

Saying One Thing and Doing Another: Whiteness and Education in the Neoliberal Era

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My Teaching, My Whiteness

IN MAY OF 2012, THE PRINCIPAL AT PRIMVILLE Area High School¹ (PAHS)² gave me permission to conduct *The Whiteness Project* for our high school's upcoming extracurricular drama season. I convinced her that it would contribute to the equity mission at the high school, a mission she described as "the heart of the school's mission" (fieldnotes, 5/15/2012).

At the time, I was an English and drama teacher. I also directed plays, improvisational theatre, and musicals in our school's robust drama program. This program involved nearly 150 students each year, and routinely sold out performances in our 600-seat auditorium. Before sharing more about *The Whiteness Project*, I will describe my teaching experience. My background led me to design the teacher-researcher critical whiteness pedagogy that inspired the subject of this essay—neoliberalism, whiteness, and education.

I am white. The first four years of my teaching career occurred at a large, urban high school in a major city in the Midwest. Cardinal's student population was predominantly Black³. My experience as a teacher at Cardinal forced me to pay careful attention to my own whiteness. After four years at Cardinal, I was accustomed to having frank discussions about race, especially whiteness. Indeed, my experience as a teacher caused me to participate in what the Reverend Dr. Thandeka (1999) described as the "race game." According to Thandeka, white people learn to avoid thinking about ourselves as racial actors, as white. It becomes difficult for whites to consider the ways that we do, in fact, have a race. Her research showed the social discomfort that comes from white people talking openly about our whiteness. Over time, largely due to teaching in communities of color, I became comfortable talking about my whiteness. Furthermore, I grew passionate

about anti-racist work—the differences in resources for students at the wealthy suburban high school I attended and Cardinal troubled me.

I was recruited to teach at PAHS with the promise of working in a more robust theatre program after four years of teaching at Cardinal. PAHS was a suburban high school in the same Midwestern city as Cardinal. PAHS had a larger population of students who identified racially as white.

I was assured that my new school district was committed to equity. A poster with the school's equity mission statement hung in every classroom in the school district. Administrative leaders such as my principal touted this statement as the most important part of the district's mission. I was even asked how I would contribute to this mission during my interview.

After being hired, I was frustrated by how difficult it was for my mostly white students at PAHS to discuss race in ways that had been unavoidable or routine at Cardinal. It seemed like my district was expressing a commitment to racial diversity, but not really *doing* anything to achieve that mission. Later, I concluded this was, in part, the result of neoliberalism, as discussed below.

The Whiteness Project was my attempt to facilitate a consideration of whiteness with the mostly white students in our school's drama program. Furthermore, I hoped to engage the community in this discussion through theatre.

This project has been written about in other publications (see Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015; Tanner 2017, and Tanner 2018 for more about this work). This essay uses students' critique of their high school's equity mission statement as a departure point to consider the following question: How did neoliberal discourse cloak and contribute to continuing practices of white supremacy in this school?

First, I frame my argument in terms of neoliberalism, whiteness, and education. Next, I describe *The Whiteness Project* in detail. Finally, I tell and interpret an ethnographic narrative in response to my question above. Ultimately, this essay hopes to provoke considerations of how to disrupt ongoing practices of white supremacy in U.S. schools and society in the neoliberal era.

Whiteness and Education in the Neoliberal Era

Supporters of neoliberal policies trust the deregulated market to usher in democracy. I worry that market forces are entangled with white supremacist ideology, and this discourse trickles down to our institutions. Also, I am concerned that neoliberalism is especially present in our schools, and obstructs anti-racist teaching and learning.

Lipman (2013) argued that neoliberalism has been the “defining paradigm of the past 30 years” and described it as “an ensemble of economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourse, and ideologies that promote individual self-interest” (p. 6). Lipman went on to write “the power of neoliberalism lies in its saturation of social practices and consciousness, making it difficult to think otherwise” (p. 6). Other scholars have also written about the increasing presence of neoliberalism in U.S. institutions (see Davidson & Shire, 2015; Harvey, 2007; Giroux 2003, 2004, 2014; Olssen, 2006; Robbins 2009). Indeed, David Harvey (2007) argued that neoliberalism “has in effect swept across the world like a vast tidal wave of institutional reform and discursive adjustment” (p. 23).

Deregulation, rather than facilitating democracy, reaffirms a status quo that serves private and often privileged interests. The global economy has, historically, served and been served by white supremacy. It is easy to espouse commitments to multiculturalism. It is harder to disrupt white supremacy, especially if that disruption challenges market forces. K-12 education in the U.S. is, of course, influenced by neoliberal trends. This is especially true of multicultural agendas such as the equity mission at PAHS.

Scholars such as Gaztambide-Fernández (2012), Ghosh, (2004), and Melamed (2006) have critiqued these neoliberal, multicultural agendas. According to Gaztambide-Fernández (2012), “The critiques of multiculturalism are not new, and many scholars have pointed to the various limitations of a concept that in its very etymology contains an aged conception of culture that cannot but re-inscribe colonial essentialisms” (p. 43). White supremacy – an ongoing legacy of colonial essentialisms – benefits from this condition, and serves to uphold whiteness as the cultural ideal.

Scholarship in the field of education has illustrated the continuing dominance of whiteness in U.S. schools. White supremacy privileges white students at the expense of students of color, despite ostensibly multicultural initiatives in schools (see Bonilla-Silva 2006; Gulson et al., 2013; Leonardo, 2009; Leonardo & Tran, 2013). In fact, Ladelle McWhorter (2005) worried that multiculturalism causes educators to participate in neoliberal confirmations of colonial essentialism. For McWhorter, white supremacy is reaffirmed even when educators, especially white educators, simply acknowledge the existence of white privilege without actively working to disrupt white supremacy.

This climate of neoliberalism begs an important question regarding anti-racist pedagogy. What can educators with social justice, anti-racist intentions do to *actually* disrupt neoliberal understandings of whiteness and race in education?

The Whiteness Project

Peggy McIntosh’s (1998) scholarship about white privilege has dominated the field of education for nearly thirty years. When whiteness is discussed in education, it is often done so through this framework of white privilege. White privilege teaching requires white people to admit that they have privilege. If they do, they are right. If they do not, they are wrong. Facilitators often assume that when white students are resistant to white privilege pedagogy, they are simply expressing racist, incorrect thinking that needs to be adjusted. Lensmire (2010) warned that educators and researchers “recognize that resistance to anti-racist and social justice efforts is not always a straightforward defense of white privilege” and, instead, “we must remain attentive to the pedagogical possibilities of complexity and conflict” (p. 170). Ultimately, Lensmire et al. (2013) worried that white privilege frameworks have come to stand in – uncritically – for all considerations of whiteness in education. They wrote that this focus actually limits white students from participating in anti-racist action. White privilege pedagogy is often transmissive, deficit based, and leaves white people without any way to engage anti-racism.

Disciplining white students or labeling them as racist does not allow for considerations of whiteness to become transformative or generative. This is not to argue that white privilege does not exist. Indeed, I contend that white supremacy in the U.S.

continues to flourish. Still, I worry that whiteness pedagogy is limited by a narrow focus on privilege. Indeed, at a recent talk, Tim Lensmire (2015) worried that

...in multicultural and anti-racist education in the United States, we have a white-on-white violence problem, and that at least part of this problem is caused by a white privilege framework that dominates our educational imaginations and practices.

James Jupp (2013) has gone so far as to call for a second wave of critical whiteness studies. This followed Lensmire's (2010) call for more complex, nuanced pedagogical treatments meant to motivate anti-racist action in white students. Indeed, Jupp et al. (2016) have thoroughly detailed the progression toward a second wave of whiteness studies in education in their exhaustive review of the field. They "believe that recognition of second-wave race-visible studies offers" creates the opportunity for teachers to "develop and revise" teaching and learning that "presume complex understandings of race-evasive and race-visible White identities" (p. 27). In other words, this second wave of critical whiteness studies is radically different from a white privilege framework. It calls on educators to openly embrace the promise and pitfalls in the complex relationship between race-evasion and race-visibility when designing teaching and learning about whiteness.

The critical whiteness pedagogy described below was built out of this second wave of critical whiteness studies. It was intended to facilitate radically open discussion of whiteness with white students. Grounded in the important work of writers of color like Ralph Ellison (1953/1995), Toni Morrison (1992), and Thandeka (1999), students were asked to grapple with what happens to white people when they are made white.

Nearly forty, mostly white, 9th-12th grade students voluntarily participated in *The Whiteness Project* with me during the 2012-2013 school year. We met before and after school, as well as on weekends.

In the fall, students participated in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) collective. They created projects, conducted research into whiteness, and discussed findings. YPAR relies on the following assumptions about teaching and learning: 1) youth should design their own outcomes in collaboration with adults, 2) power should be shared between the youth collective and facilitator, and 3) the ideas the collective generate dictate the research agenda and curriculum (the following are compelling examples of YPAR work: Appadurai, 2006; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Guishard, 2009; Morrell, 2008). Cammarota & Fine (2008) argued, "PAR blurs the line between pedagogy, research, and politics" (p. viii). Scholars Brian Lozenski (2014) and Shannon McManimon (2014) also detailed ways that teaching and research can exist in a blurry, productive relationship with each other in PAR projects. Examples of student research included social justice theatre workshops, personal interviews, reflective writing, ethnographic fieldwork, and more.

During the winter, student findings were presented back to our collective and used as the inspiration for a playbuilding collective (see Boal, 1979; Norris, 2009; Zipes, 2004 for compelling examples of playbuilding practice). Eventually, students wrote an 82-page script entitled *Blanchekreist: A Collaborative Play about Whiteness*.⁴

Lastly, this play was performed five times during a weekend in May of 2013. I directed this spring play. Also, I facilitated a question and answer session between the

participants and the audience after each performance. Our audiences averaged 200-250 people each night. This performance received both local and national media attention.

As a white teacher-researcher, I referred to reflexive scholarship such as the work of Britzman (2003), Chadderton (2012), and Lather (2006) to carry out critical, ethnographic research. Furthermore, my role as a lone researcher was troubled. I worked with a voluntary teaching and research assistant—my former student named Natalie who was finishing a degree in elementary education at the time. We wrote extensive fieldnotes, recorded teaching sessions, held interviews with participants, collected student work, and stored all private and public communication during the project. Natalie and I participated in what Fram (2013) called constant comparative analysis to analyze our enormous data corpus. Ultimately, methods of interpretive research (see Erickson, 1986) helped us to test and confirm assertions about how students engaged this consideration of whiteness.

Interpretive and critical methods were used in concert with each other to practice what Patti Lather (2006) described as “a disjunctive affirmation” that was about “neither reconciliation nor paradigm war” but “a reappropriation of contradictory available scripts to create alternative practices of research as a site of being and becoming” (p. 52). Furthermore – as an ethnographic research instrument – I consulted with work such as Foley (2002), Anderson & Scott (2012), and Wagle & Cantaffa (2008) to better understand how ethnographers can investigate *their* impact on the field. What was *my* influence—both in terms of students represented themselves to me, as well as the work they accomplished over the year? Specifically, Chadderton’s (2012) work was useful—she was a white scholar who conducted critical ethnographic research on whiteness. Chadderton borrowed from the seemingly contradictory scripts of critical theory and post-structural theory to claim whiteness is both an arbitrary construct *and* a social reality, and that scholars should make whiteness visible as such. Moreover, Miller (2015) wrote that when conducting critical ethnographic work about whiteness,

...it is important to state that although whites have been centred for decades in almost every aspect of our society, focus is rarely given to the racialised nature of being white. Too often, whites feel that race and racism have little to do with themselves and underestimate their role as racial actors within larger systems that normalise whiteness and produce systems that secure white supremacy (p. 140).

This study overtly focused on what Miller described as the racialized nature of whiteness—both in the teaching and research design of the project. I made my own whiteness visible by including daily reflexive notes in my field notes. I checked my own thinking through daily conversations with a racially diverse collection of colleagues, students, friends, and scholarly mentors. Both Natalie and I kept detailed field notes, recorded teaching sessions, conducted interviews with participants, collected student artifacts, and stored all private and public communication during the project.

The narrative below illustrates and analyzes moments when students considered how neoliberal, multicultural discourse cloaked white supremacy at PAHS. This vignette is inspired by methods of narrative research, in which researchers story and interpret experience to report their data. I employ this narrative approach because it provides an efficient way to share complex experiences that happen across time and space (see the following for compelling examples of narrative research: Barone, 2000; Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Jacobs, 2005; Moen, 2006; Smagorinsky, 2011; Spry, 2001). Data analysis is included within the vignette below in order to guide the reader through a consideration of neoliberalism, whiteness pedagogy, and education.

Identifying White Supremacy in a Multicultural Mission Statement

Sixteen students met me at PAHS on a Sunday afternoon in October to participate in a critical whiteness workshop. This workshop was *not* designed to discuss white privilege. Rather, it was created to facilitate discussion about historical and contemporary white supremacy in the United States. The session was held in the school's auditorium. It lasted two hours and was led by two of my colleagues from graduate school—Dr. Brian Lozenski and Dr. Shannon McManimon.

First, I led both the students and facilitators in a theatrical warm-up that included breathing, stretching, and theatre games. After that, Brian handed out copies of historical race law in the United States from the 17th and 18th centuries. Students spent thirty minutes discussing the history of race law, talking about ways that white people were required to obey white supremacist laws in order to avoid punishment, and thinking about how this history informed our present understandings of whiteness. Next, Shannon led the group in a theatre exercise based on the work of Augusto Boal (1979) called image theatre. We worked together to create still life, theatrical images of the concepts we discussed with Brian. Each group presented their scene and we discussed these dramatic images. Finally, students broke into the voluntary research groups in which they had been working during the fall to discuss how this workshop connected with the research they were conducting. Students returned and sat down to form a circle on the stage after discussing connections between the critical whiteness workshop and their research projects. Each group shared their small group discussions. One group had a particularly productive conversation that involved an interesting critique of the equity mission at PAHS.

Four 11th graders had been working together since September. These were: Lauren⁵, Mark, Megan, and Victoria. All of these students were white. Also, all of them were academically successful—they had top grade point averages in their class and were enrolled in the school's AP courses. Also, these students were extremely involved in extracurricular programs at the school such as cheerleading, orchestra, and band. The four of them participated in theatre during all four years of high school. As well as being diverse in terms of gender, these students represented a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds—Megan and Lauren came from modest families, Mark's family was middle class, and Victoria's family was upper class. These four students also had strong relationships with me that involved spending time in my classroom before and after school, taking classes and independent studies with me, participating in the plays I directed, and working with me as a mentor. They were extremely invested in all three phases of *The Whiteness Project*. The students – perhaps because they were used to completing rigorous work in AP courses – were equipped to conduct academic research. They were creating a research project that would use theatre exercises to analyze how young children learned about whiteness by creating participatory research sessions for 1st, 3rd, 5th, and 8th graders in the school district.

This group of four students was the last one to share out. They held their discussion in the greenroom that was attached to the backstage area of the auditorium. Students often

hung out in this space during rehearsals or performance. It had comfortable chairs and couches. A framed poster of the equity statement hung in the greenroom—this same poster was required to be displayed in every classroom in the school. Megan brought it with them to report their discussion back to the large group. The poster read as follows: “Primville Area High School is committed to ensuring an equitable and respectable experience for every student, family, and staff member regardless of: gender, home or first language, ability, race, age, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and national origin” (Primville Equity Poster).

What follows is a transcription of what the group said when they described their discussion to the large group. Before proceeding, I want to point out something that both Natalie and I wrote in our fieldnotes. At the time of the following discussion, we understood that Mark, Megan, Lauren, and Victoria were being cynical, even critical in the excerpt below. They were clearly *not* convinced that the mission at PAHS was contributing to anti-racism and the statements below were sarcastic.

Megan: White equals normal equals good equals universal equals American equals. What helps or hinders seeing it? Which is why we brought this with us (*refers to a framed poster of the equity statement that had been hanging in the green room. Both Lauren and Victoria laughed and pointed at the poster*). Mark, would you care to explain?

Mark: Okay, um. So in the equity poster and then the statement, especially depending on the version of it, it, it comes across sounding as (*put the poster down in front of him and pointed emphatically to emphasize each word of the following sentence*), hey, straight white guys, we know not everybody is like you, but out of the goodness of your heart, could you please not bully them? Cause that’s what it sounds like (*Victoria laughed*).

Megan: That is the white people are good part of the equation.

Zach: And that it’s the white equals normal. It’s the even if you don’t quite make it to normal, we’ll still be nice to you. And it just. It’s. Even though it doesn’t, it doesn’t explicitly say that but even just saying regardless of how you’re not like this, we’ll accept you out of the goodness of our hearts which (*shrugs*). (Critical whiteness workshop, 10/14/12).

Subsequent discussion by the collective after this report made it clear that there was consensus that these students had interpreted the equity statement in important ways. Indeed, there are two important things to pay attention to in their analysis in terms of neoliberal, multicultural practices in education.

First, though the equity statement was expected to create more just, inclusive conditions in the high school, these four students argued that it actually disguised white supremacy. According to Mark, the equity statement implied that “white equals normal.” Specifically, he claimed that white, straight men were the expected audience for the message. The equity statement upheld whiteness as an ideal by creating a list of identifiers that deviated from what Mark described as “straight white men” without ever naming what

normal was. Students were troubled that the equity statement did not name whiteness and, rather, used multicultural rhetoric that served to uphold whiteness as a normalized ideal. Recall Davison & Shire's (2015) concern that white supremacy, in this contemporary neoliberal context, is often expressed as ideological superiority. According to this group of students, the equity statement contributed to reaffirming that superiority (i.e. "white people equal good") even as, in Mark's sarcastic words, white people are expected to "still be nice" to people who are not included in the normalized category of whiteness. The group's analysis shows that the equity statement actually masked white supremacy in their school. Furthermore, Lauren's group's analysis illustrated an example of what Bonilla-Silva (2006) described as colorblind racism. Bonilla-Silva articulated colorblind racism as an institutionalized state in which white people internalize the inferiority of people of color – or, in the case of the equity poster, the difference – as the result of individual characteristics as opposed to racially influenced social reality. Ultimately, in the excerpt above, it seems that these four students were able to trace the presence of white supremacy in the school's equity statement despite the way that it was cloaked by colorblind or neoliberal ideology. This may have something to do with the radical design of the critical whiteness workshop in relation to YPAR.

It is also important to note that *students* were able to come to the complex analysis discussed above on their own. The presenters of the workshop certainly were careful to explain the historical logic of white supremacy. By October, I had spent time serious time meeting with Lauren, Mark, Megan, and Victoria to discuss whiteness. Still, these students came to their conclusions on their own in ways that helped the adults—myself included—consider a critique of the school's equity statement and, subsequently, its multicultural mission. This was allowed because the adults (i.e. the presenters, Natalie, and me) did not have specific conclusions we expected our students to agree with. YPAR and playbuilding practices helped to create a radical environment where students were allowed to explore without preconceived outcomes *and* critique standardized artifacts such as the equity statement. Mark made it clear to Natalie and me in an interview following the performance or our play that he would never have been allowed to share his analysis of the equity statement in a traditional classroom in the district because teachers would have told him that was wrong – even racist – to question it because he was speaking from a position of white privilege (Interview with Mark, 6/11/2013).

Ultimately, students began turning their findings into a play in January. Our discussions about ways the multicultural agendas cloaked white supremacy informed the students' playbuilding. The group conceived of a community that was suffering from a virus without realizing that they were sick. This was how the group agreed to present an allegorical telling of whiteness in their script. The symptoms of this sickness included blindness, oppression, and rage. One student, Tony, referenced the equity statement once again during a discussion in a script-writing meeting at the end of January. Tony was a white, 11th grade boy. Unlike many of the students that participated in the theatre program, Tony did not take AP classes and was not a high-achieving student. He told me that he saw himself as a comic actor and was a member of the long-form improvisational theatre troupe that I directed during all four years at the high school. Tony often took a counter opinion to students like Mark, Megan, Lauren, or Victoria. Perhaps this was because Tony was not successful academically. Still, Tony's research – though it was not as academically refined as his peers – was compelling.

Tony was brainstorming ideas about how people in the fictional community were treating the symptoms of the virus. Tony thought that it would be a good idea if people were prescribed glasses to correct their vision. Tony told me he liked this idea because he believed that most anti-racist pedagogy that he had experienced in the school treated symptoms without examining the root of the problem (fieldnotes, 2/20/13). A colleague of mine at the high school was filming the particular script-writing session referenced below. Gregg was a media-specialist and very interested in racial justice work in schools. He participated in equity planning at the district level. Gregg volunteered to film sessions when he was available so that Natalie could participate. He was also responsible for the documentary that is shared in an earlier footnote. Gregg and Tony ended up having a conversation after Tony expressed his idea about glasses to the playbuliding collective. I omit comments by other students to focus on Tony and Gregg's discussion. That exchange happened as follows.

Tony: Right, okay, so people are starting to get sick okay? They're starting to lose their eyesight right, it's becoming foggy, they don't see things the same way okay? And then the way that people try to fix it, that our still not affected by this, try to put like a pair of glasses on them. And we don't know what the sickness is or why they're losing their sight and the glasses don't even help it just identifies them. Or maybe it helps them cope with it, it doesn't fix it... ..You know what the glasses are like, it's like the equity statement at our school. It doesn't fix anything it just kind of makes us feel good about each other (*Gregg laughed. Tony turned to Gregg*). Do you agree with that?

Gregg: I helped write it and I agree with you (*Gregg laughed again*). (Scriptwriting session, 1/29/13).

Tony's comment is, in some ways, profoundly insightful. First, his metaphor about sickness is a powerful way to conceive of whiteness in the United States. The people in his metaphor are suffering from a sickness that they are not even aware of, and this disease influences how they understand their world. Neoliberal practices *do* disguise whiteness and create oppressive situations that are cloaked by misleading rhetoric. Secondly, his specific comment about the equity statement could be helpful for those who would consider how neoliberal practices inform anti-racist work in education. Tony saw that the equity statement served to make people "feel good about each other" without actually fixing anything. Even Gregg, a huge proponent of the equity statement, was able to admit that Tony's critique was valid when he laughed and agreed with him. Tony's statement is a concise way to describe a worry about racial justice works in schools in the era of neoliberalism. The status quo is maintained even as participants espouse commitments to anti-racism. McWhorter's (2005) worry mentioned at the outset – that multicultural education often does not disrupt white supremacy in U.S. schools – was confirmed.

Saying One Thing and Doing Another

I was speaking with a colleague in the fall of 2012. We were watching Fox News in an airport terminal, on our way to a conference. Barack Obama had just been re-elected, and Bill O'Reilly said he was worried that this election would mean terrible things for white people.

“At least O'Reilly is upfront about his racism,” my friend joked cynically.

I told my colleague how difficult it had been to get permission for my students to conduct research about whiteness in my school district.

“The principals in the district keep telling me they support this work,” I told her, “even as they are coming up with reasons to justify why my students cannot conduct their study of whiteness.”

“What else can they say? They cannot tell you that they support racism but they also have to maintain the status quo, so they say one thing and do another” (fieldnotes, 11/10/12).

My colleague's statement stayed with me long after that morning. It returned to me as I considered the complex theorizations of the equity statement offered up by students like Tony, Mark, Megan, Victoria, and Lauren during their participation in *The Whiteness Project*.

Their conclusions were similar to those of my colleague. According to their analysis, the equity statement in their high school did, indeed, seem to be saying one thing while upholding another. White supremacy was disguised, normalized, and held up as the ideal even as the equity statement was being referred to publically as the school's commitment to racial justice. Furthermore, traditional practices in the school did not allow students to speak back against this neoliberal, racial agenda. White students such as Mark were even accused of being wrong, privileged, or even “racist” when they offered competing interpretations. All the while, the status quo was maintained.

The more that I reflected, the more my colleague's statement seemed true. *The Whiteness Project* was somewhat baffling to other white colleagues and administrators at PAHS. They often espoused support for the project, but were skeptical about whether or not white people could understand or even discuss race. My white principal kept reminding me to involve students of color in the work. Other white teachers did not seem to understand the value in having white people discuss whiteness. One teacher told specifically told me that “a bunch of white kids talking about race couldn't possibly accomplish anything” (fieldnotes, 4/24/13). It was as though my white colleagues – people who were quick to admit they have white privilege – were convinced that only people of color should be participating in discussions of race. It was almost as if these white colleagues did not permit white students to learn or talk about race, because they were afraid students might say or do something racist. In this way, the burden was left for students of color to learn (or even teach their white peers) about race.

The Whiteness Project was designed to specifically engage white people in understanding how their race contributed to inequitable systems of white supremacy in our school, community, and in society at large. Critical whiteness pedagogy, unlike more traditional white privilege pedagogies, requires institutions to permit white people to engage in more serious or open-ended considerations of whiteness, in order to participate in both learning about their own racial identities and in undertaking anti-racist work.

The radical work of my students in *The Whiteness Project* helped illustrate much to me about the limitations of contemporary multicultural education. The equity poster at

PAHS limited possible anti-racist action in much the same way that Lensmire et al. (2013) argued white privilege pedagogies do not actually provide generative ways for white people to disrupt white supremacy. The equity poster came to stand as a social justice placeholder at PAHS, and white supremacy was protected because of it. I worry that in this contemporary, neoliberal climate, other multicultural programs, artifacts, or pedagogies do the same. White supremacy is confirmed in the name of social justice.

The Whiteness Project was an alternative way to conduct anti-racist, whiteness pedagogies with white students in K-12 schools because it came out of a second wave whiteness approach and critiqued neoliberal understandings of race and race pedagogy. Much work remains to answer Lensmire's (2010) call for more nuanced versions of whiteness pedagogy. There is even more work to do to understand how white supremacy continues to reproduce itself in U.S. schools and society. Education can be a generative site of discovery and transformation, but it can also reaffirm social conditions. I continue to wonder how educators can create ways to engage white people in anti-racist action. A place to start may be identifying how neoliberal conditions disguise white supremacy, often in the name of multiculturalism, in U.S. schools and society.

Notes

¹ The names of both of the high school's discussed in this essay are disguised.

² PAHS is a school in a first-ring suburb of a major metropolitan area in the Midwest. It catered to 9th-12th students and had an enrollment of nearly 2500 students during this study. PAHS was a predominately a white school at the time of this project with roughly 65% of students identifying as white.

³ I am choosing not to capitalize the word "whiteness" in this essay. As a white person, I do not want to contribute to the serviceable, monolithic narratives of white supremacy. I choose to capitalize the word "Black" in this essay because, over time, this label became a way for Black people to form solidarity against white supremacy in the United States.

⁴ The full text of the play can be found here: <http://bit.ly/1EypYOe>

⁵ All student names are disguised in this essay.

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