Supporting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Learning in White Majority Settings

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SUPPORTING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION LEARNING IN WHITE MAJORITY SETTINGS

By

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A DISSERTATION

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Increased public scrutiny and outcry over police shootings of unarmed Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor to name just two, forced a greater awareness of societal demonizing and criminalizing of Black and Brown people due to racial stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination. This examination of American policing and justice systems, as one element of systemic racism then spawned a broader look at how Black, Indigenous, and People of Color face racism in every aspect of their lives, including in education. As school districts heed the call to understand the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in order to achieve more equity in education, effective staff training often under diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts becomes a step forward. White majority communities and schools face unique challenges in equity training with White educators, who often have limited personal experience with racism and cultural diversity, leading to lack of understanding about the presence and consequences of systemic racism. This research evaluated how a White majority school district’s equity training impacts White teachers’ racial literacy. Evaluation of the implementation of equity training, as well as staff responses to the training, provided understanding of benefits and shortcomings of DEI programs in a White majority school districts.
The combination of examination of context of White majority schools with analysis of responses to specific trainings resulted in findings that have pragmatic applications to develop improved equity training for schools.

Keywords: diversity, equity, and inclusion training, White majority schools, racial literacy, constructivist learning, critical Whiteness
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION OF RESEARCH

America continues to grapple with the legacy of racism as the widespread protests about racial injustice from spring 2020 highlight. Varied public reactions to the exposure of systemic racism highlight how American society has ignored its past, which then shapes and survives in its present. In Maine, a White majority state, White people can maintain the fallacy of being color blind since their experiences with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color often remain rare outside of cities of Lewiston and Portland, which have higher percentages of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color residents. Although limited understanding of other people’s experience is a national problem due to the pervasiveness of de facto segregated schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces, people living in states with higher populations of White residents face even fewer opportunities to connect with people of races beyond the White majority. In schools with limited racial diversity, most students have little contact with people of different races. According to Bolgatz (2005), without experiences mitigating ignorance about other races, all students regardless of racial identity can perpetuate stereotypes and maintain racial divisions. In 2018, 89% of students in Maine schools identified as White. By contrast, 60% of students identified as White in Massachusetts schools and 23% of students identified as White in California schools (Greatschools.org, 2020). Schools with less racial or ethnic diversity tend to have less racial or ethnic diversity among staff. In 2015, schools with less than 10% minority students had 2% minority teachers, while schools with 90% or more minority students had 55% minority teachers (Hussar, et al., 2020). In Maine for the 2017-18 school year, 96% of teachers identified as White (US Department of Education, 2020). Maine’s demographics create unique challenges to
designing and implementing programs that help White teachers learn about and change racist societal patterns.

Racial literacy is a set of practices that allows people to recognize, respond to, and counter forms of everyday racism (Twine, 2003). Advancing this knowledge acquisition with White teachers is a means to promote changed beliefs about the significance of race. The practice of racial literacy requires learning about diverse and unfamiliar experiences and viewing racial issues through a critical lens that recognizes current and institutional aspects of racism (Vetter & Hungerford-Kressor, 2014). This training may be even more necessary in White majority places where invisibility and ignorance about White privilege are easier to maintain. Many Americans hold deeply ingrained beliefs about meritocracy and individualism, which hamper examination of the systemic racism that has impeded the opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to thrive and prosper (Arnold, 2019; Burley, et al., 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Singleton & Linton, 2005). White people can go through life without thinking about and without taking notice of race, even while they are part of a system that created racial inequality (Lewis, 2004). An aspect of Whiteness is a hesitancy to engage with historical legacy and present-day realities of racism (Gillon, 2021).

Color blindness, interest convergence, and White privilege inhibit full engagement and equitable school experiences for students of color (Chapman, 2013). These experiences can seem invisible in White majority schools, leaving many White educators to assume there is no racism in their organizations. Lewis (2001) studied a suburban school with an almost all-White student population and found that White people who grow up in racially homogeneous settings do not have any idea about how race works or how their own lives are racialized. This study examined equity training for teachers in a White majority Maine school district that promoted racial
literacy which can then support inclusive schools. I use “equity training” deliberately as it is the term used by the Regional School Unit (RSU) at the center of this study. This wording is an example of the need to temper social change and increase the racial comfort of White participants (Gillon, 2021). Rather than calling this training “anti-racist,” the term equity training offers a more benign and broader context for exploring a range of topics related to equity, which include race, as well as socio-economic class, abilities, gender, sexual identities, etc. Leonardo (2004) asserts that White scholars focus on the innocence of privilege to avoid threatening White audiences. Emphasis on the reality of ongoing cultural appropriation and racial inequality may result in White audience members discrediting the content and ignoring efforts for change. Equity (or diversity or cultural competency or multicultural) training may mask examinations of racism with language more acceptable to White educators.

**Problem of Practice: Racism in Schools**

Schools reflect society, yet educators hold on to the belief that schools are great equalizers and places of opportunities for all students (Isseks, 2017; VanSciver, 2006). While schools do make differences in students’ lives by providing physical, emotional, and intellectual growth through professional guidance and instruction, this idealistic view of schools only reveals part of student experiences and ignores how schools reflect and perpetuate societal racism. As a personal example, a former student of mine who identifies as Black shared with me both the humiliation and support she experienced as a student in my class. She explained that she felt shut out by a class discussion surrounding the racism in *Heart of Darkness*, where her experience and ideas were not heard or valued. However, she also described how much it meant to her when I encouraged her to go to college (where she is now) and provided one-on-one talks with her about her potential. My best intentions resulted in my supporting and nurturing this student, while my
lack of ability to protect her from unconscious bias limited her learning. This example reveals
anecdotally how schools are only doing a partial job in educating all students by pretending
racism does not exist within education institutions.

The effects of racism in schools are well-researched from angles such as discipline,
graduation rates, academic achievement, post-graduation plans, standardized testing scores, etc.
(Aveling, 2007; Chapman, 2014; Griffin, et al., 2017; Kinsler, 2011; Knoester & Au, 2017;
Verdugo, 2011). The vast evidence of significant racial inequities in students’ education has been
repeatedly demonstrated. Yet, many White teachers still claim not to see color (Chapman, 2014;
Singleton & Linton, 2005). This pervasive belief in meritocracy and individualism reinforces
unequal racial patterns and allows for disregard of racial identities (Chapman, 2013). Singleton
and Linton (2005) argue that tightly held beliefs and understandings regarding the significance of
race make it difficult for teachers to comprehend, examine, and rectify ways in which race
dramatically impacts education. In a study of pre-service teachers, Puchner and Markowitz
(2016) found White college student resistance to classes dealing with racism and social justice.
Many White Americans retain an unmitigated self-interest that normalizes silence and
acceptance of inequities in opportunity, housing, education, and legal recourse that Black,
Indigenous, and People of Color face (Burley, et al., 2007). This combination of reinforcement of
the status quo and resistance to learning about racism by White people reveals the complex and
intertwined nature of American beliefs on race.

The paradox of White people holding onto beliefs that racism no longer exists while also
refusing to learn about how Black, Indigenous, and People of Color currently face racism feeds
the challenges of equity training. The struggles of working on equity in education are
“entrenched and socialized in historical … deficit mentality of dealing with school diversity”
(Arnold, 2019, p. 578). Teachers also bring cultural bias to their practice, which affects their understanding of students. A specific example from Friedrich and McKinney’s (2010) study of teacher inquiry is a White bi-lingual teacher who thought her students were not participating enough because they were not talking in English. Realizing her bias of expecting participation in the students’ non-dominant language allowed this teacher to re-examine her definition of participation. Being anti-racist requires deliberate and repeated effort using a growth mindset to face grappling with biases (Benson & Fiarman, 2019). Beyond the need for understanding one’s own biases and attitudes about race, equity training should foster deep knowledge about the realities of past and current racism. Furthermore, truly engaging with issues of identity and equity requires more than book learning or new skills; rather it calls on internal capacities for seeing, being, and connecting with and for one another (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2017). Focusing on a White majority district adds a new layer of complexity to how to examine diversity-based professional development and to explore the views of people within the dominant culture who see their own White ways, experiences, and beliefs as universal.

The context of racism in schools described above reveals this problem of practice, which is how to mitigate the pervasive and negative effects of ongoing racism on Black and Brown students. This research project focuses on professional development of teachers as one means to combat racism and bias in education. According to Benson and Fiarman (2020), reducing the effects of racism on students requires deep change in how educators view themselves and understand their biases that exist despite their best intentions to serve their students. Changing educators’ stances on racism can be limited by a lack of knowledge about racial identity and a focus on a binary view of racism. In order to see the effects of bias in schools and to support students impacted by racism, teachers should move beyond thinking only in terms of racist vs.
non-racist to a broader understanding of how bias exists in everyone and affects interactions. This need to examine racial identity, racialized experience, and impacts of bias may be especially needed for White teachers working in White majority schools. Professional development in these areas can be a step towards making school experience less racially biased and allowing students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to feel supported and to find success,

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study is to analyze equity-based professional development opportunities at a White majority school district in Maine. Examining teachers’ responses to training through critical understanding of race and adult learning models will further understanding of both the development and the impact of equity training.

**Research Questions**

1. To what extent does equity training impact racial literacy among White teachers at a White majority district?
2. How do White teachers understand the benefits and challenges of equity training in a White majority district?

**Overview of Methodology**

This research project is a case study of a White majority school district in central Maine, which was in its second year of equity work and training. Data from this research provide insight into the implementation and impact of equity training in a White majority setting. As a White, female administrator in her third year at this district, I hold both insider and outsider status, which creates a complex positionality of being in the know and being outside. Document reviews and participant interviews afforded insight into observed experiences that derived knowledge from those experiences. Interviews and self-assessments from participants selected through
purposeful sampling provided information from each of the six schools in the district. Thematic strands found through data coding and analysis of interview transcripts and document sources led to pragmatic insights into possible action steps. This qualitative research project offers thick description of findings through depth and detail from participants’ data.

**Considerations for Scholarly Practitioners**

Scholar–practitioners combine the strategies and knowledge gained through academic endeavors with experiences and knowledge from their craft to form the basis of effective, change-centered practice (Bouck, 2011). This research project focuses on building teacher capacity in order to develop more equitable structures in classrooms and school buildings. Combining theory and practice provides a deeper understanding of systemic racism and its effect on schools, while also accessing individual experiences with professional development and equity. Using constructivist learning theory, racial identity theory, and historical knowledge of racism, I have explored both what knowledge is needed to mitigate racism and bias and what structures help support adult learning. Bringing my own experiences as an educator helped frame how to apply the theory to data from my research. This project provides an example of how research can bring different theoretical lenses to one issue, in this case exploring how to develop equity training in ways that promote learning. Future researchers can build from this interweaving of theories as a means to examine different angles of a research problem.

Fostering change in schools can be challenging, yet this research project shows that focusing on content and structure through constructivist learning and relevancy focus can support growth. This model of using adult learning theory to promote professional development is rooted in proven practice, supporting change in teachers’ thinking and actions. As the need to foster more equitable experiences for Black and Brown students is pervasive in all schools, the
imperative for improvement calls for action. Practitioners who combine their expertise with research can create models for change that identify learning needs and provide supportive opportunities.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Following the spring of 2020 when protests against police brutality resulted in more Americans examining systemic racism (Beason, 2020; Jaffe, 2020), some public school districts have started diversity, equity, and inclusion work (VanSciver, 2006). White majority settings, especially rural states like Maine, face additional obstacles in looking at race due to the limited understanding the White culture has of experiences for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (Castaneda, et al., 2006; Tuters, 2017). Yet, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color students in Maine still experience negative consequences of racism, which can be exacerbated by lack of visibility and marginalization. For example, at a central Maine high school students who identify as Black described how being members of such a small group and continually experiencing discrimination led them to believe that they do not belong at their school (Pendharkar, 2020). The call from educators and community members for more exploration of how schools are part of the inherent racism faced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color has led to professional development efforts. In a specific example, the Maine School Boards Association and the Maine School Superintendents Association currently offer a Cultural Competence Institute, where over 300 educators from around the state meet monthly to engage in such goals as leading more effectively with cultural competence and cultural empathy, developing practical skills for strategic planning for racial equity and justice work, and developing professional development for school districts related to diversity, equity, and inclusion goals (Barrett, 2020).

The demand for this type of work exists as shown by the high number of educators seeking out these opportunities in the examples from Maine. Thus, ways to support teachers,
administrators, and staff in exploring the ongoing racism in the United States are needed. How to enable change in schools in lasting and purposeful ways is a constant struggle; however, the opportunity to improve education for all students, but especially for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color students, should not be treated as the next professional development focus that is forgotten when the next focus occurs (Arnold, 2019). Reviewing literature in the areas of critical construction of race and professional development around diversity provides a broad understanding of how schools can meet the unique challenges of examining racism and oppression in White majority places. Additionally, adult learning that centers around construction of meaning through perceptions and experiences is another valuable metric to assess the impact of equity training.

**Critical Construction of Race**

As author and scholar Toni Morrison argues, “Race has been a constant arbiter of difference, as have wealth, class, and gender -- each of which is about power and the necessity of control” (Morrison, 2017, p. 3). Racism is now often seen as a character flaw conflated with prejudice, which means accusations of racism are often deflected with the absolutist view that only outlier, bad people are racist (Leonardo, 2004; Wilkerson, 2020). Yet, the pervasive and ongoing use of race as a means to control groups and individuals continues to this day even in our supposedly post-racial world. Proponents of colorblindness argue that race is no longer a factor in how privileges and marginalizations are situated or conferred (Khalifa, et al., 2013). This idea of being beyond color leads to ignorance and disbelief about the intrinsic role race plays in the lives of all Americans (Singleton & Linton, 2005). Without the understanding of society as inherently racist, racism is exoticized and when confronted with instances of racism, responses often center around the aberrant nature of the event and questions about how such an
event could even happen (Warmington, 2009). Schools reflect society, and White teachers may be less capable of understanding racism since they have not experienced discrimination and oppression firsthand, thus following White majority culture’s unwillingness to see or learn about experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (Singleton & Linton, 2005; Tuters, 2017).

If color blind beliefs of White people reinforce racial patterns and allow disregard of racial identities, then schools where most teachers are White may become institutions that reinforce systemic racial oppression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nieto, 2006). Black, Indigenous, and People of Color students in White majority schools often lack support systems and doubt their academic abilities, creating homogenous racial enclaves to shield themselves from racism (Chapman, 2013). School racial climate and diversity of staff are significant predictors of achievement gap for Black students (Whaley, 2017). Having more ethnic representation in staff is a means of support, especially in White majority areas (Castaneda, et al., 2006; Paris, 2017). Education can support all students in developing racial literacy by creating more diverse schools, bolstering ethnic identity in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color students, and implementing ethnicity and diversity programming (Nishina, et al., 2019). Schools reflect the racism of society, yet schools can also support all students’ growth in understanding racism. To dismantle racism in its myriad forms, White teachers need to know about the history of race and how inequitable politics, economics, and social practices continue to affect the way Americans live today (Bolgatz, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Critical studies of race, including Whiteness, offer lenses through which to examine how White teachers approach matters of race, affecting their involvement in equity training. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) cite historian Carter Woodson and sociologist W. E. B. DuBois as early twentieth-century pioneers of scholarship about race as the central construct for
understanding inequality in the United States. Yet, White people may view themselves as non-racial and their experiences as universal. Gillon’s (2021) summary of tenets of critical whiteness study includes Whiteness as color blindness, ontological expansiveness, and racial comfort. These elements run counter to the idea of race being a central construct through White people’s willful and subconscious ignorance of race, including Whiteness, and through assumptions of White privilege in exclusion, appropriation, and space (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Dyer, 2002; McIntosh, 2002). As shown in Lewis’s (2004) research, Whites see the word race as code for racial minorities, revealing that most Whites in the United States believe race is about others, not themselves, which highlights the need for Whites to develop understanding of their roles as racial actors. An example of seeing racism as central to education involves reframing the idea of achievement gap as resource gap (Nieto, 2006) or education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2013). This shift rejects the individual responsibility or personal blame associated with lower achievement and places the differential in a historic and socio-economic frame of current and chronic historic neglect, under-funding, and deficit mindset, all of which are often invisible to White educators (Allen & Liou, 2019). A color blind political context in education perpetuates the ideas and structures that preserve the system of White privilege (Diem, et al., 2016).

Incorporating critical construction of race, which includes examination of racial realities and identities for all races, into equity training builds understanding of the systemic nature of racism and inequality and how education participates in and perpetuates inequalities (Paris, 2017).

**Equity and Diversity Professional Development**

In schools, diversity is espoused as an imperative and essential goal, however is handled in a fragmented manner with treatment of all diverse identities as equivalent and with a single approach to adjust instructional practices (Arnold, 2019). Furthermore, professional development
opportunities in equity and diversity often do not call into question participants’ ignorance about and justifications for racism (Lawrence & Tatum, 2012). Multiculturalism or diversity generally is taught as unity of difference or benign normalization of difference, rather than as challenges to misconceptions and stereotypes that lead to inequality (Leonardo, 2004; Nieto, 2006). Perceiving difference as the goal for equity training obscures the realities of racist inequality -- what is not admissible cannot be addressed and what is unspeakable cannot be solved (Wilkerson, 2020).

Shamus Khan (2011) in his sociological study of an elite boarding school describes how race can be seen as a social category that does not matter compared to merit and success. This idea of accepting all into elite status can be seen as eliminating the need for social transformation, which furthers the assertion that seeing diversity as embracing difference may not actually result in change. Examining the need for equity and inclusion could support equity training (Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2012). The manner in which equity or diversity training has been offered coalesce into two needs: making overt the need to examine ongoing racism rather than focus on more abstract exploration of difference and building capacity for open discussion of historic and pervasive racism. Explicit conversations and teaching about racial oppression promote the necessary awareness of self and systems (Zion, et al., 2015).

Educators also need exposure to multiple narratives that can expose the contradictory nature of reality in order to displace absolute and dualistic representations of race and racism (Lynskey, 2015). Since all people bring their biases to any endeavor, these preconceptions regarding race create challenges in how teachers examine and understand the multiple impacts of race on students (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2017; Friedrich & McKinney, 2010; Puchner & Markowitz, 2016; Singleton & Linton, 2005). Narratives can often be a strong means of exploring others’ lives through everyday experiences which offer perspective and viewpoint to
create a better understanding of how Americans see race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano, 1997). Firsthand accounts and exchange of stories can shift from deficit attitudes to increased knowledge about inequality (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2013).

Another approach described by Riordan, et al. (2019) identified keys to implement deeper learning for equity, including center content on equity and critical pedagogy and model instructional practices that promote equity. An example of instructional practices is using collaboration and inquiry stances to support teacher growth (Roegman, et al., 2020). James-Wilson and Hancock (2011) provide five stages as a framework for equity work, including exploring through reflection and self-critique, confronting beliefs and expectations, and engaging others through collegial relationships that encourage collective responsibility. Coupling critical reflection and self-knowledge allows for exploration of complexities and possibilities and looking beyond one’s own experiences (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2017). The challenges facing equity professional development stemming from entrenched beliefs in color blindness and meritocracy may be mitigated with trainings that set explicit purpose and include reflection, collaboration, modeling, and narratives. The ability to talk about race and inequity is necessary for educators to see and change individual and school practices to be more inclusive and equitable (Greene & Jaquith, 2020).

**Constructive Learning Theory**

Collaboration and reflection offer opportunities for adults to learn (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2017; Roegman, et al., 2020). Knowledge and skill that are socially constructed or discovered are perceived as more important to learners than those transferred directly by others (Coggshall, et al., 2019). For equity training in particular, transformative learning about cultural groups can commence with critical reflection of one’s own cultural
identity and how that identity affects attitudes and assumptions about other cultures (Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2019). Equity training may have limited effect unless participants in the training are given opportunities to interpret new knowledge in terms of their existing understandings and to push beyond using information to confirm ideas they already have (Puchner & Markowitz, 2016). Broad ideas about constructivist learning stemming from work by John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky focus on constructing understanding, assimilating new information with existing knowledge, and learning as a collaborative process (Bada, 2015). Equity training requires the learning of new information that builds on prior knowledge in order to develop greater understanding of structural racism.

Social learning provides structure for teachers to share their expertise. Teachers, as experts in their own fields, can support professional learning (O’Dwyer, 2018). Teacher learning is individual but also situated in a social context (Nielsen, 2012). Working with others to bring individual and structural factors of racism into view may foster richer understandings of race, racism, and White identity (Hambacher & Ginn, 2021). White teachers need to learn about variations in racial phenomena across schools and classrooms, including helping teachers to notice how race matters in all-White classrooms (Shah & Coles, 2020). Group learning can further individual understanding of race and racism since collaborative learning provides diverse perspectives from group members. Working with colleagues, teachers can promote effective collaboration and shared responsibility (Prenger, et al., 2021). The constructivist learning component of social learning can be a key part of equity training by encouraging White teachers to work together to learn about their own racial identity and persistent racial realities.

The learning models ways of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2009) and scale of intercultural competency (Bennett, 2004) each provide a lens into exploring capacity to learn and style of
learning, which can further examination of how adults build equity knowledge. Drago-Severson (2009) describes transformational learning as shifts in how to interpret, organize, understand, and make sense of experiences, which learners approach through four different ways of knowing: instrumental, socializing, and self-authoring and self-transforming. Each way of knowing approaches learning through a different angle from focus on individual needs to orientation towards contradictions and paradoxes (Drago-Severson, 2009). Bennett (2004) presents a model, called the Bennett scale or the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity to examine intercultural competence through six stages: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. The first three stages are more ethnocentric orientations that can be seen as ways of avoiding cultural difference, while the other three stages are more ethnoretative ways of seeking cultural difference (Bennett, 2004). As constructed and social knowledge are influenced by ways of learning and stages of competence, using constructivist learning theory provides a means to explore the impact of equity trainings.

Conclusion

The three strands of the review of literature: critical construction of race, equity and professional development, and constructivist learning all provide context for the examination of equity training and adult learning. The research described above reveals broad areas that can support growth in understanding of equity, such as reflection and self-examination, narrative information about diverse experiences, collaboration and social learning, and building on prior knowledge. Also shown in this research are constraints to learning from equity training, including limited understanding of diverse experiences and realities, disbelief about pervasive and systemic racism, color blind beliefs, and lack of self-knowledge about White race and White privilege. The reality that discussions of race, bias, prejudice, and racism are rare in historically
White spaces (Greene & Jaquith, 2020) provides another barrier to equity training in White-majority school districts. These common elements determine the need not only for increased racial literacy among White educators, but also for how greater understanding and knowledge can be realized through adult learning theory. This research project examines these supports and constraints of diversity training for White teachers in a White majority district in order to determine ways to promote learning about equity that can mitigate obstacles to that learning.

**Conceptual Framework**

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework Diagram*

Improving equity in schools can start with teacher training as a means to support teachers in developing their own racial literacy and then creating school environments where all students feel like they belong (Singleton & Linton, 2005). Critical understanding of race includes learning
about the centrality of racism in societal institutions, including education, and how this societal racism directly connects student achievement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Nieto, 2006; Parker & Stovall, 2004). Critical Whiteness study sheds light on how Whites lack understanding of their role in a racialized society (Gillon, 2021; Leonardo, 2004). Using this framework to evaluate teacher equity training furthers the examination of implementation of and response to trainings by placing them within the context of systemic racism inherent to schools. Adult learning theory provides a theoretical basis for the development and implementation of equity professional training. Constructive-development theory promotes active meaning and transformational learning through individualized supports based on four ways of knowing: instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming (Drago-Severson, 2009). Another learning model, Bennett’s (2004) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, describes the standard ways in which people experience, interpret, and interact across cultural differences. Combining theory about constructive ways of knowing with developmental stages of intercultural competency as a way to assess equity training may further support the understandings about staff learning. This research component is shown in Figure 1 with the arrows indicating input from the two theoretical perspectives into equity training.

Examining the results of training flows from the central, top box to expanding racial literacy (the book image). The term racial literacy stems from sociologist France Winddance Twine (2002) who describes racial literacy as a set of practices designed by parents and others to teach their children how to recognize, respond to, and counter forms of everyday racism. The definition of racial literacy has expanded to include understanding the origins and continued functions of race in society (Horsford, 2014). Equity training for teachers spans topics such as learning about the history of racism, understanding unconscious biases, celebrating cultural
differences, exploring how to talk about race, and other factors related to inequality. Bolgatz (2005) argues that racial literacy is like a foreign language, and staff and students need practice in these new forms of literacy.

The ultimate goal of increased racial literacy as shown by the image at the bottom of Figure 1 is more inclusive schools. Since color blindness, interest-convergence, and White privilege can create racially hostile environments for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in a manner that inhibits full engagement and equitable school experience (Chapman, 2013), changed learning environments through building greater racial literacy among teachers and staff will allow all students more equitable access to education.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

1. To what extent does equity training impact racial literacy among White teachers at a
   White majority district?

2. How do White teachers understand the benefits and challenges of equity training in a
   White majority district?

Research Methods

Overview

This research project is a case study of a White majority school district in central Maine,
which was in its second year of equity work and training. Data from this research provide insight
into the implementation and impact of equity training in a White majority setting. Case studies
create accounts of a setting or population whose specific circumstances and experiences can be
applied externally (Maxwell, 2013). As a White, female administrator in her third year at this
district, I hold both insider and outsider status (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), which creates a complex
positionality of being in the know about overt plans while possibly being outside of the informal
communication loop offered to veteran staff. Examining the implementation of and response to
the equity training came from document reviews and participant interviews.

This case study follows an empirical inquiry model, which investigates a contemporary
phenomenon in depth and in context and includes multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009).
Empirical inquiry explores observed experiences and derives knowledge from those experiences
rather than a preconceived theory or belief. Using a pragmatic paradigm, analysis of this case
study results in proposed, possible actions that are guided by knowledge that has practical
consequences (Goldkuhl, 2012). Data collected from research are organized through thematic strands (Krathwohl, 2009) that were determined through an iterative process of analysis and coding (Miles, et al., 2014). Offering a narrative provides a method of characterizing phenomena of human experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative description also allows readers to determine validity and generality (Krathwohl, 2009) of the findings with potential application to other White majority settings.

Case Background

Regional School Unit (RSU) 123 (the number has been changed for anonymity), comprising four central Maine towns, offers a case of a White majority district in a White majority state that is engaged in equity training. 92% of students in RSU 123 identify as White, while 8% identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (Public School Review, 2020). 86.5% of staff in RSU 123 identify as White, while 13.5% identity as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (RSU 123, 2020). This district started equity work in the spring of 2019 following a parent presentation at a school board where they discussed their concerns about racist curriculum and minimal response from teachers and administrators about the racist content. The case study examines the equity work in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, during which training was offered to staff at in-service days. A document review of equity training documents and a participant self-assessment about intercultural competency and ways of knowing provided data and informed data analysis allowing for detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to find the individuals who best represent the issue being studied (Burian, et al., 2010). Selecting staff for interviews began with identification of possible participants from principal recommendations of participants to include staff from each of the six schools in the
district. Participants were recruited by email invitation with follow-up phone calls to provide information and answer questions. This sample should provide enough evidence for transference of findings to similar situations or phenomena (Byrne, 2001).

**Data Collection**

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were held with participants in the spring of 2021. Participants included teachers or specialists in each of the district’s six schools in order to represent a cross-section of teachers by grade span and by location. Interview participants were suggested by building principals based on their learning style and participation in equity trainings. Teachers were recruited by initial emails with follow up emails or phone calls to set and confirm interview dates and times. See Appendix A for recruitment scripts. Twelve interviews were conducted involving two participants from each of the six district schools.

Teacher interviews provided in-depth information about responses to implementation of equity trainings, as well as insights into adult learning. Qualitative interviewing looks for rich, detailed information consisting of examples, narratives, and anecdotes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Participants were asked about their responses to and implementation of specific trainings and were requested to take a self-assessment about learning style based on Ways of Knowing (Drago-Severson, 2009) and Bennett’s Scale of Intercultural Competence (Bennett, 2004). See Appendix B for self-assessment. These informational data were reviewed for possible answers to research questions about exploring strengths and challenges of equity training opportunities and examining how adult learning can support increased racial literacy.

Interviews lasted from 35-60 minutes with follow-up as needed. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by the researcher. Individual teacher participants’ identities
have been kept confidential by the use of pseudonyms and code letters to protect anonymity. A key linking names and code letters to the data was kept separate from the data in a secure document and was destroyed by January 1, 2022. This key was stored on a password-protected computer. For the duration of the project, recorded interviews were digitally stored and were deleted by January 1, 2022. Transcriptions of recorded interviews were created using the recording function on Zoom and then edited for accuracy by the researcher without use of outside services and were reviewed for clarity and anonymity. Transcripts were destroyed by January 1, 2022. See Appendix C for interview protocol. A copy of interview transcripts and draft findings and discussion were given to each participant for member checking.

**Memos**

Written memos were created after interviews, exploring the information provided by the participants and looking for commonalities. These memos integrated ideas from interviews, as well as provided reflection on my positionality and role in the interview process (Krathwohl, 2009). For example, in a memo after the second interview, I discussed the conversational nature of the first interview and explored how I crafted a relationship with the participant within a social context (Seidman, 2013).

After the first interview, I reflected on the need to balance the conversational nature of the interview. [For the second interview] I responded to the participant’s answers and the information gathering during the interview which may mean more focus on question/answer than discussion. I wonder if I lead participants with my reactions or does it help with creating rapport and putting the participant at ease? Probably not an either/or answer since both can happen.

This memo excerpt reveals my attempts to examine the inquiry relationship between researchers and participants (Clandinin, et al., 2007). This relationship includes the feelings, hopes and reactions of participants and interviewer. An example from a memo shows my desire to interact personally with a participant, “I found myself reassuring them about their abilities and bolstering
their confidence which again probably transgressed the interviewer role but it’s hard to listen to someone who is so competent and caring to not have confidence in themself.” Another example discusses my need to keep personal reactions minimal, “They used two slurs not directly, but in reporting what someone else said. Still the use of the homophobic and racial slurs took me aback -- my assumption was that most people don’t say the words even when they are saying what others say.” As exploring research role and influence is one of my focuses, memoing gave ongoing and timely data about my reactions and responses.

Memoing about data analysis during data collection helped me determine next steps and provided critical looks at research data. A memo following an initial collation of participants’ survey results changed my plans for how to recruit future participants.

Survey data were supposed to help me select the other half of my participants, but it was pretty varied so did not give me a direction to look for learning types. Instead I will go with another selection process of content area and school, of course. So, I am looking for teachers who teach different content areas than the ones I have already interviewed.

In another example, a memo about first-round coding showed the challenges of integrating learning styles and cultural competencies into interview data and ideas about making sense of data, “I am also struggling with how to include learning style into this -- perhaps I need to sort responses by learning style to see if there are any strands that carry through by style. Other thoughts about organizing information include participants with diverse backgrounds versus from Maine…” Both of these examples demonstrate how memoing furthered my exploration of both my research data and my role as a researcher. As described by Maxwell (2013), memos encourage researchers to engage in reflection, analysis and self-critique. These written notes and thoughts helped me better understand my topic and data.
Data Analysis

Analysis of documents focused on key words or ideas. Reviewing transcriptions of each interview, I completed open-coding by hand with line-by-line identification of the responses to interview questions. Broad areas that connected to my conceptual framework -- trainings, purpose, and learning styles -- provided organization for first-round codes: White majority setting, racial literacy, racial construction in schools, professional development, and constructivist learning. These categories were identified in order to develop analytical insights throughout the data collection and analysis process (Emerson, et al., 2011). After digitally highlighting interview transcriptions for each of the categories during the first round of coding, I created a table of responses in order to explore commonalities (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Table 1
Sample First-Round Coding Charts of Participant Responses

| Racial Literacy (RL) | I was very sad and very surprised to learn more about the history of racism in America | it really kind of opened my eyes … making sure we’re representing different people and not just stereotyping | it doesn’t mean the stereotypes or the single story that I have in my mind would fit [students from low SES] | we’ve kind of grown in the way that we can talk about it, like the idea of difficult conversations |

I then revisited the initial coding table to check my information. A second round of focused-coding looked for common themes in the participants’ responses, resulting in organization of responses in a new table by theme and new codes. For example, the first-round code of racial literacy was divided into racial literacy from personal or school lenses and the first-round code of professional development was divided into purpose, implementation, learning choices, group learning, and self change.
Table 2
Sample of Second-Round Coding from Professional Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>it was not put in the context of “this is part of a greater conversation about diversity, about inclusion”</th>
<th>to take a look at my own viewpoints and to see my own biases</th>
<th>made you aware of the new language</th>
<th>that might have been one of those like necessary first steps to bring something foundational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>I am doing more during read aloud with some more diverse books</td>
<td>But then, not knowing how to move forward with that in my own regards</td>
<td>I want to do something, but that might not translate into action</td>
<td>I thought it was nice to have some strategies there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Learning</td>
<td>I would draw more from hearing what others say and being like a people watcher and interpreting others</td>
<td>I think it’s very difficult to have the depth of conversation if you’re in that large group framework</td>
<td>learning in that group setting with our other colleagues can be uncomfortable to have those conversations</td>
<td>once you get into this situation and just how open everyone can be and honest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This generative stance allowed me to discover constructs during data collection and then continually reconstruct to derive meaning from data throughout the data analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Immersing myself in the data through the steps of interviewing, transcribing, reviewing, and coding transcripts provided “rightness and coherence” for data analysis (Seidman, 2013, p.130).

Validity and Limitations

Establishing integrity of this research stems from explanation credibility and translation validity (Krathwohl, 2019). Explanation credibility arises from the plausibility of the conceptual explanation of the phenomenon researched. Using a case study provides detailed description of
the teacher equity training and teacher responses to that training. Credibility emerges through the analysis of the case study giving credence to the explanation of the connections between training and responses and applicability of that explanation. Applicability connects to the translation validity component of establishing credibility for this research. As the research design follows an iterative process of systematic data collection and repetitive data analysis, the procedures show valid research methods through the information-rich data from participants (Mills, et al., 2010). The rich data become thick description consisting of depth and detail that allow the reader to experience and to transfer information (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). However, the study’s pragmatic nature of seeking transference of findings to similar situations or phenomena may not be actualized given the specific contexts of teacher equity training of this particular case.

**Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues arise in working within my own school district, both as an insider and an administrator. Insider status can increase both conscious and unconscious bias which may affect the data collection and analysis. Exploring data with a questioning stance rather than a preconceived theory can lessen the potential of insider status effect (Yin, 2009). Memoing throughout the data collection process also allows for researcher self-reflection that creates opportunities for examination of bias or status. The perceived power differential as an administrator in the district is another ethical consideration. This study was conducted at the same time as an outside consultant was completing an equity audit for this district. The district equity audit included a survey of staff, parents, and students which provided public findings that informed my research. The school climate survey designed by the consultant followed a stakeholder-informed process. The consultant also held a series of initial interviews which provided further contextual data for my research. Separate interviews by me used pseudonyms
for staff since anonymity cannot be maintained in interviews conducted directly by me (see Appendix D for consent form). This study occurred separately from the equity audit performed by a consultant for the RSU 123 district.

**Researcher Positionality**

My role as an administrator in the subject district of the case study creates a complex researcher stance. Having only worked at this district for two full years, I lack the institutional knowledge and the deep understanding of culture and stakeholders. However, this limitation can also allow more neutral examination and more unbiased perspective (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Starting with less expertise and experience may help frame a questioning approach, which may lead to more openness, allowing for ideas to emerge. Acting upon the advice of being adaptive and flexible and avoiding substantiating a preconceived idea (Yin, 2009) allowed me to let my data lead my analysis. My positionality as a White woman can also influence my research in the area of equity training. At points in my career in education, I have had students and parents question my motives as racist. DiAngelo (2018) asserts that White supremacy in the United States means that all interactions between races reflect the systemic racism of American society. If racism is deeply embedded in White people’s thought processes and social structures then ordinary routines and practices often have racist dimensions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Therefore, my thoughts and actions are inherently racist since I live in a racist society. Considering this lens on my existence as a participant in and a reflection of the dominant culture can provide insight into how I collect and analyze data. The choices I make as a researcher cannot be separated from my roles within my district and my place within American society; therefore, examining and articulating the biases and advantages that arise from my positionality provides opportunity to incorporate my stance into the research process.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

Case Narrative

Regional School Unit 123 is comprised of four towns located in central Maine and is located in a suburban/rural area outside of one of Maine’s largest cities. Maine’s population demographics from 2021 show 94.3% of the state’s population identify as White (citation). 92% of students in RSU 123 identify as White, while 8% identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (Public School Review, 2020). 86.5% of staff in RSU 123 identify as White, while 13.5% identity as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (RSU 123, 2020). This district offers a case of a White majority district in a White majority state that is engaged in equity training. The case study examines the equity work in the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, during which training was offered to staff at in-service days and staff meetings. I became a middle school principal in this district in the 2019-20 school year, so have seen firsthand what equity training has been offered. Invited to join the district Equity in Education Committee during the school year of 2020-21, I have had direct involvement in planning and implementing equity training offered by RSU 123 to teachers. The district’s framing of equity work, which was shared with all staff states,

In response to community feedback about curricular choices, RSU 123 started a multi-year examination of values, mission, and programming to explore equity in our district. As a school community that reflects the larger Maine community, our district is mostly comprised of white, European ancestry, Christian, heteronormative, and nondisabled people. The need to create and promote inclusive schools for all stakeholders including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color students, English Language Learners, homeless students, LGBTQIA+ students, migrant students, special education students, and students in poverty became apparent. To support this need, RSU 123 has embarked on a variety of opportunities ranging from community forums to teacher training to curricular review. These efforts start the process of enriching all students’ learning and growth and supporting genuine self-expression and youth development across all

This equity work offered three elements conducted over two years: 1) leadership development, 2) knowledge and skill development for staff, and 3) youth development and support. For leadership development, select teachers, administrators and school board members participated in the RSU 123 Equity in Education Committee and the Cultural Competency Institute run by the Maine School Management Association (a statewide, non-profit federation of local school boards and superintendents). Each of these groups provided knowledge and skill development to build leadership capacity. To build staff knowledge and skill, different experiences were offered. During the 2019-20 school year, outside consultants facilitated staff, student, and community forums exploring RSU 123’s values and mission. During the 2020-21 school year, members of the district equity committee developed staff training opportunities on topics such as the legal history of racism, Black American poets, and Wabanaki culture (a confederation of four principal Eastern Algonquian nations: the Mi’kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot). RSU 123 staff from the equity committee also offered book groups for staff that centered around race and rural poverty. Youth voices were included with middle school and high school student groups meeting with an outside consultant and discussing equity issues in their schools, as well as compiling and presenting data from student equity surveys.

When I started working at this district, I was, and continue to be impressed, with the willingness to engage in the self-examination, knowledge building, and community inclusion that drives its equity work. Although the first year’s work was cut short by COVID, looking at district values as professed in its belief statement allowed stakeholders to explore the written and public statement about what the district values:
Education enables all students to learn the skills, acquire the knowledge, and develop the attitudes necessary for them to reach their potential as citizens who can meet the challenges of a changing global society.

We believe that

- All citizens in our communities share the responsibility to educate our children and themselves,
- Our schools are community support systems and should welcome and encourage all members of our communities to participate, and
- Our schools will have a supportive and empowering atmosphere for all students and community members. (RSU 123, 2021, Our mission).

A public session for community members and sessions for staff offered opportunities to see if stakeholders agreed with these statements and how they saw the statements enacted in schools.

In the second year, focus on staff training brought teachers and other staff members in direct contact with information about inequity towards and resilience of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color groups in the United States, while also showing them classroom adaptable activities.

The focus of each of these years (see Appendix for timeline) reveals a drive to take action and to include stakeholders. Parallel to these efforts were attempts to hear constituent voices from consultant-facilitated student groups and a formal equity audit. RSU 123 also used surveys and interviews to learn about school experiences of students and their families in schools and to gather data for planning future equity work. As part of a leadership team working with an outside consultant on the equity audit completed in July 2021, team members, including myself, focused on determining the current status of the district in regard to equity and inclusion in order to use that information to move forward with change.

A critical event in the spring of 2019, when a parent made the school board aware of racist text choices and subsequent, minimal teacher and administration response, was the catalyst for RSU 123 beginning its equity work. The district’s willingness to examine and assess experiences, curricula, and structures has become even more pressing in our current time. Living
in a White majority state can reinforce a color blind stance toward race that assumes racism does not occur here, but following the protests of spring 2020, more Americans now understand that racism happens everywhere and often in invisible and assumed ways. RSU 123 is taking first steps to address racism in a White majority setting, and this research examines how those initial efforts were planned, implemented, and received among staff in one Maine school district.

**Participant Descriptions**

Twelve staff members were interviewed during the spring of 2021. These participants included two staff members from each of the district’s schools, which include three elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. Ten of twelve participants were classroom teachers purposefully selected to include representation from all content areas, including special education. One of the remaining twelve had an additional role besides teaching as a school librarian and the final participant was a special service provider. Participants’ involvement in RSU 123 ranged from 30+ years’ experience in the district to two years’ experience and from attending schools in RSU 123 as a child, having their own children attend district schools, and living in district to having no connection to the district beyond working there. All participants were White and three of the twelve identified as male, while the remaining nine identified as female. Participants were given pseudonyms that were gender-neutral, and “they” was used as pronouns for all participants to enhance anonymity.

Participants completed a self-identification survey based on Drago-Severson’s ways of knowing and Bennett’s developmental model of intercultural competence. For the ways of knowing, survey results were compiled and participants who had 83% or higher in an area were considered to self-identify in that way of knowing (Ways of Knowing Participant Chart, Appendix E). For the development model of intercultural competence, survey results were
compiled and the highest score for participants indicated where they self-identified their competency (DMIC Participant Chart, Appendix F). In order to extend understanding of these learning scales, the following charts include survey data and interview responses to show common elements among participants who identified in key categories of each survey.

Information about participants who identified equally in areas is included in both descriptions.

Table 3

Participant Self-Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years of Experience at Current District</th>
<th>Way of Knowing</th>
<th>Intercultural Competency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avery</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Self-Authoring</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corey</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Self-Transforming</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darby</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>Self-Authoring</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emory</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Self-Transforming</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finley</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Socializing/Self-Authoring</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>Self-Authoring</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harper</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>Self-Authoring</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Self-Authoring</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Self-Authoring/ Self-Transforming</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kai</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Self-Transforming</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Instrumental/Self-Authoring</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use of these adult learning theories as part of the analysis of research findings enhances the examination of how learners respond to equity trainings. Below are broad explanations of how participants’ responses on the survey and in interviews reveal their competencies and ways of knowing.

**Participants’ Self-Identification Using Developmental Model of Intercultural Competency**

This model examines the spectrum of adults from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, which occurs when people become more interculturally competent. Understanding the level of competency among school staff provides information about individual and group needs in learning about equity. According to Bennett (2004), ethnocentrism is seeing one’s own culture as central, accepting their primary socialization, and viewing their own experience as consistent with reality. Ethnorelativism is when one is able to see their own experiences, beliefs, and behaviors as one organization of reality among many. In a White majority state, like Maine, understanding realities that coexist with White people’s perceptions of reality can be even more challenging. A sample of participant responses reflect the greater ease of remaining ethnocentric in a White majority setting: “In Maine we don’t have a lot of diversity;” “We really don’t have a diverse community;” and “I’m from the county [Northernmost county in Maine] and so I don’t have a lot of experience with diversity.” These comments show the need for diversity training to support development towards an understanding of different experiences and viewpoints. Bennett (2004) describes ethnocentrism as a way to avoid cultural difference by denying its existence or minimizing its importance in ways consistent with the participant comments quoted above. In the continuum between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism, there are six stages: denial of cultural difference, defense against cultural difference, minimization of cultural difference, acceptance of cultural difference, adaptation to cultural difference, and integration of cultural difference.
Among research participants, they self-identified either at the acceptance or adaptation stage, which are described more below.

**Table 4**

**Participants’ Self-Identification Using DMIC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Model of Intercultural Competence</th>
<th>Descriptor (Organizing Engagement, 2021).</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>fail to recognize distinctions among cultures or consider them to be irrelevant</td>
<td>0% (0 out of 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>perceive other cultures in polarized and competitive terms and exalt their own culture over the culture of others</td>
<td>0% (0 out of 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimization</td>
<td>assume that their distinct cultural worldview is shared by others and is universal or disregard and neglect the importance of cultural differences</td>
<td>0% (0 out of 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>recognize that different beliefs and values are shaped by culture and that other cultures have legitimate and worthwhile perspectives that should be respected and valued</td>
<td>67% (8 out of 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive</td>
<td>are able to adopt the perspective of another culture, when they can empathize intellectually and emotionally with the experiences of others</td>
<td>33% (4 of 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>has an identity or sense of self that evolves to incorporate the values, beliefs, perspectives, and behaviors of other cultures in appropriate and authentic ways</td>
<td>0% (0 out of 12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants’ Self-Identification Using Ways of Knowing Model

Based on Robert Kegan’s constructive-developmental learning where people act as active meaning makers of experience, Drago-Severson (2009) classified ways of knowing, offering another lens with which to examine learning needs that may impact response to equity trainings. Drago-Severson’s model is not a progression to a better way of knowing, but instead highlights different ways of knowing that can be of use in different situations, which means that these fluid capacities can offer both strengths and challenges in learning situations. Instrumental knowers are defined by their own needs and desires and cannot take another perspective fully. Socializing knowers have the capacity for reflection and abstract thinking and identify themselves by relationships, so seek approval and acceptance from others. Self-authoring knowers reflect and prioritize other perspectives and generate their own systems of values and standards. Self-transforming knowers are more open to others’ perspectives and make decisions based on common good. These stages reflect building capacity in transformational learning, as opposed to informational learning. Transformational learning supports shifts in how people interpret, organize, understand and make sense of experiences (Drago-Severson, 2009), all of which are skills needed in equity trainings. Almost all research participants self-identified as self-authoring or self-transformative knowers, showing a vast majority of participants have the capacity to see others’ perspectives and to transform their own understandings in ways that can more fully support equity goals.
Table 5

Participants’ Self-Identification Using Ways of Knowing
(adapted from Drago-Severson, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way of Knowing</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>defined by their own needs and desires and see things more from their own</td>
<td>8% (1 out of 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>perspective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socializing</td>
<td>identify by relationships and seek approval and acceptance from peers</td>
<td>8% (1 out of 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Authoring</td>
<td>reflect and prioritize other perspectives and can regulate relationships and</td>
<td>67% (8 out of 12)</td>
</tr>
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Findings

Research Question 1: To what extent does equity training impact racial literacy among White teachers at a White majority district?

Research participants all described their interest in and development of their racial literacy. These attitudes are reinforced with all participants self-identifying at the acceptance or adaptive levels of intercultural competency, showing their respect for cultural difference and their abilities to adopt perspectives of others. The racial literacy of participants emerged as a theme through first-round coding, while second-round coding showed distinctions between individual understanding of race and broader knowledge of systemic racial oppression. Participants’ responses about racial literacy also revealed how living and working in White
majority settings affected their understanding of race due to isolation from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color’s experiences and White-centric ideas. More discussion of the theme of racial literacy follows in the next section.

Participants:

- Expressed interest in developing racial literacy
- Showed respect for cultural difference
- Held limited understanding of Black and Brown people’s experiences
- Demonstrated little knowledge about White racial identity

Research Question 2: How do White teachers understand the benefits and challenges of equity training in a White majority district?

These benefits and challenges emerged through participants’ discussion of constructivist learning and professional development needs. Research participants discussed the learning in terms of developing new understandings that challenged their way of seeing racial realities. All participants found value in social learning, expressing their growth from hearing others’ viewpoints and experiences and discussing the need for comfort and trust within groups. Some challenges emerged through participant responses to equity trainings, including lack of set purpose and differentiation, timing that conflicted with other needs, and uncertainty about next steps.

Participants:

- Understood construction of new realities of racial understanding
- Explored paradox of group learning as needing diverse views and building trust among members
- Identified need for articulated purpose for equity work
discussed challenges in timing and implementation of trainings

These broad findings emerged through three themes that are discussed in the next sections of this chapter. A primary coding of racial understanding became secondary codes of personal racial understanding and views on institutional racism. These components are part of theme one, which explores efforts to develop racial understanding. First-round codes about constructivist learning, group learning, and professional development sorted into two themes, also discussed in the rest of this chapter. Theme two examines how components of constructivist learning can support equity training through social constructs of knowledge and differentiation of learning opportunities. Professional development elements contribute to theme three which explores how to support learning through adult learning theory. Interwoven through these thematic descriptions of research findings are how intercultural competency and ways of knowing affect adult learning about race and racism.

**Theme 1: Efforts to Develop Racial Understanding and Decenter Whiteness**

Diving further into responses centered around my first research question starts with examining the impact of equity trainings in this case study. White teachers in White majority settings may need more support in developing racial literacy since they have not experienced discrimination and oppression firsthand based on their racial identity (Tuters, 2017). Nine of twelve participants revealed their limited experience with racial diversity. As Finley said, “I went to school in central Maine and there were maybe two People of Color in my entire high school. So, the whole idea of broadening my viewpoint has been probably my adult life.” Jordan described how people living in White majority places can remain ignorant about racial realities, “You don’t realize that that’s happening around the world, especially being in Maine.” This ability to see racism as aberrant and existing elsewhere was echoed by Darby, “We are in such a
closed off part of the country that … we look around at our communities and completely dismiss [racism] because we don’t see it here. Like we don’t view the police in the same way.” One participant discussed how being in a situation where as a White person, they were in the minority was not the norm, “I was the minority. And it wasn’t that it was bad. It was just weird, it was different. I’ve never [been in the minority], I have lived in White Maine.” These limited experiences with diversity and racism among White participants affects their involvement and responses to equity trainings, as shown in both personal and school-based understanding of racial literacy.

**Understanding Race through White-centric Lens**

Participants showed a range of personal grasp on racial literacy. Three participants mentioned their color blind way of looking at people. Emory said, “I’ve never judged people for anything like that … skin color has never come into play.” Lee explained, “I’ve worked with all kinds of different human beings from different places and I don’t see race.” Grey showed new understanding about their color blind views, “I was just teaching students and now I’m not sure that students of color necessarily perceive it that same way.” However, other participants revealed more awareness of the need to see race and to understand differences. Corey described understanding another’s perspective, “I can never feel those same feelings that he had because he was in a different time and place, and he had a different experience than me.” Also discussing being able to see another perspective, Harper said, “And there are many times in my life I benefit from blending in, but when I’m highlighted as someone who has a difference that someone doesn’t agree with that, for me, is a great learning moment because it’s like oh that’s what communities of color feel like.” Others raised the need to understand their White privilege:

Avery, “[We need to] begin to understand our position of privilege;” Finley, “thinking about how
those laws which for White people were beneficial but not for People of Color, that was really eye opening for me;” and Darby, “I am privileged, my wife is privileged, our kids are White and upper middle class.” This range of views reveals a challenge for diversity trainings to reach large audiences, like a school district. For example, the belief that White majority schools cannot be racially inequitable hides the fact that students from non-majority groups are more likely to feel alienated, misunderstood, or neglected in school than students from majority groups (RSU 123, 2021, *Equity Audit Report*). Therefore, seeing Maine as a place where there is no diversity or racism can be a limitation to equity trainings, as shown by a participant’s response, “Some of the staff members … they’re like okay fine racism is bad, but what can I do because there’s no one that I can be anti-racist about.” Harper showed a counter view of seeing diversity even in a White majority setting, “It’s just important to kind of come back to that as an anchoring lens that we are dealing with a pretty diverse population.”

Five participants shared attitudes about how they or the district are already doing a good job with equity. Some felt as individuals they were “already there” or “already aware” of equity and inclusion. As one participant said, “I feel confident that I am on the right track ... I’ve already self reflected ... I’ve already been there. I’ve gone through it and, and I feel like I’m approaching things correctly.” Others saw the district’s efforts as moving forward well. Blair said, “I think we’ve come a long way. I think we’re trying to do it.” This view was echoed by Emory, “We had a pretty good grasp of racism and the equity issue as far as that goes. I felt like we have been doing a pretty good job with that.” Individual awareness of racial literacy encapsulated differing views toward race, ranging from colorblindness and assumption of doing well to exploring others’ perspectives and examining their own White privilege.
Seeing Race and Racism in Schools

Unlike the variety of personal understanding, participants were more focused with a consistent attitude of hope towards incorporating racial literacy into schools. Corey saw equity trainings as framing “how we can create a more equitable solution to things by kind of looking at these different [historic] perspectives that maybe we haven’t looked at before.” Darby hoped equity training would lead to “a focus like when we think about what’s working with our curriculum and what isn’t, how are we amplifying voices, how are we talking about inequality, where we can talk about the issue of power.” Harper focused more on students and how to foster connections, “understanding what these kids are coming in with and trying to make this a community of learners where you’re acknowledging that there are lots of perspectives.” Finley also shared how trainings changed their ways of working with students, “you know not to rely on those kids to bring their experience of being a person of color that’s not their job.” Finally, Avery discussed teachers, seeing equity trainings as how “we are training our district employees to be allies.” Darby addressed the need for diverse staff, wanting the district “to prioritize hiring People of Color… we can actually go out and be proactive about it and enact the change that we want to see.” Although addressing a range of topics, these responses reveal optimism and hope participants felt toward equity training’s impact.

Curriculum and content choices were another area that participants saw as opportunities for increasing school-based racial literacy. They discussed ongoing changes, such as middle school diversity book groups, which Jordan described, “It’s been kind of cool to see the team implement different stories into their curriculum, of different lifestyles and different situations that you know these kids have been through and now they’re actually reading books that they can probably relate to and connect with better.” Emory explained, “It has changed how we stock our
literature and we want to make sure that we’re encouraging students to read those different kinds of books.” Addressing school decor, Blair commented about “more posters and pictures around that show a more diverse group of people.” These instances were often school or team-based, showing individual work on building racial literacy for students.

Overall, equity trainings at RSU 123 have encouraged staff to look at their own attitudes. Even as some continue to see the world as race neutral or view themselves as already aware, others express change and growth in how they perceive racism both personally and in schools. Schools and teachers have made steps in diversifying curriculum and content on individual or team levels. A thorough understanding of how systemic racism affects Black, Indigenous, and People of Color students in White majority schools remains a pressing need. Also, four participants brought up the need for equity in other protected classes, including ability, gender, and sexual orientation. Another element of the RSU 123 district demographics is diversity in socio-economic status, and many participants brought up needs of students living in poverty.

**Adult Learning Supports for Racial Literacy Development**

Using the developmental model of intercultural competency to examine increasing racial literacy reveals how participants on the acceptance versus adaptive competency level viewed their understanding of race in different ways. Interviews of participants who self-identified at the acceptance level reflected their competency by showing their interest in learning about others. As Bennett (2017) describes, at the acceptance stage, people become conscious of themselves and others in cultural contexts that are equal in complexity but different in form. Corey’s response, “there’s so many different perspectives and different ways out there and that you know just because we live life one way doesn't mean everybody does and to have that open broad understanding [of others],” reveals understanding of the complexity of their own and others’
lives. Furthermore, Blair stated, “[equity trainings] really kind of opened my eyes to making sure that we’re presenting things to all people in different ways, you know, making sure we’re representing different people.” Bennett (2017) also warns of a naïve and paralytic position of “it’s not bad or good, it’s just different” (p. 6) that can be part of the acceptance stage. As an example, Indigo offered a relativistic view, that “everyone’s probably wrong and everyone’s probably right at the same time,” which reflects the concern of acceptance as a passive stance. Bennett (2004) describes people at the acceptance stage of intercultural development as showing the beginning of ethnorelativism (as opposed to ethnocentrism). They understand others are different but equally human and identify cultural differences are part of human interactions. As Finley said, “there’s no one single story … there are multiple different sides and multiple different perspectives.” These attitudes shown by participants with accepting competency reinforce the overall willingness discussed above to build racial literacy by the majority of participants.

The small number of participants who self-identified at the adaptation stage of intercultural competency show the potential of how increasing racial literacy can move school staff beyond accepting difference to building capacity for change. People at the adaptation stage engage in empathy and have the ability to take perspective or shift frame of reference in regard to other cultures (Bennet, 2004, p. 8). Avery commented, “[You] have to raise your own awareness before you can do anything with it … begin to understand [White people’s] position of privilege.” Kai mentioned the need “to deepen our knowledge of different histories of different groups of people.” These two comments show how at the adaptation stage people can see their need to learn about others and themselves as a precursor to action. Participants’ responses at the adaptive level showed an understanding of the imperative step of deep learning
about others, rather than just seeing differences, which was a common response at the acceptance stage. In addition, according to Bennett (2017), people at this stage can engage in competent enactment of alternative behavior that is appropriate to different contexts. For educators, this behavior may take the form of advocating for change. For example, participants saw understanding and including different perspectives as a means for helping to improve equity in schools.

The differences between learners at the acceptance and adaptive level show how learning in equity trainings can be dependent on intercultural competence of school staff. Although all participants self-identified at an ethnorelativism stage of competency, nine of twelve participants also shared comments that revealed ethnocentrism focused around living in an area “lacking in diversity.” These seemingly contradictory ideas (having both ethnorelative and ethnocentric attitudes) demonstrate the fluid nature of intercultural competencies where people will move between ethnocentric and ethnorelative comments and behaviors, as well as the capacity to hold attitudes that conflict with each other. Using the development model of intercultural competence can be a method to develop equity trainings that provides support to move people towards higher stages of both understanding racial literacy and acting on that knowledge.

**Summary of Theme 1**

Developing racial understanding and de-centering Whiteness rely on seeing race in schools. Participant responses showed varied individual awareness of racial literacy, such as expressing colorblind attitudes and examining White privilege. Participants also raised a range of views about the presence of racism, need for change, and level of awareness. Even as these educators saw the need for understanding the diversity of experiences, they also questioned the need for a focus on equity in a White majority setting. Understanding about the racialized nature
of society and effects of bias on all people can be supported through building intercultural competency. As Dr. Tracey A. Benson, professor and anti-racism consultant, described in a 2020 interview, “The reason adults are racially illiterate, struggle to talk openly about racism, and have an intense fear of being labeled ‘racist’ is because we don’t teach racial literacy in our schools” (Ferlazzo, 2020). Schools need to provide structures and supports for understanding the role of race in schools.

**Theme 2: Constructivist Learning Connections to Exploring Racial Literacy**

This theme and the following one address my second research question in examining how research participants articulate the benefits and challenges of equity training. Constructivist learning can be described as making meaning of experiences and creating realities based on cognitive, emotional, and inter- and intra-personal development (Drago-Severson, 2004). Constructivist learning builds from people’s own representations, and by incorporating new information to their pre-existing knowledge, they construct adapted and new representations. Diversity training asks participants to understand their own and others’ experiences and to create a broader reality that includes these different realities, which directly relates to constructivist learning. As Finley explained, “There are always going to be things that challenge your current understandings, but I think that’s important too. That’s the only way you grow.” Another participant saw that diversity training asked people “to open up their minds and their views to different values and understandings of different cultures and lifestyles … [to take] the opportunity to not only understand other views but also learn about other views that they might not have known about before.” These two comments further show the acceptance level of intercultural competence shown by most participants, since they discuss understanding differences. Some participants acknowledged the difficulties of exploring new understandings.
Grey, who self-identified at the adaptive level of intercultural competence, classified the purpose of the trainings, “to open a dialogue, to start talking openly about uncomfortable, different perspectives on topics around equity.” Their acknowledgment of the discomfort of learning other perspectives shows the ability to adopt new knowledge and change viewpoints. All in all, these comments reflect participants’ understanding that they were being asked to create new realities from information and experiences offered in trainings.

**Learning about Race through Social Contexts**

Constructivist learning also frames learning as a social activity. Working with others fosters human connection, so group engagement is a critical part of constructivist learning. Drago-Severson and Blum-Stefano (2018) define a holding environment as learning through providing differentiated supports and challenges needed to increase internal capacities. Holding environments meet people where they are, offer supports based on their way of knowing, challenge edges of learning to promote growth, and offer consistency and flexibility that adjust to learners’ needs (Drago-Severson & Blum-Stefano, 2018). Pre-conditions of trust, safety, and respect allow others to be welcomed into learning through care and appreciation. These environments that support social learning emerged in every participant interview, with all sharing positive responses to working in groups and some offering advice in how to improve group learning.

All participants saw group learning as valuable, describing opportunities to hear other viewpoints as a way to learn together. Kai said that they “liked working with [their] peers or coworkers because we don’t get to work with them all that often, and I mean they're certainly interesting and they give you a different perspective.” Multiple participants discussed what others contributed to the learning: Corey, “Everybody brought something different to the table”
and Indigo, “[It was helpful] to hear from other people’s perspectives.” Although all participants indicated that working with a group offered new information, group learning may resound even more with socializing knowers, who orient themselves to others’ opinions and ideas (Drago-Severson, 2007). Finley, a self-identified socializing learner, mentioned how they think “other people’s perspectives … either solidify my own or adjust my own understanding of things.” Beyond just appreciating the viewpoints of others, participants described how group learning helped them support others’ growth and grow themselves.

Group engagement in learning can strengthen human connection. Avery described how “the process of listening to my colleagues come to realizations themselves” helped her understand that their colleagues’ learning was part of “their story.” Explaining the importance of trust in group learning and how colleagues can help each other, Harper said, “[having] a safe place to discuss that without making anyone feel bad or embarrassed, I think is a helpful thing because staff can kind of recognize what they need to do to learn and grow.” These supportive environments also fostered individual thought and change. Self-authoring knowers want to develop their own standards and values, which can be enhanced through connections with others. Indigo, a self-identified self-authoring knower, exemplifies this focus on individual growth combined with willingness to reflect on their understanding. “I learned a different perspective that I might not have learned on my own just by listening. But I think we all have to have that same mindset of I’m here to make a difference, I’m here to do better.” Blair, another self-authoring knower, described how working with their colleagues “made me really think about [the training] and have some conversations with my colleagues about these things.” Instrumental knowers, who can be more focused on their own perspective, can benefit from group learning, as shown by Grey’s comment that they “would draw more from hearing what others say and …
interpreting others’ input as one way to gain self-understanding, Lee, another instrumental knower, shared how group learning can be where “ideas can be floated and I think that’s the best way to change for myself, to change my understanding of something. I don’t really see my perspective of what I have seen and witnessed in my lifetime, maybe someone has something else.” In addition to discussion of the benefits of group learning, participants offered critique and advice for improvement.

**Trust Creates Safe Place for Social Learning about Race**

Holding environments require trust and safety, as well as provide supports and challenges to promote learning (Drago-Severson & Blum-Stefano, 2018). Yet, interview responses raised areas where these elements were under-utilised. Participants shared ideas about formation of groups for equity trainings, navigating the paradox of challenges of working with people they have never met outside of a breakout session with the advantages of strengthening ties across the district and hearing new people’s ideas. As Jordan described, “it would have been more successful or more meaningful if we were able to do it in a smaller group setting … Because I don’t know anybody from outside of [their specific school] really, so it was kind of nice to meet people from outside just my school and hear their views.” Darby explained their struggles with random placement in groups, “When you’re forced into groups it’s awkward, sometimes you are with the wrong people. Like I had an instance where I was uncomfortable with some of the things that one of the persons in my group was saying.” Random groups can also lack connectedness as shown by Grey’s comment, “[There] is all that awkwardness that starts every time a new group happens and I just think that so much gets lost there.” Participants also shared their concerns about how others would receive their ideas. Emory said they “feel intimidated by teachers in high school... there’s an intimidation factor... you can always kind of pinpoint who
those strong personalities are so sometimes you just kind of sit back and let them [talk].” While another, Indigo, felt judged when they offered another way of looking at something: “They kind of looked at me like I had three eyes.” Instrumental knowers principally can be concerned with the right way of doing things. For example, Corey shared that they worry about “what kind of judgments [other people] would have on me because maybe I wasn’t thinking quick enough or coming up with responses … that were correct.” Another instrumental knower, Blair stated a concern about how to navigate communication, “you don’t want to say something incorrect and get in trouble for it, so just having models … and have lead conversations [would be helpful].” Their concerns about having the correct answer and knowing the procedures exemplify instrumental learners. The participants’ responses show an emergent need of building of care and appreciation in learning groups and consideration of formation of and structures within groups.

Participants not only addressed needs of forming groups, but also offered suggestions to develop more trust and support in group learning. Many included creating groups with people that they already have relationships with, especially when tackling equity issues. Blair notes a challenge of random groups: “It takes extra energy when it’s somebody you’re not used to interacting with … to be able to talk to and get to know a new person.” While others raised the defensiveness that arises in equity training as another challenge of random groups. As Harper explains in group work, “if people are challenged there’s kind of this immediate defense.” Grey agrees that guardedness arises, “The first thing that came to mind is defensive and obviously I think that’s a gut response that we all feel.” In order to mitigate these challenges, participants recommended creating groups that allowed group members to feel more supported, either smaller groups or groups with people they know. Finley said, “I’m much more comfortable and much more apt to talk with people that I know, and kind of have a rapport with.” This sentiment
was echoed by Emory, “if it’s a group of people that I know, like if you put me with my grade team, I could be open and forthcoming” and Corey, “[if] it’s my team. I’m comfortable with them.” Grey described how working with a group they usually work with was better because “we’re able to get more done.” Jordan offered advice about formation of groups, “Not more than maybe eight people in a group, a good small group where people are actively involved. Not where it’s just like one or two people that talk the whole entire time.” Size was also important to Harper, “[In] any of those tough conversations where potentially it’s really vulnerable or difficult content. I think any group that’s larger than ten is too much.” Lee reiterated the need for small groups, “Having a huge amount of people on the group discussion I don’t think is a solid place for me, whereas small group discussions are more impactful to me.” Group learning is seen as valuable by participants, especially if learning conditions foster communication through small size and trust.

Supporting Racial Literacy through Differentiation

Another aspect of constructivist learning involves meeting learners where they are and providing differentiated supports and challenges. Although this component of offering learners what they individually need was less discussed than the creation of holding environments (see paragraphs above), a few participants did raise ideas about how equity training could offer more variety based on individual staff needs. As self-authoring knower Avery explains, “Not everyone found value in it, some people felt like they’d already been doing similar work and didn’t feel like there was anything new for them.” This idea of being offered information they already knew was echoed by another self-authoring knower, Darby, who described a training as “most of that stuff I already kind of knew. It didn’t really have much of an impact on me. I guess maybe for people that had less of a historical context that would have been important.” Darby continued
with asking for choice, “those are good for adult learners especially targeted and focused topics.”

Drago-Severson (2007) sees the possibility that self-authoring knowers’ understanding of their own ideals and principles can limit perspective to their own ways of thinking and doing. For example, Grey reveals this limitation, “I feel like I’ve lived my life in my own little bubble and thought my bubble was the way I was supposed to be perceived.” Beyond desire for differentiation in material offered and need to expand their own perspectives, building from prior knowledge was another component of differentiated learning mentioned by one participant. Lee noted that equity trainings offered by the district were familiar to them since the trainings “reinforced what my previous trainings have been like.” This participant had received extensive diversity training through another job. These participants’ ideas show another need for equity training development and implementation as differentiation.

**Summary of Theme 2**

Participants both understood the need to develop new realities through equity training and appreciated learning with their peers, yet revealed needs for creating environments that supported that learning. Trust and respect were difficult to foster in random groupings, but participants saw value in hearing from others. They appreciated everyone’s focus on individual and institutional growth, while also sharing realities of defensive reactions to equity trainings. Organization of groups emerged as a common need, while differentiation needs surfaced from fewer participants. Overall, many participants expressed sentiments of understanding the need to change and to be open to new viewpoints, which they saw emerging from group learning.

**Theme 3: Professional Development Needs that Impact Racial Literacy Growth**

This final theme also addresses my second research question about how the participants identified benefits and challenges of equity training. Adult learning stems from a
“need-to-know” stance, where adults want to understand the purpose of the learning and how it will help them (Knowles et al., 2005, pp 64-65). As Blair, an instrumental knower, said, “I like to know the reason why I’m learning it. I like to know what you want me to learn from it, you know why am I learning this and what am I learning.” Self-authoring knowers see what they value and apply that to learning, as shown by Harper's thoughts: “I do try to approach things with a growth mindset. I have a very diverse background, and I guess a comfort level that maybe most other people don’t have.” Equity training can require an even more explicit setting of purpose since some participants may cling to colorblind ideas that race does not affect modern life (Singleton & Linton, 2005). When asked about the purpose of equity trainings offered by the district, almost all of the participants’ responses were at the acceptance level of intercultural competency, focusing on the need to learn and raise awareness of differences. Blair described the purpose as, “to make sure that teachers are providing a wider view of the community that might live in Maine, but there are people of different races, colors, creeds, from all over the world, and we need to embrace their differences.” Jordan conveyed their understanding of the purpose as, “to open up their minds and their views to different values and understandings of different cultures and lifestyles.” One participant’s response was more at the adaptation level of intercultural competence as they moved beyond individual knowledge of difference to discussing broader implications of racism, “to raise our awareness of institutional racism and to start thinking about our relationship to institutional racism and what we may be doing institutionally that is racist.” Despite this broad consensus of understanding the overall purpose of the equity trainings, participants discussed limitations of seeing how each training fit into the complete picture.
Set a Clear Purpose

Equity trainings offered by RSU 123 allowed participants to come to their own general understanding of why the trainings were being conducted; however, some participants expressed that the purpose was not made explicit to them. Participants who self-identified as self-authoring or self-transformative spoke more about the need-to-know purpose, which may be due to these knowers being more oriented to self reflection and multiple perspectives. As Emory, a self-transformative knower, said, “it would have been nice if somebody had said to us well, this is why we’re doing this.” Beyond the overall reason for equity work, the specific purposes for each training session were also not made overt. One training with a national presenter was described by five participants as particularly unclear in how it related to other trainings. As Finley, who self-identified as self-authoring, explained, “I really had a hard time connecting the whole diversity and equity piece to that training.” Another self-authoring knower, Avery agreed, saying “it was not put in the context of this is part of a greater conversation about diversity, about inclusion.” Additionally, connections among trainings were limited by lack of communication about how trainings related to each other. Darby, also a self-authoring knower, described the trainings as “punctuated” and “string of pearls type learning.” Participants who were more able to reflect on themselves and expect complex systems were ones who characteristically voiced criticism about the lack of articulated purpose.

The district did offer broad framing for equity work in the spring of 2021 that provided a context of community feedback, description of district as mostly dominant culture, and need for inclusion for all students (RSU 123, 2021, Equity Framing). This document was shared with staff after most trainings had been offered, thus too late to provide framework for the trainings. As Elliott (2021) found in her implementation of a mindfulness-based approach to diversity
trainings that support the primary need for safety and empathy among participants, the most
critical predictor of success in this work can be creating a teaching environment of trust centered
around the reasons for the training. When working with White majority schools, setting a
purpose can be even more important. Reluctance to see relevancy and need for inclusion training
can limit engagement (Payne & Smith, 2018). Two participants indicated confusion about the
point of some of the trainings: Blair said about a training, “I wonder what was the purpose of
that” and Darby wondered where “was the continuation from [the trainings].” Lack of articulated
purpose can also lead to questioning the worth of trainings. Indigo indicated frustration at the
depth of content of trainings, describing a need to “go deeper” since there wasn’t “really enough
to explain racism.” RSU 123 offered an explanation of purpose after a year and a half of
trainings as described in a goal from the Equity in Education Committee: “to build capacity in all
staff across the district so that staff are better prepared to prevent and address equity concerns as
well as promote equity in our schools and create inclusive programming” (RSU 123, 2021,
Equity Framing). Although participants showed an implicit understanding of this goal, specific
articulation of purpose earlier in the training would have provided more understanding of why
the trainings were being offered and what the goals of the training were for all participants,
especially for those who have capacity for self-reflection and inquiry (Cormier, 2021).

Consider Conflicts of Timing

Timing of trainings was seen as problematic by half of the participants, spanning all types
of knowers. Some questioned the focus on equity in a year with more pressing issues, including
the COVID 19 pandemic. According to Lee, “this year was particularly hard to have… those
kind of trainings in staff meetings, because we had a lot of things going on.” Emory described
frustration about the timing, “I felt like, really we’re doing this now? That’s just my first instinct
with everything that’s been kind of thrown at us in this atypical year. Had we done it on a normal year, it probably would have been so much better received as far as people really putting themselves into it.” Another issue raised was using staff meeting time for equity trainings. Harper captured the contradictory nature of having equity trainings during staff meetings, saying both “making time in a staff meeting to have those discussions is a worthwhile activity” and “some of those opportunities can get lost in the shuffle because folks are tired and overwhelmed and that time of the day is just a tough time anyway for teachers.” Another participant, Indigo, expressed concerns about time constraints, “I just think it’s not enough, it’s not enough time. We were just glossing over a lot of things that … we need to learn.”

Determining timing can be critical to whether staff are willing to use the information from the training (Palmer & Noltemeyer, 2019). The findings above about the need for an articulated purpose connect with this question about the right timing to reveal the interrelated nature of creating the value of equity work. These findings about perceived lack of purpose or poor timing demonstrate resistance to equity work, either through not seeing it as a priority or even as a need. Grey described their understanding that equity work has to be fit in, “There’s never a right time to have that discussion ... it has to be scheduled somewhere and that’s just the nature of that.” Their response does not indicate any urgency, more of a sense that equity work needs to be part of the other work. Again, the COVID 19 pandemic probably heightened this feeling of many things needing to happen, as Harper said about a training at the start of the 2020-21 school year, “I feel like we were all kind of in the survival mode at that point.” Overall without a common sense of need, the question of timing is a natural extension of lack of purpose. Participants who don’t clearly understand why they are doing the trainings will also wonder if their time could be better spent on what they may consider to be more pressing than equity work.
Move Beyond Discussion to Implementation

More than half of participants discussed implementation following equity trainings. Self-authoring knowers are especially focused on action, which fits their focus on performance. As Avery showed, many participants wanted to be able to take steps following trainings, “I want to do something with it.” Harper also discussed the need for action, “Teachers, I think, understand that we do need to address bias, that we know what’s okay or not okay, at least in the school setting. But I think there is a real need for actual concrete action.” Darby showed how they think change should be instituted, “I would love to see us reflecting a little bit more thinking about how our curriculum and instruction needs to be completely overhauled.” All of these self-authoring knowers showed readiness to make change. Self-transformative knowers may question implementation without consideration of the complexity of student backgrounds and needs. For example, Emory acknowledged the need to help students “become parts of different groups.” Kai explored the challenges of which groups are part of equity work, “It’s interesting the topic of equity and I think often it is going towards race and culture. But I also think there’s other parts of equity to reach all of our students.” These self-transforming knowers see the contradictions of equity trainings which focus on a single group.

Some participants expressed feelings of uncertainty about how to move forward. Instrumental knowers may need structured support, as shown by Blair, an instrumental knower, who asked for that type of help. “Then one thing we didn’t think of but now I see it, the second step … We need people to sit down or we need a committee to look at [diverse texts].” Self-transformative knowers may have concerns that stem more from their understanding of paradox. For example, expressing a concern of adding more that is not required content, Corey shared, “It’s hard kind of to get those pieces into a curriculum that doesn’t have it embedded
when we’re supposed to be teaching [other things].” Beyond just uncertainty, a couple of participants saw implementation as problematic. Darby described their thoughts about not establishing the why first, “It seems like we’re just doing things because it’s artificial and because we have to, rather than it actually being something that really matters to us.” While Lee saw no implementation happening, “So I think the trainings were good but I don’t think it really changed what I was doing prior to and after.” This discussion of what to do next stems from participants’ desire that trainings affect instructional and classroom practices intended to make lasting change in schools (Stewart, et al., 2021).

**Summary of Theme 3**

Findings about professional development needs focus on purpose, timing, and implementation. Participants shared a desire to understand the why of equity trainings, so specific articulation of purpose and goals of the training would support learning. Some participants expressed priority given to equity work in time of high COVID needs, while others acknowledged that there is always more need than time. A set purpose and goals could also support the timing since participants in trainings would understand better why trainings were happening at a particular time. Beyond wanting to know why, adult learners also favor relevancy and connection to their own situations. Providing structures for implementation allow participants to feel ownership of knowledge and to understand what next steps to take. Taking into account these professional development needs can provide more support for success of equity trainings in enhancing teacher understanding and fostering change in schools.

**Summary of Findings**

Understanding of racial literacy by White teachers is impacted by equity trainings in development of both individual and school-based understanding. Although White staff in White
majority schools often have limited experience with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color experiences and realities, participants demonstrated a range of views towards race from minimization of racism in Maine to perception of White privilege. Participants all self-identified with either acceptance or adaptive intercultural competencies, both of which are on the ethnorelative part of the continuum, giving support to the participants’ reports of personal growth and teacher/school change as a result of equity trainings. Despite these steps forward, equity trainings in White majority settings with White majority school staff face challenges that are discussed more in chapter five.

In addition, examination of constructivist learning opportunities and professional development needs further revealed benefits and challenges of equity trainings. Participants viewed equity trainings as needed, but shared desires for more support in constructivist learning components like social or group learning, differentiated content, establishment of trust, and skill development. Participants’ different ways of knowing showed a variety of responses to constructivist learning based on strengths and challenges of each way of knowing. As discussion of the three components of professional development (purpose, timing, and implementation) illustrated, adult learners want to understand why their work matters both as an overall purpose and also how each component fits into the whole. Participants acknowledged the need for equity training but saw it competing with other teaching demands during a pandemic, which made them question the timing of the trainings. They also showed a need for more support in implementation of ideas from trainings into instruction and content. These three components of professional development can be further examined through the lens of adult learning theory, which reveals how participants’ intercultural competency and ways of knowing can impact their
professional growth. How to use both intercultural competencies and constructivist learning as ways to bolster learning during equity trainings are further explored in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this case study is to examine how equity training impacted White teachers’ racial literacy and to explore their understanding of the benefits and challenges of equity training in a White majority school district. A recent assessment about another Maine school’s efforts to address racial inequity offers a glimpse at reluctance among White staff to face the realities of racism in today’s world. This school is not part of my case study and is located in southern Maine yet provides a strong example of the need for increased racial literacy among White majority staff. The Field Middle School (a pseudonym) has a diverse student population (25% of students identify as Black, 25% as other People of Color, and 50% as White), yet are taught by mostly White educators (Bennett, et al., 2021). When exploring racial inequity in discipline referrals, school administrators accepted the White majority staff’s reason for the disparity as cultural differences and had students create a code of behavioral values that captured male, Black students’ culture and aspirations. After this step had minimal impact on school discipline, administrators realized they had upheld a racialized notion of a safe and orderly school and had avoided the real work of adults investigating and remedying their own biases (Bennett et al., 2021). This example reveals how the minimization and avoidance of systemic racism can be pervasive in White majority settings. The conflation of cultural misunderstanding with structural racism exemplifies how White majority staff need to develop racial literacy, as examined in my case study of staff responses to equity training in RSU 123.

This chapter discusses how setting, teacher competencies, and constructivist learning intertwine to limit and/or support increased racial literacy for White teachers. Understanding
how White educators in White majority settings hold less knowledge of the realities of racism furthers the exploration of how race and place impact the efficacy of equity trainings. This ignorance is embedded in what West, et al. (1998) described in the seminal book *Race Matters* as the attitude that everyone else should fit into White definitions of what it means to be American. Assessments of intercultural competencies and ways of knowing provide insights into how to create training that taps into strengths while also challenging edges of knowledge. Social learning needs, as well as purpose, timing and implementation of trainings, emerged as areas that participants saw as both helpful and hindering. Determining staff developmental level and learning styles can support learning (Eberly et al., 2007). Combining awareness of specific deficits in White staff’s understanding of racism with learning and developmental structures that support growth provided practical information about how to offer equity training that promotes change. The sections that follow discuss three components of research findings, setting, cultural competency, and constructivist learning, in order to deepen understanding of how these three aspects affect equity training.

**Impact of White Majority Settings**

My first research question asked about the extent equity training impacted racial literacy of White teachers in White majority settings and revealed a paradoxical response from participants. This response connects to the critical understanding of race portion of my conceptual framework (see Figure 1 on page 20). Although participants in this study universally expressed a desire to improve their understanding of racism and an acceptance for the need of equity trainings, a majority of them also shared colorblind and White-centric views at the end of the two years of equity training. These participants may hold these contradictory views simultaneously due to living in a place they describe as having little diversity. As educators,
participants demonstrated their desire to understand and support all students, but they also maintained their views of Whiteness as an unnoticed normative center (Doane, 2003). This study confirms the unexamined universality that White culture implicitly stands for all that is presumed to be right and normal (Andersen, 2003). White majority settings contribute to seeing White as a norm due to White inhabitants’ physical isolation from experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color experiences and limited understanding of the social consequences of these experiences, as well as Whiteness as a racial identity.

**Lack of Experience with Race and Racism**

Most research participants commented about central Maine being a place with little diversity. Although not explicitly stated by most participants, little diversity seemed to refer to few members in the school and local community who were a different race than White. In the absence of every day social contact among people of different races, stereotypes can rule perceptions (E. Anderson, 2015). These views of not seeing diversity connect to how previous life experiences can create hegemonic understandings of difference and lead to an often unconscious reliance on White privilege, both of which contribute to resisting examination of racism (Picower, 2009). Also, the downplaying of the significance of race makes it difficult for White teachers to comprehend, examine, and rectify ways in which race impacts Black, Indigenous, and People of Color students and staff (Tuters, 2017). Research participants also expressed contentment with the status quo, indicating they felt they were and/or the district was doing a good job with equity. This finding reflects national attitudes, where schools do not acknowledge the roles of historic and systemic racism (Liou & Hermanns, 2017; Pena-Shaff et al., 2019). Some participants identified themselves from areas of Maine where there is little diversity, while others labeled themselves as from away (a common Maine phrase for people...
who have moved to the state) and used that status as indicator they had more experience with
diversity. “From away” can hold a pejorative meaning of being an outsider to people from
Maine, yet here participants indicated that not being from Maine meant they had more
understanding of diversity. These participants saw their experiences with Black, Indigenous, and
People of Color as needed for understanding about racism. They perceive the isolated nature of
their current lives either as a continuation or divergence from where they lived before. The
isolation of Whites in many areas of Maine from interactions with and knowledge of Black,
Indigenous, and People of Color reinforces the hesitancy described by Gillion (2021) of Whites
in rural areas to engage with the historical legacies and present day realities of racism. A specific
example of ignoring diversity in Maine is the erasure of Indigenous people’s persistence in their
homeland. Living in areas isolated from diverse peoples and cultures can hide the presence of
racism allowing White people to believe that bigotry and racism are rare (Brown, 2018). In
addition, Banaji and Greenwald (2013) argue that social differentiation exists, which means
people sort others into categories then infer characteristics associated with these categories.
Limited experience with people can perpetuate inferences about others. The little first-hand
knowledge and understanding White teachers have of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
experiences can result in quandaries about providing equity training in White majority settings.

Lack of Understanding White Racial Identity

A persistent challenge of equity training in White majority settings is how the race of
White is often seen by White people as the norm and as universal (M. Anderson, 2003; Boyd &
Darragh, 2021; Dyer, 2002; Stewart, 2020). Participants’ responses show these attitudes, since
the majority mentioned the lack of diversity in their area of central Maine, and only two
participants indicated the need to see the diversity that does exist or understand Whiteness as a
race. Teachers interviewed at this particular White majority school district want to develop their racial literacy but may be unaware of how they remain detached from full engagement by ignoring their own racial identities. White teachers need to understand Whiteness as a racial identity and a privilege in order to recognize institutional inequities and subtle forms of racism, as well as accept how race bias can blind Whites to the reality of racism (Tilley & Taylor, 2013). In addition to building capacity for understanding racism, White teachers can benefit from learning about their own race, which is often seen as universal so not needing scrutiny. Seeing the omnipresence of White supremacy in American society and investigating how White racial identity has informed and still informs educational practices are means for White teachers to examine their racial selves (Black, 2021). With only two participants seeing a need to understand White as a race, an overwhelming majority of research participants did not mention White racial identity at all. Ignoring the centrality of Whiteness infuses White racial identity with positive social attributes, including innocence (Leonardo, 2004; Richards, 2002). Connected to necessary learning about the racial identity of White as conveying privilege and being a race category is the uncertainty of need for diversity training in White majority settings.

Understanding the need for equity training in White majority settings emerged through participant responses, showing the lack of explicit purpose articulated to staff about equity trainings. The RSU 123 equity audit’s interview and survey data provide further evidence of uncertainty of purpose with its finding that faculty and staff in RSU 123 have not yet developed a shared understanding of why equity matters and why it should be prioritized (RSU 123, 2021, Equity Audit Report). According to White (2002), race is discussed as a Black, Indigenous, and People of Color issue and about disadvantages members of those groups face, which may explain White teachers’ uncertainty about why race matters in a White majority school. A 2017
University of Pittsburgh study that surveyed educators about the need for teaching students how to analyze and respond to social justice revealed that White teachers of mostly White students did not see a need, while most White teachers of Black students held the opposite view (Rand, 2021). That study echoes the White teachers’ responses in this case study, who did not see equity training as a priority. Furthermore, research participants determined their community as lacking diversity, meaning they may devalue Black, Indigenous, and People of Color experiences and knowledge even while showing acceptance towards learning about difference. This devaluation may lead to superficial engagement in equity trainings. Limited understanding of White as race and privilege are compounded by lack of knowledge about lived and learned experiences with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, as discussed in the section above.

Overall, participants in this White majority setting showed acceptance and interest in learning more about diversity. However, this setting also created challenges to developing this knowledge about racial diversity due to White-centric attitudes, White inhabitants’ isolation from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, and limited understanding of race identity both for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and for White Americans. Findings from my first research question about the impact on racial literacy from equity training showed that participants did not have extensive knowledge about the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and lacked understanding of White racial identity. These findings reveal how the component of critical understanding of race from my conceptual framework needs to be emphasized in equity training in order to increase racial literacy of White staff. The willingness to learn shown by research participants indicates that growth can occur given organizational structures that support learning and include White racial privilege along with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color racial realities.
Intercultural Competency to Support Equity Training

Connected to both my first research question about building racial literacy for White teachers and my second research question about exploring benefits and challenges of equity training is teachers’ intercultural competency. This model of adult learning is one component of another element of my conceptual framework, constructivist learning theory. Using Bennett’s developmental model of intercultural competency, which provides a scale of orientations for how adults acquire intercultural competence, all participants self-identified as ethnorelative with either acceptance or adaptation orientations. This scale uses the constructivist view that as one’s experience of cultural difference becomes more complex, one’s potential competence in intercultural relations increases (Hammer et al., 2003). As people move along the continuum from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism they develop a deeper understanding of cross-cultural experience (Organizing Engagement, 2012). Since most participants self-identified as having accepting or adaptive competencies, their overall willingness to build racial literacy reflects their ethnorelativist abilities to explore difference. Details about the acceptance level of intercultural competency, which is where the majority of participants self-identified, as well as challenges of moving from acceptance to adaptation, were shown in participant responses in this study.

Acceptance as Baseline

A preponderance of participants self-identified at the acceptance level of intercultural competency, which means they experience others as different from themselves, but equally human. Participant comments like “there’s so many different perspectives and different ways out there” and desires like “making sure we’re representing different people” are reflective of their ability to accept others. Acceptance is a key first step to develop ethnorelativism competencies that allow more understanding of cultural difference. Yet, acceptance may not be enough for
change, since even as the world becomes more open to difference, inequity persists (Khan, 2012). Since White students’ perception of cultural acceptance and connectedness increases with the number of White teachers in the school (LaSalle, et al., 2020), the feeling of acceptance can be reinforced by the presence of teachers who have an understanding of students’ racial culture. White majority schools need to develop White staff’s knowledge to move them towards promoting acceptance of diverse cultures in schools.

Although acceptance is a competency in the ethnorelative stage of intercultural competency, Bennett (2017) also warns of a naivety at this stage exemplified by positioning difference as neither good nor bad. This attitude can also emerge as passiveness towards White identity, which arises from ignorance of White privilege (McKinney & Feagin, 2003). If White teachers perpetuate the assumed racial comfort of the White majority as innocent and passive (Gillon, 2021), they may foster a relativist stance of accepting all difference instead of a critical view of race. Despite these limitations, research participants at the acceptance level understand others are different but equally human and identify cultural differences as part of human interactions. However, these same participants acknowledged the ease of ethnocentrism living in a White majority setting, citing limited experience and engagement with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

**Moving Beyond Acceptance**

This challenge of maintaining acceptance and moving to adaptation in areas where there is limited opportunity to build experiences of cultural difference is one of the key elements of developing and implementing equity trainings in White majority settings. Two elements of my conceptual framework, critical understanding of race and constructivist learning theory, can be applied here. One step that could support cultural competency is for teachers to review their own
prejudices and cultural misconceptions in order to understand stereotypical or unfair attitudes that they hold about students (Pang, et al., 2021). As participants’ descriptions of their personal understanding of racial literacy showed, working against colorblind attitudes, minimization of racism, and ignorance of White privilege is more difficult in White majority schools even when staff accept differences.

The crux of intercultural adaptation is the ability to have an alternative cultural experience (Bennett, 2004). Providing these alternative cultural experiences supports adults in their development of intercultural competency. White teachers may need to develop understanding that their view is not the only view (Richards, et al., 2007). Participants in this study had completed a year of staff trainings and revealed themselves in a nascent stage of building intercultural competence. These trainings provided historic context for racism, offered book studies to explore racism, and gave opportunities to learn more about Black, Indigenous, and People of Color culture, all of which can advance intercultural competency. Beyond training opportunities that provided knowledge and understanding of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color experiences, additional work of exploring White culture and privilege would help White school staff to see their own reality in alternative ways. Transformative learning about cultural groups begins with critical reflection of cultural identities (Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2019). The four participants who self-identified at the adaptive stage revealed this distinction of needing to understand White roles in racism, as well as to understand Black, Indigenous, and People of Color realities. As Avery said, “[You] have to raise your own awareness before you can do anything.” Equity trainings should deliberately build on intercultural competency through experiences that develop alternatives to White understanding of their own and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color lives. However, the equity training in RSU 123 lacked deliberate planning of
how to increase competency and offered learning and growth opportunities that were not integrated in a comprehensive way.

In summation, using the edge between acceptance and adaptive orientations can help create equity trainings that challenge White school staff’s knowledge of their own intercultural competencies. The default ethnocentric worldview may be sufficient for managing relations within one’s own culture but is inadequate to the task of developing and maintaining social relations across cultural boundaries (Bennett, 2004). As participants revealed in their interviews, living and working in White majority settings make it easier to slide back to ethnocentrism. The broad findings for my first research questions revealed how participants had interest in building equity capacity and respect for differences, but findings for the second question showed the need to understand more clearly the purpose for trainings in order to see the systemic nature of equity needs. These responses show the intertwining of the learning theory and critical understanding of race components of my conceptual framework. Equity trainings should make explicit the need to push towards ethnorelativism as an ongoing way to develop competency in social relations across cultures. Providing learning opportunities that expand White school staff’s experiences can support their acquisition of a deeper knowledge of themselves and others, beyond just difference. Intercultural sensitivity and competency are goals for equity trainings that can be further supported by constructivist learning that develops understanding of self and others.

**Constructivist Learning to Support Equity Training**

My second research question looks at the benefits and challenges of equity training from White teachers’ views. Participant responses examined equity trainings in order to identify areas that promoted or hindered their learning. As equity training builds the creation of a more expansive reality based on constructing adapted representations, constructivist learning provides
direction for analyzing that process, as included in my conceptual framework. Equity training provides learning opportunities to examine one’s own and others’ experiences to expand their own view of reality. Participants in this study understood that they were being asked to create new realities from information and experiences offered in trainings. This type of experiential learning is one way to give appropriate support and demands needed to move White school staff towards increased knowledge and alternative understandings of cultural contexts. White teachers can be encouraged to challenge, confront and disrupt misconceptions and stereotypes that lead to inequality and discrimination (Nieto, 2006). Despite their understanding of the learning they were participating in, research participants identified areas that impeded their learning. In exploring teacher responses to equity training to determine areas that can support adult learning through constructivist theory, participants determined purpose, social learning and relevant work as necessary components to equity training.

**Learning with Purpose**

Participants, especially those self-identified as self-authoring or self-transformative knowers, expressed the need to know the purpose of equity trainings. Adult learners primarily come from a need-to-know stance, wanting to see connections to how learning will meet their needs (Knowles et al., 2005). If the purpose of equity training is obfuscated, White staff in White majority schools can more easily cling to beliefs that they do not have diversity or racism, so they do not need equity training (RSU 123, 2021, *Equity Audit Report*). Understanding the need for equity training is a necessary first step. In the case of RSU 123, a parent publicly expressed criticism of racist content and lack of school response to their concerns. This pivotal event then led to creation of an equity committee and equity training. Yet, most participants expressed frustration that the purpose of trainings was not made explicit to them. There was no connection
made between community concerns and subsequent trainings, again reflecting the lack of clear purpose setting for the trainings. The lack of extension between this community critique and the following equity trainings allows racial events at schools to be seen as isolated events made by overzealous, culturally insensitive but good teachers (Love, 2019). Setting a purpose would make the need for a systemic response overt and would acknowledge the presence and force of structural racism. Furthermore, as Alim and Paris (2017) argue, schools should incorporate the complex ways and practices of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities and perpetuate, foster, and sustain cultural pluralism. By not articulating a purpose that connected back to community concerns about systemic racism and that looked forward to building culturally responsive schools, trainings offered by RSU 123 did not provide White staff with a compelling justification about why equity training was being offered, allowing simplistic views of racism to continue.

**Learning with Others**

Using Drago-Severson’s ways of knowing provides another element pertaining to the relevance of constructivist learning to racial equity training, especially in regard to the social component of adult learning. Almost all participants expressed both strengths and concerns about working in small groups; however, participants who self-identified as instrumental knowers showed more reluctance. Participants who self-identified as instrumental knowers made comments like, “I felt like I was being quizzed” and “I may not accept that [idea].” These comments reveal how instrumental knowers focus on their own needs and reactions. Participants who self-identified as self-authoring understood the paradox of wanting information from people they may not know well and of building enough trust to share with relative strangers. White teachers specifically may need collaboration for inquiry about equity since their bias towards and
ignorance of racial realities may limit their efforts (Friedrich & McKinney, 2010). Examining the different needs of knowers can help create groups that safely discuss values, perspectives, and ideas. As Heifertz et al. (2009) explain, urgency is needed to motivate people to engage in change since people will incline to maintain their current way of thinking if they do not understand the imperative. This lack of prioritization and urgency for equity work stems from ongoing minimization of how White supremacy impacts education for Black and Brown students (Allen & Liou, 2019). Yet, the holding environment must also contain cohesion of relationships to avoid feelings of being overwhelmed or avoidance. Collegial relationships encourage collective responsibility (James-Wilson & Hancock, 2011). Different knowers can offer their strengths to develop relationships and engage in learning. Additionally, building in support for different needs of knowers can bolster efforts to build trust and openness needed for group learning.

**Learning with Relevance**

A final component of adult learning revealed in this case study is the need to make work meaningful. When the problem is real, relevant, and current to group members, the learning is more likely to transfer to real-life problem solving (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). Participants expressed the desire to “take steps” and have “actual concrete action.” Others expressed uncertainty about moving forward due to confines of curricular expectations, as well as limited understanding of the purpose and next steps. Implementation following professional development is dependent on staff commitment to change, which depends on capacity and context beliefs (Steyn, 2005). Capacity beliefs include self-efficacy and self-confidence. As participants showed unease about entering into challenges of equity work with students, building staff capacity in handling instruction and discussion about equity would foster greater
implementation. Context beliefs refer to staff perception about structural support from administration and peers. Concrete organizational supports would allow staff to understand the priorities and parameters of change based on equity training. In addition, equity trainings that incorporate the practice of identifying problems of practice, exploring solutions, and changing practice (Coggshall, et al., 2019) could support the next steps that participants desired. Participants all expressed interest in learning more about equity and willingness to participate in trainings but questioned the seemingly disconnected nature of the trainings as contributing to uncertainty about how to implement knowledge from training into classrooms.

Mainly, the three components of constructivist learning discussed above provide insights about how to create professional development opportunities that foster increased racial literacy and cultural competency. Research findings about the strengths and challenges of equity training stemming from my second research question showed the need for articulated purpose for equity work. Trainings with an overt purpose tied to a community need set an urgency to the work. Further findings from this second question revealed how participants’ responses explored the paradox of group learning. Learning with others supports adult growth if there is trust and openness. Finally, participants discussed the challenges of implementation stemming from trainings. The desire to take action can be furthered with relevant implementation of learning. These findings link back to how constructivist learning provides input into equity training as shown in my conceptual framework. These components of constructivist learning identified by research participants can be used to bolster White teachers’ understanding and action in regard to racial and cultural inequities.
Conclusion

The findings of this case study support development of White teachers’ racial literacy through equity trainings and expose challenges about both the development of cultural competency and the structure of trainings. These supports and challenges were analyzed through themes of understanding of racial identity, constructivist learning, and professional development needs. Despite participants’ reports of personal growth and/or teacher/school change, a range of views towards race was demonstrated. This range can be attributed to isolation and White-centric reality of living in a White majority setting. The impacts of White majority settings on equity trainings include limited knowledge of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color experiences and lack of understanding about White racial identity. Building White teachers’ intercultural competency is one way to mitigate the impact of White majority settings. The majority of participants self-identified their intercultural competency as acceptance, revealing that equity trainings should make explicit the need to push towards more ethnorelativism. Moving teachers beyond just accepting difference can happen through learning opportunities that expand White school staff’s experiences. This final point of discussion of the findings explores how constructivist learning components of articulated purpose, social learning, and relevant work can all support White teachers in creating knowledge and understandings of cultural contexts. Delineating the practical applications of how the impact of White majority settings, the development of intercultural competency, and the use of constructivist learning combine to provide more effective equity trainings will be presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 6
IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Introduction

As this case study has shown, White teacher participants showed interest in and acceptance of developing their racial literacy. They saw the need for equity training, engaged in training activities, and articulated personal growth from the trainings. These findings revealed White teachers’ willingness to learn about race and racism. However, the range of views and responses they expressed about race in post-training interviews still demonstrated White-centric attitudes that can be attributed to living and working in White majority settings. Helping White school staff move towards ethnorelativism (the ability to see their own experiences, beliefs, and behaviors as one perception and organization of reality among many), as well as understanding White racial identity, emerged as needs. Participants’ discussion of constructivist learning components of trainings provided another lens into how to support White teachers’ need for greater intercultural competency. This chapter makes practical suggestions based on research data about how to support diverse cultural understandings in a White majority setting and how to use constructivist learning to enhance learning and improve implementation. Intercultural competency and constructivist learning each interweaves with the other in ways to create more productive and impactful equity trainings.

Ways to Extend Cultural Competency

Despite participants in this particular White majority school district showing acceptance and interest in learning more about diversity, White majority settings include hurdles to effective equity training such as the persistence of colorblindness, minimization of racism, and ignorance of White racial identity. Identifying these challenges is the first step towards extending cultural
compentency. Research participants expressed White-centric attitudes, by denying the presence of diversity in their area of Maine and by questioning the need for equity work in their schools. These opinions ignore diversity within their communities and exacerbate denial of the need for equity work. Acquiring knowledge of Indigenous and other non-dominant diverse groups in the area would help to dispel the myth that White majority places have no diversity. Building understanding of the need for equity work by incorporating community voices about racism and disenfranchisement would also further awareness of local diversity. Finally, a clear and specific purpose for equity trainings linked to community needs would further help counter the idea that places lacking in diversity do not need equity trainings.

Participants also described having limited experience with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color due to living in a White majority area. This isolation from experiences of people with different cultural backgrounds can partly be addressed through providing opportunities for White teachers to hear first-hand narratives of diverse life experiences, which can support understanding others’ views. A specific example of narratives being a powerful learning tool emerged from research, as many participants cited one training as especially impactful. This training centered on a TED talk, “The Danger of a Single Story,” in which author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie described how others held a single story about her as a Nigerian and how she held single stories about other groups of people. Participants described how after hearing Adichie’s talk they looked at their students as having more than a single story. Another way to extend cultural competency could be to offer access to art, music, drama, movies, and poetry created by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. These emotive and narrative modes of communication support empathy for and admiration of other people. Another specific training that participants cited as impactful was discussing poems by Black Americans and creating a visual for the poem
in small groups. Lastly, trainings should include overt explanation of the relevance to that particular setting. Outlining why these training relate to the specialized White majority setting allows White teachers to connect training to their own or their students’ lives.

A third challenge shown by research participants was not just a limited understanding of the racial identity of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, but that of White people as well. Only a small number of participants mentioned the need to examine White privilege or White culture. Participants perpetuated the idea that racial identity is only about other races, not about Whiteness. Knowledge about White privilege, as well as a critical lens into White culture, can help White teachers see their place in a racialized world. Understanding that racial identities shape relationships among all groups builds common understanding of racial identity formation and its consequences in schools. Participants discussed social learning with many expressing the need for trust and connection in order to meaningfully work in groups. Creating groups that promote discussion and allow for open idea exchange was identified as a prerequisite for complex conversations about racial identity.

Table 6
Extending Cultural Competency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limitation</th>
<th>Extension 1</th>
<th>Extension 2</th>
<th>Extension 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White-centric Attitudes</td>
<td>Acquire knowledge about past and present of local BIPOC experiences</td>
<td>Incorporate community voices about racism and disenfranchisement</td>
<td>Provide clear and specific purpose for trainings linked to community needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation from Diverse Life Experiences</td>
<td>Build opportunities to hear first-hand narratives about diverse life experiences</td>
<td>Incorporate BIPOC art, music, drama, movies, poetry into trainings</td>
<td>Explain relevance of equity trainings for local community and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Race as Pertinent to Others</td>
<td>Acquire knowledge about White privilege and White culture</td>
<td>Connect information about racial identities</td>
<td>Create work groups that develop trust and caring</td>
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These practical recommendations to extend cultural understanding are both overlapping and symbiotic. Providing White teachers in White majority settings with multiple and connected activities that create structures and offer opportunities to learn more about diverse peoples, including themselves, can begin to offset the limitations of living and working in an area where isolation fuels perception about a lack of diversity. The opportunities described above allow White teachers to build their intercultural competence. This effort can be supported by providing cultural experiences that develop alternatives to White self-understanding as well as their views of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color lives. Most participants self-identified at the acceptance level of intercultural competence. This starting point makes moving toward adaptive competency a key next step to fostering a shift from accepting difference to adapting understanding and behavior based on cultural knowledge. The extensions recommended above can expand White school staff’s experiences in order to both support their acquisition of knowledge of themselves and others and to develop abilities in social interactions across cultures. Beyond exploring practical ways to develop intercultural competency in White majority settings, understanding how to support growth through constructivist learning can also improve equity trainings.

**Ways to Extend Learning**

Equity training encourages staff to build new or broader realities about racism by adapting their current realities through new knowledge or experiences about White racial identity and the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Learning alternative understandings of cultural contexts supports intercultural competency. In order for this learning to occur, research participants determined necessary components to equity training as clear
purpose, social learning and relevant work. These three aspects of constructivist learning supply a blueprint for professional development to promote growth and development, which combined with efforts to extend racial literacy and cultural competency can improve the outcome of equity trainings.

Making explicit the purpose of equity trainings was a need identified by most research participants. What precipitated the start of trainings -- a critical event, community request, staff need, student feedback, or national events -- can all spur a school district to begin equity work. Naming this catalyst can provide context for the reason for holding trainings. Building a purpose that connects training to community needs also grounds equity work as a need-to-know opportunity. Adult learners want connections to how learning applies to their immediate circumstances and moves towards supporting their own needs and those of their students. A purpose that identifies community concerns, systemic racism, and culturally responsive schools can help White staff to understand why equity training is being offered as a resource to better design and implement necessary changes in education.

Working with others is a critical part of constructivist learning, as adult learners build from their own and others’ experiences to create different realities. Research participants unanimously found value in group engagement around equity, describing opportunities to hear other viewpoints as a meaningful way to learn together. However, group learning requires development of trust and caring in order to allow learners to feel safe in discussing experience, perspectives, and ideas. Participants identified the need for both different voices and established relationships. Their criticism of random groups was juxtaposed with their understanding of needing to hear from people they may not know well. In order to bring these needs together, creating and maintaining groups across schools or disciplines would bring in multiple
viewpoints, while also allowing relationships to build that would elicit trust in the group. Lastly, group work can encourage collective responsibility by supporting implementation and action based on shared efforts. Social learning creates collective efficacy if it arises from an environment of trust in others and common engagement in change.

Meaningful and relevant work is a final component of supporting adult learning that emerged through this research project. Similarly to setting a purpose, as described above, developing an understanding of the need for equity work helps establish meaning. Research participants showed readiness to make change but also expressed uncertainty about exactly what changes they should be making. Creating meaning -- why there is need to do equity work -- encourages action and implementation. Beyond building the desire, participants described a need for more support for the implementation of ideas from trainings. Concrete organizational supports would allow staff to understand the priorities and parameters of change based on equity training. For example, goals and action steps could be created to establish what to do next. Developing supports of how to take action is another structural component that would support change. Through the equity audit, staff in this case study expressed the need for more information about how to hold conversations about race with students (RSU 123, 2021, *Equity audit report*). Determining specific examples of support like this one would be in addition to the goals and action steps needed for implementation. Taking action or instituting change with appropriate supports promotes the relevance of learning.

**Table 7**

**Extending Adult Learning**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Extension 1</th>
<th>Extension 2</th>
<th>Extension 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set a purpose</td>
<td>Provide context for how equity work began</td>
<td>Connect equity trainings to community needs</td>
<td>Outline how training will support educational reform</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These suggestions to extend adult learning are applicable to most professional development. However, these supports are even more needed in equity work, where learners are encouraged to reassess their understanding of others and to change their way of seeing race. Given the isolation and subsequent ignorance of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color experiences, White staff would benefit from carefully crafted experiences that incorporate learning theory. Developing White teachers’ racial literacy through constructivist learning components offers an adult learning lens on how to develop and implement equity training in ways to support learning about self and others. This area of how to create equity trainings that expand intercultural competency through the development of alternative understandings of race and racism is under-researched, so more examination of the intersection of adult learning theory and increasing racial literacy is needed.

**Ways to Extend Research**

Examining how teachers respond to equity training includes research on critical understanding of race, which spans from seminal work in the 1990s such as documentation of ongoing racism by Cornel West and the need for critical race perspective outlined by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate to more recent examinations of White privilege and its role in racism from Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Peggy McIntosh, and Django Paris. Similarly, constructivist
learning theory has roots back to Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky as well as more recent applications by Robert Kegan and Ellie Drago-Severson. More research on using constructivist learning to support racial literacy could build from this case study to explore the symbiotic relationship between constructive meaning and developing intercultural competency. As these research data showed participants were in a narrow range of acceptance and adaptive levels of intercultural competency, examination of how to move educators toward integration would support building teacher capacity through adult learning theory.

Another gap in the research involves evaluation of equity training to reveal how these trainings impact change in both participants’ personal understanding of race and structural changes resulting from these new understandings. This research project examined response to equity training after two years of work. Research that collected data prior to training, during training, and after training would provide stronger evaluation of the impact on educators’ understanding of race and racism. As schools rise to meet societal calls for recognition of pervasive, systemic racism and for demand of change in institutions such as law enforcement, the judicial system, and schools, all educators need to build their understanding of themselves and others’ roles in a racialized world and to help dismantle the ways their institutions perpetuate racism. More research on how to support teachers in this endeavor will encourage and help schools and districts to enact training and professional development that meets learners’ needs and supports change.

Finally, more research into how to use exploration of White racial identity would support the need shown in this research for DEI training to do more than look at experiences of “other” cultures. Currently, increasing numbers of diverse students are being taught by mostly White teachers. Developing an understanding of the White race and its social construction, place of
privilege, and implicit bias can be a missing step in equity trainings offered to educators. Studies that explore how to offer a combination of knowledge building about the history of Whiteness, along with learning about diverse peoples could help developers of training determine best practices in supporting this type of learning.

**Ways to Develop Policy**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion training has been included in varied settings from schools to businesses. This research provides understanding of how to support adult learning in regards to developing racial literacy or cultural competence. I caution against policy makers dictating what trainings should exactly look like since local context should drive the work. This research project has revealed a proven need for setting a clear and specific purpose for equity trainings. This purpose should lead to goals and actions steps, and all components should be rooted in local context. Determining the exact need for equity training within the community allows participants in these trainings to understand why they are essential and relevant, which fosters commitment to change. In this area, policy makers should give local control to communities. However, the content and structure needs shown in this research project could provide guidance for developing trainings.

This research shows that limitations on White educators’ views of race and racism may be an extension of living and working in White majority settings. These identified limitations of White centrisim and isolation from diverse experiences can be mitigated with content that shows local diversity and addresses White-centric attitudes. Policy makers could suggest that DEI training provide examination of White racial identity and history alongside learning about racial identities and histories of Black and Brown people. Without exploring White people’s role in creating and propagating race and racism, learning about Black, Indigenous, and People of
Color’s racialized experiences can seem separate and disassociated from how people who identify as White built a system of privilege and supremacy for themselves. Beyond content, this research also revealed structural needs to support developing racial literacy and cultural competency. Similarly, policy makers could suggest constructivist learning elements that further adult learning, like clear purpose, social learning, and relevancy. As this research showed a lack of seeing the pertinency of race among participants showing the importance of equity work is a necessary organizational structure. Social learning is another valuable component of supporting adult learning that could be included in policy about DEI training. Overall, looking at content and structure to identify what meets local need would be helpful elements of developing equity trainings that could be communicated by policy makers.

**Conclusion**

In the summer of 2019, I switched from where I had spent 20 plus years as a high school English teacher and seven years as English department chair to become a middle school principal in a neighboring district. From my first job interview at this district, I was made aware of a parent complaint in spring 2019 about racism in texts and the dismissive response by the middle school staff. Once hired, I became immersed in reactions to this critical event, which included suspicion and hurt at the staff level and action and planning at the district level. I soon saw the possibility for productive and helpful research about equity trainings offered to White majority staff. The racial reckoning of spring 2020 further revealed the need for the United States to acknowledge the historical legacy and current reality of racism in our country. This research project took on new urgency as I grappled with enhanced awareness of microaggressions, colorblindness, and White privilege as pervasive expressions of White supremacy and racism. I questioned what my role as an educated, White, middle class woman could be in researching
equity. Yet, these labels oversimplify my positionality since they show where I am now, but not the nuances of living in Asian countries until I was six years old, then returning to the United States to divide my time between a hippie commune with my mother and suburban life with my father. One of this project’s focus is on White majority settings as causal forces that inform White teachers’ understanding of race. Like my background, the complex nature of how the White participants discussed their racial literacy reveals how labels capture some but not all meanings.

This research project showed that White teachers in White majority settings have limited experiences with and understanding both of Whiteness as a racial identity and culture and of experiences of Black, Indigenous and People of Color. Diversity, equity, multiculturalism, and anti-racism trainings are not new to education. For example, almost thirty years ago Kailin (1994) presented an anti-racist staff development for teachers, a plan that included understanding individual experiences with race and White privilege, moving away from multicultural illiteracy, and implementing anti-racist knowledge in schools. Similar themes emerged in this case study, showing the pervasive and ongoing need for equity training.

Exploring constructivist learning connections with racial literacy development among White teachers revealed specific ways to develop equity trainings to support learning. White staff, in White majority settings, demonstrated acceptance of difference, yet still expressed White-centric views and limited understanding of diversity, showing the need for providing learning experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color culture, endurance, and struggles. Developing intercultural competency to move towards ethnorelativism can help White educators dismantle structural racism. White teachers also need opportunities to learn and reflect on White racial identity and privilege in order to acknowledge and own how those parts of
themselves affect their professional decisions, while also moving beyond binary, simplified conceptions of White identity (Black, 2021; Crowley, 2019; Tanner, 2017). Ways to develop new understanding are through group learning, self-reflection, and caring, trusting spaces (Park & Tomkins, 2020). As a specific example, a study about the impact of an African American history collaborative teacher study group found that teacher groups alleviated teacher concerns about addressing difficult topics, promoted self-reflection about personal perceptions, and enabled the sharing of experiences (Johnson, et al., 2021). Other constructivist learning components found to be integral to learning during equity trainings include setting a purpose, creating meaningful and relevant work, and using narratives and emotive modes to learn about others and oneself.

As my own racial literacy moved towards seeing police violence against Black and Brown people as part of systemic racism that included courts, employment, housing, and schools, I saw how our supposedly post-racial country was denying the reality of lasting structural racism that has remained hidden to most White Americans due to societal elements such as de facto segregation and fallacious beliefs about equal opportunity. I now see the need for White teachers not only to understand the lives and identities of students who have varied backgrounds but also to learn about White racial identity and the privilege that identity provides. As schools grapple with their own structural racism that exists within the systemic racism of this country, improving the racial literacy of White teachers is imperative. Students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are likely to be taught by White teachers, since in 2018 80% of teachers in the US identified as White. In White majority settings, where students who identify as White make up 90% of the school population, 98% of teachers in these schools identify as White (Geiger, 2018). White educators remain in charge of increasingly diverse classrooms, which makes the need for equity training imperative. For the United States to move
towards its professed ideals of equality and freedom for all, schools must become places where staff learn about racism in order to support all students by dismantling racist barriers to education.
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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Script (in person with principals)

I am Susan Thibedeau, a graduate student from the University of Maine conducting a research project, and I am hoping you will be willing to suggest potential interview participants for a research project evaluating RSU 123’s equity training. I am evaluating the district’s equity training and exploring adult learning needs. I plan to interview two teachers at each school, so would appreciate any suggestions for teachers who would be willing to participate. This selection will provide information about district equity training and teacher response and needs. Interviews will be 45-60 minutes long and will be recorded. I will ask questions about how teachers responded to and/or implemented equity training.

Thank you

Recruitment Script (initial email to suggested participants)

I am Susan Thibedeau, a graduate student from the University of Maine conducting a research project and a principal at a school in this district. I am hoping you will be willing to help me with an evaluation of RSU 123’s equity training. Your name was suggested by your building principal. I am looking at development and implementation of our district’s equity training and teacher response and/or implementation of that training. I am also exploring adult learning and how learning theory can support teachers in equity training. I will ask questions about your responses to the training and request that you take self-assessment about learning. I plan to interview two teachers in each of the schools in our district, which will provide a cross-section of grade-span participants.

Thank you

Follow-up Email Script

Hello, this is Susan Thibedeau. We talked earlier about you taking part in a research project through the Department of Education Leadership at the University of Maine, where I am a graduate student. This research is evaluating equity training at RSU 123. At that time, you agreed to participate in an interview. Could you please confirm our meeting time on (date) at (time)? We will meet on Google Meet or Zoom. I have attached a copy of the consent form.

Thanks again for your willingness to help me with this project.
OPENING

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.

Introductions.

Brief overview of the research project:

I am looking at development and implementation of our district’s equity training and teacher response and/or implementation of that training. I am also exploring adult learning and how learning theory can support teachers in equity training. I will ask questions about your thoughts about the training and request that you take self-assessment about learning.

Purpose of today’s discussion:

I am interviewing a selection of teachers from different schools to get their perspectives and thoughts about equity training in RSU 123.

Ground rules for today’s discussion:

- This conversation will be recorded and transcribed: I will use the recording and transcription for the purposes of taking detailed notes and analyzing data.

- The recording and transcription will be destroyed by September 1, 2023.

- While the general information you share and specific statements you make may be used in my dissertation and reports to RSU 123 administration, your name will not be used and any personally identifiable information will be removed.

- Please know you can refuse to answer any questions and/or terminate the interview at any time.

QUESTIONS

Please describe your role in and relationship to the school, including how long you have been working at RSU 123.

Do you recall the different components of equity training that RSU 123 has offered since Spring 2019? (If not, provide reminders of community forums in Spring 2019, community forums and values review in Fall 2019, professional development in Fall 2020)

Working backwards (starting with most recent), please share your thoughts and responses about each offering of equity training:
Courageous Conversations workshop with Jen Abrams (October 2020)

History of Racism through Legal Lens activity with school staff (August 2020)

Community Diversity Forum and Grade-level Spans Diversity/Equity Session with Nicola Chin (December 2019)

Community Diversity Forum with Nicola Chin (March 2019)

What did you think was the purpose for each training?

What did you think was helpful or not helpful about each training?

Did these trainings impact your teaching practice? If so, how? If not, why?

How did these trainings inform your understanding of racism and/or equity?

What supports could the district provide to help teachers with racial literacy?

**Learning Style:**
How do you learn about another person’s perspective?

How do you respond to group learning?

How do you see yourself as a learner?

When faced with learning something new how do you react?

When challenged about your beliefs how do you react?
APPENDIX C

LEARNING SELF-ASSESSMENT
Sample questions for learning self-assessment based on Ways of Knowing (Drag-Severson, 2009) and Bennett’s Scale of Intercultural Competence (Bennett, 2004)

What are your preferred learning opportunities? Choose all that apply.
By yourself, in a group of peers, directed by a national expert, directed by district staff, through narrative, through facts, through reflection

I believe different people should all be treated the same.

I think our district provides equity for all stakeholders.

I would like to learn more about other cultures and equity issues.

I understand other people's perspectives.

I respect the way people from different cultures behave.

I respect the traditions and customs of other cultures.

I think my culture is better than other cultures.

I try to learn as much as possible from people of other cultures when I’m with them.

I always know what to say when interacting with people from other cultures.
APPENDIX D

Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research project by Susan Thibedeau, a graduate student in the Department of Education Leadership at the University of Maine, working with Catharine Biddle, an associate professor in Education Leadership at the University of Maine. The purpose of this research is to evaluate equity training in RSU 123. All information will be kept confidential. You have been selected to participate because you are a teacher in RSU 123 who has taken part in district equity training and has been recommended as a participant by your school principal.

What will you be asked to do?
You are asked to participate in a confidential interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will take place at a time and place that is mutually convenient and will be a video meeting. I will record and transcribe the interview to help me recall the discussion afterwards. The recording will be destroyed by September 1, 20123. Participants’ names or identifying information will not be included in the transcription.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation in the interview is voluntary. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer and you may choose to end the interview at any time.

Risks to Being in the Study:
Except for your time and possible inconvenience, there are no foreseeable risks from participation in the interview. It is possible that you may feel uncomfortable answering some questions. You may skip any question if you wish, and you may end the interview at any time.

Benefits of Being in the Study:
While this study will have no direct benefit to you, this research may help us learn more about how to develop and implement equity training that supports staff.

Confidentiality
Your name will not be on any of the data. A pseudonym or code number will be used to protect your identity. A key linking your name to the data will be kept separate from the data in a secure document and destroyed by September 1, 20123. This key will be stored on a password-protected computer. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed through Google Meet or Zoom transcription. Both recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed by September 1, 2002.

Contact Information:
You may contact me, Susan Thibedeau, by email with any questions at susan.thibedeau@maine.edu. You may also reach the faculty advisor on this study at catharine.baddle@maine.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, University of Maine, 207/581-2657 (or e-mail umric@maine.edu).

Your signature below indicates that you have read the above information and agree to participate. You will receive a copy of this form.

_____________________________  ____________________________
Signature                  Date
## APPENDIX E

### Ways of Knowing Participant Chart

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* 1-4 scale from survey plus additional points from relevant interview question
## Appendix F

### Developmental Model of Intercultural Competency Participant Chart

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<th>I am interested in the traditions and customs of other cultures.</th>
<th>People’s race or culture is important in understanding them.</th>
<th>I am curious about other people.</th>
<th>I like to compare and contrast my experiences with others’ experiences.</th>
<th>I try to learn as much as possible from people of other cultures when I’m with them.</th>
<th>I respect the way people from different cultures behave.</th>
<th>I always know what to say when interacting with people from other cultures.</th>
<th>I understand other people’s perspectives.</th>
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BIOGRAPHY

Susan Thibedeau has attended or worked in schools her whole life. Following many years as a high school English teacher and English department chair, she is now a middle school principal. She has a bachelor’s degree in Economics from the University of Massachusetts, a master’s degree in Education from the University of Pennsylvania and a master’s degree. She is a candidate for a doctorate degree in Education Leadership from the University of Maine in May 2022.