go of Literary Whiteness: Antiracist Literature Instruction for White Students* by Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019), as the topic of this book captured what we hoped to focus on during our conversations. For March and April's book choices, we offered some possibilities to the preservice teachers and asked for their suggestions. They elected to read *Not Light, But Fire: How to Lead Meaningful Race Conversations in the Classroom* by Matthew Kay

(2018) in March and *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo (2018) in April. Due to scheduling conflicts, we discussed March and April's books together in one conversation.

Using narrative inquiry as our methodological approach, we sought to understand how the preservice teachers were making sense of antiracist pedagogies based on their lived experiences as students, preservice teachers, and people existing in the world (Lachuk & Mosley, 2012), while being grounded in the books we read. Narrative inquiry brings focus to the stories of human experience, grounded in particular personal, social, and temporal contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Kramp (2004) wrote that narrative “connects events, actions, and experiences, and moves them through time” (p. 110), allowing us to consider how these pedagogical considerations may play out differently in various teaching scenarios. In narrative inquiry, stories are “not just after-the-fact representations” of reality (Tracy, 2020, p. 69), but instead are active, lived expressions that encourage participants and researchers to construct new meanings together (Caine et al., 2013). Aware that our lived experience could support the preservice teachers (Clandinin & Caine, 2008), both during the book club meetings, and as they began their teaching careers, we told our own stories as they pertained to the books and discussion questions. The book club became a place where the graduate students and preservice teachers shared their storied lives in order to cultivate deeper understandings of antiracist pedagogies in ways reflective of Freire's critical pedagogy (1968/2014) and hooks's engaged pedagogy (1994). After transcribing the recordings from the meetings, we individually read the transcripts and analyzed the narratives within our conversations, making note of patterns in the data that could lead to overarching themes. In line with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we met to discuss our codes and determine themes that focused on how the preservice teachers constructed and reconstructed their understandings of antiracist pedagogy while

negotiating their lived experiences, particularly their field experiences. We determined that the narratives worked within three main themes: 1) the ways in which both their identity as White women educators and the diverse racial identities of their students are at the forefront of enacting antiracist pedagogy; 2) the ways they received or did not receive support while implementing antiracist pedagogy and related practices; and 3) the pedagogical decisions needed in order to plan for and use antiracist pedagogy. After developing these themes, we copied the narratives that aligned with them into a separate coding workbook and then confirmed that the data reflected each theme. In the next section, we will share the narratives that led us to the three findings and discuss how we began to make sense of the participants' lived experiences, including the book club meetings themselves.

Findings

Identity Matters

The preservice teachers in our book club, three White women, frequently expressed concern over how the intersection of their racial and professional identities might affect both their messaging around race and the students' interpretations of those messages. As teachers, they understood that they held a position of authority in the classroom, and that their words, therefore, could be interpreted as authoritative. But their identity as White women, especially in classrooms leading discussions on race with students of Color, created a present awareness of the fact that they did not have the authority to discuss the impacts of race or racism on individuals with students holding marginalized racial identities. June expressed these concerns based on her experiences in student teaching, saying:

Oftentimes in class, we can frame discussing race as like a matter of opinion. As opposed to like, these are concrete, just like we are teaching you how to identify literary devices, we are teaching you how to identify these things (in reference to racial literacy objectives) as well. At the same time, though, as a White educator, if I have, like students of Color in my classroom, I don't want them to feel . . . as if they are the spokesperson for their race, of course, but I also really struggle with being in a position of teaching them something about their lived experience . . . I think, you know, of course, I am the teacher. I have, you know, certain authority here, but at the same time, I do feel a level of deference . . . that's something I've always, like, struggled with.

The question that follows from June's concerns, which resonated with other members of the group, is how a White teacher can speak on race and racism with students of Color without making assumptions about those students' personal lived experiences. The next question is what a White teacher could do to create an environment where race and racism can be discussed openly, and where all students feel secure enough to share their perspectives as these topics are discussed. These conversations are not meant to be comfortable, but the environment in our classroom should be one that is secure enough for students to call out bias in both the literature and in the teachers' interpretations of it, when necessary. How can White teachers set the table in their classrooms for a secure conversation, and allow all students to feel comfortable, welcome, and able to share, but also not as though they have been put under a microscope?

Kay (2018) argues that this begins with a slow process of building a trusting classroom environment. In our book club meetings, we discussed how important it is to build relationships of trust with students on an individual level, so that those students could let teachers know, privately or publicly, if they felt spotlighted or further marginalized through class discussions on

race. Jennifer, the first author, suggested that in situations where there are few students of Color in a classroom, it is important to find time to check in with students outside of class, and to build those relationships early in the year. Madison, the second author, suggested that while students should not hold the burden for being an authority on race in these conversations, teachers can work to rebalance the measure of authority between students and teachers in the classroom, while building an understanding that all students can hold teachers accountable when they hear something they disagree with, or when they notice bias in a conversation. The third graduate student facilitator, Anthony, reminded us all that “you're not really teaching them, right? You're . . . inviting the lesson into the classroom.”

The (Im)possibility of Safety

There is an assumption here that it is possible to create a safe environment for students of Color in majority White schools with majority White teachers, but this assumption is highly questionable. Can students of Color, in school contexts where their race is in the minority, be guaranteed safety in these conversations? Even when White teachers and classmates have good intentions, these conversations can quickly become targeted and explosive, and will inevitably be at the very least uncomfortable. As Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019) warn, “We cannot avoid the fact that race talk can be—understandably should be—hard and uncomfortable” (p. 93). In traditional schooling spaces, racial and social hierarchies and their underlying operation within our curriculum will not simply disappear when a teacher brings attention to race. However, the concept of *safety* in these conversations is very different for a White teacher than for a student of Color, and this fact came up often in our conversations. Anthony asked the group to consider this aspect of safety and belonging, and Brianna reflected on a time when she attended a mostly Korean church with a friend’s family, saying

Did I feel unsafe? . . . No, I didn't feel unsafe at all. And like, in fact, like, you know, when I was thinking more about it, I was like, really, I didn't have to feel unsafe, either. Because I, in most places that I go to, like, I'm not like in the minority, you know, I'm like, the majority of the group. And so when I went in that place, it was just like . . . weird, for lack of a better terms, you know . . . I was completely safe. And there was no reason for me to feel lost.

It is possible for White educators to take the safety of a place for granted, in a way that students holding marginalized identities cannot. Safety is not implied in a classroom, if that is a place in which a student has needed to conform to the practices and expectations of other cultures, or where they and their social or community groups have been attacked, dismissed, or ignored. It is important for White educators who plan to discuss race and racism with their students to understand that, despite the work they do to create a trusted and secure space in their classroom, this space may never feel safe to students.

Naming Race

Another theme that came up often as we discussed how to have conversations about race and racism using literature was the need for teachers, often working in classrooms with a majority of White students, to name race, to remind students that the race of characters impacted the narrative in some way. Sophia explained her need to remind students of the race of characters as they read *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry (1959):

A lot of them like really hated Walter's character, and like, were real frustrated with him, which like I can get because I mean, he like loses (the) family's money. He makes some bad decisions. But I feel like a big part of his frustration ties back to segregation. And

you know, being a Black man in the 50s and 60s. And I feel like at times, (they) kind of missed that. And then as soon as I said it, then like it connected, and they're like, 'Oh, yeah, yeah,' and made some good points related to that. But it's like I kind of had to keep reminding and bringing that back up.

Sophia's experience here, with needing to bring attention to race and the way it was shaping characters' experiences, is not unique. June shared a similar experience with reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1960) and *A Raisin in the Sun* when she was a student herself, explaining that "I don't remember ever having critical race discussions in the class about them" and that race was not a "central focus." She told us that "I remember liking the characters of *A Raisin in the Sun* and like relating to them and thinking about their story, but I don't remember ever tying it explicitly to especially present-day racism." This resonated with the other group members and the authors, who went on to discuss the intentionality behind creating race-related objectives in order to bring attention to race, as Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019) propose.

Brianna extended the need to call out race and its operation in a narrative to an analysis of White characters as well, a concept that critical Whiteness scholars argue is a necessary step in making "the invisible norm of whiteness visible" (Applebaum, 2016). Brianna reflected on the arguments discussed in *Letting go of Literary Whiteness*, saying,

whenever we're reading texts that have people of Color in it, we don't ever even recognize the Whiteness of the White characters. Like we never actually even comment on the fact that they're White or, or their role in the book in their Whiteness . . . What does this mean about their role? What does this change about their character in the story?

The need to call attention to the race of characters of Color was evident in our discussions, but Brianna points here to a need to bring attention to the way that race operates for all people, at all times, and particularly where Whiteness is functioning as an invisible privilege that deserves examination.

Seeking Support

Our conversations frequently circled around and back to how to implement antiracist pedagogy in a school or community that does not support it. Our discussions preceded our state's legislation against teaching politically divisive concepts, and so these preservice teachers, now induction-year teachers, had legitimate reasons to be concerned. Two of the three preservice teachers shared angst over the possibility of getting fired if they attempted the strategies in the books. Brianna described her placement setting as “divisive” and explained that “the amount of just hate and just divide between the students is unreal.” June added that the only way she felt she could begin to have the type of conversations detailed in our readings were through journal prompts, and that she

didn't feel like there was a big space for sharing after that, it was more of you know, you (just) think about it . . . And that's something I've been struggling with in my placement, feeling like, you know, I want to have these conversations.

Brianna talked about her experience with teaching a lesson connected to Juneteenth that in her words “shook the whole school” and particularly fueled her worries about engaging conversations on race:

I talked about, like, the importance of Juneteenth, and, you know, gave them an opinion piece of “Do you think that it should be a holiday?” . . . And the next day I come in, and

everybody in the school knows about this assignment and knows about the fact that like, I talked about Juneteenth and, you know, the White students are upset.

While telling this story, Brianna explained to the group that this type of reaction had also happened to other teachers in her small school. Some teachers would openly question why topics like this should be discussed at all. Brianna reflected on how the experience has influenced her decision making around planning and instruction,

So, I don't know. I'm scared about doing the Harlem Renaissance with Langston Hughes. We're gonna see how that goes. But how do you like, handle that in a school that's just so divisive?

When the participants shared their fears for implementing antiracist pedagogy in schools that may not support it, the graduate students tried to provide insight on how to navigate these spaces. We discussed how asking questions about the school's stance on antiracist and culturally sustaining pedagogies during job interviews could help the preservice teachers find a supportive community for this work. Additionally, we discussed how contracts work for induction-year teachers and beyond. We also conceded that regardless of the school setting teachers end up being hired in, they may need to take risks by prioritizing meeting students' needs over pleasing their administrations. Anthony asked the group to consider, especially given their positionality as White women in the profession, that "maybe you'll just get a side eye but not lose your job" if you engage in conversations on race and equity. The scenarios we discussed were based on our collective experiences, but whether or not the participants will find support for antiracist pedagogy in their future classrooms is, of course, contingent on where they are hired. When we named this during a meeting, Brianna responded by questioning the importance of working in

supportive schools versus those that ask teachers not to engage in conversations on race: “But I feel like the schools that need it most are the ones where they're not supportive of this kind of work. Right?” And in light of many states passing policies restricting teachers’ pedagogy and curricula, we cannot help but recognize the accuracy in Brianna’s question.

Stories of Standards

The last narrative that developed in our conversations revolved around instances where the accountability-driven instruction of preservice teachers’ school contexts built barriers against antiracist pedagogy. Many of the preservice teachers wondered how they could implement the discussions suggested in Kay’s (2018) book and the units from Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019), while still teaching what their schools and districts prioritized. They found it challenging to consider how standards-based instruction could encompass antiracist pedagogy, particularly in an ELA classroom. Their experiences in student teaching often reinforced a notion that instruction in literacy skills conflicted with the critical pedagogical decisions and lessons described in the texts we were reading. For instance, June worried that these conversations might put her behind in the pacing of her lessons, saying “What if, you know, the whole day is just this discussion, and then I'm off pace . . . with what we need to hit.” While the books we read discussed how to cultivate a secure place for this work, and what steps teachers might take to manage these difficult conversations with students, the preservice teachers still had many questions about how these conversations might impact their day-to-day instruction.

This concern was reinforced by an experience June had during her student teaching, the day after the January 6th attack on the capitol. June expressed her inner turmoil after witnessing the riots and hearing commentary about the event in a podcast, and felt she needed to address the

attack with her class but was discouraged by the guidance her cooperating teacher provided. She explained that

after the capital riots, January 6th, I went into school being like, I feel like we have to talk about this . . . because a student actually in my class came in, and he said, “What if they were like Black people?” Like, he just brought that up. And I talked with my mentor teacher about, like, what should we say in this scenario? . . . But she was just like, yeah, I think that there are a lot of things in this country that we need to ask and we need to change. And I think these are good questions that we need to be asking. And then it's like, okay, get out your materials. Let's start the day. You know, it was like, I could tell he wanted to talk, but everyone was just like, I don't know. So that's a tension I've been feeling.

Her story points to one reason preservice teachers might not feel confident implementing antiracist pedagogy, because it requires a change from how they were taught as students, and possibly also from their mentor teachers' pedagogies. In our role as facilitators of the book club, we found it necessary to spend time during the meetings discussing how antiracist pedagogy asks us to address the immediate wants and needs of our students before the demands of our curriculum. This often requires us to pause or discard our carefully planned units and lessons to address current events and students' own racialized experiences. We also discussed, through the texts we read and by sharing our own experiences, how teachers might plan out essential questions guided by antiracist pedagogy, write objectives aligned with these questions (Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides, 2019), reimagine assessments through the principles of this pedagogical approach, and read literature through different critical lenses. We discussed with our preservice teacher participants how all of this work might be situated in the required standards as

a way to bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical through concrete examples of how teachers can meet expectations to cover assigned learning standards while prioritizing education as a practice of liberation.

June's narrative also speaks to the benefits of having colleagues who support practices embodied in antiracist pedagogy who might be able to help think through the pedagogical decisions teachers make. We connected the participants to Teaching On the Days After, a Facebook group of educators who believe in adjusting curriculum to make space for the important events students experience, in hopes of providing more community beyond our book club. We also discussed how participants might build this intentionally into their job search, by asking the administration directly how open they are to conversations on equity and race in the classroom. Apart from this, we brought up the value of seeking out colleagues outside of the school where a teacher works to build a broad community of support.

Limitations

With our book club space being voluntary, the number of the participants included in this inquiry is one immediate limitation. Additionally, we recognize that those opting into an antiracist teaching book club are necessarily demonstrating an open stance toward learning and implementing such pedagogy in their classrooms. It is important to note that these stories shared do not represent all the preservice teachers' ideological beliefs, particularly those resistant to or in rejection of antiracist pedagogy. Our aim was not to provide a representative sample of the preservice teachers' experiences across our department, rather we hoped to share rich stories of those eager to participate in the space and reflect on how the process could support future work with preservice teachers.

Implications

Preservice teachers hoping to enact positive social change in their ELA classrooms by engaging with social justice pedagogies (Adams, 2007) and antiracist pedagogy deserve a space to learn about these pedagogical practices before leaving the university. As former classroom educators ourselves, we have a clear understanding of the hectic nature of those first few years of teaching, and how difficult it can sometimes feel to return to our values, amidst the logistical and emotional demands of an early teaching career. Providing preservice teachers with an intentional space to both learn about and practice antiracist pedagogies before diving into classroom teaching can help them to build a supportive framework on which to base their pedagogical practices, and to which they can return, if and when they question their purpose in the classroom.

At the same time, one methods course, or as is more likely, one section of a methods course, devoted to justice-oriented pedagogies will not be enough to support preservice teachers in developing ongoing and intentional antiracist practices. This work requires classroom educators to engage in difficult, critical reflection on themselves and on their teaching practices (hooks, 2003; Sealey-Ruiz, 2021). Teacher educators have been pursuing this work with methods such as simulation activities to make identity visible (Jiménez, 2014), conducting archaeologies of self (Sealy-Ruiz, 2020), and engaging in racial literacy education (Price-Dennis & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021), among others. A book club can be one additional way for preservice teachers to create a supportive network of colleagues committed to this difficult work, and a place where they can share ideas, inspirations, and important missteps that they make as they work to build antiracist ELA classrooms.

Our work with preservice teachers in this book club space allowed us to hear stories about their determinations and their worries, and to share our own experiences, failings, growth,

and successes from our previous work in classrooms to support our racially diverse students and to hold space for conversations on race. Through the conversations we had in this book club, we learned that White teachers need to name and reflect on their racial identity, especially in how they interact with the literature they teach. We learned that teachers can take intentional steps in cultivating a secure environment for conversations on race (Kay, 2018). We learned that when we do not find support from our school administration, we can seek it out from our colleagues and our communities. We also learned that we can work together to share ideas for how to link the demands of teaching content-area learning standards to the demands of teaching racial literacy. We hope that the book club community helped alleviate some of the preservice teachers' fears and provided them with some of the necessary tools to take up antiracist pedagogy in their first years of teaching.

Conclusion

By starting a community that reads and shares stories, we were able to better understand what support preservice teachers may need as they work to develop antiracist pedagogy for ELA classrooms. The narratives shared in the book club show how the participants were making sense of antiracist pedagogy while negotiating their past and future experiences. The findings could help inform teacher education programs looking to facilitate this work in coursework and accompanying spaces by providing specific topics for inquiry and discussion so that preservice teachers feel supported in taking up these pedagogies. Since our preservice teachers were all White females, our findings have particular implications for teacher education programs that serve predominantly White women. In reflecting on the meeting transcripts, we found that our participants felt they had much to learn before taking up antiracist pedagogy. Together, we considered the ways in which both their identities as White women educators and the diverse

racial identities of their students are at the forefront of enacting antiracist pedagogy, the ways they might receive and seek support while implementing antiracist pedagogy, and the pedagogical considerations necessary in planning for antiracist pedagogy.

The next step for us, the authors, as future teacher educators, is to continue to support our preservice teachers as they work through hesitations and barriers in taking up antiracist pedagogy early in their careers. For others exploring ways to build on this work, we excitedly imagine various iterations of the reading and sharing of stories connected to identity and race and grounded in antiracist pedagogy, whether it be within course assignments, alongside faculty and university personnel, or alongside mentor teachers at local schools. We end our story here with a reminder from Chris Emdin that this work is both necessary and possible. Emdin tells White educators that “your whiteness is not an impediment to your effectiveness” (Gonzalez, 2021, n.p.) when working with students of Color. Instead, it is necessary that we seek to learn from the epistemologies of our racially diverse students and engage them in conversations that might work to advance antiracism in our society.

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