ABSTRACT

Carrie Lynn Morris, WHITE WOMEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS: EMBODYING ANTIRACISM IN EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2023.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how white women identify and enact their roles as antiracist school and district leaders for equity. We met together in a community of practice focused on antiracist growth and equity leadership. I examined my equity leadership story and captured the stories of five other white women, who are school and district leaders in eastern North Carolina, on their journeys of leading for equity. I aimed to better understand what embodying antiracism means in our context. To do so, I used participatory action research and ethnographical and autoethnographical methodology to collect and analyze data. The study was grounded in this theory of action: If we, as white women, understand how we embody antiracism, then we can better understand how to be leaders of and for equity. Two findings emerged from the study: (1) White eastern North Carolina educational leaders implicitly embodied antiracism to create more equitable and accessible public school settings, and (2) a community of practice focused on antiracist growth and equity leadership nurtured a *necessary space* so that white leaders moved past their fears and hesitancies toward learning and growth. As participants engaged in a *necessary space*, they critically reflected on their identities, contexts, and roles and responsibilities for dismantling systems of oppression in their circles of influence. As a result of uncovering and confronting the conflicts, contradictions, and ethical dilemmas that school leaders face in leading for equity in the eastern North Carolina context, we co-developed a set of practices that could inform school leaders who want to take on the mantle of antiracism as they identify and respond to equity challenges in their contexts. The implications for the study are widespread as leaders in multiple contexts understand themselves as leaders and

strive in diverse contexts to enact their espoused values. Racial and gender affinity groups offer a holding space to support school leaders to examine self and understand their contexts so they can successfully act on their values.

WHITE WOMEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS: EMBODYING ANTIRACISM IN EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA

A Dissertation
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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By
Carrie Lynn Morris
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Director of Dissertation: Matt Militello, PhD
Dissertation Committee Members:
Roshaunda Breeden, PhD
Larry Hodgkins, EdD
Lynda Tredway, MA
Bonnie Lo, EdD

DEDICATION

for Millie

I embodied life and love most when I carried you:
rejecting societal messages
listening to my body—resting when tired, moving when energized,
knowing what I consumed was going into your developing body.
I found the courage to say no and ask for what I needed.
I sang, wrapped my arms around myself and swayed, loving my body and loving you.
And when you arrived in this world, I allowed myself to break rules
for a time…

But I eventually got lost again,
Lost in society's rules for new mothers, for working wives, for educators, for women.
You grew up watching me swirl and spin,
Trying to be everything for everyone, never feeling like enough.

Then time stopped.

A person who held your hand,
and examined the seaweed, the flowers, the shells, and the passing box turtle (while I spun),
He was gone.

And you taught me a new way to live again,
to embody emotions as they came, to listen for understanding,
to slow down and breathe, to never assume I knew what another was thinking.

You reminded me to create again,
create art and experiences:
to jump into the cold, or turquoise, or murky water and feel it on my skin,
to watch the sun rise and feel the warmth on my face,
to use my hands and heart as much as I use my mind.

Morris—his name, became my name, and is your name.
The journey toward becoming Dr. Morris is because of you.
.
I dedicate this dissertation to you, Mildred Eve Morris…
You inspire me to reconnect with myself
so that I bring the fullest expression of me to the important work to be done.

Thank you for walking with me in this life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A conversation with Dr. Francisco Guajardo at a community learning exchange altered how I look at the world. Matt Militello, thank you for hiring me all those years ago, for sending me to that first learning exchange, and for seeing in me what I needed to see in myself. Your investment in my professional development has brought me to this place.

I now see what was once invisible to me and pay attention to an inner landscape. Lynda Tredway, thank you for helping me express this journey in words, for cherishing the stories told here enough to devote countless hours to this project, and for setting a table for learning in a way that is both warm and demanding. To Matt and Lynda as a team, you breathe joy and justice into everything you do. Your guidance helps me reimagine what is possible. Thank you.

Metaphors help me make sense of difficult concepts. Not because I want to simplify or reduce the complexity but because I want a visual to illuminate and clarify my understanding at a moment in time. Bonnie Lo and Maenette Ah Nee-Benham, thank you for the questions, perspectives, and conversations which led me to the wave metaphor, a way for me to understand what embodiment means. I am honored to know you both and grateful for the zeal you bring to your scholarship and the work of nourishing other women in educational leadership.

As Elena Aguilar says, the healing of our world may lie in the spaces we create for storytelling. LB, MM, JP, JJ, and KM/MB, your stories were courageous and vulnerable, and the space we created with each other was healing. Thank you for your leadership in ENC and for your trust through this process. I feel “held” after our journey together.

Yasmin Williams, DJ Lofi, Khruangbin, and Taimane provided the soundtrack as I wrote this story, ECU instructors, colleagues, and classmates lovingly pushed and pulled me toward the finish, and my friends and family sustained me in this journey. To all, I express gratitude.

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> *I had decided never again to speak to white women about racism. I felt it was wasted energy because of destructive guilt and defensiveness, and because whatever I had to say might better be said by white women to one another at far less emotional cost to the speaker, and probably with a better hearing.*
>
> –Audre Lorde, *An Open Letter to Mary Daly*.

White women in education can be a critical linchpin for addressing the issues of racial equity in our schools and our nation, and I, with other white southern women educators, want to know how to be antiracist equity allies in ways that support racial equity. I want to ensure that the rural schools of North Carolina address issues of racism hampering our students from achieving their full potential. I want to be known as a person who knows how to talk about race and how to act as an educational leader for racial justice in this context. That is the focus of this ethnographic study of white women school leaders who are committed to racial justice in our southern context.

The grim reality is that racial equity in schools is far from being resolved, and currently, educators across the nation are striving, yet struggling, to learn more about what it truly means to achieve equity in schools (Aguilar, 2020; Dugan, 2021; Radd et al., 2021; Rincones et al., 2021; Triplett & Ford, 2019). The 2020 Presidential election further illuminated the stark divisions that have festered throughout our history. Communities around the nation continue to grapple with anger, frustration, and misinformation related to three pandemics: a health crisis, an economic recession, and a racial reckoning of historical injustices and violent acts toward People of Color and Native people. Conversations in schools about equity in the American South are further complicated due to the historical ancestry of enslavement and segregation. For decades, many white Southerners viewed civil rights issues as a memory of the past, which was resolved with

the march of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the espoused integration of students through *Brown vs. Board of Education* (Butler, 2020; Donovan, 2020; Roy & Ford, 2019; Triplett & Ford, 2019).

Race is a social construct with power implications, especially in North Carolina. Although the American Psychological Association's style guide recommends designating racial and ethnic groups with proper nouns, I use a lowercase letter when describing the participants as white women. In our efforts to understand our positionality as leaders in the eastern North Carolina context, this choice coincides with our desire to recognize and decenter whiteness in our educational contexts. The choice aligns with Price (2019); by de-emphasizing the word white and capitalizing other racial identities, we right a long-standing wrong and recognize people of color and their demand for dignity. "Until we address the interactive effects of discrimination and subjugation . . .we cannot embrace equal treatment in our language" (Price, 2019, para. 11). Appiah (2020) debates the topic, giving reasons on both sides. The Associated Press made the decision to lowercase the term white in racial, ethnic, and cultural senses because people described as white generally do not share the same history and culture in a global context (Daniszewski, 2020). In referring to people who identify as Black or African American, Latinx or Hispanic, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and other historically marginalized people, I use the capitalized phrase People of Color and Native peoples as Michael and Bartoli (2023) use in their book *Our Problem Our Path*.

Leverett (2002) named people equity warriors who lead a charge for more equitable and accessible organizations. Love (2019) uses the term co-conspirator, calling on white people to stand up for justice using the abolitionist movement of the mid-19th century as a guide. In her dissertation on school leaders working for equity, Quadros-Meis (2021) invoked Shields (2010) to explain how transformative leaders are not only empathetic, but they act to disrupt systems of

oppression and injustice. Lear (2006), in his story of Plenty Coups, the Crow chief who led his people through times of cultural devastation, discusses how our beliefs and actions of radical hope provide a way forward. As a white woman educator, I ask, "What role do white women in positions of school leadership play in conversations about race?" I posit that white female leaders must seize the opportunity and do the internal, self-reflective work necessary to lead for equity. As individuals and as a group, we need to champion and embody antiracism in how naming ourselves and how being and becoming leaders of equity. I want to be a white woman that Audre Lorde can count on to talk to other white women about race and move the needle on racial justice.

My Journey: Doing the Internal Work

Transitioning to school administration after 18 years as a public school teacher opened my eyes to injustices in schools and districts. Earlier, I would not have acknowledged that schools are a part of perpetuating injustice, but I have come to see that by maintaining the status quo and/or not looking at policies, procedures, data, and all school activities through another lens (other than a white, cis-gendered lens), schools and districts, do indeed, perpetuate and preserve deep-rooted injustice. School leaders have the responsibility to intentionally dismantle and disrupt these inequities. The internal work is personal, linked to my identity, and challenges me to grapple with how white supremacy culture is a disease infecting all Americans (DiAngelo, 2011; Kendi, 2019; Saad, 2020; Wise, 2012).

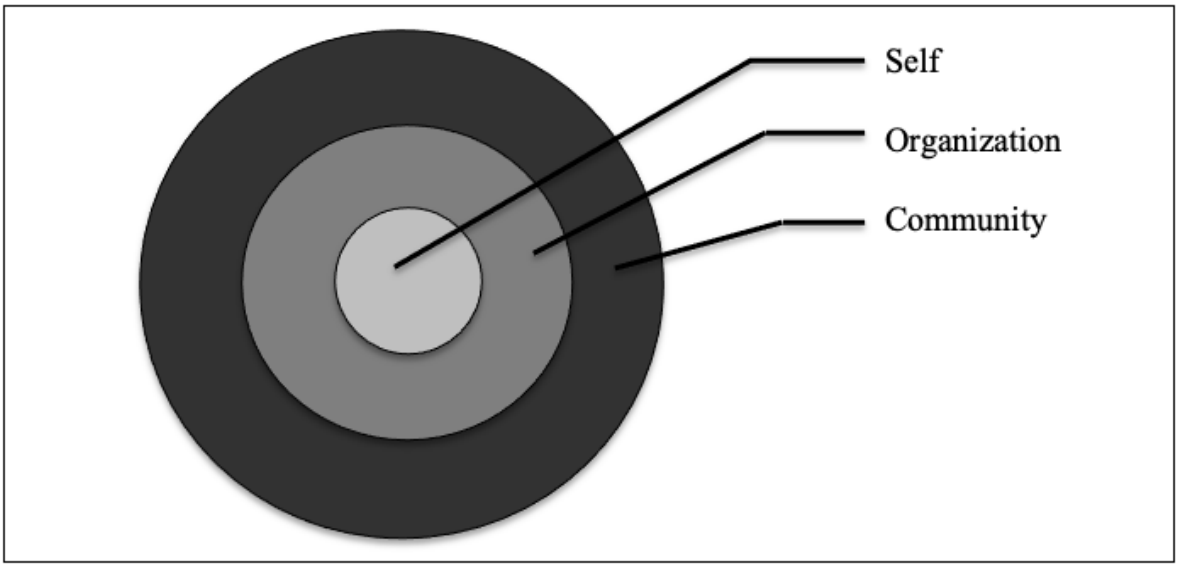
Participating in multiple white affinity spaces has helped me understand and unpack how the invisibility of white supremacy culture and whiteness often go unnoticed by white people (Okun, 2021). Communities and public schools are populated by people from diverse backgrounds and experiences, and school leaders charged with educating *all* children cannot

afford to be unaware of how whiteness influences the learning environment in their schools. For me, this work can be hard, emotional, and challenging and began with examining my identity and unconscious biases.

Research Inquiry

I engaged in a participatory action and activist research (PAR) project and study to discover how white women embody antiracism and identify and enact their roles as school leaders for equity (Hale, 2017; Herr & Anderson, 2014; hunter et al., 2013). I first met the participants in this study as a part of Cohort I of Project I[4], a one-year professional learning experience for school leaders at East Carolina University (ECU). Utilizing Community Learning Exchange (CLE) pedagogies, we explored the ecologies of knowing (see Figure 1) with a diverse group of school leaders (Guajardo et al., 2016). We participated in racial-gender affinity groups with fellow doctoral students. The facilitator for our group was not from the south but had substantial experience in white women's affinity groups. The study participants and I are white women from schools and educational settings in North Carolina.

The ecologies of knowing (see Figure 1) offers a framework for organizing "our thinking and learning experiences from the micro to the meso and on to the macro levels, or spheres, in which we experience life" (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 27). Race is a social construct and those considered racially "white" benefit from privileges in America (Onwuachi-Willig, 2016). As Mills (1997), names race as an unwritten contract that relegates persons of color to a lesser status, Kendi (2016) traces the history of racism in America and the dual genesis theory that has persisted, naming African Americans as not the same kind of humans as whites. Acknowledging that the American culture was founded on white supremacy power structures requires different levels of work, as does unpacking the benefits of white privilege. This work begins with self and



Note. This figure is from Figure 2.2, Ecologies of Knowing (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 28). Inserted with permission.

Figure 1. Ecologies of knowing.

internalized beliefs and continues with understanding how race influences interpersonal relationships and institutional structures in our organizations and communities (Okun, 2021; Oluo, 2017; Saad, 2020). While a leader for equity ultimately seeks to disrupt racial inequities in the school context (institutional), DiAngelo (2018) suggests antiracist education starts at the micro-level. I discuss the purpose of the study and present the focus of practice, research questions, and an emerging conceptual framework. Finally, I discuss the potential significance of the study to practice, policy, and research.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand our individual identities and our collective identity as white women educational leaders by moving from fear to growth as the foundation of embodying antiracism (Ibrahim, 2020a, 2020b; Kendi, 2019). I wanted to understand how we embody our roles as white women leaders. The ecologies of knowing provided an ontological structure for understanding what it means to embody antiracism. The popular definition of embodying is "to give a concrete, tangible form to an abstract concept or to personify" (Free Dictionary, n.d.). Embodiment means that cognition or epistemological and ontological self is a result of one's presence in time and place and how that time and space affect meaning and our way of knowing and then acting (Cromby, 2014). Bourdieu's (1977) definition of habitus is the origin of embodiment: "a system of lasting transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions"* (p. 83). Thus, we all possess deeply engrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we exhibit because of our experiences. In this study, I wanted to understand on a deeper level how white women school leaders are doing internal (self) antiracist work that affects their leadership actions in their schools (organization) and communities. In other words, how can we learn how to bring

ourselves to the work and embody something that may not be a part of our historical understanding of self? The research participants and I explored how to take up the work of anti-racism.

Focus of Practice

The focus of practice of the participatory action research (PAR) project and study was to understand and describe how white women embody antiracism to lead for equity in North Carolina public schools. This study informed my perspectives and actions as a white, female leader and fills a niche in the research—telling the stories of white women leading for equity – particularly white women in the south. As a result, the study added to the growing body of research about social justice in schools.

White persons must do a different kind of work and thinking to act in spaces and places to support an antiracist approach. School leaders and educators cannot look to colleagues who are People of Color or Native people to guide talks about racism and structural inequities, especially in the American South. White people need to facilitate discussions among themselves about antiracism and address their discomforts so that they can participate in multiracial conversations and equitable actions. As Audre Lorde alluded to in her letter to Mary Daly in 1979 in the quote that began this chapter, and as Tatiana Mac reminds us in her *Save the Tears: White Woman's Guide* (2020), the best person to call out a white woman is another white woman. Vice President Kamala Harris stated in her acceptance speech on August 19, 2020, "There is no vaccine for racism. We've gotta do the work" (Harris, 2020). The work for white folks is iterative and includes cycles of reflection and action while moving away from fear toward growth.

Research Questions

I propose research questions to explore and understand more about the ways white women identify their roles as leaders for equity and about how they enacted their roles in a North Carolina public school context. Additionally, I consider my perspectives and actions as a leader for equity. The overarching research question is: *How do white women embody antiracism to lead for equity in North Carolina public schools?* The following questions guided our work:

1. How do white women identify and reflect on their roles as leaders for equity?
2. How do white women school leaders enact their roles as leaders for equity?
3. To what extent do I shift my perspectives and actions as a white woman leader?

The research questions capture my desire to understand on a deeper level how the antiracist work white women school leaders are doing internally related to their identities and affects their actions as leaders for equity in North Carolina school settings.

Participants and Engagement

I invited five white women to participate in the study. The women are educational leaders in North Carolina who were concurrently EdD doctoral students in an equity-focused doctoral program. Together, as co-practitioner researchers (CPRs), we acted as critical friends who supported each other as leaders for equity in addressing equity dilemmas in our educational contexts, and in understanding our role as white women embodying antiracism (Foulger, 2010). I collected data in iterative cycles of inquiry including group sessions during each inquiry cycle. To prepare to facilitate group sessions, I engaged in a national network for white educators focused on understanding more about disrupting whiteness (I.D.E.A., n.d.). I facilitated the sessions utilizing CLE protocols and collected field notes when I observed participants in their school contexts. I took responsibility for data collection and initial coding and analysis and

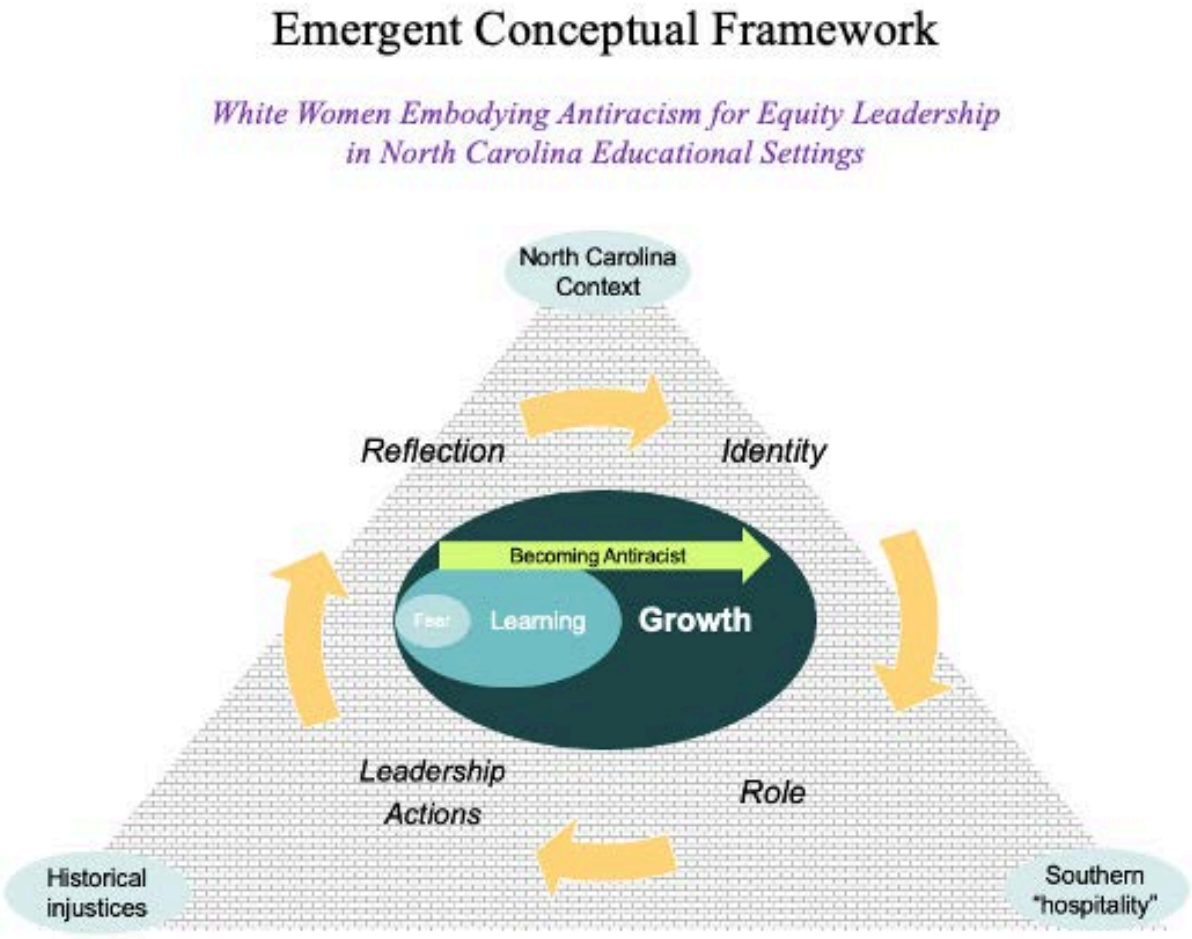
conducted individual interviews and member checks with CPR participants to ensure data collection and analysis was accurate. I used this emergent conceptual framework, including the North Carolina context, as a guide.

Emergent Conceptual Framework

The emergent conceptual framework (see Figure 2) includes a layered look into the context, identities, and actions of the participants in this study. In the center of the framework is a continuum of movement toward being and becoming antiracist. In the Ibrahim (2020a) framework, based on Kendi's (2019) work, he invites people to move from fear to learning to growth. A North Carolina landscape is the background of the emergent conceptual framework, illuminating the duality of a history of injustices in education and politics contrasted with the optics of a welcoming Southern social culture of hospitality (Huler, 2012; Roy & Ford, 2019). Layered over the North Carolina context are the internal and external factors with which a school leader contends as a leader for equity in an inequitable system. This cycle includes the participants' identities and identity contingencies, their roles as leaders and their approaches to leadership, the actions they take to enact leadership, and their reflection on the actions. The cycle is a repetitive process.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the exploratory study has implications for practice, policy, and research. The participatory action research (PAR) project is significant because the values and beliefs of school leaders affect their leadership styles. Social justice school leaders "advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 222). Disproportionate discipline data and opportunity gaps continue



Note. The emergent conceptual framework describes reflective leadership in an ENC context.

Figure 2. Emergent conceptual framework.

in public schools (Kundu, 2019). School leaders must look at their organization's values, practices, and policies and utilize recent research and the local community to diagnose and design strategies specific to the needs of a school's students.

Educational Practice

The PAR is significant to practice by encouraging white leaders to take responsibility for their learning about injustices and understanding how white women develop and embolden their abilities to lead for equity. White women lead a majority of United States classrooms and more than half of public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020, 2021). If we are to understand structural inequities present in schools, our inner journeys matter, white women must simultaneously self-reflect, recognize, and address blatant racism and micro-aggressions and the implications of patriarchy and white supremacy. School leaders who lack knowledge and learning of these power dynamics risk allowing nefarious conditions to flourish under their leadership. Unfortunately, not all school leaders learn about systemic racism in life experiences, teacher or administration education, or in district and state professional development.

Leading for equity must include the ability to listen and look for sightings of discrepancy between a school's stated beliefs and the actual behaviors of school staff (McDonald, 1996). Eubanks et al. (1997), in describing the types of conversations in schools as Discourse I or II. Discourse I conversations blame children or families, and district or state initiatives, as leaders point fingers at "everyone and everywhere" for injustices created by social and economic structures outside of the school. Discourse II schools "create an organizational setting that is continually changing and developing because the members are continually learning" (Eubanks et al., 1997, p. 157). Unexamined school cultures and conversations can hold Discourse I structures (hegemonic cultural discourse) and equity trap structures in place, such as educators holding

deficit views, refusing to see color, and blaming students for destructive behaviors (Eubanks et al., 1997; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Through the PAR project, I sought to understand how school leaders uncover the discrepancies between beliefs and practices and how this affects their leadership behaviors as a result.

Educational Policy

In terms of policy, the study is significant because school leaders need a space to analyze current school policies for racial and gender bias. Specifically, in North Carolina, where a resounding good "ole" boy network often has the last word (Nelson, 2017), creating a space for empowering women to stand up for the students and communities they serve affects policy at local and state levels. The PAR provides districts and states an understanding of the support needed for educators and leaders navigating conversations in schools related to movements like *Black Lives Matte*r and *MeToo*. We needed to find ways to recognize current events in schools and navigate the controversies over critical race theory (CRT) and maintain our roles as equity leaders in schools. School leaders who understand and advocate for learning at all levels demand the critical thinking skills necessary for analyzing policies for biases, creating space to listen to diverse voices, and for reframing the discourse so that we can address issues of inequity.

Educational Research

People of Color and Native peoples cry out for white America to awaken and act. Multiple sources inform white folks, yet many white educators remain unaware of the role they play in upholding oppressive structures in schools (DiAngelo, 2011; Kendi, 2019; Saad, 2020; Steele, 2010; Wise, 2012). Many teachers teach the way they were taught (DeWitt, 2012; Dugan, 2021; Gay, 2018). Schools, hopeful for change, may unknowingly deter the very families and students they claim to serve (Eubanks et al., 1997; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Hammond,

2015; Khalifa et al., 2016). This is the right time to invite change based on the recent racial reckoning in America and sanction educators to do something different (Saad, 2020; Safir & Dugan, 2021). Asheville, North Carolina, a more progressive area of the state, recently made national news by proposing a model of reparations for Black residents by investing in Black communities and providing funding for Black people who have been denied housing through redlining and gentrification (Romo, 2020). Asheville provides one strategy to repair historical inequities, but is it enough? Educators and school leaders must question themselves and reject behaviors and structures which perpetuate inequities. Hence, this study fills a niche in the research, telling the stories of white women leading for equity, adding to the growing body of research around social justice in schools.

Study Considerations

The study is about white women who are school leaders leading for equity. I made every effort to address limitations, validity, confidentiality, and ethics with rigorously ethical data collection and analysis procedures. I describe these efforts in detail in Chapter 3 (Saldaña, 2016). The study is a small autoethnographical and ethnographical study and through this study, I desired to understand leading for equity in North Carolina on a deeper level. I acknowledge that as a white woman, I can never fully understand how I have both benefitted from and been complicit in upholding white supremacy culture in the North Carolina schools where I have worked. I equally acknowledge that I have the power as an educational leader to move my practice from transactional to transformative, and I recognized that my journey begins through developing critical consciousness and moving from fear to growth (Ibrahim, 2020a; I.D.E.A., n.d.; Quadros-Meis, 2021). In Chapter 3, I detail other considerations, including limitations, validity, and confidentiality and ethical considerations.

Summary

> *No matter who you are, you have the power to influence change in the world. You can continue to unconsciously allow white supremacy to use you as it used your ancestors. Or you can intentionally choose to disrupt and dismantle white supremacy within yourself and your communities so that BIPOC can live free of racism and oppression. The choice is yours. The moment is now. Help change the world. Become a good ancestor*. (Saad, 2020, p. 212)

I chose in this study to question white supremacy and learn how to embody being an antiracist leader as I work with other southern white women educational leaders to do the same. The PAR project and study align with key principles from CLE ecologies of knowing (Guajardo et al., 2016) and Ibrahim's (2020a) zones for becoming antiracist, which I describe in the literature review. The work of equity takes courage and patience. Colleagues who are People of Color or Native people do not need to educate their white peers on the racial atrocities they have been subjected to because of systemic inequities. Instead, white individuals in leadership must learn about themselves to address the inequities in their organizations. How do white women educate themselves about antiracism and enact leadership behaviors to disrupt inequities and support the growth of other educators and school staff? Understanding the stories of white women leading for equity in their contexts further informs my journey of leading for equity in educational settings.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the focus of practice, presented an emergent conceptual framework, described the significance of the study, and included literature to unpack terms used throughout the PAR study. In Chapter 2, I delve into a comprehensive literature review of the historical, political, and sociocultural laws and actions specific to the North Carolina context, the principles of equity leadership, and ideologies that white women bring that complicate and strengthen the work as an equity leader. Chapter 3 details the methodology of the study, the context, and participants, including limitations, and the research design, including the cycles of

inquiry. In Chapter 4, I outline the Pre-cycle data collection. In Chapter 5, I present the stories of the women, highlighting their voices in the process. I describe two more cycles of inquiry in Chapters 6 and 7. In Chapters 4, 6, and 7, I include an analysis of artifacts used for data collection, the process of coding and examining evidence to inform each cycle of inquiry, and the findings of each cycle. In Chapters 7 and 8, I discuss the findings, provide next steps and potential opportunities for future research studies, and discuss my leadership learning.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

You cannot fix a problem until and unless you can see it. (Wilkerson, 2020, p. 16)

The literature review begins by examining the context of North Carolina. The seeds of inequity were planted in North Carolina's past and many of these "seeds" continue to grow. I present some historical, political, and socio-cultural contingencies affecting educational contexts. Next, I describe the characteristics and considerations of school leaders who lead for the purpose of disrupting inequities in their school settings. Finally, I weave in literature specific to the intersecting identities of the participants in this study as white women. The literature provides a scaffold to begin to understand the complex stories of white women leading for equity in their school and district settings.

A North Carolina Landscape

Understanding the historical, political, and socio-cultural framing of whiteness and patriarchy in North Carolina sets the backdrop for the complicated context which school leaders face in this landscape. The deliberate actions taken to sustain and perpetuate white supremacy and oppress People of Color and Native peoples are often not included in school textbooks or taught in public schools or universities (Biewen, 2017; Butler, 2020; Gilmore, 2019; Tyson, 2006; Wise, 2012; Zucchino, 2020). Structures of patriarchy linger from the past and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated gender inequities in employment, earnings, health and wellness, and political participation (Edwards, 1991; Shaw & Tesfaselassie, 2020). North Carolina school leaders who lead teachers, schools, and communities must consider the ways in which unexamined history in their communities and current realities are barriers toward equity (Roegman, 2017; Wilkerson, 2020).

Historical Frame—Intentional Inequities in Education and Politics

North Carolina's history is riddled with examples of intimidation, violence, and duplicitous policies and laws used by whites in power to keep Black individuals, organizations, and communities from thriving. By the late 1800s, the promise of earning an education, owning a business, and being elected in local government was available in North Carolina Black communities. Unfortunately, the scourge of white supremacy was not destroyed by the Civil War in the 1800s or the 1900s Civil Rights Movement. The seeds of white supremacy culture were planted in the history of North Carolina and continue to flourish in its educational and political institutions of today.

Education

An education in North Carolina was equated to freedom and an opportunity for prosperity in the 19th century, yet white supremacy endured (Gilmore, 2019; Roy & Ford, 2019). Whites enacted anti-Black legislation across the South prohibiting teaching slaves to read or write, but Union occupation during the Civil War provided a safe place for Black communities to open schools and thrive as free citizens (Roy & Ford, 2019). In the years after the war, a fervor for education and learning in Black communities was fueled by emancipation. In the late 1800s, Black women were offered more opportunities for higher education than white women, whose opportunities were limited to motherhood or finishing school (Gilmore, 2019). In 1868, the bi-racial and progressive Republican party officially adopted a state tax to fund a universal public school system for Blacks and whites (Roy & Ford, 2019). The tax code shifted around the turn of the century and allocated funds toward white schools. Then state superintendent, James Y. Joyner, suggested districts “quietly manage” their funds so “the negroes will give no trouble about it,” thus perpetuating unequal funding based on race into the 20th century (Roy & Ford,

2019, “Rise of the Democrats and the Advent of Jim Crow” section). Upholding white supremacy through unequal school funding and anti-Black discrimination continues today.

Visible changes in education touted as improvement often obscure negative consequences held in place by systemic structures for teachers, families, and students who are People of Color. “Because of its ability to successfully shroud the harm of its Black residents, North Carolina’s racism was often far more insidious” (Butler, 2020, p. 3). More than 3,000 Black educators, mostly women, lost their jobs to white teachers during the 1960-70s desegregation shift, under the premise that white schools were “better,” without acknowledgment that a lack of resources contributed to inequities (Roy & Ford, 2019). The Leandro Supreme Court Case in North Carolina was filed by students and families in low-wealth districts who claimed their children did not have the same opportunities for education as in other districts (Hoke County BOE v. State of NC, 2022). In the 25 years since the case was filed, the spending gap has only widened between rich and poor school districts (Childress, 2019). While the Leandro case is not focused on race but on the structures which provide funding to schools, it could be argued that race is relevant based on the racial demographics of the districts (Roy & Ford, 2019). The reprehensible reality of “Two North Carolinas” was founded on white supremacy and rooted in structures maintaining intentional inequities for the benefits of white people (McColl, 2015; Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2020a, 2020b). Inequities purposefully perpetuated by whites in power for their own benefit is even more evident in the political history of North Carolina.

Politics

North Carolina history is peppered with stories of voter intimidation, violence, and the redrawing of political districts for the advantage of white candidates. Efforts to deliberately reduce the Black male vote were especially effective in eastern North Carolina where Blacks

were sometimes in the majority (McColl, 2015). The 1898 Wilmington, NC, *coup d'état*, the only successful government upheaval in the United States, is one example of the "campaign of terror" used by white supremacists in North Carolina to devastate prospering Black communities (Randle, 2020). A *White Declaration of Independence* was issued; more than 100 Black citizens in Wilmington were murdered (some estimates put this number at 300 murdered); and Black-owned businesses were burned, forcing most of Wilmington's Black population to flee (Randle, 2020; Tyson, 2006; Zucchino, 2020). "After the coup, no Black citizen served in public office in Wilmington until 1972. It wasn't until 1992 that a Black citizen was elected to Congress" (Randle, 2020, "The Coup Left Lasting Scars" section). A government entrenched in white supremacy is less visible, but still evident in today's North Carolina.

Recent elections have sparked debate and divide across the entire country, with North Carolina citizens, once again, in "the paradox of Tar Heel politics" (Christensen, 2008). Lawmakers continue to push for voter suppression measures through voter identification laws targeting Black voters with surgical precision (Corriher, 2021). The ploys to disenfranchise Black voters have shifted over the years from observable violence and intimidation to underhanded measures. Gerrymandering, the redrawing of state districts to benefit a political party, negatively impacts Black voters and women (Shaw & Tesfaselassie, 2020). The current landscape in North Carolina may not be overtly based on white supremacy, but surreptitious tactics are still at use by people in power (often white males) to hold positions of power and privilege.

The history of education and politics in North Carolina sets the stage for past inequities to continue, and one could argue that this is the case in many parts of the country. In the next section, I present how this dilemma is especially challenging due to the Southern hospitality

culture of North Carolina and how these perceived "niceties" create barriers to progress in conversations about racial and gender inequities.

Sociocultural Frame: Southern Hospitality

From sweet tea to front porch swings, the North Carolina landscape has a reputation for hospitality. The duality of politics, of urban and rural living, of mountains to sea, continues in the meaning of North Carolina "hospitality." Huler (2012) suggests that Southern hospitality has a dark side, and the graciousness of North Carolinians is both armor and weapon. "It may cover our greatest sins and enable our most manipulative behaviors" (Huler, 2012, para. 18). This "hospitality" shrouds the ever-present currents of racism and sexism in both the past and present. "North Carolinians recognized the importance of optics and were very much vested in maintaining a sophisticated system of racial hierarchy in order to imbue the perception that they were the New South" (Butler, 2020, p. 8). Wilkerson (2020) posits that we must be able to see a problem before we can fix it. Those in positions of power and privilege can use the spirit of "hospitality" to obstruct or avoid conversations about race and gender inequities.

White fragility describes the defensive reactions many white people have when our advantages, viewpoints, and opinions are questioned or challenged (DiAngelo, 2018). For example, words such as *white supremacy* and *racism* are rarely spoken in the context of North Carolina's southern "hospitality" and may result in the emotional discomfort of educators unprepared to discuss these concepts (Teaching Tolerance, 2020). Understanding whiteness and how I and other white people benefit from a racial hierarchy is a psychological issue. Wilkerson (2020) labels the racial hierarchy in America a caste system, comparable to those in India and Nazi Germany, and the South as the place where this "caste system was formalized and most brutally enforced" (p. 29). Discussions about race-based inequities, racism, structures that

support white supremacy, and how to direct actions and funding to impact these structures are rarely had in schools of the American South. "We avoid such conversations in schools because it could stir things up that we're unprepared to handle" (Wormeli, 2016, p. 19), yet school leaders are in fact uniquely positioned to create spaces in their buildings for these important conversations to occur.

The North Carolina landscape provides a foundation to understand why school leaders, specifically white school leaders, may have difficulty leading for equity. Entrenched belief systems, historical policies and laws, funding inequities in schools, social norms, and identity contingencies all add to the complex backdrop facing North Carolina educational leaders. Next, I offer a summary of the literature examining school leaders who lead for equity. The journey toward creating antiracist institutions is long and arduous, yet the time to begin is now.

Equity Leadership: A Journey

> *Depending on our identity markers and life experiences, we also have different things to learn. Learning about white supremacy and racism will be a lifelong commitment for all of us. There's no level of 'wokeness' at which we graduate or retire.* (Aguilar, 2020, p. 78)

The work of leading for equity is challenging, emotional, and never finished. School and district leaders who lead for equity need support in multiple ways. My short experience as a school administrator after 18 years as a teacher left me overwhelmed, exhausted, and discouraged. School administration is a lonely job. I wanted to know how both current and future school leaders can equip themselves and find support from colleagues to face the hard work of leading for equity in public schools. A global pandemic, the cries of "Black Lives Matter" ringing from the streets, and an economic crisis illuminating racial disparities, all highlight the need for change in the systems of our country. School leaders have an opportunity to lead for equity, but they cannot do this alone. As I mentioned in the previous section, the context of

North Carolina adds to the complexities. Equipping equity leaders with the foundation, provisions, and sustenance to continue and succeed begins with understanding the importance of this role. In this section, I present literature about the importance of equity leadership in education, the importance of building relational trust between members in the school community, various approaches to equity leadership, and the recognition that white leaders must approach equity leadership as humble learners. Finally, as the quote from Aguilar expresses, equity leadership is not only a commitment to learning and a life-long journey but a journey to begin and continue without delay.

Educational Leadership *is* Equity Leadership

Calls for rethinking schooling and leadership are growing louder, fueled in part by the educational shifts necessitated by the global pandemic. Historical inequities perpetuated in school systems have only been exacerbated by closing schools and moving to digital instruction in many public schools (Rincones et al., 2021). Galloway and Ishimaru (2017) propose 10 high-leverage practices leaders for equity can use which include constructing and enacting an equity vision, supervising for equitable teaching and learning, and developing organizational leadership for equity. Roegman's (2017) study on leading for equity illuminates the importance of keeping equity at the forefront despite the constant movement and fluidity of school contexts. Leaders must always look through an equity lens. Elena Aguilar (2020) states "every conversation I have in and about schools is a conversation about equity" (p. 9). School leaders need to rethink their roles as leaders for equity, mighty warriors for social justice, and equity warriors (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Leverett, 2002).

Educational leaders must create spaces to rethink the purpose of schooling and engage teachers and communities on how to better meet diverse students' needs (Rincones et al., 2021).

As schools shifted to digital platforms through the pandemic, the role of teacher expanded to include other adults in children's lives. Illich (1972) put forth the idea that "things, models, peers, and elders" (p. 76) could contain all the resources needed for learning. How do school leaders shift conversations about schooling and learning to focus on the assets of the students and families they serve and the role of the school to support student learning? As Safir and Dugan (2021) ask, "What would it look like to let go of all of our assumptions and rebuild the system from the bottom up, from the *student* up?" (p. 2). This begins with a leader's ability to forge and maintain relationships between the people in the school and community (Fullan, 2002). Relational trust in each other and in leadership is necessary to have honest dialogue and move toward a common goal.

Importance of Relational Trust

Relational trust is encouraged or discouraged in the moment-by-moment interactions between people in an organization, beginning with a leader's behaviors. Relational trust, deemed a core resource for school reform by Bryk and Schneider (2002), is grounded in respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Relational trust is at the core of Freire's concept of "education as the practice of freedom," not domination, and is the foundation of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogies (Freire, 1970, p. 18; Hammond, 2015; Khalifa, 2018). It is imperative for a leader to facilitate an organization where people trust each other.

Leaders Set the Standard

Leaders set the standard for how people are treated on a school campus and "play a significant role in establishing the norms and structures that support teacher professionalism" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014, p. 73). A high-leverage practice employed by successful

equity leaders is to model behavior that aligns with their core values and respects the humanity of diverse students, staff, and families (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). School leaders who take time to build trusting relationships with members of their school and community reap benefits in other areas. There are correlations between principal trustworthiness, leadership behaviors, and student achievement (Aguilar, 2018; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Grissom et al., 2021; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014). Exemplary principals move beyond relationships and examine how privilege, power, and oppression influence the treatment of others in their care (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). As goes the leader, so goes the school.

Social interactions between groups in a school encourage or discourage relational trust. The level of relational trust in a school environment is characterized by how teachers interact with students, teachers interact with other teachers, teachers interact with parents, and finally how the principal interacts with all these groups. “Relational trust is forged in day-to-day social exchanges” and grows over time (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 139). A genuine sense of being heard, seen, and understood characterizes relational trust; therefore, school leaders must model genuine listening (Safir & Dugan, 2021). Opportunities to express one’s opinion respectfully and feel valued can contribute to relational trust and connectedness among staff, even when disagreements arise (Bryk et al., 2010). The work of equity leadership cannot be sustained in a school where the adults do not trust each other. Leaders must consider and develop their abilities to bring people together and create trusting spaces.

Humanize Learning Through Connections

Schools are complex systems with many variables for change and leaders must co-create a learning culture in a school (Fullan, 1993). School leaders can explore research on school reform, change theory, improvement science, transformative leadership, instructional leadership,

cognitive coaching, and the list goes on. With all the options on how to create learning cultures for school improvement, leaders must remember that leading schools involves multifaceted human exchanges which must be grounded in trust (Aguilar, 2018; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Fullan, 1993).

A growing base of literature highlights non-traditional or alternative views to leadership with a foundation in relationships and inclusivity, such as indigenous thought and practice (Ah Nee-Benham & Napier, 2002; Khalifa, 2018). Ah Nee-Benham and Cooper (1998) present narratives of diverse women in school leadership, many of whom had been marginalized in their own schooling experience, but who used these personal experiences to inspire their own ability to create spaces of learning and growth in schools. “Shared narratives cannot be created without dialogue, and community cannot be created without a sense of inclusion and connection” (Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998, p. 149). Developing an understanding of our own identity and how that identity contributes and connects to our environment and community is what Herman (2013) describes as our *truth quest*. According to Herman, this quest involves helping each other recover our core humanity. Actions, policies, or procedures which dehumanize or devalue any person or group in a school take away from the collective ability to learn from and with each other and sustain a learning culture (Guajardo et al., 2016; Livingstone Smith, 2011; Wilkerson, 2020). School leaders must recognize who feels small, othered, objectified, or dehumanized in their school and create space and time to include these people and groups in the school community (Bennett, 2020).

“Emerging research on improving equity in educational organizations suggests that leadership is critical” (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2021, p. 471). Once a leader recognizes their responsibility to lead for equity, to build trusting relationships, and to cultivate a culture where

people thrive, a leader must confront and disrupt the perpetual inequities in the school's existing state of affairs.

Disrupting Inequities: Various Approaches

School leaders and educators have an immense responsibility to the people in their care. A school leader may recognize the importance of their role and commit to creating a learning environment where the focus is relational trust, inclusivity, and connection, but research shows that this is not enough. The school leader must dedicate themself to identifying and disrupting current inequities in the school (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2021; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Theoharis, 2010). Table 1 outlines different approaches to leading for equity that have surfaced in the research. Leaders are crucial in the process of leading more just, antiracist institutions and, consequently, each leader must decide the best approach for an equity agenda in their context (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2021).

The characterizations of equity approaches presented in Table 1 are not comprehensive and are offered as a starting point to summarize the literature about the various ways leaders approach equity. Whether a leader takes a "lead from the front" champion approach, a "lift from beneath" supportive approach, or a combination of multiple approaches, a central theme is prioritizing care for students by disrupting and interrupting status quo policies, practices, and ways of thinking in public schools (Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998; Hammond, 2015; Radd et al., 2021; Safir & Dugan, 2021).

No one individual knows enough to disrupt all inequities in a school, and long-term positive change requires a leader to reflect, collaborate, connect, and communicate with the community they serve, even as they understand that some school staff and community members may be resistant to change (Fullan, 1993; Marris, 1974; McDonald, 1996). Sustaining change

Table 1

Approaches to Lead for Equity

Characterization	Description	Supporting Literature
The Transparent Equity Champion (Radd, et al., 2021)	Takes an explicit, strong equity stance Works persistently to increase self-awareness of equity and the awareness of others Provides clear and transparent action steps and pairs clear expectations for the school community Disrupts dominance and decenters whiteness and privilege Gives up the right to comfort in a position of power	(Radd et al., 2021) (Rigby & Tredway, 2015) (Theoharis, 2010) (Tilghman-Havens, 2020) (Okun, 2021)
The Equity Coach (Aguilar, 2020)	Takes a side-by-side approach to consistently advancing equity Works to cultivate resilience, improve reflective abilities, and build skills in others Provides guidance for others and models equitable practices Builds capacity in others Coaches others to see how equity issues show up in micro-level classroom practices and macro-level systems	(Aguilar, 2020) (Radd et al., 2021) (Aguilar, 2018) (Fullan, 1993) (Rigby & Tredway, 2015)
The Tempered Radical (Meyerson, 2004)	Engages in small battles and leverages small wins to push against the status quo Works to make subtle, incremental changes Provides researched-based articles to improve current-school practices Begins change in a small, networked improvement community Manages heated emotions to fuel an agenda for equity "Picks a hill to die on" when leading for equity in oppressive organizations	(Meyerson, 2004) (DeWitt, 2012) (Theoharis, 2010) (Bryk et al., 2017) (Ryan & Tuters, 2017)

Table 1 (continued)

Characterization	Description	Related Literature
The Love Warrior (Doyle, 2016)	Takes a collective approach to lead for equity by lifting others	(Doyle, 2016)
	Works to flip the paradigm of school to be more student supportive and culturally responsive than adult-comforting	(Leverett, 2002) (Pucci, 2017)
	Redefines leadership to equate power with connection and relationships	(Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998)
	Advances others' values and beliefs about equity with a commitment to care	(Ah Nee-Benham & Napier, 2002)

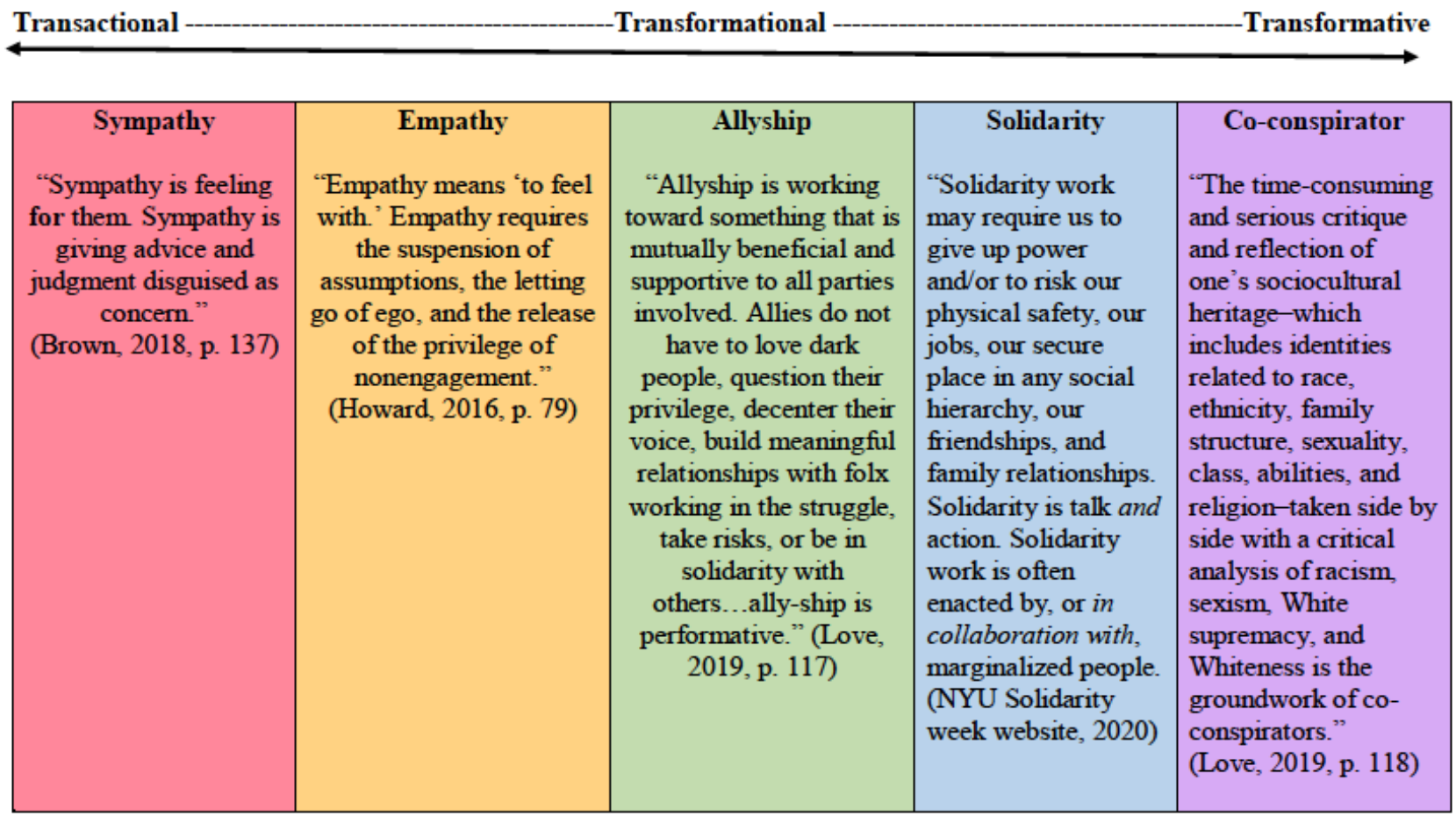
takes time and is a complex process requiring re-culturing, which Fullan (2001) describes as a contact sport. Because change is challenging, creating a learning organization where everyone is encouraged and required to grow is a key component in a journey of leading for equity.

Creating a Learning Organization

Equity leaders must include meaningful action as they contend with the challenge of leading for equity and creating space for stories and inclusion. Leaders are responsible for creating a learning organization, a place where everyone is curious to "investigate, listen, ask questions and take risks" (Aguilar, 2018, p. 243). This encourages the humanization of leadership where a school leader can be vulnerable, have honest conversations, and give and receive constructive feedback (Bennett, 2020; Brown, 2012; Rincones et al., 2021). School leaders must recognize how to consciously move forward when disrupting inequities even when there are setbacks. This is especially important for white school leaders who may not be aware of their own privilege and first must disrupt internalized white supremacy culture thought processes (Okun, 2021). Leaders must recognize and acknowledge that their own learning about leadership can come from nontraditional sources, atypical for white supremacy culture and norms.

Transactional to Transformative

Critical consciousness is what Freire (1970) describes as the ability to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and act (*praxis*) against injustices. Quadros-Meis (2021) presents a culturally responsive school leaders' continuum in which becoming authentic co-conspirators is a process that moves from transactional to transformative (see Figure 3). "Individuals must engage as learners before they act as allies, advocates, and activists" for change in schools or society (Bruce & McKee, 2020, p. 51). How do school leaders move both themselves and others forward on a continuum of growth? The research suggests that leaders



Note. This continuum, developed by Quadros-Meis (2021), from her unpublished dissertation.

Figure 3. Culturally responsive school leaders' continuum: From transactional to transformative.

begin with advancing intersectional self-awareness and commit to learning with openness and humility throughout the rest of their career (Mosley et al., 2021; Radd et al., 2021). Quadros-Meis presented this framework for working with Black youth, and I posit that white school leaders for equity must reflect upon their own relationship with historically marginalized groups in their own context and consider how to consciously move toward being a co-conspirator (Love, 2019).

For a white person, a learning journey about systemic racism and toward critical consciousness is like the trajectory of an asymptote—a line continuously approaching a given point that it will never reach (see Figure 4). White school leaders awakening to the injustices rooted in school policies and practices feel a sense of urgency to do something now, but leaders should be cautioned to remember that equity work, both personally and in schools, is a marathon, not a sprint (Aguilar, 2020; Radd et al., 2021). School leaders who plan professional development around race and equity work risk creating circumstances which are ineffective or could lead to voyeurism or othering, creating experiences of racial trauma for People of Color or Native people (Dugan, 2021; Mosely et al., 2021; Tucker-Smith, 2021). A synthesis of literature on culturally responsive school leadership suggests a combination of learning, reflection, and action is necessary in social justice leadership (Dugan, 2021; Khalifa et al., 2016; Tucker-Smith, 2021).

Fear to Growth

Dissuading some white school leaders from acting is fear (Dugan, 2021; Saad, 2020; Stewart, 2014). White school leaders must contend with their own emotions when they talk about race and inequities in their school context (DiAngelo, 2011). Moving from “safe to brave” spaces is an important concept to help understand, challenge, and stand in solidarity against the

Note. This trajectory toward critical consciousness (asymptote) was presented in a white affinity space by facilitators for I.D.E.A. (n.d.).

Figure 4. The journey toward critical consciousness.

structures of power, privilege, oppression, and white supremacy existing in schools (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Saad, 2020). The terms “antiracist” and “antiracism” are explained by Kendi (2019) and encourage humans not to label each other with these terms but rather to explore how it is our thoughts and actions that can be either racist or antiracist. “If we are not actively anti-racist in our behaviors and language, then we are maintaining whiteness. There is no middle ground” (Apgar & Jewett, 2020, slide 13). Figure 5 depicts a framework for understanding a journey of moving from fear toward growth in becoming more antiracist (Ibrahim, 2020a, 2020b; Kendi, 2019). School leaders must understand how their own identities, beliefs, values, and goals intersect with those who they serve, while simultaneously taking time to amplify and listen to diverse voices in their schools and communities. Leaders are responsible for creating what Aguilar (2018) calls a learning organization, a place where everyone is curious to “investigate, listen, ask questions and take risks” (p. 243). Demystifying equity leadership, embracing discomfort in discussions about race, and reinvigorating schools as places of learning helps white school leaders move from fear to growth (Aguilar, 2018; DiAngelo, 2011; Gay, 2018; Kendi, 2019; Radd et al., 2021; Saad, 2020). Leaders must be learners on a journey of equity leadership.

Educational leadership *is* equity leadership. White school leaders must embark on a learning journey with humility and courage to understand the impacts of the oppressive policies and practices affecting their school community. Moving forward on a continuum from fear to growth, from transactional to transformational, guides school leaders in recognizing various approaches to pursue a more just path and a more student-centered school. School leaders must understand how their own identities, beliefs, values, and goals intersect with those whom they serve while taking time to amplify and listen to diverse voices in their schools and communities. Next, the focus of equity leadership is narrowed to investigate women who lead.

Note. Framework by Ibrahim (2020a, 2020b), inspired by the work of Kendi (2019). In this framework, Ibrahim suggests that a willingness to learn can move individuals out of the fear zone and toward becoming antiracist.

Figure 5. A framework for becoming antiracist.

Women Who Lead Educational Settings

> *This sad reality is that while white women are an oppressed group, they still wield more power than any other group of women—including the power to oppress both men and women of color.*
>
> –Mikki Kendall (2021), *Hood Feminism*

> *Domination and control have become synonymous with power, but power does not have to come at the expense of others; it does not have to oppress in order to express.* (Lesser, 2020, p. 105)

White women hold multi-faceted identities defined by race, ethnicity, gender, social-economic status, age, sexual orientation, and religion. Within the context of this study, the duality of race and gender generates the most challenges and yet the greatest opportunity for growth. As members of the oppressed gender, some women leaders hold a unique position and must contend with structures of patriarchy and develop a "double consciousness or double vision" to account for these intersecting identities (Nakama, 2005, p. 171). The ideologies and values of white women can both complicate and strengthen their work as school leaders for equity.

Cultures of Domination

Pateman (1988) and Mills (1997), together (2007) and individually, outline social contract theory and the ways in which early philosophers continue to influence the current beliefs in modern civil society. In *The Sexual Contract*, they stated that women were considered less valuable than men, and this belief was the foundation of the patriarchal societies in England and America (Pateman, 1988). Mills (1997) states that the sexual contract laid the path for *The Racial Contract*, which ranks whiteness as higher than any other race; this contract influences power relations in past and modern civil societies. Together, Pateman and Mills (2007) agree that early philosophers set the foundation for an American system in which males hold and wield

power over females, and whites hold and wield power over other races. bell hooks (2013) states this definitively:

> Imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. This phrase is useful precisely because it does not prioritize one system over another but rather offers us a way to think about the Interlocking Systems that work together to uphold and maintain cultures of domination. (p. 4)

White women have been both the oppressors and the oppressed throughout history. White women must consider their intersecting identities when understanding their role in leadership positions.

White women have used their power in both intentional and unintentional ways to wield power. White women intentionally excluded women of color for their own advantage during the feminist movement (hooks, 2000). From Audre Lorde's letter to Mary Daly to Ruby Hamad's 2020 essay, *White Tears/Brown Scars*, these authors present the idea of performative victimhood and posit that white women's visual signs of discomfort, including tears, are about power, not weakness (Boshier, 2020; Hamad, 2020; Lorde, 1984). Historical atrocities have been committed by white men to protect "their" women, especially in the case of southern white elite women (Edwards, 1991; Hamad, 2020). White women leaders must contend with their own discomfort and emotional insecurities to ensure they avoid what Audre Lorde (1984) calls "destructive guilt and defensiveness." Power must be used to move toward courageous conversations about race, leading to more equitable schools for historically marginalized students and families (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Doing Power Differently

Feminist theorists posit that women lead with an *ethic of care*, rather than the traditional masculine *ethic of justice* (Aguilar, 2018; Gilligan, 2014; Nakama, 2005). While each individual woman's story is exceptional and nuanced based on many different identity contingencies, multiple empirical studies do suggest women lead differently than men (Ah Nee-Behnam & Cooper, 1998; Blackmore, 1999; Marshall, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 2003). Lesser (2020) proposes that "women still share many similarities—some from nature, some from nurture, and some from the wounds of patriarchy" (p. 13). Lesser (2020) suggests the exclusion of women from traditional power hierarchies has encouraged them to lead differently. She compares patriarchal "old-story power" with alternate ways to lead (see Table 2). Ironically, alternate ways to lead include vulnerability, collaboration, and leading with a vision of inclusivity and connection, and are the same as traits supported by the research about effective leaders for equity (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2021; Khalifa, 2018; Radd et al., 2021).

Just as white supremacy culture is often invisible to white people, patriarchal structures can be invisible to women (Gilligan, 2014; Gilmore, 2019; hooks, 2013; Mendez-Morse, 2003). Negative stereotype threats affect women's self-efficacy and performance (Bergeron et al., 2006; Steele, 2010). Oluo (2020) proposes that women and People of Color are more likely to be hired to leadership positions in organizations that are already at risk and are then seen as less effective leaders (when compared with white men). Old story power characteristics can be synonymous with the toxic leadership characteristics of authority, domination, and the silencing of opposing voices (Armitage, 2015; Lesser, 2020). Women in leadership positions must understand how patriarchal structures affect them and must dispute voices that detract from the important responsibilities of leading for equity. In the current educational climate, white women must step

Table 2

Old-Story Power Characteristics Compared to Alternative Ways to Lead

Old-Story Power	Doing Power Differently
Strong/weak hierarchy model	Partnership model
Authoritarian	Interactive
Collaborates competitively	Collaborates connectively
Values individualism, fortitude, and action	Values relationship, empathy, and communication
Withholds praise/encouragement	Generous with praise and encouragement
Denies one's own mistakes and vulnerability	Transparent about mistakes and vulnerability
Dominates, interrupts, overrides	Listens, processes, includes

Note. This information is from the Lesser (2020) research and "especially from the work of Barbara Annis, CEO of the Gender Intelligence Group, and from Riane Eislr, author and cultural historian" (p. 167).

into leadership roles in ways that disrupt traditional hierarchical leadership styles, push against gender roles, challenge white supremacy culture practices and policies, elevate the voices and concerns of those previously silenced by the norms of whiteness, and advocate for the school children in their care. Schools must move beyond arguing the opinions of extremes and instead elevate the voices of those "who demand that we identify the political choice being made whenever schools continue inequitable practices" (Marshall, 2003, p. 216).

Summary

Wilkerson (2020) presents an old house as an analogy for tackling systemic racism. Although we may not be able to see a water leak, the peeling of paint and the buckling of a floor are indications of that leak. "You cannot fix a problem until and unless you can see it" (Wilkerson, 2020, p. 16). I presented the literature in Chapter 2 to see some of the challenges that white women leading for equity in a North Carolina context may face. I presented an overview of historical, political, and socio-cultural complexities that school leaders face in a North Carolina landscape and the seeds of inequities still growing. I presented an overview of literature about equity leadership and various approaches to disrupt inequities and I identified literature specific to the intersecting identities of white women as both oppressed and oppressors. People of Color, including Black, Latinx, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, Native peoples, and all historically marginalized people deserve co-conspirators in schools who shine a light on systemic racism and disrupt inequities in schools. "America is an old house…and any further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands" (Wilkerson, 2020, pp. 15-16).

In Chapter 3, I discuss the qualitative research process and methodologies, research questions, and action research cycles. I introduce the participants and outline data collection and

analysis processes. Additionally, I share limitations, internal and external validity standards, confidentiality, and ethical considerations for the participatory action research project.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

Leading for equity in schools and districts requires leaders to simultaneously provide opportunities for "reflection and dialogue about racism and oppression as well as joint work to construct and enact theories of change that challenge institutional 'common sense' and transform both the structures and culture of schools toward justice" (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2021, p. 496). In the previous chapters, I explained that the work begins internally with deep reflection and continues with adopting and articulating an equity stance (Khalifa, 2018; Radd et al., 2021; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). In addition, I described the North Carolina landscape as one with unjust historical, political, and sociocultural laws and actions often unseen nor explicitly discussed due to Southern "hospitality" (Gilmore, 2019; Huler, 2012; Roy & Ford, 2019). I focus specifically on white women educational leaders because I am a white woman and "schools are also staffed by primarily white middle-class educators with limited lived experience of racial inequities" (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2021, p. 471). As a white educational leader, "one either allows racial inequities to persevere . . .or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist" (Kendi, 2019, p. 9). In this ethnographic/autoethnographic study, I explore the focus of practice guided by this overarching question: How do white women embody antiracism to lead for equity in North Carolina public schools?

Through this study, I wanted to understand how white women in district and/or school leadership roles share their experiences and build individual and collective capacity to understand, stand up, and take risks to disrupt inequities based on race. As I transitioned to school leadership administration after 18 years as a teacher, I observed and participated in the ways injustices in schools are overlooked, ignored, and perpetuated through fear, insecurity, silence, dismissal, and/or inexperience. Often, school leaders do not take action to broaden their

mindsets, nor do they necessarily know how to lead equity-driven change in their schools (Aguilar, 2020; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2021; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Safir & Dugan, 2021). Informed by the ecologies of knowing self, organization, and community, school leaders begin with self-identity work, recognize the action spaces and contexts that they affect, and value assets while confronting challenges in their wider communities (Guajardo et al., 2016). Learning how white women lead for equity in diverse school organizations presents learning opportunities on a journey to build antiracist institutions (Kendi, 2019; Khalifa, 2018; Margolin, 2015; Tippett, 2021b). The theory of action for this study is: *If* we, as white women, understand how we embody antiracism, *then* we can better understand how to be leaders of and for equity.

In this chapter, I discuss the methodologies, rooted in activist consciousness, of participatory action research (PAR), ethnography, and autoethnography (Adams et al., 2015; Eisenhart, 2018; Hale, 2017; Herr & Anderson, 2014; hunter et al., 2013; Wolcott, 2002). I invited five educational leaders to participate in a white women's affinity group with the purpose of forwarding our antiracist growth and equity leadership. Over the course of a year, I collected sources of data from artifacts from their participation in group sessions utilizing community learning exchange protocols, meeting notes, field notes from observations of participants in their contexts, and interviews of participants. In iterative cycles of inquiry, I analyzed these qualitative data sources to determine codes, categories, emergent themes, and eventually, findings (Saldaña, 2016). In this chapter, I outline the research design and process, describe participants, summarize data collection and analysis, and discuss the study considerations of limitations, validity, and confidentiality and ethics.

Qualitative Research Process

The purpose of this study is to understand our individual identities and our collective

identity as white women educational leaders, by moving from fear to growth as the foundation of embodying antiracism (Ibrahim, 2020a; Kendi, 2019). Then I wanted to understand how we embodied our roles. This study informed the perspectives and actions of white women leaders and contributes to the research by telling the stories of white women leading for equity, adding to the growing body of research on social justice in schools (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016; Quadros-Meis, 2021; Radd et al., 2021). The grim reality is that racial equity in schools is far from being resolved; currently, educators are striving yet struggling to learn more about how to achieve equity in schools. In describing the qualitative research methodology of participatory action research (PAR), I focus on action research with an activist stance, ethnography and autoethnography, and cycles of inquiry.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research (PAR) is a broad term that describes a research methodology integrating previous studies and research, action, and participation from members of the same community who are affected by the research (Eisenhart, 2018). I identified a focus of practice and wanted to understand and learn more about the problem in a specific context through the knowledge and lived experiences of those closest to the issue. The white southern women educational leaders expressed a deep interest in the focus of practice. I invited five women to be Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR) to understand how we enact antiracist leadership. Eisenhart (2018) describes how other persons contribute to participatory action research and states that PAR is a type of research that focuses on social problems identified by study participants and "on engaging participants as co-researchers (or 'partners') to study and address their problems" (Eisenhart, 2018, p. 164). I committed to consciousness-raising, among both researcher and study participants, regarding power differences and implications for the

problems faced and the solutions that are possible (Eisenhart, 2018). As a group of white women leading for equity in North Carolina public schools, we engaged in an inquiry process. In other words, I worked "with insiders to an organization or community" not conducting a study "to or on them. It is a reflective process" (Herr & Anderson, 2014, p. 3).

As a white woman currently serving as the program coordinator for a grant that supports school leaders in equity-driven leadership, I was positioned to work with other school leaders on a journey toward creating and sustaining antiracist institutions. This PAR study required time, patience, humility, and courage, but the PAR project process inspired hope and possibility, which are key components for school leaders to possess in today's educational climate (hunter et al., 2013). An activist stance as a researcher was useful in the PAR process.

Activist PAR and the Role of Praxis

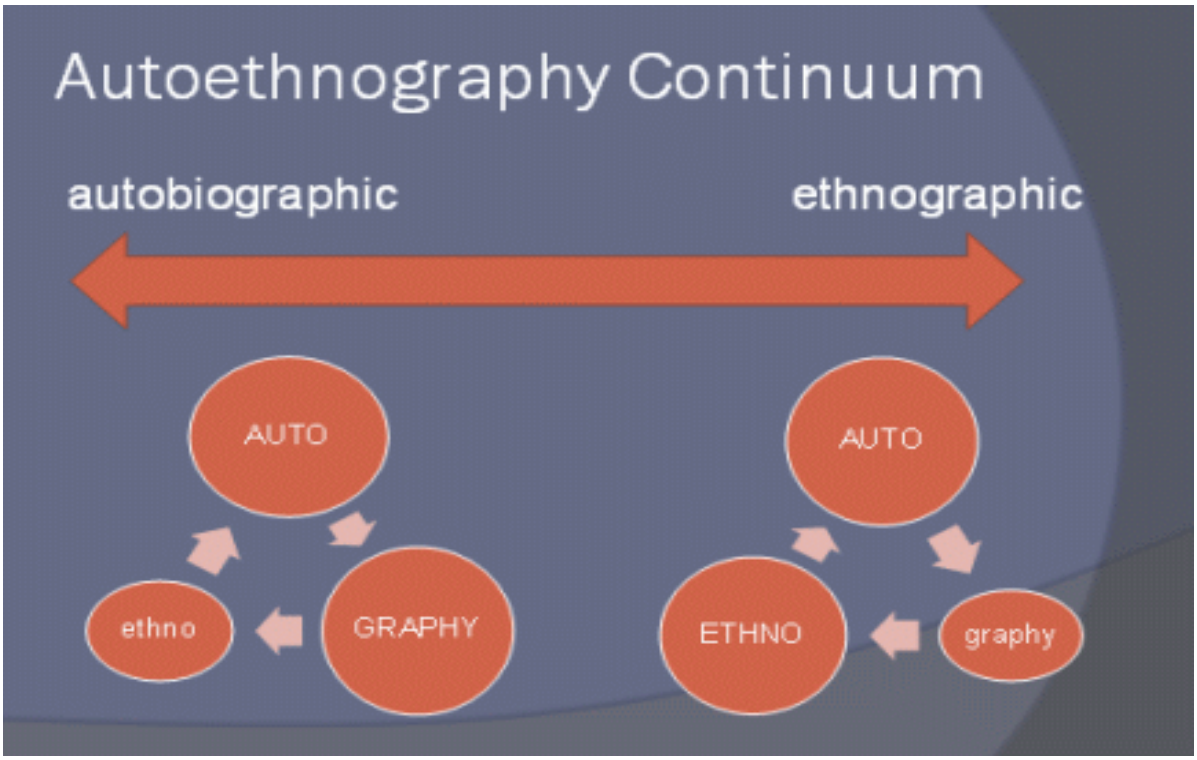
This study aimed to uncover, confront, and understand the conflicts, contradictions, and ethical dilemmas school leaders face in leading for equity, an important proposition in activist research (Hale, 2017). An activist research agenda is one that focuses on social change and connect to social action and social movements. In North Carolina, where racial inequities are often unspoken or overlooked, a PAR with an activist stance, termed an emancipatory PAR, supported leaders to challenge the *status quo* in public schools (hunter et al., 2013). Activist researchers cross boundaries, connect research and activities, and take a stance of critical involvement (Lee, 2019). Freire (1970) argues that it is not enough for people to come together to learn and understand their social realities, but the knowledge must then result in action in their environments. This combination of deep reflection based on a generative understanding of how and when to act and with whom is what Freire (1970) terms *praxis*. I, with the CPR group, used this type of generative reflection to act in our contexts.

The study participants engaged in critical self-reflection activities related to racial and gender identities to enact leadership actions leading toward more equitable school settings for historically marginalized students and student groups. To capture the stories of the women in this study as they engaged in the process of reflection and action, I utilized ethnographical and autoethnographical methodology.

Ethnography and Autoethnography

Ethnography and autoethnography require the lead researcher to zoom in and out to view the big picture and small details while acting as both a storyteller and scientist (Given, 2008). An ethnographical study seeks "to uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular work settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation" (Van Maanem, 1979, p. 540). The study participants were school and district leaders, and my role was to understand the focus of practice from an *emic* perspective (Given, 2008). "The emic perspective—the insider's or native's perspective of reality—is at the heart of most ethno-graphic research" (Given, 2008, p. 289).

Autoethnography is a self-critical and reflective methodology in which the researcher is a subject in the study. Research methodologies often require researchers to resist subjectivity, but autoethnographical studies include the perspectives of the researcher and encourage vulnerability and connection between the researcher and other participants. Figure 6 represents a flexible continuum of autoethnography in which the researcher may emphasize the autobiographic or writing more about self (*auto*) in the research process (*graphy*) at certain points or is focused toward the cultural (*ethno*) aspects of self (*auto*) at other points. "Wherever one is on the continuum, it represents a mix of artistic representation, scientific inquiry, self-narration, and ethnography" (Ngunjiri et al., 2010, p. 3). Through regular reflective memos, I documented my



Note. From Ngunjiri et al. (2010), adapted from Ellis and Bochner (2000).

Figure 6. The autoethnography continuum offers the researcher a frame for research identity.

perspectives and reflections throughout the study. “Autoethnographers gaze back and forth” looking through an ethnographic lens and then “they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Utilizing a methodology to capture the connections between scholarship and life is appropriate in this study in which my identity as a white woman intersects with my role as researcher. The continuum supports my ability to be a part of the study and at the same time be a researcher of stories of others through an ethnographic lens.

I made my involvement visible, including possible biases and subjectivities, by including personal perspectives and documenting them throughout the research process. Conducting research is both a creative and scientific process. I engaged in telling my story and the stories of other participants through creative means using ethnographical and autoethnographical methods in iterative cycles of inquiry.

Cycles of Inquiry

To understand how white women lead more deeply for equity, I followed a process to iteratively collect and analyze data to inform the subsequent next steps. Participatory action research projects and studies are distinguishable by cycles of data collection and analysis that informs future cycles (Bryk et al., 2017). In the PAR project, I collected data from a small group of participants in three cycles of inquiry. The participants and I engaged in activities to understand more about white women’s journeys toward equitable, antiracist leadership in North Carolina educational contexts. The repetitive process of data collection and analysis informed my understanding and that of the participants individually and collectively and influenced actions in our educational contexts (Lewis, 2015).

Community Learning Exchanges (CLE) Pedagogies

Community Learning Exchange (CLE) pedagogies capture a climate, spirit, and interaction between people. The CLE process welcomes vulnerability and encourages curiosity and action (Guajardo et al., 2016). Most participants were situated in rural, poor, and/or historically Black communities. Often, the students identified as People of Color in participants' schools were identified as "low performing" by state testing data. These school leaders were tasked with school improvement. I used CLE pedagogies to invite educational leaders to further explore and understand the meaning of leading for equity in the situated context of North Carolina educational practices, policies, and research (Maier, 2018; Roegman, 2017).

Additionally, women in leadership often contend with stereotype threats and insecurities related to imposter syndrome, an internalized feeling of never being enough (Lesser, 2020; Steele, 2010). White women must be aware that their emotions, tears, and fears have been used to villainize, terrorize, and oppress People of Color and Native peoples in history, and their discomfort has been used in educational settings to avoid difficult conversations (DiAngelo, 2011; Hamad, 2020; Shakeshaft, 1989). By using CLE pedagogies, I provided a safe space for women to reveal self-doubt and build relational trust as a group, and a brave space to identify areas of growth and stimulate courageous action which challenges the *status quo* (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Guajardo et al., 2016; Quadros-Meis, 2021). I chose research questions to guide this PAR project and study. I iteratively engaged leaders to develop trusting relationships and communicate how white women can be leaders for equity in this context (Radd et al., 2021).

Research Questions

In the study, I analyzed the stories of participants through the context of North Carolina and the participants' identities as white women leading for equity in educational settings.

Understanding and examining the work of an equity leader begins with self and continues to the organization and community where each person lives and works (Guajardo et al., 2016). The overarching research question for this study is: *How do white women embody antiracism to lead for equity in North Carolina public schools?* The sub-questions for the study are:

1. How do white women identify and reflect on their roles as leaders for equity?
2. How do white women school leaders enact their roles as leaders for equity?
3. To what extent do I shift my perspectives and actions as a white woman leader?

During three action research cycles in Fall 2021, Spring 2022, and Fall 2022, I collected and analyzed data in response to these research questions. I describe the process for analyzing these data and how I used follow-up cycles of inquiry to further inform participant reflections and actions.

Action Research Cycles

Participatory action and activist research (PAR) studies are grounded in *praxis*: reflection-based action with a goal of social justice. Participants met for guided reflection with opportunities to consider past and future actions related to equity leadership in their contexts. In each cycle of inquiry, I facilitated group sessions to cultivate relational trust and discuss equity dilemmas. In addition to group meetings, I collected data from individual participants through individual interviews, written reflections, and observations. As a participant in this study, I regularly recorded reflective memos to understand my leadership journey (see Table 3). I collected and analyzed data identifying emerging codes and categories to understand shared and individual patterns and behaviors over time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As I collected data, I concurrently analyzed data from the cycles of inquiry to inform future cycles of inquiry, reflection, and action (see Figure 7). The study participants acted as CPRs and assisted in

Table 3

Action Research Cycles

Research Cycle	Proposed Activities
PAR Pre-cycle October 2021-January 2022 (Chapter 4)	Invited white women to participate and form a small study group Met to build relational trust, gather data on identities and context
PAR Cycle One February 2022-May 2022 (Chapter 6)	Met as co-practitioner researchers (CPR) using community learning exchange (CLE) protocols Lead researcher observed participants in their contexts Conducted individual interviews to inform data analysis
PAR Cycle Two June-October 2022 (Chapter 7)	Continued PAR Cycle One activities Analyzed data and evidence from previous cycles Conducted member checks to ensure accuracy and inform data analysis
Voices and Vignettes (ongoing) (Chapter 5)	Compiled quotes and stories from three cycles of data and grouped the data by each participant

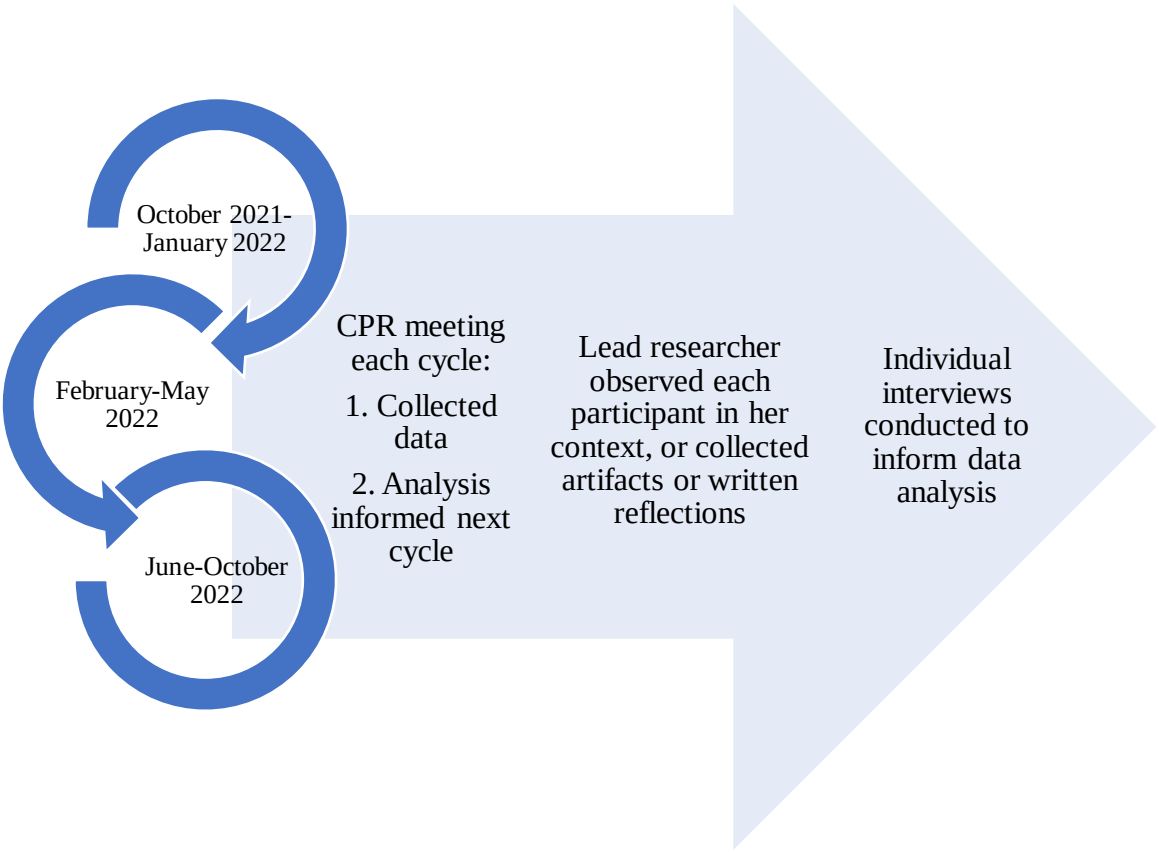
supporting each other's work. I analyzed the data and shared the results with them s so they could consider how to make decisions about enacting equity leadership in their contexts and how we should move forward as a group during the study.

Participants, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

Through this study, I understood more about the journeys of white women leading for equity in educational settings and how they developed an antiracist lens and used their lenses in the North Carolina context. This was a different journey for each woman. While the participants and I have commonalities (white women educational leaders in North Carolina), I explored the individualities in each participant's identity and context. This exploration of identity "is not a straightforward process when considered from a postmodern perspective: identity demands a process of infinite interpretation, reinterpretation of experiences, circumstances and conditions, emphasizing the interconnectedness of past and present, lived and living" (Starr, 2010, p. 4). As I examined my equity leadership story through autoethnography and captured the stories of other white women on their journeys of leading for equity, I am starting to understand what it means to embody antiracism.

Participants

I invited five white women educational leaders in North Carolina school and district settings who were concurrently EdD doctoral students in an equity-focused doctoral program. I provided each participant with opportunities to examine her leadership and doctoral study through an equity lens. To prepare for this study, I participated in a national affinity group of white persons with the Institute for Democratic Education in America (I.D.E.A.) to gain a deeper understanding of my identity as both a white person and my role and responsibility for disrupting racial inequities (I.D.E.A., n.d.).



Note. Three iterative cycles of inquiry include reflection, support, and action in context.

Figure 7. Iterative cycles of inquiry.

Sampling

Purposeful sampling involves gathering data from a representative sample of people who can respond to questions about experiences with situations that are related to the focus of inquiry (Patton, 1990). I used purposeful sampling to specifically identify the white women engaged in antiracist educational leadership practices (Patton, 1990). The five participants were from group of 74 school leaders involved in a grant-funded professional learning project called Project I^4. Through Project I^4, beginning the summer of 2019, the participants and I began the work to understand antiracism and enact equity-driven instructional leadership practices. I purposefully narrowed the criterion for participation to white women from North Carolina schools who participated in Project I^4 and were enrolled in East Carolina University's EdD program. I am aware that "qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 27). Through this study, I closely examined my journey and their journeys striving to be antiracist educational leaders in North Carolina. Five women accepted the invitation to be co-practitioner researchers in this study, and four of the five continued through all three cycles of data collection.

Co-Practitioner Researchers

I term each participant in the study a CPR with two purposes in this project; they acted as critical friends and participated in activities and member checks. We shared our stories, thoughts, and actions to support and nourish each other to continue the work of equity leadership. As critical friends, we engaged in CPR group meetings to discuss equity dilemmas and support each other to frame issues of equity and provide reflection opportunities that inform action. Together, as co-practitioner researchers, we used multiple lenses to examine responses and actions, and CPR members provided alternate perspectives (Foulger, 2010).

I took responsibility for data collection and initial coding and analysis. Co-practitioner researchers "cast a wider analytic net" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 37), provide an alternate perspective on the data (Foulger, 2010), and engage in member checks to determine the accuracy of data. Participants determined the degree to which the description was complete and realistic, if the analysis and themes were accurate, and if the interpretations were fair and representative (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018, p. 261). I conducted member checks at the end of each cycle of inquiry to ensure the data analyses were valid and accurate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Guetterman, 2018).

Data Collection

I regularly collected and concurrently analyzed data to inform the next steps and make decisions about the processes for each subsequent cycle. In Table 4, I present the data collection instruments, methods, and the process for triangulating data for each research question.

Reflective Memos

A key data collection instrument is the reflective memo (Birks et al., 2008; Saldaña, 2016). I engaged in a process of reflective memo writing to capture my reflections and understandings after experiences with participants. Writing reflective memos (see Appendix H), with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model enhanced the opportunity to understand my experience and helped me plan future actions. In this process, I described a concrete experience and noticed feelings and thoughts. I then conceptualized the experience by relating it to larger, more abstract ideas and identified what the next steps may be, with a focus on how to change behaviors or actions. This process of recording the metacognitive and/or meta-affective reflections through memos is at the heart of the ethnographical and autoethnographical data to be collected in this PAR study (Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Saldaña, 2016; Starr, 2010).

Table 4

Research Questions, Data Collection Instruments, and Triangulation Plans

Research Question	Data Collection	Triangulated with
1. How do white women identify their roles as leaders for equity?	CLE Artifacts Field Notes Participant Reflections	Reflective Memos (see Appendix H) Interviews (see Appendix G)
2. How do white women school leaders enact their role as leaders of equity?	Field Notes Interviews (see Appendix G) Participant Reflections Sightings Protocol (see Appendix D2)	Reflective Memos (see Appendix H)
3. How do I shift my perspectives and actions as a white woman leader?	Reflective Memos (see Appendix H)	Interviews (see Appendix G) Participant Reflections

Community Learning Exchange (CLE) Artifacts

An artifact collected during a CLE is a piece of data representing thoughts and reflections, sometimes in symbolic or non-linguistic ways (Guajardo et al., 2016). In the group meetings, we used CLE protocols rooted in gracious space, the wisdom of people, and the power of place (Guajardo et al., 2016). CLE pedagogies are used to nurture relational trust between CPR members. I collected and coded artifacts (CLE artifacts) as data. These artifacts were further enhanced and understood through written reflections in a sightings protocol (see Appendix D2), discussions, and observations with individual participants in their educational settings.

Field Notes

I documented field and meeting notes when I observed participants, both when meeting as a group and when observing participants in their school settings. The skilled observer uses thorough methods to document observations and learns "how to write descriptively; practicing the disciplined recording of field notes; knowing how to separate detail from trivia" (Patton, 1990, p. 201). During site visits, I deepened my understanding of each participant's context. A template including a timestamp and selective verbatim is used to capture accurate data in field notes. Field notes from observations are descriptive and were further interpreted through discussions with the group or individuals "Participant observation characterizes ethnographic research" (Given, 2008, p. 290). Because each participant lives and works in a North Carolina context, yet in different communities and schools, field notes were used in the analysis to determine similar patterns related to each participant.

Sighting Reflection

Participants engaged in discussions about equity dilemmas in their contexts in each cycle. As a result, they often became aware of something they previously had not noticed. I used a sightings protocol (see Appendix D2) for consistency and to understand a participant's thinking processes in a deeper way. The protocol had two purposes: To provide an opportunity to reflect on the usefulness of the meeting session and share new thoughts or observations from one's context; and to provide other forms of data I could use to triangulate. I gathered specific information for each participant through individual interviews.

Interviews

I conducted interviews with individual participants to gain a clearer understanding of other data collected and to clarify categories or emerging findings. I used a protocol and took notes on a shared Google doc so participants could add to, reflect on, or adjust my interview notes (see Appendix G). As both a participant and lead researcher, I needed to refrain from making assumptions about the experiences of the other participants in this study (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Interviews provided a chance to elucidate the voices, views, and stories of participants separate from my own experiences and reflections. I collected both individual data, such as individual interviews, and group data from CPR gatherings.

Data Analysis

I used orderly coding processes to analyze the data collected in each inquiry cycle. I used Saldaña's (2016) guide, strengthening my research methods. In preparation for data analysis, I remained organized, exercised flexibility and perseverance, dealt with ambiguity, stayed open to creativity, documented the process to ensure I was rigorously ethical, and continued to build my vocabulary knowledge. I determined codes through cycles of inquiry and triangulation with

reflective memos, artifacts collected, and detailed field notes. I further explain how I analyzed specific data.

For reflective memo analysis, I relied on the four categories in the Kolb cycle of experiential learning, including a concrete example, reflective notes, abstract conceptualization, and a plan for future actions. I coded memos systematically by reading and coding raw data, identifying preliminary codes, and determining final codes (Saldaña, 2016). Reflective memos were key to documenting the process of planning, facilitating, and reflecting on CLE artifact experiences, discussions, and other interactions with participants (Saldaña, 2016). I determined patterns of reflection in which personal and collective experiences and abstract conceptualizations relevant to existing literature were processed and how those influenced the next steps in the inquiry process (Kolb, 1984).

Using the CLE pedagogies, I had collected artifacts from co-practitioner researchers (Guajardo et al., 2016). These artifacts were symbolic or linguistic and these "should not be considered nouns—i.e., the things analyzed by a researcher after production—but as verbs—processes co-examined with participants during the artistic product's creation, followed by participants' reflections on the interpretations and meaning of their own work" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 60).

I took field notes during meetings and site visits informed data analysis., which provided descriptive data from gatherings and site visit observations. I coded and documented these data, designed a codebook that I used throughout the research, and used these data to inform emerging categories and themes.

I depended on triangulating data for accuracy and validity. "Triangulation is basic in ethnographic research. It is at the heart of ethnographic validity, testing one source of

information against another to strip away alternative explanations and prove a hypothesis" (Given, 2008, p. 291). I used follow-up written or verbal reflections and/or meeting notes from individual interviews to clarify and confirm emerging findings. This linguistic data provided another layer of intelligibility and insight into participants' language through what Saldaña (2016) terms *in vivo* codes, or codes in the context, that further enhanced data analysis. The evidence from each PAR inquiry cycle influenced the activities of the next cycle (Bryk et al., 2017). I used multiple data sources to triangulate (Saldaña, 2016) and substantiated emerging categories and themes through member checks with CPR members.

Data collection, analysis, and explanations contribute to or detract from the validity of a study. Collecting, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data ethically and systematically requires a researcher to summarize and synthesize emerging themes, compare to existing literature, recognize impacts of positionality, transparently describe this, and describe both the lessons learned, limitations, and impacts on further research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). While every attempt was made to ensure this study was ethical and thoroughly documented and verified, I considered key aspects of the study to ensure accuracy of the data analysis.

Study Considerations: Limitations, Validity, and Confidentiality and Ethics

In this qualitative study, I considered limitations, validity, and confidentiality and ethics. I made every effort to balance the limitations by conducting transparent, repetitive cycles of inquiry that produced thick data sources and descriptions as is typical in ethnographic research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Given, 2008; Saldaña, 2016). I analyzed these data by utilizing a systematic coding process (Saldaña, 2016) and multiple validity procedures. Co-practitioner researchers, member checks, and peer debriefing mitigated the limitations of any researcher bias (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). The use of multiple cycles of inquiry, prolonged

engagement, and triangulation increased the probability that assertions (determined from themes arising from categories/codes) were representative of authentic messages which emerged from the study (Saldaña, 2016). Next, I took specific details to increase the validity of this study and they are described and supported by research.

Limitations

Limitations of this study relate to the size and nature of the study. One limitation of this study is the design of the small size of the participant group. In studies with a small size, findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of white women who lead schools in North Carolina, but findings could inform or encourage future studies. However, the process I used to collect and analyze data is useful in other contexts and by other researchers. Ethnographical studies can be difficult "to extract precise and targeted conclusions" (Quierós et al., 2017).

I informed my understandings by capturing how other women's experiences were similar and different from my own. I considered my role in the group from two perspectives: a white woman educational leader interested in learning more about improving my ability to be a leader for equity and someone committed to a journey toward antiracist; and as the lead researcher in this PAR study interested in learning more about the journeys of other white women leading for equity who embody antiracism. Next, I specifically discuss the internal validity, the trustworthiness of evidence, and the external validity of the PAR study.

Validity

I determined the validity of the study by intentionally including multiple validity procedures and strategies in the research methodology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Detailed documentation was necessary to maintain accuracy. This, and other strategies described next,

provide a guide for how I ensured the PAR study was valid, trustworthy, authentic, and credible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Internal Validity

The co-practitioner researchers were white women leading for equity, and the findings from this study were useful for their personal and professional growth but I considered other threats to validity. While I gathered data from participants and attempted to understand the emic perspectives from their points of view, I could not remove my experiences in public education as both a teacher and administrator. First, I established a meticulous process for documenting my thinking through regular reflective memoing which provided evidence of my ontology and illuminated the biases I brought to the study. Second, I corroborated data themes through triangulation "by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for the themes" adding to the validity of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200). Third, I used field observations, member checks, peer debriefing, and follow-up interviews which reinforced the accuracy of emerging categories and themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Repetition over time through multiple cycles of inquiry further added credibility to findings.

I used the evidence from this study to deepen my understanding of the focus of practice from multiple perspectives and uncover various dimensions of the focus of practice through analysis (Queirós et al., 2017). Continuous cycles of reflection, adjustment, and new action "to establish trustworthiness—in other words, do the findings represent the 'truth' as it occurred for the participants and in their context" was documented to increase the study's validity (Gerdes & Conn, 2001, p. 186). My use of diligent and prolific evidence gathering, coding, and member checks to further verify emerging codes and categories provided confidence in the credibility of the study. Detailed documentation supported findings, were consistent, and could be repeated in

another context. The disadvantages to many qualitative methods are rooted in time; therefore, I specifically focused on crafting multiple cycles of inquiry primed to produce various artifacts, field notes, and reflections, representing robust data. I coded the data for each cycle and repeated this process, using emerging categories and themes from the previous experience. Follow-up individual interviews further clarified and interpreted data and CPR member checks contributed to the fidelity of emerging findings.

Finally, the primary standard of validity in activist research is the usefulness to the participants (Hale, 2008; Hale, 2017). The participants in this study were school leaders and doctoral students completing PAR studies in their contexts. They were interested in their growth as leaders for equity. The research objectives "coincide at least in part with what actors in the processes under study think it is important to know and to understand" through the discussion of equity dilemmas in context (Hale, 2017, p. 14). Additionally, school leaders benefited by nurturing relational support with professional colleagues to continue their roles and actions as school leaders.

External Validity

A limitation of activist action research is that the study is rooted in a specific context and the findings cannot be generalized to another context; thus, explicitly describing the processes used, the evidence collected, and how the data is analyzed so that the study can be transferred or applicable in other contexts, is needed to add to validity. In this study, I wanted to know more about the roles of white women school leaders as equity leaders in North Carolina. Information from this study might guide future researchers in the educational leadership field studying antiracist leadership. I noticed and interrogated the processes leading to emerging categories and themes. In conjunction with the CPR group and through critical and reflective dialogue, we kept

the goals of action research, ethnography, and autoethnography at the forefront to guide our steps. I documented the study using extensive notetaking, reflection, collaborative processing, and the use of a "probing mode of inquiry, over time, in an attempt to 'dig deeper' and uncover something as yet unknown" (Gerdes & Conn, 2001, p. 187). Increasing the internal and external validity led to the reliability of this study and the trustworthiness of the evidence presented in the findings. Next, I describe how I ensure confidentiality and ethical considerations.

Confidentiality and Ethics

I followed all Internal Review Board (IRB) guidelines and standards to safeguard the findings against breaches in confidentiality, researcher bias, and unethical practices. I took precautions to ensure all participants gave informed consent without pressure to participate. In addition, participants could terminate consent at any time without consequence. I informed participants that their participation was entirely voluntary. The participants in this study all know each other through their involvement in a doctoral program. A top priority was to maintain relational trust and receive ongoing consent for artifacts and evidence reported in the study. I gave careful attention to maintain confidentiality because the likelihood that participants and their artifacts are identifiable to a wider audience was a consideration in this study. Each participant suggested or agreed on a pseudonym for themselves and their school district, further protecting confidentiality. I ensured data security by obtaining permissions for participation and the use of artifacts and evidence from participants throughout the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The personal reflections, stories, artifacts, field notes from observations, professional experiences shared in CLE pedagogies, and Sightings Reflections were handled with confidentiality and securely stored. I stored all physical artifacts and data in a locked location

and electronic files were password protected utilizing university standards for confidentiality, and I plan to store for three years and then destroy these data.

Summary

In outlining the research design and process, I described participants, summarized data collection and analysis, and study considerations. Qualitative research studies including ethnographic and autoethnographic designs, utilize observation and data analysis seeking to understand a "phenomenon from the views of participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 17). I endeavored to understand, through this study, how white women identify, reflect on, and enact their roles as antiracist school and district leaders for equity in North Carolina public schools. This study informed my perspectives and actions as a white women leader and contributes to the research by telling the stories of white women leading for equity, adding to the growing body of research around social justice in schools.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRE-CYCLE

Participatory action research (PAR) is a research methodology in which a lead researcher engages with participants to understand a dilemma of practice. In this case, I wanted to understand how white women embody antiracism for equity leadership in North Carolina educational settings. I combined PAR methodology with ethnography and autoethnography to analyze the experiences of six women, five of whom were members of a co-practitioner research (CPR) group and provided input on the study and myself. The CPR members and I are all white women working in educational settings in eastern North Carolina (ENC) and working on equity-centered projects through East Carolina University's EdD program. During the PAR Pre-cycle, my first task was to develop an understanding of the identities of the co-practitioner researchers. Each of us has a nuanced story and identity. Because ethnographical and autoethnographical research aims to "move from invisibility to visibility and silence to voice" and must interrogate dominant cultural narratives (Hancock et al., 2015, p. 6), I used this methodology throughout the PAR cycles of inquiry. As a result, I captured the close-up details of each participant's individual story of identity as well as mine. From our stories of identity and leadership, I analyzed how white women lead for equity in North Carolina.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the PAR context, including the place and the people relevant to the study and the process for establishing a CPR group. Then, I detail the activities in which the participants engaged, the artifacts and data I collected in the Pre-cycle process, and the process and results of coding the artifacts and data. Then, I share the data analysis process and emergent categories. Lastly, I discuss how the activities and information from this PAR Pre-cycle inform PAR Cycle One.

PAR Context

In Chapter 2, I described North Carolina as a state with dual identities, a southern state touting hospitality, and a place where the seeds of white supremacy continue to grow and prosper (Newkirk, 2016). In this chapter, I highlight the realities specific to eastern North Carolina (ENC) and the areas in which the participants in the Participatory Action Research (PAR) study live and work. Then, I describe the process for creating the CPR group and the participants Finally, I detail the participants' background information, identities, and insights into why they do the work they do.

Place: Eastern North Carolina

With flourishing seaside towns adjacent to rural agricultural communities in economic decline, the people of eastern North Carolina (ENC) have different realities—even in the same schools or counties. The five school leaders represented in this study and the people living and working in these districts do not have a single story. The participants in this study live and lead schools in districts that are economically, racially, educationally, and politically diverse and different (see Appendices D5 and E).

Economic opportunities for eastern North Carolinians often coincide with race, creating inequities in many historically Black communities. Three districts specific to this study are in counties with higher Black populations (Riverbend, Creekland, Oceanview); they correspondingly have lower rankings in economic development and median household incomes (see Appendices D5 and E). The approximate median household incomes in five of the six districts represented in this study are below the state average of $60,516 (United States Census Bureau, 2023) with two districts, Riverbend and Oceanview, coming close to the lowest district average of $37,000 (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2020a). Brookside County, with the

smallest population of People of Color and Native peoples and the largest white population, is the most economically advantaged, signaling “the depth of economic hardship in the state is closely tied to race—it always has been in North Carolina” (Mitchell, 2015, para. 1). Lack of economic development affects families, businesses, and schools. Next, I provide more details about the impacts on schools.

Educational disparities that affect educational equality in North Carolina are not a secret. The ongoing Leandro case (Hoke County BOE et al., v. State of NC, 2022; Linicome, 2020), in which five school districts in low-wealth counties sued the state of North Carolina for not providing a sound, basic education, reveals a legacy of extremes related to public education (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic accentuated these disparities and schools struggle to recruit and retain teachers and staff. The Racial Equity Report Card for NC explains that schools have additional work to do related to discipline by “reducing the use of exclusionary discipline and limiting the number of students who enter the justice system via the classroom—two practices that disproportionately and detrimentally impact students of color throughout North Carolina” (Southern Coalition for Social Justice, 2020, para. 4; Youth Justice Project, 2020). Data on youth and behavior safety reveal that students in these districts are coming to school burdened by dilemmas much broader than economic issues (see Appendix E). The landscape of ENC is further complicated by political divides, adding to the pressures school leaders face.

In recent elections, North Carolina was labeled a battleground state where residents have wide differences on politics and ideologies. The first Black lieutenant governor of North Carolina and the current state superintendent consider racism a thing of the past and are in favor of changing language like “systemic racism” to “racism,” pointing fingers away from historical

and systemic issues of equity (Childress, 2021). Right-wing voices demonize school administrators and educators by conflating terms such as critical race theory (CRT), social-emotional learning (SEL), and accusing educators of indoctrination (Robbins, 2021). By shrouding equity in schools in language, confused and angry parents are appearing at schools and school board meetings with threats (Wolf, 2021). Other voices call for explicit and open language that allows for "inclusion and diversity of American voices, deeper understanding of the complexity of racism and permits diverse perspectives and dialogue about the impact of historical events" (Childress, 2021, para. 21). NC House Bill 324, a conservative-backed bill, promotes the idea that no one in schools "should feel 'discomfort, guilt, anguish,' on account of their race or gender" (Kessler, 2021, para. 7). These ongoing debates confuse issues of politics, race, and equity often putting educational leaders at the center. These debates and ideologies have only been complicated by COVID-19 and the ongoing battle for and against mask mandates (Keung Hui, 2022). The divide between citizens in ENC communities leads to a complicated landscape for educational leaders.

Participants in this study acknowledged how their roles as educational leaders are difficult but important, and they continue to seek opportunities to grow and develop, personally and professionally. As school leaders, they have common values and approach their work with a set of similar professional experiences. As participants in an EdD program focused on equity, the leaders and I continued to seek opportunities to learn and grow. When I shared the details of the study, each participant was eager to come together with other white women striving to be equity leaders in ENC. The five CPRs and I live and work in different ENC districts, but the complicated historical realities described in Chapter 2, deep community divisions in political beliefs and personal philosophies, and the unequal access to opportunities for residents in each

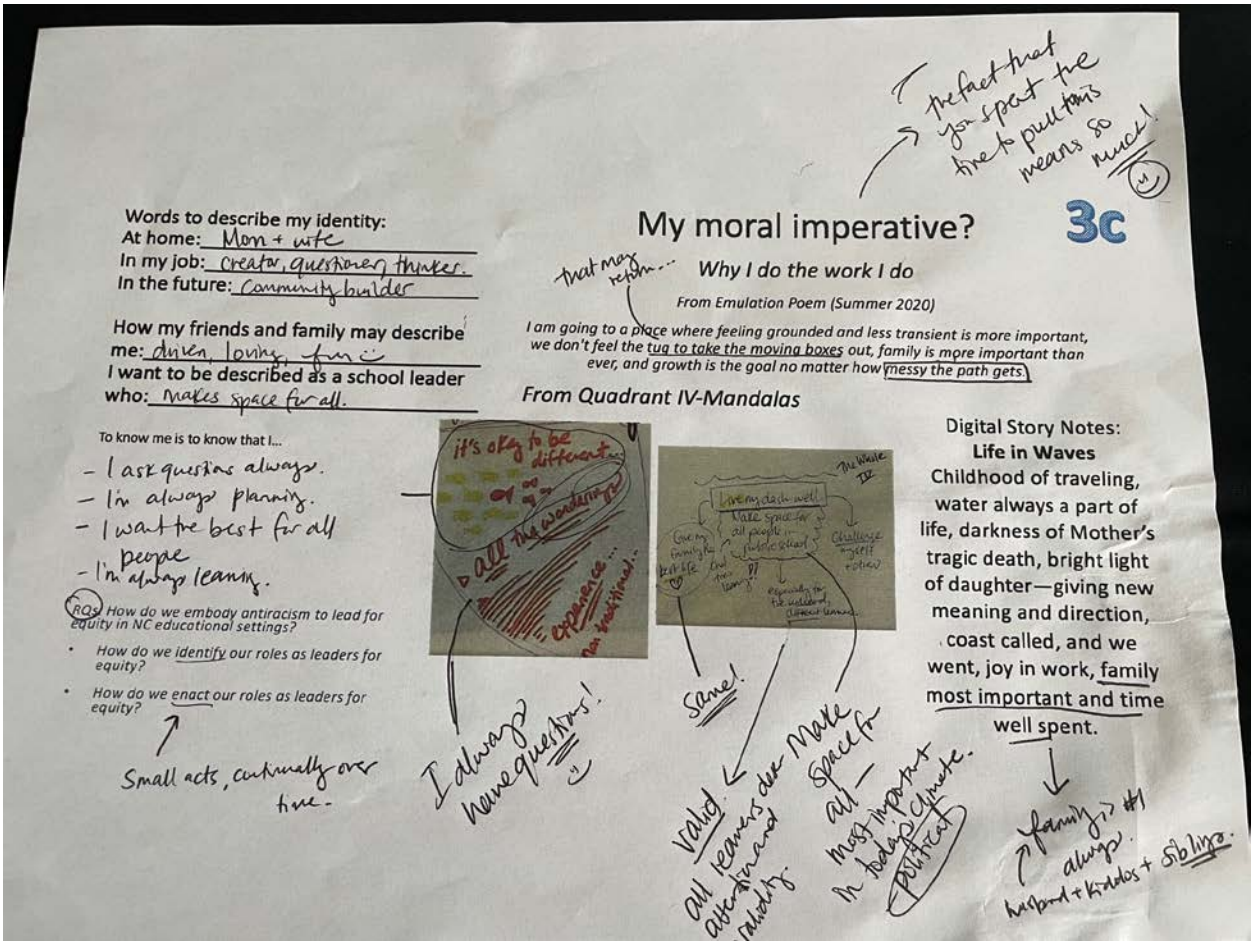
district have a similar ENC backdrop. The specifics of the participants in this study and their identities and experiences were critical to the study; their commonalities in terms of values and hopes offered a foundation for our work together.

People: Eastern North Carolina Educational Leaders

The five CPRs and I are ENC educational leaders, doctoral students, and white women who have acknowledged a desire to be or become more antiracist and lead for equitable outcomes for students. In our doctoral course, Self-As-Leader, each participant wrote an autobiography, videotaped herself reading an emulation poem entitled "I come from a place, I'm going to a place," scripted and produced a digital story about her leadership strengths, and sketched a mandala (see Appendix D1) identifying key identity characteristics leading to a moral imperative for why they do the work they do. I analyzed those documents and compiled a description of each participant related to their identity based on the artifacts created during the Self-As-Leader course and our Pre-cycle interactions (see Figure 8). Table 5 provides an overview of the CPR members and connects them to their ENC school districts.

Lyla Burgess

Lyla Burgess identifies as a leader, a mother, a wife, and wants to be known as someone who leads by example with a servant-leader mindset (Burgess, identity map, December 14, 2021). An eastern North Carolina native, Lyla describes her moral imperatives as service and love for her family, her job, and her community. She describes herself as loyal, reliable, honest, and someone who tries to do her best. She believes in relationships, contributing to the world, lending a helping hand, and giving back because she has been given so much. She participated in mission work through her church as a teen, and she acknowledges many strong female role models in her family (Burgess, digital story, July 23, 2020). Lyla's family moved when she was



Note. Each participant updated an identity map compiled from Self-as-Leader artifacts.

Figure 8. An example of an identity map artifact.

Table 5

CPR Group

Name (Pseudonym)	NC District (Pseudonym)	School Role	Years in Education	Descriptors
Lyla Burgess	Riverbend County	Early College Principal	11 (2011-present)	• Former high school math teacher and assistant principal • Currently an administrator in the district where she was a high school student and a teacher • Wife and mother of three young children
Miranda Mackey	Creekland County	High School Principal	15 (2007-2022)	• Former high school English teacher and elementary school assistant principal • Worked as an administrator in the district where she was a teacher until June 2022 • Left K-12 public education in June 2022 for a teaching position at a community college • Wife and mother of two young children
Jessica Pinkney	Brookside County	District Director	10 (2012-2022)	• Former elementary school science teacher and assistant principal in rural ENC • Worked as a district director of innovation in a different ENC district than where she was a teacher and assistant principal • Left eastern NC and accepted a position supervising elementary principals in western NC in July 2022 • Wife and mother of two young children

Table 5 (continued)

Name (Pseudonym)	NC District (Pseudonym)	School Role	Years in Education	Descriptors
Joyce Jones	Pinetop County	Early College Principal	17 (2005-present)	• Former exceptional children's teacher and assistant principal at all levels (K-12) • Currently an administrator in the district where she was a teacher and assistant principal • Wife and mother of one middle school-aged child
Michelle Brammer	Oceanview County	K-8 School Principal	16 (2006-present)	• Former exceptional children's teacher and middle school assistant principal • Currently an administrator in an ENC district nearby where she was a teacher, assistant principal, and principal • Wife of another ENC school administrator
Self	Lakefront County	University Program Coordinator	26 (1996-present)	• Former ENC elementary school teacher and middle school assistant principal • Currently a university program coordinator for a grant-funded professional learning experience for school leaders • Widow and mother of one college-aged child

in elementary school to the small, rural community in which she currently lives. Her parents chose the public school for her education and when reflecting she states, “many of the students did not look like me as they did at my previous school” (Burgess, autobiography, June 11, 2020). Lyla became a math teacher because she wanted to provide a better math foundation for students in her community. Currently, she is the principal of the district’s early college, in which most students identify as Black. While she wants to be described as ambitious in the future, she wants to slow down and cherish her family members who are most important to her (Burgess, identity map, December 14, 2021). Lyla says she is going to a place where love for her community shines through all she does and where all kids have an opportunity to achieve their dreams (Burgess, emulation poem, May 28, 2020).

Mira Mackey

Mira identifies as an organizer, delegator, caretaker, mom, and grocery shopper; she wants to be known as a school leader who is kind, loving, and supportive (Mackey, identity map, December 11, 2021). Raised in the rural South, she spent many hours of her childhood in a garden with her grandparents and often considers nature as grounding and as an analogy for life (Mackey, autobiography, June 11, 2020). Her grandmother’s message for her as a young military wife embarking on life overseas was, “find your adventure.” Mira describes these words as both a riddle and a gift through the ups and downs of her husband’s military deployment during wartime and other challenging moments in her life (Mackey, digital story, July 23, 2020). As a former English teacher in eastern North Carolina (ENC) with a passion for prose and poetry, Mira identifies with the ethereal *Ent* beings from *The Lord of the Rings*, tree-like characters firmly rooted but able to act and move when called to adventure (Mackey, identity map, December 11, 2021). Her latest life story includes the birth of her second son and transitioning

from an elementary assistant principal position to her first principal position mid-year during a global pandemic. She values a community with other women who help her to establish models for whom she wants to be and how she wants to interact with the world. Mira considers how to identify learning barriers for the students in her rural ENC school and how to overcome these barriers as important in her role as a school leader for equity (Mackey, identity map, December 11, 2021). She describes herself as coming from a place of love and always moving in that direction in the future (Mackey, emulation poem, May 28, 2020).

Jessica Pinkney

Jessica identifies as a mom, wife, creator, questioner, thinker, and community builder; she wants to be known as a leader who makes space for all (Pinkney, identity map, December 11, 2021). Her childhood home often shifted due to her father's naval service and where her mother and three younger siblings lived; she had many experiences in new cultures—domestic and abroad (Pinkney, autobiography, June 11, 2020). Jessica started her career as an educator in rural ENC and thrived as a successful, innovative science teacher resulting in leadership opportunities early in her career (Pinkney, autobiography, June 11, 2020). After a career transition to administration, which she found incongruent with her previous passion for teaching, and an unexpected family tragedy, Jessica, her husband, and her young daughter uprooted their inland ENC life for a coastal location. A new superintendent recruited her and she began a position on the district office leadership team. This new life by the sea brought back a connection to the water, a constant in her childhood, and new possibilities for a future in educational leadership (Pinkney, digital story, July 23, 2020). She believes that leaders for equity enact their roles in small acts continually over time; for her, finding the balance between her passion for work and joy in home and work is important. Jessica self-describes as driven, loving, fun, and always

planning and learning; she values people who are willing to step away from traditional paths and be different (Pinkney, identity map, December 11, 2021). She describes herself as going to a place where she feels grounded, where family is central, and growth is the goal, no matter how messy the path gets (Pinkney, emulation poem, May 28, 2020).

Joyce Jones

Joyce identifies as a caregiver, organizer, motivator, servant leader, problem solver, and holistic thinker; she wants to be known as a leader who listens to others to create a culture that allows for all students, staff, and parents to be the best versions of themselves (Jones, identity map, January 11, 2022). She spent her childhood in North Carolina, which she describes as difficult and full of negative voices but found freedom in college and after moving to a more diverse San Francisco in her twenties (Jones, autobiography, June 11, 2020). Her college degree was in business, but she shifted to education as an exceptional children's teacher after moving back to North Carolina when she was married. Joyce lives with her husband and is the mother of a middle-school son. Her friends and family describe her as open-minded, helpful, and accepting of others; they say she brings a positive energy that brings calm to the environment (Jones, identity map, January 11, 2022). She found inspiration and drive first as a teacher and now as the principal of an early college and acknowledges the struggles in her childhood have helped her empathize with students and families who may be amid difficult circumstances (Jones, autobiography, June 11, 2020). Her mission is to be a positive force in the lives of others and strives to "only speak words that make souls stronger" (Jones, digital story, July 23, 2020) and leave places better than she found them (Jones, identity map, January 11, 2022). She describes the place she is going as a place where learning will facilitate her conscious growth and will allow her to be better (Jones, emulation poem, May 28, 2020).

Michelle Brammer

Michelle identifies as a wife, runner, hostess, listener, conscious leader, decision-maker, and problem solver; she wants to be described as a leader who is purposeful, equity-centered, and unwavering on a commitment to the community (Brammer, identity map, January 10, 2022). She grew up in southwest Virginia's mountains and possesses great pride in being from a lineage of hardworking Appalachian people (Brammer, autobiography, June 11, 2020). While she recognizes she was successful in sports and school during her childhood, she confesses she wrestled with feelings of inadequacy as a girl and young woman (Brammer, digital story, July 23, 2020). Her undergraduate degree in journalism took her away from home to Washington DC where she "learned the beauty of diversity" and eventually felt a pull toward becoming an educator with Teach for America in North Carolina (Brammer, autobiography, June11, 2020). She began as a middle grades exceptional children's teacher, became a department chair, and eventually school administrator in rural North Carolina, and currently is the principal of a K-8 school. Michelle's friends describe her as funny and quirky, loving, chatty, and opinionated and to know her is to know that she cares deeply about what others, specifically those she loves the most, think of her (Brammer, identity map, January 10, 2022). She gets her energy from engaging with other people and recognizes the positive impact running has had on her self-acceptance (Brammer, digital story, July 23, 2020). She ran a half-marathon in February of 2022. Michelle describes the place she is going as a place where emotions are seen and celebrated, where we run toward our identity with all its beautiful quirks and kinks, and where she is loved for the human she's being, rather than the one she's not yet (Brammer, emulation poem, May 28, 2020).

Carrie Morris (Self)

I identify as an educator, mother, friend, daughter, and sister; I want to be described as an advocate for public schools and as an educational leader who is reflective, courageous, and is striving to grow and learn, even when that means sitting with feelings of apprehension or discomfort (Morris, identity map, December 11, 2021). While I no longer work directly in a K-12 public school, my current role in supporting professional development for school leaders is relevant to this study and reflective of the 20+ years I spent in ENC public schools as a teacher and administrator. In my experiences as an assistant principal, I felt misaligned with my reasons for becoming a teacher. Connecting with diverse school leaders through the university work as well as with the participants in this study presents chances for reflection and deeper understanding. As the parent of a college student who graduated from public schools of ENC, I reflect on the many ways my daughter was privileged by her race and standing as the child of a local teacher (Morris, autobiography, May 10, 2020). As the widow of a veteran who took his life by suicide in 2019, I recognize the need for spaces of healing in our communities (Morris, digital story, June 17, 2020). I am described by others as hard-working, caring, and reliable; I describe the place I want to go as a place of balance, a place where people can release their pain and shame to find deeper connections with others, and a place of unexplainable joy and resilience (Morris, emulation poem, April 15, 2020).

Jointly, the women leaders of the CPR group brought a collective passion for education and a desire for a brighter and more equitable future for the most vulnerable students in eastern North Carolina—those students who are most vulnerable to the vicissitudes of poverty and lack of adequate educational resources. Individually, we brought our separate identities, different experiences, and personal strengths and needs to the work of equity leadership. In outlining the

events of the process and the layered reflective process, we engaged in to better understand our identities.

PAR Pre-Cycle Process

During the first cycle of inquiry, the PAR Pre-cycle, I facilitated several activities which began during the Fall 2021 academic semester. The main goal of the Pre-cycle process was to understand more about the individual and collective identities of the CPRs and to learn more about qualitative coding and analysis. The activities of this cycle included identifying CPRs, creating the CPR group, acquiring Internal Review Board (IRB) permissions, coding self-as-leader course artifacts, gathering as a CPR group to set a purpose and plan for our work together, member-checking identity maps, and beginning the group artifact representing our current understanding of white woman who embody antiracism in North Carolina educational settings. In providing details about specific Pre-cycle activities, I view these as a strong grounding for the relational trust we needed to address the questions of this project and study.

Activities

I focused the activities of the Pre-cycle on identifying participants and understanding more about their identities (see Table 6). In September, I contacted potential participants for the study. Five white women I met as a part of a one-year professional learning experience for school leaders during the summer of 2019, who are currently enrolled in an EdD program at East Carolina University, agreed to be CPRs and participants in the PAR study. I spent much of the Pre-cycle compiling, coding, and analyzing documents the women created during a Self-As-Leader course in the summer of 2020. I coded the artifacts, distilling them into identity maps. At a December gathering and in one-on-one conversations, the CPRs reviewed, added to, and

Table 6

Pre-Cycle Activities

When (2021-2022)	What	Purpose
September-October	Meeting with dissertation coach and EdD Instructors	Consider possible CPRs
	1:1 Phone conversation with potential co-practitioner researchers (CPR)	Introduce PAR study, review IRB participation, obtain permission to review Self-As-Leader artifacts, explain IRB letter needed for site visit
	Email communication	Obtain IRB letter permissions to visit school sites, set date for group gathering
	Reflective Memo	Reflect on role as researcher/scholar and work as university program coordinator
October-November	Review of Self-As-Leader artifacts Emulation Poem Flipgrid Autobiography Digital Story Mandala	Understand more about the individual and collective identities of the CPR participants
	Open coding of artifacts	Distill artifacts into an Identity Map for each participant
	Reflective Memo	Reflect on setting a group gathering date and purpose
December-January	Group gathering	Set purpose for group, build relational trust, revise identity maps, enjoy a meal together, begin group artifact
	1:1 Follow-up	Create shared google doc (between lead researcher and each participant) for the purpose of sharing resources and member checking
	Reflective Memo	Reflect on my own leadership, practice qualitative coding

edited their identity maps. Throughout the Pre-cycle process, I wrote reflective memos to understand my identity, reflect on conversations with CPRs, and understand qualitative coding. I used Community Learning Exchange (CLE) protocols from the CLE practices during the group gathering and follow-up conversations to cultivate relational trust and capture a group artifact representing our work together (Guajardo et al., 2016; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2021). In analyzing examples of these activities, I gained a deeper understanding of each person's personal biography and leadership values.

Self-As-Leader Artifacts and Identity Map

Each CPR created multiple artifacts to represent her identity as a woman and leader: emulation poem, autobiography, digital story, and mandala. Each considered four quadrants of self (historical, cultural, biological, and political) to describe salient leadership attributes. In constructing the digital story (including images, music, and voiceovers), each CPR highlighted a gift she brings to leadership. In designing a personal mandala, each participant examined the faces of her personal and professional life (see Appendix D1). I condensed components of each artifact into a single identity map for each person; during our December gathering and one-to-one conversation, each CPR added to her identity map (see Figure 8).

Individual Conversations and CPR Gathering

Over the Fall 2021 semester, I had a conversation with each CPR member and we scheduled a group meeting. The first conversation took place by phone, and, for the second meeting in December, we gathered in a central location in ENC. I was cognizant of the distance issues for meeting in person and of their time. Then, I compiled, coded, and analyzed artifacts to create individual identity maps for each co-practitioner researcher (see Figures 8). In preparation for the December gathering, I facilitated an experience that allowed for space to breathe, eat, and

enjoy time together, while utilizing CLE pedagogies to capture data and engage participants. As a result, this gathering provided an opportunity for connection, reflection, and self-care.

In our initial CPR gathering, we used CLE practices to build relational trust and construct a group artifact representing our work together as white women embodying antiracism in North Carolina educational settings. Parker (2018) suggests gathering in a setting "that embodies the reason for your convening" (p. 55). At the CPR gathering opening circle, each person considered her purpose for gathering. I utilized Parker's (2018) language of creating a specific, focused, and disputable purpose that can shift and change over time based on the needs of the group. During the gathering, I invited each person to revise her identity map, and we began the construction of a group artifact representing our collective identities as white women, North Carolina educational leaders, who are striving to embody antiracism and lead for equity. Not all participants could attend the gathering; therefore, I scheduled a longer one-to-one conversations with those participants to complete the activities of the gathering.

Through the Pre-cycle process, to capture the stories and data from these women, I had one-to-one communications with each CPR and included these two shared documents:

- An Individual Document (Google Doc): shared between each co-practitioner researcher and the lead researcher to document work together, provide member-checks, share resources, and serve as a reflective resource of identity and leadership.
- Group Artifact (Google Jamboard): What began on chart paper at the initial CPR, I transferred to a Google Jamboard to allow the lead researcher and co-practitioner researchers access to this document over time.

After communicating with each CPR member, I planned for the next cycles of inquiry, including proposed dates and activities, and began the lead researcher process of coding and analysis.

Coding

I coded the initial artifacts and documents, including identity maps, the group artifact, and reflective memos. I used open coding and focused on the identities of the CPRs (Saldaña, 2016). I used Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software program, to support coding analysis. After completing another round of coding and looking for patterns across the data, I was aware that the codes were similar to the language used by the participants, which Saldaña (2016). classifies as *In Vivo* coding. Multiple conversations with instructors guided me to analyze data from different perspectives and returning to the research questions helped me think about what I learned about the identities of the women from the Pre-cycle data (see Figure 9, which offers a graphic of the process from data to subcategories to an emergent category). I used the process of lumping and splitting the data to ask myself what I learned about the participants from the data, and that guided the development of code groups and emergent categories (Saldaña, 2016). The codes were the foundation for the categories.

Emergent Categories

The data from the Pre-cycle revealed two emerging categories: personal identity influences on leadership and moving forward with purpose despite difficulties. I am included in the CPR group and utilize first-person language, which includes the analysis of evidence from myself and co-practitioner researchers. An autoethnography begins with questions related to thoughts, feelings, identities, and experiences that make us deconstruct and reconstruct understandings of ourselves, others, and our worlds, sending us into a looping process of sense-making (Adams et al., 2015). In Table 7, I summarize the data from the Pre-cycle. The evidence represents the entire group, including myself; I played the dual role of participant and lead researcher. When referring to the CPR group, I use third-person language (participants or CPRs)

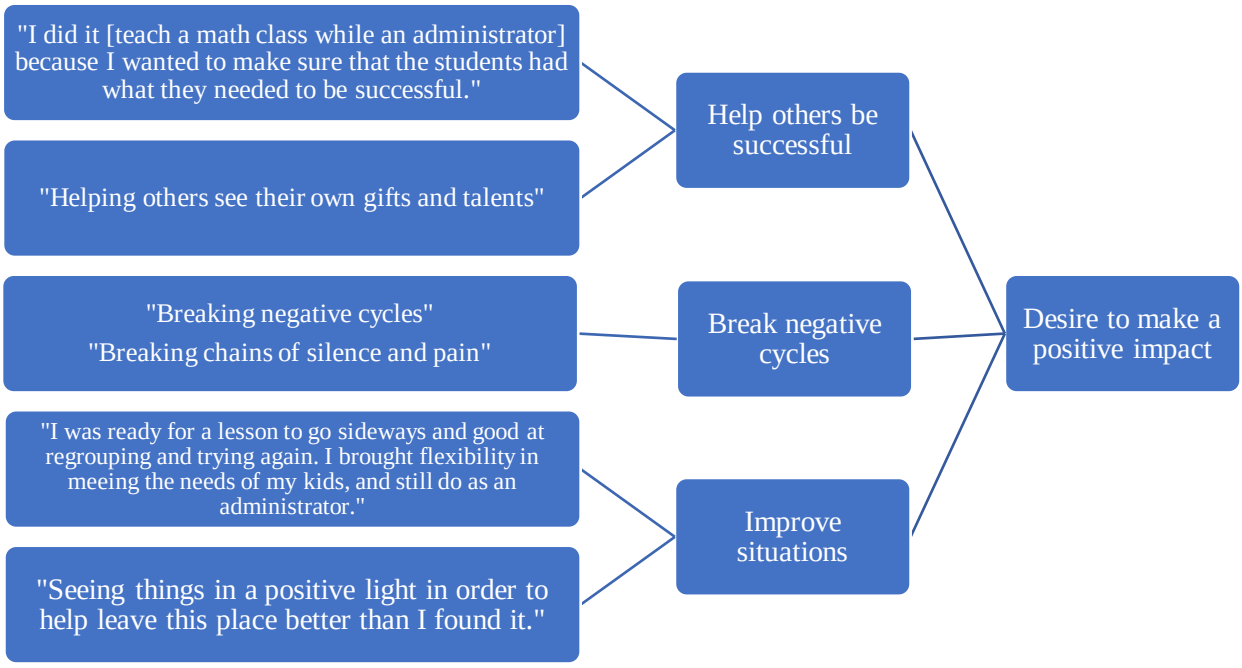


Figure 9. Process of coding data from artifacts into codes and code groups.

to describe the collective data of the group. This process of maintaining the roles of participant and lead researcher while keeping an open mind to data analysis was an important part of PAR process (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I hesitated to jump to patterns too quickly and instead describe the Pre-cycle data and provide examples and the rationale for grouping datum together (Miles et al., 2020). The participants' identities, feelings about the work they do, ways they describe themselves, and difficulties they faced on their paths to becoming educational leaders emerge in the data. In describing each emergent category, I detail supporting data following Table 7.

Personal Identity Influences on Leadership

> *Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world.*
> –Nelson Mandela, *Speech July 16, 2003*

Understanding how the individual and collective identities of the women in this group connect to their roles as leaders is fundamental to understanding how the women are leaders of equity. CPR members feel strongly about the work they do and describe themselves in similar ways (see Figure 10). Their educational leadership positions and their identities are extensions of their deepest desires and are tied to these subcategories; as a result of tabulating instances of appearance in the coding, I converted data to percentages: (a) calling (34%), (b) passion (24%), (c) strong work ethic (13%), (d) caring (12%), (e) change agent (10%), and (f) supported by others (7%). The participants do not consider "work" only in their formal roles as school leaders but include the work they do in their homes and communities. The leaders responded to a calling that intersected with their passions for educational equity and impacts their abilities to move forward despite obstacles (see Figure 10 for composite representation of data).

Table 7

Pre-cycle: Emergent Categories, Subcategories, and Code

Emergent Category: Personal identity influences on leadership (189 instances)

Subcategory	Code	Frequency	Participants	Not represented
Calling (34%)	positive impact on others	22	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Carrie	Michelle
	serve and care for others	21	Lyla, Jessica, Mira, Joyce, Michelle	Carrie
	fulfill my purpose	12	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	Mira
	create opportunities for all	10	Lyla, Jessica, ga*	Mira, Joyce
Passion (24%)	People	15	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle	Carrie
	Equity	14	Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, ga*	Lyla, Carrie
	leading/leadership	8	Lyla, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	Mira, Jessica
	learning and growth	8	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Carrie, ga*	Michelle
Strong work ethic (13%)	hard worker	9	Lyla, Jessica, Michelle, Carrie	Mira, Joyce
	Organizer	9	Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	Lyla
	Responsible	6	Lyla, Mira, Michelle, Carrie	Jessica, Joyce
Caring (12%)	Nurturer	13	Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	Lyla
	wife or mother	10	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	none
Change agent (10%)	positive influence	11	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle	Mira, Carrie
	problem solver	7	Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle	Lyla, Carrie
Supported by others (7%)	family/ancestors.	8	Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	Lyla, Mira
	others (not necessarily family).	6	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Carrie, ga*	Joyce, Michelle

Table 7 (continued)

Emergent Category: Moving Forward with Purpose Despite Difficulties (total 85)

Subcategory	Code	Frequency	Participants	Not represented
Past Experiences (42%)	Thoughts or feelings of fear	16	Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	Lyla
	Challenging circumstances	11	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	none
	Inner Critic	9	Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	Lyla
Resilience (37%)	Feeling grounded and accepted	11	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	none
	Seeking balance and peace	8	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	Mira
	Seeing and celebrating emotion	6	Mira, Michelle, Carrie, ga*	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce
	Finding joy	6	Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	Lyla, Mira
Agency (21%)	Choosing my path	7	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle	Carrie
	Connecting with others	6	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Carrie	Mira, Michelle
	Desiring to be better	5	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce	Mira, Michelle, Carrie

Note. *"ga" represents the group artifact.

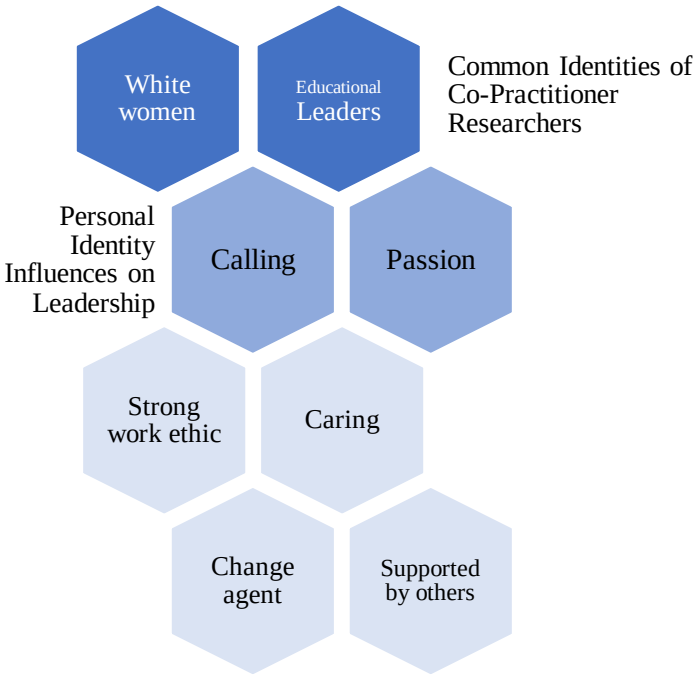


Figure 10. Collective identity descriptors of the CPR group from the Pre-cycle data.

Calling

Dik (2016) describes a calling as "a pathway for expressing your purpose in ways that make the world better" and one-third of participants' responses spoke of a personal calling to engage in work, home, and community in particular ways. The study participants had a calling; they desired to make the world better by making a positive impact, serving or caring for others, fulfilling their purpose, and/or creating opportunities for all. The participants' purposes and work in school and as mothers, wives, and community members overlapped. They expressed a desire to leave a place better than they found it and believe that their love for the community is shown through their actions and ability to make a positive impact. They wished to be described as leaders who give of themselves to their students and staff, as leaders who are loving and supportive, and called to serve and care for others. The participants described themselves as purpose-driven, searching for meaning, and having the desire to live well while fulfilling their purposes as women in their many roles. They expressed a desire to create opportunities for all, making space for all people and their learning, especially the unheard. Answering a calling intersects with a well-honed passion for the work of equity.

Passion

Participants expressed their passion for people, for equity, for leading/leadership, and learning by their individual and collective enthusiasm or excitement. In 24% of the responses, participants confirmed that they are passionate about the work they do. They expressed passion for taking care of people in their families, schools, and communities. They expressed a deeply felt belief that they could make a difference. In specifically citing equity, individuals said: "I want to be known as a leader who is equity-driven" and "leaders for equity identify barriers for learning for children and how to overcome them." However, they were aware that their passions

for equity sometimes caused other reactions in ENC. On the group artifact, one person described her passion for equity as finding a "balance between burning the place down and not completely losing my spark for this work" (Group artifact, January 10, 2022). The participants described a passion for learning and growth. They were passionate about leading and described themselves as leading by example and being conscious leaders. Their passions translated into a commitment to work ethic.

Strong Work Ethic

A strong work ethic meant that balancing work commitments and personal commitments was tricky. They knew they were known as hard-working, organized, responsible, and capable leaders. Participants described themselves as driven and trying to do it all. Being able to organize their records, planning, and tasks were included in the work they do to stay organized. CPRs described themselves as delegators and responsible. The participants thought these descriptors represented how they were viewed by themselves and others, and they worked hard to live up to these expectations.

Caring

Women lead with an ethic of care (Aguilar, 2018; Gilligan, 2014; Nakama, 2005) and the data from the Pre-cycle supported this theory. Every participant in the study identifies as either a wife, mother, or both and on every participant's identity map the words mother/mom/mama and/or wife were used to describe an identity at home. In the evidence from the mandalas (see Appendix D1), spouses and children are key figures in the women's lives. Caring for neighbors, children, spouses, friends, and their community is a fundamental part of how these women view themselves and others view them. They are described as helpful, kind, as encouragers, and loving. The word love was used in every artifact to describe how these women care for others.

The women are nurturers and caring for and about others is significant in the work these women do at home, in their jobs, and in their communities.

Change Agents

The CPRs recognize their ability to affect their sphere of influence and create change for themselves or others in their respective places. They recognize their ability to bring a calm presence to chaotic situations and to motivate people. They view themselves as problem solvers and decision makers. Together these data represent the ways the CPR members see themselves affecting their environments at home and work. How their change agency is connected to the equitable outcomes they envision was a question at this point in the research journey.

Supported by Others

On both the group artifact and in the Self-As-Leader artifacts, the participants confirmed that they were not heroic leaders acting alone but relied on support from other people. Most participants expressed feelings of support from family and when describing positive traits in themselves, they recognized these same traits in ancestors. Participants recognized they were supported by others beyond their families. For example, one participant described the way a principal encouraged her to move into administration when she was a teacher, and another shared the way a community theater group supported her when she felt isolated and alone. This emergent subcategory proposes the idea that these women do not feel as if they do their work alone; they recognize others support them in their endeavors.

The Pre-cycle data helped me to understand the individual and collective attributes of the women school leaders. I recognized that participants describe themselves as feeling called to do their work and passionate about the work they do. They believed and others believed they worked hard; as caring individuals, they influenced others and could effect change because they

were supported by others. I am interested to learn more about how these attributes relate to their roles as leaders for equity, as posed in question one in the study about how they identify as equity leaders. I wanted to understand how the way they describe themselves intersects with leadership actions as they advocate for more equitable educational spaces for all learners. Part of understanding that larger question related to how the participants continued to move forward despite facing difficulties in their personal and professional lives.

Moving Forward with Purpose Despite Difficulties

> *Resilience is how we weather the storms in our lives and rebound after something difficult.*
>
> –Elena Aguilar, *Onward*

The CPR members exposed the ways they overcame past and present challenges in their lives and what they envisioned for their futures. In moving forward with purpose despite difficulties, the CPR members recognized that (n=36 or 42% of instances), resilience (n=31 or 36%), and agency (n=18 or 21%) were key factors in them weathering the storms of leadership and their abilities to rebound (see Figure 11).

Past Experiences

Participants faced challenges throughout their lives and on the road to becoming educators and leaders, yet they moved forward despite these challenges. In particular, they revealed these past challenges in autobiographies and digital stories; some participants divulged deeply personal stories of their childhood, trauma, or tragedies they faced on the road to education and leadership.

Participants acknowledged facing challenging circumstances in the past. Two of us were affected by the suicide of an immediate family member, three of the six grew up in homes where mental health or poverty affected the stability of the home, and multiple participants

Figure 11. Subcategories and codes related to moving forward with purpose despite difficulties.

acknowledged challenges in their family relationships and job situations. These challenges often manifested as parental judgement: “dad’s closemindedness,” “overcoming mom’s neglect and abuse,” or “negative voices from childhood.” In one case, a participant said a great deal of her life had been “the pursuit to leave the past behind.” As a result, some participants expressed feelings of fear; either they wished to stay in the background or were afraid to express emotions because they might not be politically correct. Thoughts or feelings of fear were linked to uncertainty about the future in two instances. As a result of these data, I was interested in learning how thoughts and feelings of fear might influence leadership for equity.

The women in this study confessed that at times their insecurities challenged them in the past. They expressed the presence of an inner critic in phrases such as imposter syndrome and told stories of not feeling good enough, having low self-esteem, and holding feelings of self-doubt and worry. One participant began her digital story with the question “Do you remember the first time you weren’t enough?” accepting that a negative voice plagued her in the past. Another participant committed to being a different kind of parent to her son so she would not be “a negative mommy record player” to break the negative cycles of insecurity from her childhood. I continued to be interested in how or if the voices of an inner critic affect women in school leadership positions and white women striving to be and become antiracists. Yet, despite their acknowledged stories, fears, and challenges, they exhibited resilience and agency.

Resilience

In discussing resilience and agency, I have a basic understanding of how the women keep moving forward with purpose based on how they responded to past challenges and developed resilience. The CPR members faced challenging situations on the road to where they are and still maintained hope for the future. Four attributes of hope helped them: staying grounded and

accepted, seeking balance and peace, seeing and celebrating emotions, and finding joy. Next, I provide more details about the data leading to each of these codes.

Participants described feeling grounded and accepted using words like rooted, phrases such as being accepted as they are, and feeling freedom from judgment. One participant described the power of digging into her past and understanding more about herself as an opportunity to "run toward quirks and kinks of identity." Another participant emphasized the importance of being accepted by close family and friends. When the CPRs described themselves in the future seeking balance and peace, they articulated the need to slow down, attend to self-care, and regenerate. One participant recognized her need to balance quiet with working with groups of people in her job. Seeing and celebrating emotions means that women want to bring their full selves into the work. One participant described the lotus flower as a symbol of feeling emotions in our body as "rising from the gloom toward the light" (Group artifact, December 11, 2021); in her digital story, Mira used anger to cover her emotions of pain and expressed the importance of feeling and recognizing those emotions (Mackey, digital story, July 23, 2020). Participants expressed moments of finding joy in the past through dancing with friends in college or being re-energized by a new job, and by describing the future as a beautiful destination where one participant described her future self as joyful. Resilience results from attitudes and behaviors but is connected to circumstances (Aguilar, 2018); the Pre-cycle evidence showed resilience from women's points of views as a vital component for moving forward.

Agency

Radd (2008) describes people with agency as people who do not see themselves as victims but as able to affect their situations. In these preliminary data, agency meant the following: choosing my path, connecting with others, and desiring to be better. Statements such

as “importance of choice,” looking at “life as an adventure,” and “all the wonderings” describe the ability to wonder about and make decisions—in other words, participants chose their paths. Participants expressed that connecting with others meant that they were developing or deepening relationships that were authentic or true. One participant said in her emulation poem: “I’m going to a place where each sunrise leads to . . .deeper connections.” Lastly, desiring to be better meant to participants that they wanted to be viewed as a good and honorable person who gives back to her school, family, and community. As another participant said in the emulation poem: “I’m going to a place where growth will allow me to be better.” Despite the challenges the participants faced in past experiences, the Pre-cycle evidence reveals that the women in this study believe they have choice and agency to effect change in their personal and professional lives.

As I analyzed the Pre-cycle data, I recognized the women have faced difficult past experiences but have found purpose in the work they do, in their agency, and in looking toward a better future. Moving forward with purpose despite difficulties means that the life experiences supported CPR members to develop resilience—ability to move forward—and agency, the power to affect the direction. At this point in the research, I was interested in learning more about how these women face difficulties in leading for equity and in antiracist work.

Throughout the Pre-cycle process, I recognized that I defaulted to comfortable tasks rather than pushing myself and the CPR team. Once I obtained IRB permissions from participants, I compiled and coded the artifacts and data and developed a codebook. I knew the participants were busy in their school roles, and I initially delayed setting up and facilitating the gatherings of school leaders, preferring to swim in the data analysis process rather than trust myself to lead a group focused on antiracism. After the initial gathering, the participants provided feedback that there was value in coming together as a group to explore equity and

antiracism. In addition to examining the first research question related to identity and reflection, we endeavored to co-create activities to support our learning and look into the enactment of equity leadership, part of the second research question.

Reflection and Planning

As the Pre-cycle ended, I was aware of the importance of reflection and planning. Gathering face-to-face during the Pre-cycle was a challenge for three reasons: lingering COVID-19 concerns with new variants emerging, difficulty scheduling across multiple people's activities related to school and home, and travel time to meet in a central location. Additionally, I faced my own feelings of insecurity at leading leaders in antiracist work and recognized that I defaulted to my comfort zone. As an introvert it was comfortable for me to spend hours reading, thinking, and interpreting data, but I needed to focus on the enactment of my equity leadership. In the next cycle, I needed to shift to virtual conversations so that distance and times were not barriers to participation and better prepare myself to facilitate a group to explore equity and antiracism.

As I wrote in my autobiography, "I never considered myself a leader." I realized that I regularly battle my internal critic who reminds me that I have never been a school principal or district leader. I had more years of experience in public education and life than any of the CPRs, but I faced discomfort at the prospect of leading leaders. I am much more comfortable as a part of a leadership team that I support and to which I contribute; being responsible for the planning, facilitation, or hard conversations and decisions is more difficult. I recognized that if I wanted to facilitate a group in which we push each other to be critical friends and antiracists, who are willing to understand and interrogate our whiteness to be more effective leaders for equity, I had to deal with my apprehensions and include strategies for mitigating this discomfort. As a result, I engaged in my learning as a part of a national white affinity group striving to disrupt white

supremacy (I.D.E.A, n.d.). Additionally, I mapped out a course of action for PAR Cycle One and Two and shared this with CPR members in December 2021 to keep us responsible for our commitment to each other and to being and becoming antiracists.

Moving forward into future cycles, I needed to view our CPR space as a place to cultivate our social justice imperative and collective commitment to being antiracists. The participants found value in coming together to explore equity and antiracism; in addition to exploring our identities, we co-designed activities in future cycles of inquiry to understand more about the enactment of our leadership in our contexts. As leaders for equity and white women the politics of the caste system endure (Wilkerson, 2020). I overcame my fears by being part of a national network of white educators who explored equity and antiracist practices and talked about how to disrupt injustice. I did believe this statement:

> To upend systems, you've got to do more than read about white fragility and antiracism. You've gotta be engaged in the practice and dirty work of politics…are our politics changing, are our laws changing? … if you have this groundswell of support, and all this enthusiasm and it goes into buying books, with no disrespect to authors of the books, it's missing the mark…and these folks [white folks] often have the recognition of the system that upholds this [white supremacy]..and yet the solution is missing the mark…white folks are having a quiet racial reckoning…but the evidence shows that the reckoning is starting on the bookshelf and ending on the couch. (Demby & Meraji, 2022, 30:40)

After the Pre-cycle process, these important lessons surfaced. First, the women in the CPR group were busy, ambitious individuals and needed a plan moving forward. Despite their busy schedules, they wanted to interrogate their identities and roles as white women leaders of equity. In this Pre-cycle, I learned more about the participants' identities and their work and how

they move forward despite challenges, and I learned more about myself and my discomfort. Next, I wanted to learn more about the journeys toward becoming and being antiracist and how this shows up in the personal and professional lives of the participants. I needed to learn more about how we facilitate spaces to support each other in tackling equity dilemmas in our contexts. To address their busy lives and observe how they enacted their work as leaders, I planned engaging in one-to-one observations of participants at school sites and facilitating reflective conversations about the work they do.

I recognized that in the analysis of the Pre-cycle data, the voice of each participant needed more attention. The unique experience of each woman and their stories in different eastern North Carolina contexts were invisible in my writing.

Summary

May I have the courage today
To live the life that I would love,
To postpone my dream no longer
But do at last what I came here for
And waste my heart on fear no more
–John O'Donohue (2008), *To Bless the Space Between Us*

Pre-cycle evidence and interactions set the stage for beginning to understand how white women in educational leadership positions in eastern North Carolina identify themselves and view their roles as leaders for equity. CPR members and I took time to reflect on our Self-As-Leader artifacts from 2020 and revisited why we do the work we do, personally and professionally. We collectively began crafting an artifact representing a North Carolina educational leader and a white woman who embodies antiracism and leads for equity. I became more aware of the limited time of the participants and the difficulty in scheduling face-to-face gatherings and the importance of scheduling well in advance. We acknowledged our purpose for the gathering was to continue to support each other and learn and grow.

The Pre-cycle evidence revealed that the women in this study feel called to make a positive impact in their respective spaces of home and work. Passionate about people, equity, leadership, and learning, they are called to make a positive impact, serve, and care for others, fulfill what they believe to be their purpose, and create opportunities for others. They identified as nurturers, hard workers, organizers, and problem solvers who are responsible for and supported by others. They moved forward with resilience and agency yet acknowledge difficult feelings and circumstances they have faced in the past. In the next cycle, I visit each participant in her school context, and begin to understand some of the equity dilemmas each participant faces in her context. We will reexamine our collective artifact and further consider what it may mean to embody antiracism as white women and educational leaders in eastern North Carolina.

In this chapter, I wrote about the group's collective identities and the commonalities between the members of our co-practitioner research group, but what was missing were the individual stories. Each of us aspired to be more antiracist and enact equity leadership, but the journey was different for each person. Antiracist work and equity leadership require internal and external work. In a reflective memo, I considered Dewey's words and my words as a foundation for shifting the structures of the upcoming chapters:

> The institutions and customs that exist in the present and that give rise to present social ills and dislocations did not arise overnight. They have a long history behind them. Attempting to deal with them simply on the basis of what is obvious in the present is bound to result in adoption of superficial measures which in the end will only render existing problems more acute and more difficult to solve. (Dewey, 1938, p. 77)

I considered Dewey's reminder of a long history of injustices and the many superficial measures I witnessed school leaders use for the illusion of creating more equitable structures, realizing that not much changed in the 20+ years I served as an ENC teacher and administrator.

> Understanding a long history of unequal structures in North Carolina is something to keep in mind, yet not be paralyzed by. My participants all lead schools and districts laden with racial and economic inequities purposeful by design. Leveraging small wins internally (identity reflection reducing defensiveness and anger) and externally (as school leaders who are committed to equity) is important. (Morris, reflective memo, October 24, 2021)

I considered the many ways I felt paralyzed as an administrator, not feeling as though my leadership was making any real difference in challenging status quo educational structures. I began to wonder how each participant could equity leadership in her context and further her personal antiracist work, leading to sustainable shifts in ENC educational space. By summarizing their stories and voices, I risked watering down or minimizing the small wins, and the conflicts, contractions, and ethical dilemmas the women face. Therefore, in Chapter 5, I centered the voices of the participants.

CHAPTER 5: VOICES OF SCHOOL LEADERS WHO LEAD FOR EQUITY

> *I see bold women everywhere taking what used to be called a tendency to cause trouble and rebranding it as a tendency to speak up, to confront gaslighting, and to make our culture more caring, communicative, and emotionally intelligent.* (Lesser, 2020, p. 55)

As white women aspiring to be antiracist and equity leaders in eastern North Carolina (ENC), we have a responsibility to share our lived experiences. In the American Christian tradition in which women are often expected to be submissive and compliant, and in the south where women are socialized to be sweet and hospitable, voicing opinions in opposition to those in positions of power can be risky. As white folks benefitting from whiteness, we have a responsibility to understand our positional and sociocultural power, examine how power operates through our schools and districts, critically reflect on decisions using an equity lens, and work with others to share power and expand decision-making to include the people closest to the issues (Guajardo et al., 2016; Radd et al., 2021). This work is complicated, necessary, and iterative but to build an embodied antiracist culture, the work of healing and growth first happens internally and radiates outward (Menakem, 2022). When I began the dissertation journey, I did not plan to attend to my need for healing; yet opportunities for growth came from developing an awareness of my emotional responses.

I recognized an unsettled feeling in myself as I met with the co-practitioner researcher group during PAR Cycle One. When I shared the Pre-cycle data analysis chart from Chapter 4 (see Table 7), Lyla said, “To me, it seems like we all, even though we’re in different settings, we’re still very similar with our passions and our goals and what we’re doing in each of our places” (meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Michelle added, “The top codes were about our calling and desire to make a positive impact and serve…but the next highest frequency was thoughts or feelings of fear…I found that interesting.” She went on to say, “It looks like we all have this

wondering or fear…if we are meeting our purpose?" Joyce countered that interpretation with, "Is it we had thoughts and feelings of fear in our past and maybe that's what's driving us to want to be change agents?" (meeting notes, March 13, 2022). I recognized that, by coding through my lens, I might be missing the stories behind the data told from the participants' perspectives. My reflection on this topic led me to include the voices of the women before analyzing the data from PAR Cycle One and Two. In this chapter, I share the voices of each participant through words, artifacts, and descriptions of site visits and interactions.

Vignettes and Voices

I developed vignettes of each woman from the stories, quotes, and artifacts from PAR Cycles One and Two. I used field notes during site visits, processed my thoughts in reflective memos, planned and facilitated co-practitioner researcher sessions, and conducted individual member checks and interviews. Each participant conducted a member check to verify the descriptions and quotes.

Lyla Burgess

On a chilly, rainy February day, I visited Lyla, the principal of a NC early college high school. Most North Carolina school districts (83%) have early college campuses, often sharing space with a community college (NCDPI, 2022). The early college program, Cooperative Innovative High Schools in NC state legislation, specifically targets "certain student populations: students at-risk of dropping out of high school, first-generation college students, and students who would benefit from accelerated instruction" (Bell et al., 2019, para. 5). In Lyla's small ENC district, schools are often racially segregated with most Black students and a growing Latino population attending the public schools, and mostly white children in private schools. However,

this early college is the most diverse school in the district with the demographics of the school matching the district's census demographics most closely (60% Black, 30% white, 10% other).

We toured the campus and visited the classrooms, particularly those of the Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPR) in her PAR study. Lyla's CPR group included four teachers: an English teacher (Black female), a science teacher (Black female), a math teacher (white female), and a social studies teacher (white male), and she focused on increasing academic discourse in classrooms based on evidence-based observations. She told me stories about teachers, the students (all of whom she knows by name), and her experience growing up in the rural, historically Black community (HBC). As a white woman, she felt accepted in the majority Black community because she had grown up in the area. Members of the Board of Education (BOE) members call her by her first name because they have known her since she was a young girl when she attended the district public schools. Lyla emphasized that she works at a great school and loves her job.

Despite her attachment to the area, Lyla and her husband discussed moving to another location offering more educational opportunities for their three children and alleviating her heavy workload. Her three-year-old daughter "plays school" and repeatedly pretends to "go to meetings like Mommy", and her husband and extended family often step in to watch her toddler twin boys. Her principal role at the early college is time-consuming, with required attendance to board meetings lasting sometimes until 10 pm, and school responsibilities. The night before my visit, she and her staff met with every 10th grader and their families to review recent testing scores and educational plans. The school does not have a full-time receptionist, testing coordinator, or assistant principal, despite her requests for those positions.

She felt that she was missing precious time with her children. As her three young children approach school age, she and her husband are torn about where the children should attend school. She thought the testing requirements in the public elementary schools would not be good for her oldest daughter, yet she described the optics of sending her daughter to a private school as "political educational suicide". Lyla is approaching her sixth year as a principal at the early college (see Figure 12).

During PAR Cycle Two, I learned more about Lyla's PAR project, and she shared personal frustrations related to the public's perception of her school. Lyla identified barriers to her equity leadership work and how she maintains her resilience despite the difficulties. Lyla stepped in to teach math at her school due to a shortage of qualified math teachers. She shared the strategies she uses to manage the demands of her job but admitted that she does not always feel successful at her roles: principal, teacher, or mother. Despite the challenges, Lyla recognized the growth she has made as a leader and the importance of building relationships with the people in her school and community. For Lyla's PAR project, which focused on improving academic discourse in four classrooms at her school, she conducted evidence-based observations in the classrooms, provided the evidence to the teachers and engaged in conversations with teachers about the evidence. The evidence focused on the ways the teachers were equitably calling on students and they asked students. Lyla stated in her leadership digital story:

> As Friere says, the starting point for any action is the reality of the person who is making changes. The key factor is that teachers assume responsibility for their teaching …my role as a school leader is that all participants need to be ready for change. Ensuring things happen with teacher input is more important than pushing forward without full understanding and teacher consensus. (Burgess, leadership story, July 22, 2022)

Lyla, CPR meeting notes, March 13, 2022.

We are [her CPR group] *looking at different protocols that teachers are using the classroom and we've recently gotten to using an observation tool, and I feel like I am being an equity coach because my participants, while I thought we had gotten far with the definition of equity, are still struggling with "equity is* [means] *equal". And, in looking at the observation data, while we're just right now looking at questioning, we're still not even thinking about how we are calling on kids in the classroom and who is having access to those questions… it's really tiny baby steps.*

Lyla, Group Artifact (image and six-word poem), March 13, 2022.

"I [Lyla] *said, "seeing value in everyone and moving forward". And then I put an image of a half empty glass, reminding myself, do I look at the glass as half empty or half full? And keeping that in my mind as I move forward. As WE move forward"*
(Lyla, CPR Meeting Notes, March 2022).
Note. Data came from the Group Artifact which is an ongoing collection of our reflections and thoughts. The addition was made during the March 2022 CPR Meeting after I asked the question, *"What is resonating with you right now about your role as a leader for equity and about what it means to embody antiracism?".*

Lyla, Sightings protocol, April 15, 2022.

I was talking with a teacher (who was Black) about her student teacher (who is Black) and the student teacher's supervisor (who is white). The supervisor was comparing our school, our students, and the student teacher to another student teacher (who is white) and that student teacher's supervising teacher (who is white). The supervisor was not trying to understand how our school works and operates and was trying to put our school in the same frame as the other (which you cannot compare them). The comments that were being made to my teacher and her student teacher were just racist, and I named it for what it was. I told my teacher what I would do, and I asked if she wanted me to step in and talk with the supervisor and she asked me not to, but I think she felt like I was on her side and would have her back, or at least that is what I hope. I am starting to see more situations that raise my awareness of how others are treated, and I am trying to always make sure I stand up for those situations and name them for what they are.

Figure 12. Data from PAR Cycle One (Lyla).

She shared that when she began the leadership journey as a principal, she was unsure of who she was as a leader. “Reflection has served as a critical component for me as a leader…I reflected on the systems we have in place that affect students…and on the internal transformation I have made” (Burgess, leadership story, July 22, 2022).

During the September CPR meeting, Lyla shared an equity dilemma with our group related to public perception of the early college where she is the principal. She said,

> We have great test results. We do really great things with kids. We get kids that are pretty low coming to us, and we grow them, and I do have the highest white percentage of students at my school, of any school in my district…we have about 30% white students. I’ve had this internal/external battle about who I admit to our school, because my school has been deemed ‘the white school’, partially because I’m a white principal, but because we do see an increase of white students coming to our school…we look at a lot of factors, at whether our students are first-generation [college students]…when you look at our historical data, our white students’ parents tend to be less educated than a lot of our Black students’ parents…and so when I hear my school board members asking ‘what equitable policies do you have at your school?’ and in the next breath, they turn around and say, ‘oh, well you’re the white school and have the good kids and that’s why your score is the way it is’…my teachers don’t get credit for the good work they are doing and the hard work we’re all putting in…that’s been a struggle for me. (Burgess, meeting notes, September 18, 2022)

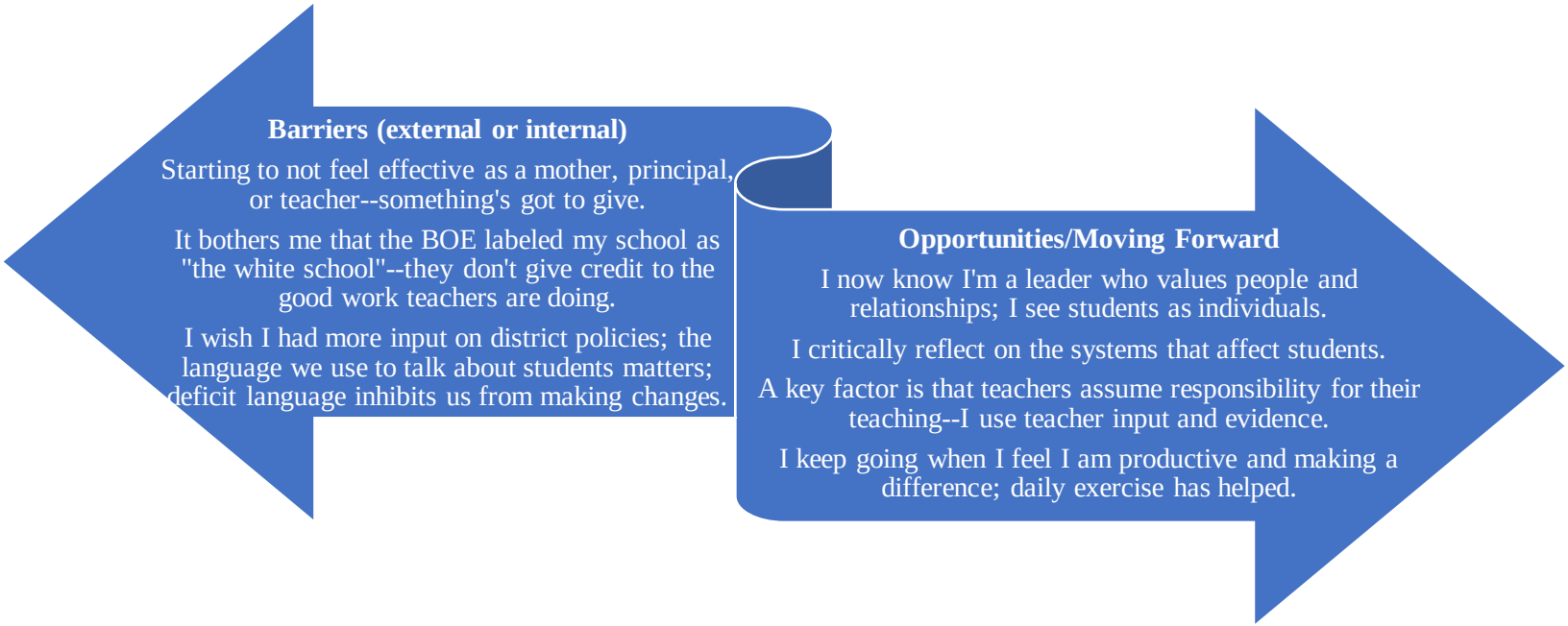
Lyla admitted she has strong perseverance because seeing the students at her school grow is part of what propels her forward. To care for herself, she began a morning exercise routine two years ago after her twin boys were born. This quiet time before everyone else is awake helps her

to stay level and juggle her responsibilities. She leans on her support network (husband and parents) to help at home. She worries that students have a much harder time than she did when she grew up in the same community and are under a "fine microscope". She shared a story about advocating for two senior students when she perceived the community college disciplinary consequences to be too harsh for the situation and the barriers and opportunities Lyla has found on the journey to be a more equitable leader (see Figure 13).

Mira Mackey

I visited Mira at a rural ENC high school on a windy day in March 2022. Mira was a new high school principal, hired in the middle of the 2020-21 school year while students were out of school due to COVID-19. The school is housed in an old brick building, formally the Black school during segregation in the Historically Black Community (HBC) and under the same roof is a middle school. A brand-new elementary school is within eyesight, across what was once farmland. The middle/high school building was supposed to be torn down and a new school built, but a new superintendent changed the plans. When she took the job, she thought she would be moving into a new building, but that has not happened.

Mira led me into her office and closed the door and asked if it was okay if she vented. She recently documented a situation in which she feared two staff members had perhaps not told her the truth about how they handled a situation with a student (Black female) whose father is a teacher at a local school. The student reported a staff member had physically stopped her from leaving the classroom to use the restroom. School safety video supported the student's story, showing she had been physically stopped by staff members, but this was not the story two staff members told her, who stated they had never touched the student. Mira thanked me for listening, saying it helps to talk about difficult situations with someone else. She reported she had



Lyla, 1:1 Interview, October 4, 2022.

"Kids today are under such a fine microscope…I consider, 'what is the focus for this child?' I want to support the child (they are still kids) to get to the next goal–they still have a whole life ahead of them. For instance, two seniors at my school were caught with pot. There are two sets of conduct rules (community college and public school). The students still had access to education through the public school district. The community college banned them from access to education. The students are first generation college students, two African American females, who had great grades and had never been in trouble before. They didn't even get access to finish coursework online through the community college–my recommendation–so they could finish their community college classes. Here I am trying to help them get their associates degree–I could not believe that our community college was not going to provide them access to finish their education…They now are both at four-year universities and doing well. At the center are the students."

Figure 13. Data from PAR Cycle Two (Lyla).

completed multiple other time-consuming and stressful Title IX investigations. She said she often relied on her relationship with the district human resources contact, with whom she already had a positive relationship, because she had not been given a mentor or other administrator to contact when she had new questions as a new principal.

As we observed the school, she pointed out improvements to the school since she became the administrator (wall murals and quotes completed by students and parents over the summer, a reorganized library with updated books and resources, supplies teachers had received through grants and partnerships with local businesses). She proudly showed me the classrooms of the teachers in her CPR group and pointed out how their classrooms supported academic discourse (e.g., horseshoe, pairs, trios), which related to her PAR study.

When I met the assistant principal (Black female) and graduation counselor (Black female), they mentioned to me they thought Mira was a great principal who did not give herself enough credit and spent too much time at school. “She needs to spend more time with those two beautiful boys she’s raising,” one commented. I noticed a plaque on the wall that read, “Principal of the Year”. When I asked, Mira humbly admitted the district had selected her to represent the district as the Principal of the Year after only a short time of being a principal. Later, when I asked her if she enjoyed her position as the school principal, she sighed and said some days she did, but she carried so much home with her. In a recent incident, she investigated related to a reported sexual assault on campus, she found out the student had lied about the incident. The situation caused her so much grief she took a few days off from school to process her emotions. She expressed regret in needing to take time away from school because she knew her teachers did not have the luxury to step away from their classrooms. Mira shares her vision for her role as

an equity leader through a six-word poem and image and provides details about an equity dilemma and her change in perspective after reflection (see Figure 14).

PAR Cycle Two does not include Mira's data because she withdrew from the doctoral program and resigned from her principal position during the summer of 2022. When I first heard about her decision, I expressed concern and she responded to a text message saying, "Thank you. I'm good. Transitioning to the community college is a really good start to decompressing and feeling good. Thanks for the check-in" (Mackey, text communication, July 20, 2022). She accepted a director position at the district community college managing a workforce innovation grant that helps students earn general education degrees, learn English, or prepare for jobs. Much later after a member check, she reflected,

> Somewhere along the way, I feel like I got really lost and just broken. Being at [the new job] has given me so much time and space to just breathe…and the feedback I have gotten has been just incredible. Everyone thinks that I am a shining star…This position is working with at-risk populations and making small differences in people's lives, and I like that a lot. (Mackey, email communication, March 1, 2023)

Mira's data are included only in the PAR Cycle One analysis.

Jessica Pinkney

Jessica is a district coordinator in a coastal ENC community where she and her husband moved when she accepted her position three years earlier. The district is spread over a wide geographic area; the drive from the district office to one elementary school took one hour and was shrouded in thick fog due to cold ocean water and warm spring air. Despite the distance, Jessica visited schools often. She knew every staff member by name and invited me to observe classrooms, especially the Spanish dual language classrooms, some led by international faculty,

Mira, Group artifact (image and six-word poem), March 13, 2022.

"My poem is 'the gift of service is love others' and I put two more words, because I needed more. It also says 'help others'. And I put a picture of people at well (Mira, CPR Meeting Notes, March 2022).

Note. Data came from the Group Artifact which is an ongoing collection of our reflections and thoughts. The addition was made during the March 2022 CPR Meeting after I asked the question, *"What is resonating with you right now about your role as a leader for equity and about what it means to embody antiracism?".*

Mira, CPR meeting notes, March 13, 2022

I had a student… just yelling the most awful things. Calling her [his girlfriend]*…And he's screaming up and down the hallway…and he's punching a wall…So, in my head I'm like, "hey, if he's willing to do this like publicly, what is he doing to this girl?" and that's exactly where my head went…when I interviewed kids* [to find out what happened], *I found out that this is normal behavior for this particular couple…we ended up the next week having a conference with the boy and his mom… I explained to the mom, no nonsense, he* [School Resource Officer] *could have* [put the student in handcuffs]. *He is 18…and this 18-year-old kid starts breaking down crying. I get my SRO out of there. My counselor's there with me and he* [the student] *broke down crying. And he said, "I know I've got a problem; I know I need counseling. "He said, "I don't believe that I hurt anybody. I've never hurt anybody. Y'all look at me like a monster" …He said, "I've never hurt her." He's not a monster. But for four days I held that in my head…And I realized like that, the equity issue is so clear. I have two boys… a girl could have done exactly what he did, and I would not have thought, "oh, she's abusive"… these are MY equity issues that I need to sort through…my heart said I need to protect the girl, instead of saying, "I needed to separate these people and figure out what's going on in a real and loving way" … and so I was really glad I had this learning experience, even though it made me feel not great…I have two little boys. My little boys will grow up, and…it just all resonated.*

Figure 14. Data from PAR Cycle One (Mira).

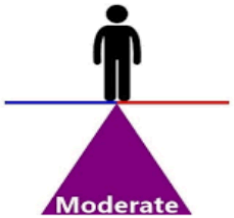
one of the programs for which she is responsible. Jessica's CPR group consisted of three principals, two assistant principals, and a district technology director. All the CPR members of Jessica's PAR study had been recruited to participate in the Project I^4 cohort, a one-year grant-funded professional development program focused on improving equitable access in math classrooms and increasing academic discourse through evidence-based observations. Jessica continued the work of the grant in a PAR study with the administrators.

Because the district was quite a distance from my home, Jessica invited me to spend the night before our school visits where I spent time with her, her husband, and two small children. Jessica and her husband told stories about some parents (white) in the district who attended board of education (BOE) meetings and targeted district personnel with social media attacks and blamed them for Critical Race Theory (CRT) being present in the schools. Jessica's husband said they had to be careful who they invited to their children's birthday parties and was concerned for his wife's safety after some social media lies and threats. Jessica, who did not grow up in the area, expressed feelings of frustration that some people whose families have been in the area for generations believed they deserve to maintain their traditional values over other people who may have different values and are not "from" the area.

The BOE had three open seats in the fall, and she expressed concern about extreme right-wing candidates running unopposed for the seats. Jessica mentioned if the political pressures continued to mount and if the school district continued to be a place where she was not allowed to address inequities and those inequities went unchallenged by the BOE, she would consider leaving the area. She was proud of the shifts her team had made in three years: expanding the dual language program, changing hiring practices to include diverse voices, educating school leaders about using evidence-based observations to address classroom inequities, and increasing

Jessica, meeting notes, March 13, 2022.
We have a very vocal pretty extreme conservative advocacy group…they come to board meetings…if you're not from there didn't grow up here, they're targeting you and I'm currently at target…And the part about it that's super frustrating is number one people writing things about you that are untrue… I wish I was able to be more of an equity warrior at work, but I can't, I'm more…in the background. I'm the tempered radical person that's making changes that they fully don't understand, but that's more of the world that I have to live in have to be really careful about the words that I use…we have three school board seats that are up in December and they have candidates that are running unopposed for all of those seats…I don't think I can work somewhere that has anti CRT legislation…I didn't grow up here so I don't have like deep ties… so what I'm grappling with right now is it worth it to stick it out for everything that we've built, or is it better to go somewhere that's more diverse and has more different voices.

The balance of honoring all voices.



Jessica, Group artifact (image and six-word poem), March 13, 2022.
"The balance of honoring all voices…like a bathroom sign person standing on a teeter totter triangle. Just because right now, depending on who you're talking to, whatever you're doing could be good, bad, ugly or indifferent. It just depends on the audience and the space you're in. And it's quite a time to be alive" (Jessica, CPR Meeting Notes, March 2022).
Note. Data came from the Group Artifact which is an ongoing collection of our reflections and thoughts. The addition was made during the March 2022 CPR Meeting after I asked the question, *"What is resonating with you right now about your role as a leader for equity and about what it means to embody antiracism?"*.

Jessica, Sightings protocol, April 15, 2022.
When working with district and school leaders during the hiring process, we've purposefully changed the way that we hire…School leaders have been encouraged to diversify the interview team for all positions…to get a variety of perspectives in the process. We also changed the way we hire school leaders by having candidates go through rounds of interviews with parents/guardians, district staff, and teachers/staff from the school. The community even sent in questions they'd like asked. This process, being so holistic and dynamic, has paid off with increasing transparency along with helping truly find the person who has the skills and is the best fit. The idea of changing the way interviews are done was met with some resistance at first by district staff. However, after discussions, many realized that their worry about releasing power to others was the real issue. The worry that including more voices would lessen their voice.

Figure 15. Data from PAR Cycle One (Jessica).

support for affordable teacher housing, especially for international teachers who often fill teaching vacancies (housing is expensive in the coastal tourist destination and teachers need modified housing options). International teachers additionally provide Spanish language support to the students and families in the district's growing Latino population (see Figure 15 for Jessica's data.

When Jessica worked in previous ENC districts, she voiced her social justice-based beliefs and values but now she considers the audience in her communications. As a district leader, she often communicates with parents and community members. She said that she recognizes her role as a public-school leader is to support education for all students and families, even those with whom she disagrees. In her current position, she recognized the conflicts that her views cause and found herself keeping her beliefs and views hidden from the public. Instead, she worked for small shifts toward disrupting inequities by improving trust between the district and school leaders, educating principals and assistant principals, directly impacting teachers, and striving to improve students' experiences in schools.

In some of our communications during PAR Cycle One, Jessica revealed that she applied for positions in different North Carolina districts for the 2022-23 school year. During the Spring of 2022, an assistant superintendent she worked closely with left the district, and the superintendent decided to retire. After being offered a district position in a school district on the western side of the state, Jessica and her family decided to move. She accepted a position as an assistant superintendent responsible for 20+ elementary school principals and assistant principals. During PAR Cycle Two, I learned more about the effects of her PAR study and about her transition to a new position and new district.

Jessica's toddler son was sick, keeping her from attending our September CPR meeting,

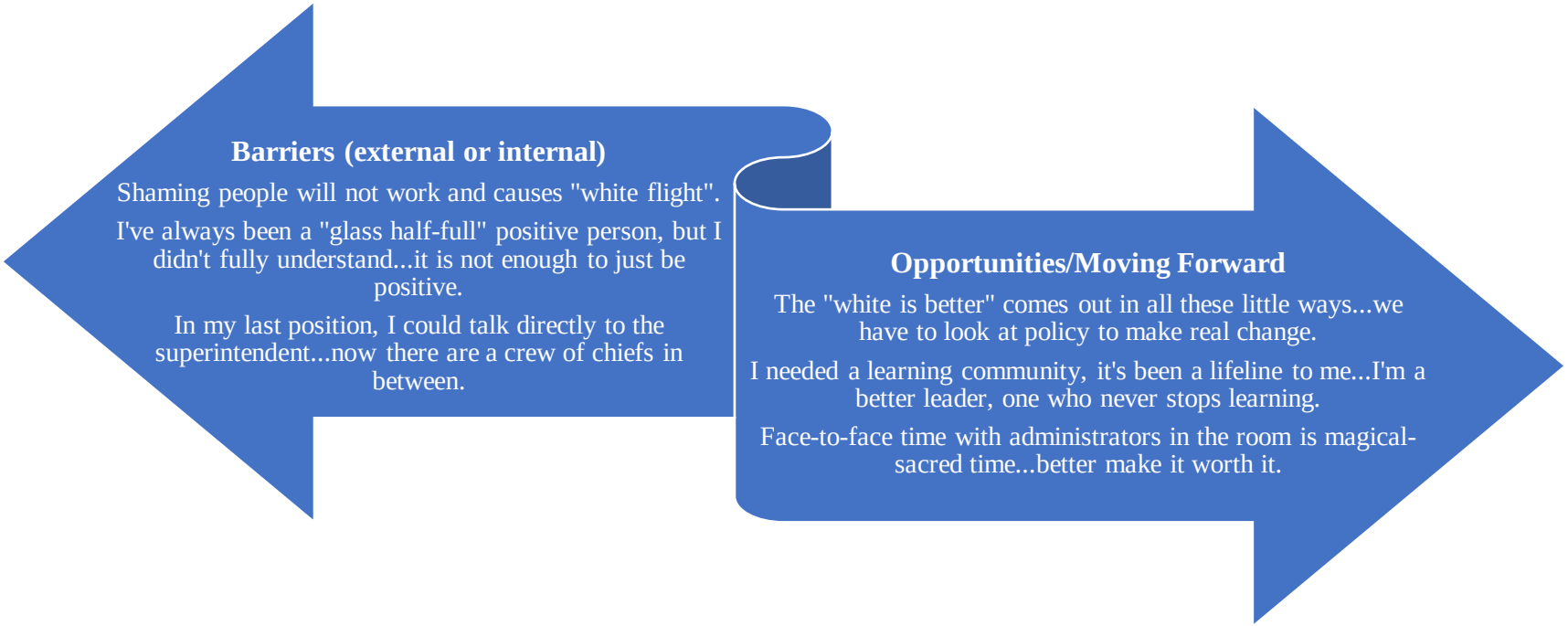
but through her leadership digital story and our one:one conversation, I learned how she used intentional reflection and protocols for relationship building to enact her equity leadership. Jessica found her passion for guiding and empowering school leaders through her PAR project. She met regularly with five administrators from the ENC district and embedded Community Learning Exchange (CLE) protocols such as personal narratives and dynamic mindfulness while supporting the school leaders in implementing evidence-based observations and conversations with teachers. Because she left the ENC district at the end of the school year, she recognized that her name would not be associated with improved test results, but she shared that growth was made in the schools of the administrators who were a part of her study. More information from Jessica is shared in Figure 16.

Jessica carried leadership lessons into her new position; she was responsible for 20+ elementary principals in another district and described the importance of using her positionality to amply voices and clear barriers. She observed assistant principals in her new district not knowing each other's names and shifted district meetings to center relationship building and professional learning. She sent a weekly newsletter, making herself available in a virtual session for questions and answers. She described a stressful day in her new role when the district received six bomb threats and students at multiple schools were evacuated for credible threats. "Having the State and Federal Bureau of Investigation on their campuses was not a world the principals had lived in before"; she discussed the importance of attending to the leaders 'needs and emotions (Pinkney, one-on-one conversation, October 6, 2022). She reported trying CLE protocols in "chunks at a time", such as moving gathering locations to important community buildings and embedding relationship-building protocols; "face-to-face time is sacred-magical time. We better make it worth it" (Pinkney, one-on-one conversation, October 6, 2022).

Jessica discussed her experiences with antiracist and equity work at different times in her professional career. In the past, as a middle-upper-class white woman, she felt that antiracist and equity work was meant to shame her. Now, she recognizes the white supremacy message of "white is better" comes out in many ways, and she sees the need to focus on policy and shifting systems. Additionally, she regularly reflects on and questions her thought processes. She spoke about times in her past when she reacted too quickly and without reflection and the ways her actions contributed to polarization. Jessica believes she is a different leader now, one equipped with tools to promote storytelling and relationship building between diverse school staff, leading to conversations that transform organizations. Jessica compared her role as a district leader to a chameleon and shared the barriers and opportunities she found on her leadership journey (see Figure 16).

Joyce Jones

I visited Joyce on the site of the early college high school, based in an older building on a university campus, where she is the principal. I took notes while she facilitated her CPR meeting and was the first to set up a site visit with me. She introduced me to the CPR members involved in her PAR study: an instructional coach (white female), an English teacher (white male), a project-based learning coordinator (white female), a math teacher (white female), and a social studies teacher (white male). She began the meeting by facilitating a dynamic mindfulness activity called five-finger breathing and reminded the group that dynamic mindfulness was a way to release anxieties from the day and she wanted to model tools to use with students in the classroom. She collected digital and written artifacts during the meeting and asked group members to provide specific details in response to questions she asked about the inquiry-based learning experiences they had implemented in their classrooms (related to her PAR study). The



Jessica, leadership story, July 22, 2022.

"In 2020 there were times when I acted quickly…and said or did things that I didn't fully understand…I contributed to the polarization…I lost sight for a moment about what it means to be a public servant. Through a lot of reflection and thinking through the why behind leadership actions along with helping fellow leaders through their own hard times, I learned to interrogate my own thought patterns and zoom out…I learned that I can handle just about anything…I can be a shield for others who need it, though it's important to separate this from a hero narrative because I ain't no hero…I use my positionality to amplify voices and clear barriers. I've experienced many times along my leadership journey when I'm not quite what others expect…I'm a chameleon…I need to be to navigate, keeping my seat at the table. Most of the time I'm learning how to operate in the educational leadership world…something I'm forever studying through my PAR and working with school leaders…we have discovered ways of being and structures that have the potential to transform organizations."

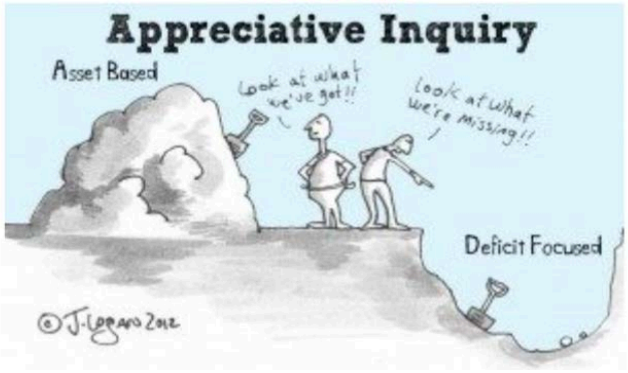
Figure 16. Data from PAR Cycle Two (Jessica).

CPR group appeared comfortable with each other and engaged in discussions and activities. Before the meeting concluded, she reminded the group about the date for the upcoming meeting and stated she would be providing a substitute for them to engage for a full day.

After the meeting, Joyce invited me to meet in her office, where we discussed more about her school and her setting. She reported that she felt challenged navigating a school on the campus of a university campus with a clear equity statement and vision to support diversity, equity, and inclusion because officially, as a public school, she was required to follow the local BOE and district's policies, which are often politicized. "Even the definition for the word *equity* is different," she told me. Despite differing visions from university and public-school organizations, she described her staff as supportive. Without another full-time administrator, she relied on the instructional coach as a sounding board for decision making and leadership support. Her staff connects the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to real-world data, projects, and problems; her PAR project was rooted in inquiry and questioning (see Figure 17).

Joyce talked about how difficult her life had been as a child growing up in a dysfunctional family and how the experience led her to want to provide a safe space for students to learn and grow and always know they felt cared for at school. The many positive notes from students and uplifting quotes around her office represented the positivity Joyce strived to bring to her position. Joyce expressed she often felt overwhelmed with the responsibilities of her job but takes time to learn the stories of her students, to support them in their learning goals. Later, she revealed to me the previous school year she had to take time off during a busy time of year to see multiple doctors due to what she now believes was a stress-induced bout of vertigo and neurological issues (dizziness, slurred speech, exhaustion, etc.). She mentioned four other staff members at her school had health-related issues stemming from stress the same year, causing

Students
Are not
Objects
Of Equity



Joyce, Group artifact (image and six-word poem), March 13, 2022.

"Students are not objects of equity. I think really what our focus on equity needs to be is our behaviors, which can include asset versus deficit language, and then just the actions that we're taking to try to support equity and our students in our schools. My picture is of two people who dug a hole and one's looking at the sand piles as asset-based and saying, "look at what we've got". The other is looking at the whole thing with the deficit focus saying, "look at what we're missing". I'm trying to reframe the way that I think…looking at the assets" (Joyce, CPR Meeting Notes, March 2022).

Note. Data came from the Group Artifact which is an ongoing collection of our reflections and thoughts. The addition was made during the March 2022 CPR Meeting after I asked the question, "*What is resonating with you right now about your role as a leader for equity and about what it means to embody antiracism?*".

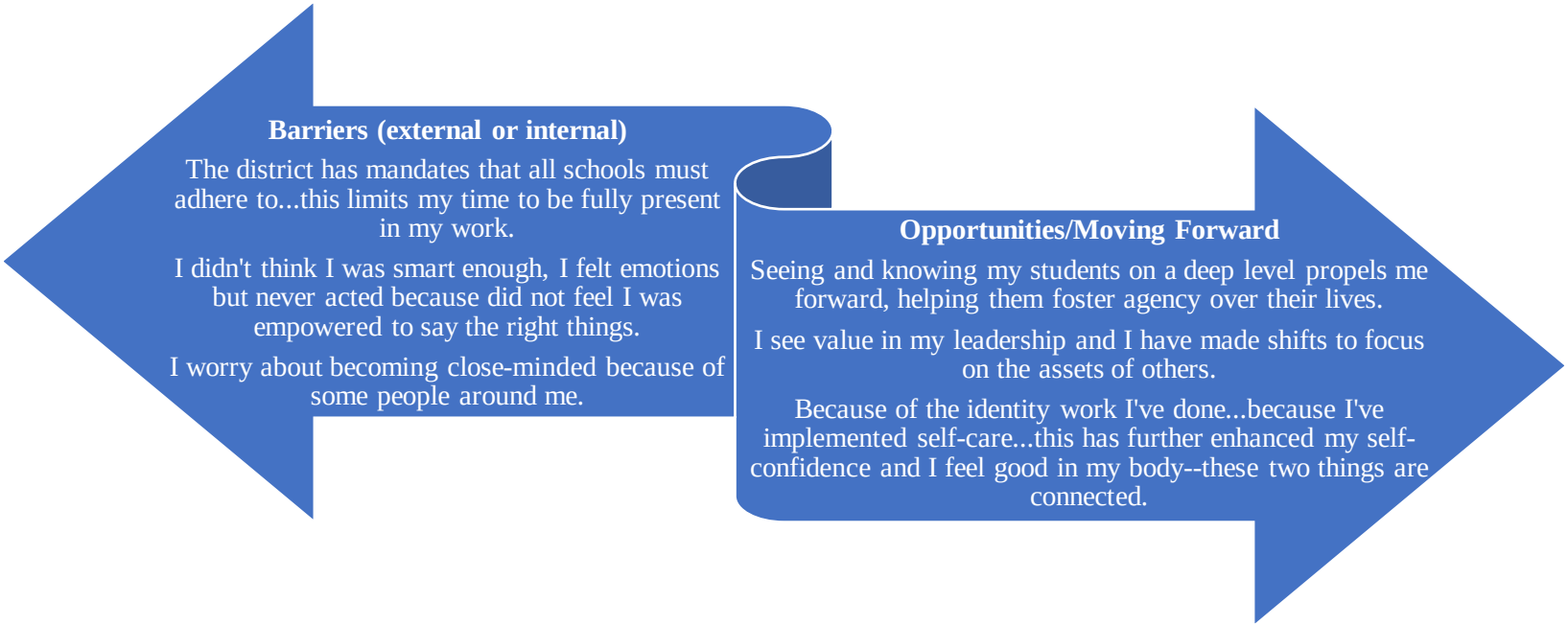
Joyce, Sightings protocol, April 15, 2022.

During a meeting with my Instructional Coach (IC) she shared a situation she had with a teacher. She told me that one of our ELA teachers was having a hard time with parents wanting to know about the books their children were reading. The teacher told the IC that she did not like the fact that her parents were trying to dictate what she was teaching. The IC pointed out to the teacher that maybe the parents felt strongly about the books because of their traditions, values, and morals. The teacher did not agree and said they were trying to control her class. She did not want to develop an understanding of the situation from the parent's perspective and instead told the IC that she did not agree and that the parents were being too controlling over students who would be in the real world soon. The IC shared with me that this teacher uses deficit language often about students and their parents… I told the IC…I would listen to the teacher's conversations in meetings, PLC, etc., and use those times as opportunities to coach the teacher to focus on asset language and to see situations through other's paradigms.

Figure 17. Data from PAR Cycle One (Joyce).

them to miss school. Putting her health and well-being at the forefront is something she has recognized is important for her to model for her staff and for her to be her best in her principal role. Joyce actively engages in ongoing reflection to learn and grow in her personal life, as evident by her recent focus on health, and in her professional life, as evident in the data collected during PAR Cycle One.

During PAR Cycle Two, Joyce revealed the ways her doctoral coach and our CPR group helped her grow and learn. She worried about how she could stay current with educational research in the future, and whether she would continue to reflect on thought patterns without a learning community outside of her district and school. She admitted that she seemed to get bogged down in the ENC context, and she worried that she may not have others who help her see things she did not see. She sees her role as a leader to help others see their gifts and talents so that they can help students fulfill their aspirations. Joyce recognized she became more confident in her abilities as a researcher and as a leader and even found her voice to speak up against family members. “I can no longer sit and listen to a one-sided conversation” (Jones, meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Joyce shifted her language to be more asset-focused and became more aware of the deficit language used by staff at her school. She used her awareness as a model to encourage her staff to shift to asset-based language, especially when talking about students and families. Actively interrogating her thought patterns led to increased awareness of the ways bias influenced her decision-making. Asking the question, “why do I think this?” has helped her unpack some stereotypes and unconscious biases (see Figure 18).



Joyce, 1:1 Interview, October 4, 2022.

"I recognize my need to check my thinking about people, to check my biases when I make decisions…thinking about my own thinking and critically reflecting on how I interact with people, or how I am thinking about people—unconscious stereotypes. I recognize my thoughts more often and ask myself, 'why do I think this way?' I recognize patterns of thought, biases…reading Kendi, having conversations, helps me check my unconscious bias…try not to cloud my judgement…what I wonder is how, without my doctoral studies, this group [CPR], a dissertation coach, etc., how will I stay current? I think here in eastern NC it is easy to get super bogged down…having space to talk about [inequitable] policies and procedures…not about affirmation as much, but as a group who can push back and help me see things that maybe I'm not seeing. I need people who are current on all this stuff…in the county office, we spend a lot of time justifying why we purchased what we did, rather than thinking about what is best for kids."

Figure 18. Data from PAR Cycle Two (Joyce).

Michelle Brammer

I passed through one of the oldest towns incorporated by African Americans as I approached the school where Michelle is the principal. The low-lying, often flooded area and deemed uninhabitable, was claimed by freed slaves after the Civil War. A recent documentary by a local Black filmmaker has drawn attention to local history and the way hurricanes, white supremacy, and political neglect have washed away the town (Cox, 2022). The school opened as a K-8 magnet school in 2014 as the district's response to "white flight" after a private charter school opened across town (Brammer, member check, September 18, 2022). When the school first opened, white families signed up, but the demographics have shifted in the past three years since she became principal. Currently, the school serves 600 scholars (69% Black, 24% white, 7% Latino) with a waitlist of families wishing to attend. The diverse staff includes two-thirds from the local community, 17 visiting international faculty, and a handful of Teach for America alumni, including Michelle.

On our walking tour, Michelle shared a brief history of the building, introduced me to staff members, communicated with students by name, and highlighted the unique way the school is structured in cross-grade level "neighborhoods" to support students. She said when parents visit her school for open house, she introduces three teachers to the parents: the child's teacher, a teacher in the grade level above, and a teacher in the grade level below. She says, "These three people are responsible for growing and loving your child." She mentioned the multiple support staff positions on her campus: co-teachers and mentors for international faculty through the Participate program, an exceptional children's teacher and volunteer who provide social-emotional professional development to staff, expanded impact teachers who are skilled at a specific subject area and teach all the students in the grade level, and three multi-classroom

leaders, former teachers who are no longer attached to a specific group of students but instead co-teach and co-plan with teachers. Two assistant principals (a Black female and white female) and a global coordinator (white female) make up the administrative staff at the school.

Michelle pointed out students wearing hoodies or hats and shared the story of updating the dress code policy during her leadership. She described how she "died on the hill of ripped jeans" her first few years as a principal and spent too much time "policing pants for rips and back pockets for cell phones" (Brammer, field notes, April 7, 2022). She decided that monitoring the dress code was less important and collectively she worked with the staff and students to understand what the community wanted. The new policy outlined what students can wear, cannot wear and can choose to wear (hoodies and hats) and included standards for how students should dress when they go on field trips and represent their school (no hoodies and hats). School pride and local history are important to the community, staff, and Michelle. Her PAR project focused on new teacher induction to her school. She believed that new teachers, including visiting international faculty, should bring their identities into classrooms and understand and appreciate the rich cultural history of the town, its history, and its people in the local area. Michelle shared the story about some parents (white) who recently left her school for the charter school (mostly white), under the guise of displeasure with the way she handled virtual instruction during COVID-19. She felt their departure may have been linked to her outward expressions of support for movements like BLM, but upon guidance from her superintendent, she has shifted her equity leadership to be more "behind the scenes", as evident from PAR Cycle One data in Figure 19.

During PAR Cycle Two, Michelle spoke explicitly about her antiracist journey and leadership development and about concerns of the lack of space for other white folks to learn and grow about whiteness. She described the leadership journey over the past few years and how it

Michelle, Group artifact (image and six-word poem), March 13, 2022.

"What happens when fear motivates progress...I don't know if any of you have ever jumped off a cliff…there's this moment of it is horrifically scary. And then, for me personally, as soon as I do it, I want to do it again… overcoming that fear…getting over that and then feeling the energy and the exhilaration that comes from something ridiculously scary. That then would make you want to like keep doing it and move forward" (Michelle, CPR Meeting Notes, March 2022).

Note. Data came from the Group Artifact which is an ongoing collection of our reflections and thoughts. The addition was made during the March 2022 CPR Meeting after I asked the question, "*What is resonating with you right now about your role as a leader for equity and about what it means to embody antiracism?*".

Michelle, meeting notes, March 13, 2022.

Last year at our open house… I wore a Black Lives Matter facemask… I continued to wear it and other outward statements of equity…And over the course of the first semester there was this group of parents, white parents, who were rallying against me… And I had to be in front of HR and my superintendent three times last semester to answer questions that had been reported…my superintendent told me, "They requested that you'd be terminated." I have an African American female superintendent, and I struggled a bit with putting myself in her shoes. Because in my white mind, I wanted her to be like "you're doing the right thing and I'm going to stand behind you." She didn't tell me I was doing the right thing she never would come out and say like don't wear your mask or don't wear your jewelry…but she would say things like, "I think that pokes the 'bear' when you wear your jewelry that rouses people up." And she did ask, "Are you actually making any strides towards better educational experiences for black and brown kids by what you wear outwardly?" And I would say that one argument is, "No." …right? that's not actual action. But on the other hand, I think it's also an outward statement…of "this is a safe place for black and brown kids and families." …I didn't lose my job… but the internal struggle that I'm having is I don't wear my earrings to work anymore…and is it out of fear out of what became a really uncomfortable semester for me? I have the privilege to not outwardly support Black Lives Matter… the privilege to scale it back per se…I'm just having this internal struggle with… am I doing enough? and we've done some other things that I actually think is moving the needle for kids academically, but I definitely can tell that I've pulled back… I've become more scared and apprehensive.

Michelle, Sightings Protocol, April 15, 2022.

Dealing with a recent disciplinary action, I noticed (sighted) that the conversation I had with the parent was different. It was a conversation that I may not have had before. The situation was in reference to a Black male being suspended…I decided to try a different approach… she [mom] felt like the supports were still "policing" her son as a Black male threat in the school. The conversation to understand her perspective required me to be super vulnerable and to hear how my white lens approached the supports totally different than hers. I thought I was "helping" but my "plan" was still laced with my white version of support. We were able to have a very honest, calm, and enlightening conversation and make some shifts. I would not have entered this conversation in the past. I would have been defensive and likely would have already had my mind made up, but I did try to lean in this time, slow down and listen.

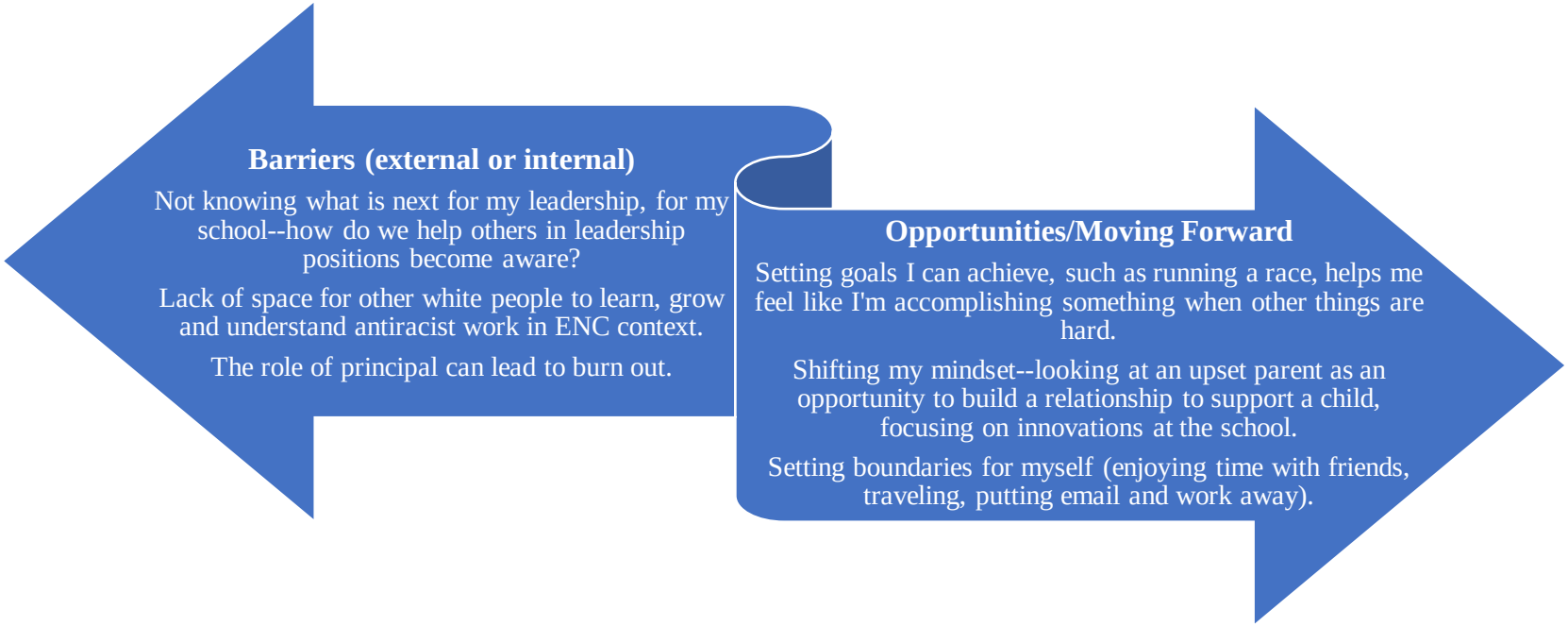
Figure 19. Data from PAR Cycle One (Michelle).

challenged her to make choices and take deliberate actions to be antiracist. She acknowledged frustration at not knowing what to do next in her antiracist work and in her leadership, and she did not want to cross a line and risk her job. At the September 18, 2022 CPR meeting she said,

> I'm just living in this like kind of purgatory…I know my values and I know what I want, but I'm not encouraging them on anyone for micropolitical reasons…I'm trying to find that sweet spot of being able to encourage and create space and provide space and hold space before I push everyone away and find the space where I just don't completely disengage from my work.

Michelle shares more about how the political landscape has affected her experience as a school leader in Figure 20.

Michelle spoke about other reflections she has had throughout her leadership journey. Engaging with students and setting goals for herself propels her forward. She regularly runs for exercise and running races (half marathons) gives her a feeling of success when other things seem difficult to achieve. She worried that many tasks of the principal seem more about checking boxes than supporting students (paperwork, district meetings, etc.) and she said she is better about setting boundaries for personal time to regenerate. She described herself as a tempered radical, looking for opportunities to listen and build relationships with others, rather than voicing her social justice opinions outwardly. She was more aware of how her biases creep in and actively stays vigilant about how to move beyond barriers. She found camaraderie in other like-minded leaders in her district and small community and is disappointed when other white people are not aware of the presence of white supremacy in the ENC context. Michelle recognized that antiracist work for white people takes time and said,



Michelle, 1:1 Interview, October 25, 2022.

"I didn't realize how much school leadership is a political game. We've never come out as a district to support Black Lives Matter, from the humanity side, not from the political side. I wish personally, I could have done more to acknowledge what was happening…have conversations acknowledging that 'this thing happened' or 'that thing happened.' I remember the day Trump was elected. I was at a math training off campus and got a call from someone at my school saying, 'there are first graders asking if their mom will be at home when they get home.' I asked if the district was going to make a statement, but they did not. That was one of the most bizarre days of my life. How can everyone go about our business as if nothing happened…Migrant families are scared. I have first graders at my school who talk at home about 'being illegal' because they have to. Aren't we allowed to make a statement that says, 'all our families are safe here?' This may be an extreme example but at what point do we step up politically?"

Figure 20. Data from PAR Cycle Two (Michelle).

> My timeline isn't everyone else's timeline—but I so fiercely want to say, specifically to white women in eastern North Carolina who aren't exposed to this work, "Hurry up! Figure it out! Get woke." I'm grateful to be a part of this group because I'm learning about by being around other white women, we all need the grace and space to become antiracist. It doesn't happen overnight regardless of how you identify…I'm aware that I'm not always giving white women the same space as I am my students, families, and friends of color…I'm wondering at what point are we providing space to encourage others to be antiracist before we push them away? When we say "affinity," I think of race and gender and while I struggle with holding the space for white women, I struggle more with holding that space for white men. In the ENC context, at some point, you're gonna run up against the white male. It's inevitable. There's still so much of an old boys' club…I wonder what it looks like to create spaces where white men hear from white women. (Brammer, meeting notes, September 18, 2022).

Michelle avowed that any space created for white people should be for the purpose of amplifying the voices of those historically marginalized in the community.

Summary

The participants in the PAR study identified as white women aspiring to be and become antiracist, educators working toward more equitable outcomes for students, and educational leaders in eastern North Carolina. The voices of the participants add texture to their individual and collective identities, underlining the complexities of the work the women do in their spaces and places. Although each individual story stands alone as an authentication of the work each woman has accomplished in her context, common threads appeared in the stories.

The common threads in the stories included the feelings the women have about themselves and the work they are doing and the actions they are taking in the spaces where they live and work. Throughout hardships, the women have maintained resilience, and kept a passion and commitment to their work, despite the obstacles they encountered. The women engaged in identity work which led to increased awareness, opportunities to reflect, and shifts in their leadership actions. Despite personal and professional challenges and barriers, they persevere, believing they can positively impact those around them. Feelings of self-efficacy influenced their sense of success. All the women maintained or began an exercise or wellness routine throughout the doctoral and leadership journey and reported this positively impacted their ability to manage complicated personal and professional tensions. The women prioritized relationship-building and reflection in their leadership roles. Their reflection led to increased awareness of the ways whiteness touched their personal and professional circumstances. The women conveyed appreciation for the CPR group; a space where they could learn and grow, vulnerably share mistakes, insecurities, and dilemmas, and where they found companions for antiracist and equity leadership work. The women asserted that historical and socio-cultural injustices in ENC were still apparent in district and board of education language and policies and appeared to persist in the hearts and minds of people in their communities. They agree antiracist work for white people is needed.

To uncover, confront, or understand more about the conflicts, contradictions, and ethical dilemmas the school leaders face when leading for equity, I analyzed the PAR Cycle One and Two data, looking for patterns. In the remaining chapters, I present the evidence using qualitative analysis of the data in codes, categories, and themes, leading to the overall findings, discussions, and implications for future research.

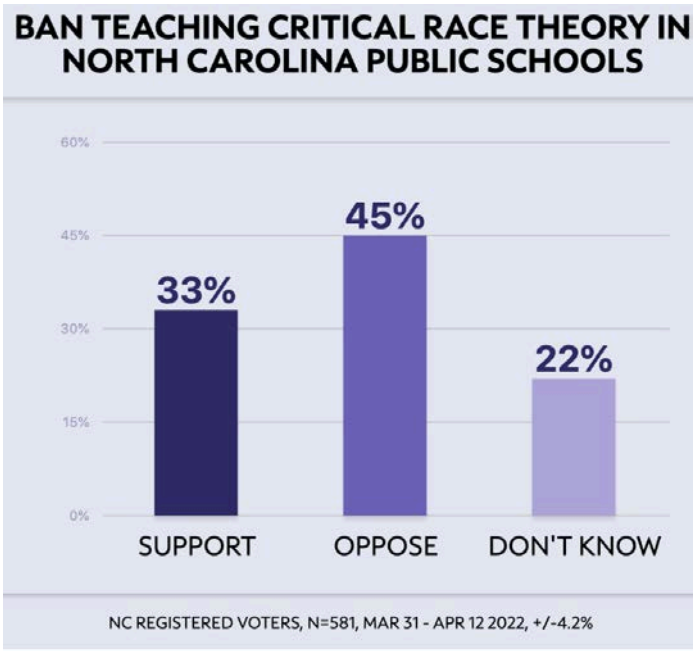
CHAPTER 6: PAR CYCLE ONE

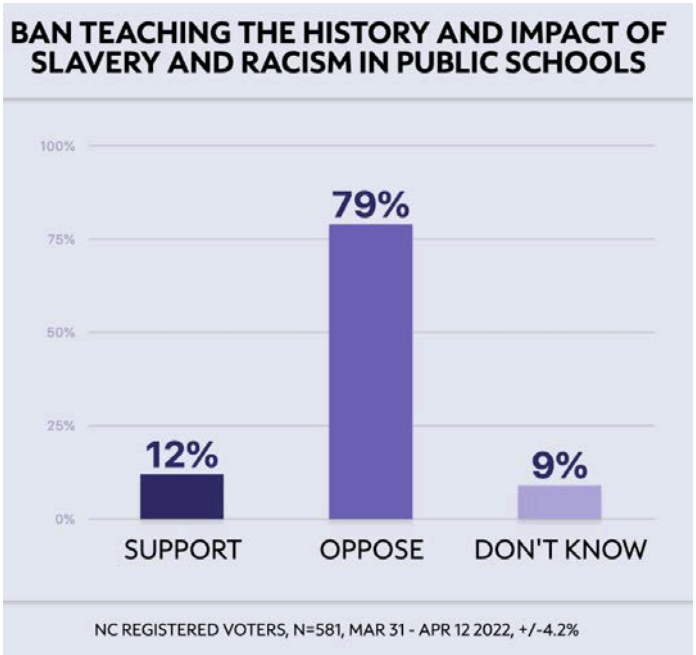
> *Exploration of identity is not a straightforward process…identity demands a process of infinite interpretation, reinterpretation of experiences, circumstances and conditions emphasizing the interconnectedness of past and present, lived and living…the complexity of the lived experience of the self, the nature of the ebbs and flows.* (Star, 2010, p. 4)

While the study participants and I identify as leaders for racial equity in eastern North Carolina (ENC) school settings, the research questions asked us to probe more deeply to understand how we, as white women school leaders who are committed to equity and aspire to be antiracist, lead for equity in the changing contexts of North Carolina schools and district. Our inquiry occurred while multiple states considered and eventually passed laws and policies restricting educators from talking about race or racism in classrooms and firing teachers who outwardly support movements like Black Lives Matter (Meckler & Natanson, 2022). I drafted the first words of the chapter shortly after another mass shooting in America: the premeditated shooting by a young white male armed with weapons and racist ideologies, murdering people in a mostly Black neighborhood grocery store.

Specifically in North Carolina, citizens are divided about the role public schools should have in critical race conversations, which has led to heated debates in North Carolina communities (Duncan, 2022). Adding to the complexity are misunderstandings about what Critical Race Theory (CRT) is and what K-12 schools teach (see Figure 21). In this context, school leaders must stay open to self-learning and clearly communicate curriculum standards, while enacting leadership toward more just and equitable schools. In the chapter, I describe the activities of the cycle of inquiry, present the analysis of data, and discuss an emergent theme and categories.

As a part of the project and study, I am interested in uncovering, confronting, and making





Note. (Duncan, 2022).

Figure 21. NC citizen poll results.

public the conflicts, contradictions, and ethical dilemmas school leaders face when leading for equity. Before we could confront the ethical dilemmas, the Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) members and I met, unpacked our identities, nurtured relationships, and cultivated trust by sharing stories; we reflected on our collective commitment to disrupting inequities in our contexts. On Sunday, March 13, 2022, we paused and breathed, shared stories of recent equity dilemmas, discussed the analysis of the Pre-cycle data, added to our group artifact, and considered asset-framing (Shorters, 2019). In addition, I observed each leader at her school site to learn more about individual PAR projects and understand the actions each person was taking in her setting to enact equity leadership and toward aspiring to be antiracist. Finally, each person shared a written description and reflection about a sighting or moment of new awareness or learning (McDonald, 1996; see Appendix D2).

In this chapter, I outline the activities of PAR Cycles One, describe the evidence, and present the analysis of the data in categories and themes. I first describe the PAR Cycle One process and share a timeline of the activities and data collection, including examples of the coding processes.

PAR Cycle One Process

In this cycle of inquiry, I worked with the CPR group to plan activities and developed confidence as a facilitator of leaders (see Table 8). I conducted individual member checks with each CPR, visited each CPR's school context, facilitated a virtual CPR group session, analyzed written reflections about a sighting written by each CPR and participated in a national network of white educators focused on disrupting white supremacy (see Table 8). During the individual member checks, I shared sections of Chapter 4 and asked each participant to check the accuracy of the information and provided the opportunity to correct any mistakes and reflect on the Pre-

Table 8

PAR Cycle One Activities

Activities	Date(s)	Data Collection	Notes
Individual Member Check	Various times in January and February, 2022	Notes/edits on shared google doc Reflective Memo	Each participant reviewed the Pre-cycle description in Chapter 4
Site Visits to each CPR's school/district site	Lyla: February 23, 2022 Mira: March 29, 2022 Jessica: March 18, 2022 Joyce: February 11, 2022 Michelle: April 7, 2022	Field Notes from each visit Reflective Memo(s)	Date/time/length of site visit was agreed upon by the lead researcher and each participant
Virtual CPR Meeting	March 13, 2022	Agenda (see Appendix F) Meeting Notes Group Artifact (digital) Reflective Memo	All participants attended
Sighting Written Reflection	April, 2022	Sighting Protocol (see Appendix D2) Reflective Memo	The protocol was introduced during the CPR meeting and was collected digitally, allowing for each participant to complete when available
My personal "antiracist" work with IDEA	March 23, 2022 April 13, 2022 May 4, 2022 May 25, 2022	Reflective Memo(s)	I, as the facilitator of the CPR group, participated in sessions of a "Disruptor's Network" with The Institute for Democratic Education in America (IDEA)

cycle data. I conducted school site visits to help me understand more about the communities where the women lead. I collected field notes about the community, the school(s), the interactions between each participant and others in the school, documented stories, debriefed with each participant, and recorded reflections and wonderings. At the virtual CPR meeting in March, we discussed the Pre-cycle data and the equity dilemmas we face, understanding how we could support each other in our journeys to be antiracist by enacting equity leadership. Each participant wrote a reflection about a sighting, a moment in time when they rethought the direction they were going or a decision they made (see Appendix D2). Finally, I continued to learned about facilitating by engaging with a network of white educators facilitated by the staff of The Institute for Democratic Education in America (I.D.E.A.). The activities of PAR Cycle One provided data to answer the research questions.

Since identity is a complex concept, qualitative researchers need to think deeply about the term and the processes before applying codes, categories, and themes to the data (Saldaña, 2016). Therefore, in PAR Cycle One, I focused on this research question: *How do white women school leaders espouse and enact their roles as leaders for equity?* In all cases, the participants espoused to be equity leaders; however, in some cases, their enactments had characteristics of what I term generic equity leadership that included advocating for equitable student access and outcomes. In other cases, the leaders attempted to enact more explicit antiracist principles as a feature of their equity leadership. Given the complexities in the state and across the country, leaders were treading carefully to enact but not to ruffle the feathers of school boards or district supervisors. This tricky balance is a feature of the evidence.

Increased Awareness

The participants shared stories about their work, their lives, and the equity dilemmas they grappled with in the context of ENC public schools. Each participant engaged in intentional reflection during the CPR meeting, during their individual PAR studies in each school or district context, and when completing the sighting reflection). The emerging theme of increased awareness includes three categories: (1) context of power structures, biases of others, and inequities (54% of the data for PAR Cycle One); (2) self-thought patterns and personal biases (27% of the data), and (3) barriers to equity leadership—external and internal (19% of the data).

Awareness of Context

The participants engaged in critical self-reflection individually, as a part of their doctoral work, and collectively, as a part of the CPR group. Their reflections led to increased awareness about the contexts in which they lived and worked; these data include power structures (39% of total responses), recognizing biases of others (11%), and inequities (4%) in their schools. Wilkerson (2020) describes the importance of shining a light on problems before being able to fix them. Increased awareness is the groundwork for school leaders attempting to disrupt historical and sociocultural patterns and for white women engaging in antiracist work (see Table 9 and percentages are for total of the data for the inquiry cycle).

Power Structures

In PAR Cycle One, participants became aware of their contexts-related power structures more than any other context-related category and more than the other levels of awareness in this theme. Feagin (2020) suggests that a dominant, white-created racial frame is present in America's long history of racial oppression and that systemic racism is kept in place because of people in power. Educators in positions of power must engage in discourse that uncovers the way

Table 9

PAR Cycle One Evidence: Increased Awareness

Category Percent of total data	Subcategory	Frequency % of total (n= 152)	Participants	Not represented
Awareness of context (54%)	Power structures	59/39%	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	none
	Biases of others	16/11%	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Joyce	Michelle, Carrie
	Inequities	7/4%	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Carrie	Joyce, Michelle
Awareness of self (27%)	Thought patterns	36/24%	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	none
	Personal biases	5/3%	Mira, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	Lyla, Jessica
Barriers to equity leadership (19%)	External	21/14%	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	none
	Internal	8/5%	Lyla, Mira, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	none

whiteness influences education (Najarro, 2022). The study participants became more aware of the influences of power in their contexts according to PAR Cycle One data. Power structures are related to the positionality of leadership, the importance of recognizing deficit language in the school context, the power of political influences and pressures, and the power of whiteness or other dominant socio-cultural norms. In naming high leverage practices for equity leadership, Galloway and Ishimaru (2017) cite the importance of articulating shifts in power structures as a critical first step.

Leader Positionality. Participants acknowledged their power and positionality as leaders and became aware of how to le shift power from the school leader to teachers or other representatives in their school contexts. Leaders spoke about their desire to increase academic discourse in classrooms and utilized evidence-based observations to provide teachers with a snapshot of current discourse practices and then engage them in conversations about increasing engagement in classrooms. For example, Mira worked with teachers to set up their classrooms and utilize technology in ways that encouraged more student participation, shifting observations from evaluative to informative (Mackey, field notes, March 29, 2022). Joyce emphasized wellness in meetings, explicitly practicing and bringing attention to the research behind dynamic mindfulness, and she modeled equitable practices shifting meetings to be more collaborative (Jones, field notes, February 11, 2022). Lyla stated, "We [the teachers and I] are looking at different protocols the teachers are using in the classroom [for calling on students] and exploring an evidence-based observation questioning tool" (Burgess, field notes, February 23, 2022). She empowered teachers to improve their calling-on strategies and reflect on ways to increase higher-level questions in lessons (Burgess, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Participants did not only

use their positionality to empower teachers to improve teaching and learning but began to utilize their leadership to bring awareness to negative or deficit language patterns.

Use of Language. Using deficit framing of language about students and families is common and creates a culture in which school staff blame students and families for failures in education. Language is a powerful tool in which school leaders can leverage to uncover and interrupt discriminatory practices (Hammond, 2015; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Rigby & Tredway, 2015). In ten instances in the data, participants recognized the use of deficit language and shifted their language or encouraged others to shift to asset-based language. For example, Joyce recognized the way she spoke about first-generation early college students was problematic and deficit-focused. She stated, "Just turning the language [from 'economically disadvantaged' to 'aspiring college students'], that is a different kind of statement, an resonates" (Jones, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Jessica listened to leaders in her district label students who spoke a second language as ELL (English Language Learners) or ESL (English as a Second Language) and recognized the labels represented a deficit mindset. She facilitated a conversation with school leaders focused on the asset of being able to speak a second language. She shifted the focus on ways to support quality literacy lessons to support all students (Pinkney, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Mira used the phrase, "I would like to gently push back on that thinking" to bring awareness to deficit language traps. For example, when an English teacher complained about how students did not know how to reflect through writing, Mira said, "I would like to gently push back on that statement and ask you, have we provided opportunities for the students to practice reflecting through writing?" (Mackey, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Mira reported the teacher followed up later and was grateful for the new perspective and with practice and guidance the students had greatly improved written reflections. In addition to recognizing

their own positionality as leaders in their school's power structures, participants gained a heightened awareness of other power structures present in their contexts.

Political Pressures. In thirteen instances, participants discussed the political pressures in existing power structures. Schwartz (2022) suggests political polarization in schools interrupts our ability to educate students, especially because of COVID-19 and CRT debates. For example, Jessica was one of the many district personnel faced with social media attacks related to the CRT debates in schools. She stated:

> They've [an extreme conservative advocacy group] basically taken me and painted me as the person that is the reason that critical race theory is in our schools… we've invited them to talk to us, they don't want to talk to us, they just want to spew whatever they want to spew…the part about it that's super frustrating is people writing things about you that are untrue. (Pinkney, meeting notes, March 13, 2022)

Jessica and Michelle described themselves as tempered radicals who wish to vocalize their equity-minded agendas but are aware of political pressures in the ENC context (meeting notes, March 13, 2022). In rural ENC districts, needed resources are often underfunded (Linicome, 2020). In a visit to Mira's rural school, she showed me multiple large boxes filled with wall monitors purchased by the superintendent. Mira and her staff installed one monitor in the media center using school funds because the superintendent did not provide the funds for installation, and then they realized the technology was not easily compatible with other school technology. The superintendent, however, was bragging about new technology in the district (Mackey, field notes, March 29, 2022). Mira's superintendent later resigned and retired, leaving his spending decisions to a successor. In addition, power structures in ENC context are often controlled by

people who identify as part of the American dominant cultural norms (white, male, heterosexual, Christian), a dominant culture in our schools.

Whiteness (or Dominant Social Identity). In thirteen instances, participants revealed an increased awareness of the presence of dominant social identity norms, specifically whiteness, as a part of the power structure. As school leaders, becoming aware of how organizations are racialized and identifying the unmarked whiteness are part of understanding how to shift power structures to benefit people of intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Ray, 2019). Schools in ENC have higher percentages of white teachers, and Jessica discussed intentional ways that their district shifted hiring to include more diverse voices:

> The idea of changing the ways interviews are done was met with some resistance at first by district staff. However, after discussions, many realized that their worry about releasing power to others was the real issue. The worry that including more voices would lessen their voice. (Pinkney, meeting notes, March 13, 2022)

Michelle shared a story about how a group of white parents regularly called the superintendent's office with complaints about her after she wore a Black Lives Matter (BLM) facemask during a school open house. Michelle's superintendent [Black female] advised her that by outwardly supporting BLM she was "poking the bear" (Brammer, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Michelle said that she did not want to cater to white demanding families and some of the same families had left her school to go to a mostly white charter school across town (Brammer, field notes, April 7, 2022). She described an internal struggle of wanting to advocate for social justice beliefs but pulling back for fear of losing her job (Brammer, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Lyla shared the quote, "I am starting to see more situations that raise my awareness of how others are treated" after seeing how a white student teacher supervisor treated a Black teacher

and student teacher (Burgess, Sightings protocol, April 15, 2022). Becoming aware of whiteness and other dominant social norms led the participants become increasingly aware of the biases of others.

Biases of Others

McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) refer to unconscious biases as equity traps; these patterns of thinking hinder the ability to create equitable educational spaces; and, in 11% of the data, participants spoke about awareness of the biases of others. For example, Lyla described another's racial bias; she recognized the comments made by an outside student teacher supervisor as "just racist" (Burgess, Sightings protocol, April 15, 2022). Lyla shared that some teachers at her school believe that equity means equal; they wanted to treat all students the same, rather than identify what students needed most to attain their aspirations (Burgess, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Joyce told a story about a teacher who "is super open-minded on one side [LGBTQ+ supporter], but super closed-minded about parents and uses deficit language often about students and their parents" (Jones, Sightings protocol, April 15, 2022). Jessica described a situation in which a student with Tourette's syndrome was misunderstood and in previous years parents had asked if their child could be moved to another class (Pinkney, field notes, March 18, 2022). In this situation, educating staff, students, and parents about Tourette's syndrome demystified the student's outbursts and led to greater understanding and empathy. Awareness was the catalyst leading to change and the participants not only disclosed stories of identifying biases of others but recognized inequities occurring in their context.

Inequities

Systemic and structural inequities exist, and schools and districts perpetuate the inequities when they are unwilling to closely examine which students are not being successful and make

shifts to accommodate the needs of those students (Safir & Dugan, 2021). Lyla observed unequal questioning strategies based on gender and race in classrooms (Burgess, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Lyla and Mira work in rural districts and do not have adequate support staff, and the inequities show up in the distribution of resources to wealthier and whiter districts in the ENC region (Burgess, field notes, February 23, 2022; Mackey, field notes, March 29, 2022). In another example, Jessica spoke about the inequitable pull-out programs for students learning English. In her district, school leaders discussed the importance of prioritizing support for those students and rethinking how to provide instruction without pulling the students from regular literacy and math instruction (Pinkney, meeting notes, March 13, 2022).

In my former personal experience as a public-school administrator, I was less aware of contextual power structures, and I would not have acknowledged that schools perpetuated inequities. I was not aware of the way sociocultural norms and historical patterns affected the context of schooling in ENC. In my work with a national network of white educators and in an equity-focused doctoral program, I learned about the power of white supremacy culture, the importance of identifying disparities aligned to social constructs (race, gender, etc.) for the purpose of transparency, and how to collect evidence during teacher observations to facilitate conversations with teachers about creating more equitable classroom environments. I learned to recognize and change by observing and practicing facilitation strategies focused on dialogue and storytelling with a work team, volunteering to co-facilitate a session with the IDEA network of white educators, engaging in leadership dialogues in my community, and consulting my dissertation coach and doctoral instructor about the CPR agenda (see Appendix F). I gained confidence in entering into the virtual space with the CPRs. In a reflective memo following the

March CPR session, I affirmed the complexity of the work and asserted there were actions we could take to move forward:

> After our recent CPR meeting—women sharing stories of equity dilemmas—I recognize that these dilemmas are so complex and are outward, inward, and constant. There is never NOT an equity dilemma brewing for public school leaders…yet there was something beautiful and hopeful about the shifts in thinking after the asset-framing introduction. (Morris, reflective memo, March 23, 2022).

Over time I learned to see invisible power structures and see racial and gender inequities in schools; as a result, I have increased my awareness about the ways school leaders can leverage their power to disrupt inequities in their context. This work is ongoing.

In this case, participants displayed an increased awareness about contextual power structures, biases of others, and inequities. An important starting point for digging into antiracist work moves from contextual awareness to identity work and understanding one's personal biases and thought patterns (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

Awareness of Self

The reflections encouraged critical self-reflection and led to an increased awareness of self. Solving systemic racism is not a task school leaders can assume responsibility for, but becoming aware of their consciousness, knowledge, and skills about issues of race and privilege is an ongoing journey toward undermining racism and whiteness ideologies (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). In 27% of the evidence from this cycle of inquiry, participants reported an increase in self-awareness. These reflections were both meta-cognitive – focused on thinking and learning—and meta-affective – centering emotions and interactions. The evidence tells the story of thought patterns the participants identified and for some, the unconscious biases uncovered.

Thought Patterns

Participants became more aware of their thought patterns and shared this awareness through written and verbal reflections. I describe the thought patterns as meta-affective or metacognitive. The prefix *meta-* is used to represent a heightened process for noticing aspects of self (Chick et al., 2009). Meta-affective involves feelings and emotions in the body, while metacognitive refers to thinking about one's thinking or learning.

Meta-Affective. The participants revealed meta-affective thought patterns (feelings, emotions, and interactions). For example, Michelle wondered if tempering her social justice actions was out of fear, if fear can be a motivator, and described the last semester as "really uncomfortable" after being called into the superintendent's office multiple times due to a group of white parents complaining about her. She wondered regularly if she is doing enough and described changing her social justice advocacy from outward expressions of support (such as BLM accessories) to leadership actions that "move the needle for kids academically" (Brammer, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Michelle described being vulnerable and listening more has helped her see things she didn't see through her "white lens" (Brammer, sightings protocol, April 15, 2022). Joyce believed that overcoming feelings of fear from the past help her be a role model for others and she uses her story of hardship to connect and encourage students (Jones, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). All participants admitted occasional feelings of inadequacy and four of five participants considered transitioning to a new position or district due to feelings of stress or isolation in their role as a school leader.

Metacognitive. Participants revealed self-awareness of metacognitive thought patterns (thinking and learning). For example, Mira and Joyce learned more about the research of effective teaching and learning strategies and modeled these in staff meetings, encouraging

teachers to adopt the practices. Mira created reflection opportunities for teachers and Joyce modeled collaborative inquiry activities and dynamic mindfulness (Mackey, field notes, March 29, 2022; Jones, field notes, February 11, 2022). As learners in the doctoral program, readers of current research, facilitators for a participatory action research study on site, and as participants in the CPR groups to further antiracist growth and equity leadership, the participants learned and enacted CLE protocols to intentionally build relationships, engage in storytelling, and foster professional conversations. For example, as Michelle and Jessica intentionally created space in meetings for storytelling, they felt a deeper connection with certain staff members (meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Jessica and Joyce recognized problematic thought patterns from their past through identity work and countered those thought patterns by asking themselves questions, such as, "why do I think this?" (meeting notes, March 13, 2022). In few instances, participants confessed an increased awareness of personal biases.

Personal Biases

The human brain is wired to draw on familiar narratives, and implicit bias often remains an unconscious operating system unless actively interrogated (Hammond, 2015; Michael & Bartoli, 2023; Shorters, 2019). Additionally, students sensing a stereotype threat act in ways that align with the bias or stereotype; therefore, unpacking personal bias is necessary for educators who want to disrupt historical patterns (Steele, 2010). While they could recognize biases in others, they began to recognize biases related to gender and use of deficit language. For example, Mira acknowledged a male gender bias when reflecting upon a situation she had at school related to a female/male encounter. After meeting with the boy and his parent, and seeing him through a different lens, she recognized her thought pattern. As the mother of two boys, she was reflective

about her assumptions and jumping to a judgement about the young man. She reflected on her assumption:

> Immediately, that's where my head went [thinking a male student was abusing his girlfriend] …a girl could have done exactly what he did, and I would not have thought, "oh, she's abusive"…I was glad that we had that particular opportunity, but it made me realize that I do have these inclinations that aren't always fair and equitable… even though it made me feel not great. (Mackey, meeting notes, March 13, 2022)

Michelle utilized the phrase white lens to describe increased awareness of the unconscious racial bias she unpacked after a conversation with a parent (Black) (Brammer, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). The evidence did not always show that awareness led to action, but Michelle's awareness led to a change in how she engaged with the parent and an acknowledgment that she acted differently than she would have in the past (Brammer, meeting notes, March 13, 2022).

I recognized the ways my thought patterns led me to act in ways that were compliant, rueful, and insecure. A male assistant principal once told me, "I'm going to put a jar on my desk and every time you say I'm sorry, you are going to have to put a dollar in the jar." I apologized for things that were not my responsibility, constantly felt that I was not good enough in my leadership role and did not feel empowered to transform school-wide inequities. I believed that by being nice and staying positive I could build relationships with people. David (2016; Brown, 2021a, 2021b) calls this toxic positivity and Noonoo (2021) describes how toxic positivity demoralizes teachers and is a mask to avoid talking about difficult emotions or avoid conversations which make some folks uncomfortable. I recognize the ways the societal norms led me to disconnect from my body. As a little girl I learned not to complain ("whine") when bored, in pain, or uncomfortable; as a teenager I hid my feelings of desire and lust, shameful for

a “good Christian girl"; and as a wife, marriage counseling suggested I “submit to my husband” and lead from alongside or even behind (Morris, reflective memo, April 2, 2022). I carried the societal messages into my role as a school leader and as a woman. Being a “good person” and a school leader required the quelling of strong emotions of anger, fear, sadness, insecurity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. I reflected on what embodiment has to do with antiracism work and school leadership in a reflective memo:

> I do not know how embodiment fits in to antiracist work and school leadership, but I see how I live/we live disconnected from things—from even our own bodies, from our families, from our food sources, from our neighbors…and the goal should be to create RECONNECTION opportunities—in our homes, in our families, in our neighborhoods, in our schools. (Morris, reflective memo, March 9, 2022)

As a former school leader, I felt I needed to have answers, and I often did not, especially to complex issues such as racial equity in schools. I found it difficult to show up in the leadership role as my authentic self. Opportunities to recognize the thought patterns and unpack biases led to a better understanding of healthier thought patterns that align with values, built self-confidence, and emboldened me to learn to facilitate conversations about inequities.

Being aware of self is key to seeing areas for growth and development, both as a white person aspiring to be more antiracist and as a leader for equity (DiAngelo, 2011; Menakem, 2017). Embodying antiracism requires attention to feelings coming up in the body and white women’s emotionality leads to recentering whiteness, a sense of entitlement, and historically has led to terrible violence (DiAngelo, 2011; Hamad, 2020; Menakem, 2017). The conditions a leader establishes either promote transparency, collaboration, and inclusivity, or conversely lead to hegemonic and hierarchical organizations (De Welde et al., 2019; Lesser, 2020). The evidence

revealed that participants reflected in meta-affective and metacognitive ways and considered how their leadership actions and patterns of thought shaped their ability to be more antiracist and lead for equity. As a result of awareness of self, participants developed increased awareness of the external and internal barriers in their antiracist and equity leadership journeys.

Awareness of Barriers to Equity

Increased awareness of contextual and self-related aspects of antiracist and equity work is important; however, identifying barriers to the work is equally important. The participants enacted PAR projects focused on an element of equity leadership in their respective contexts and 19% of the evidence indicated an increased awareness to barriers to their equity work. Barriers were related to the ENC context or nature of educational system or internalized barriers. In describing women's moral injuries and ethic of care, Gilligan (1982) contends that women ignore an inner voice of wisdom and, instead, follow societal norms of patriarchy. By shining the light on the barriers, I aimed to understand the barriers that white women leaders encountered which influenced their personal and professional work. Those barriers are a part of the macro and systemic issues of the American society (brown, 2017; Brown, 2021c; Irby, 2021); in this study, the barriers were external and internal.

External Barriers

External barriers are circumstances outside of the participants' control and most of the barriers identified by participants were external – comporting with the evidence in awareness of structures that impede leaders in their quests to be antiracist leaders. Participants often responded to the situation or event but did not have direct power to influence the person or event in the short term. Jessica discussed a male principal who was overheard making biased statements about international teachers and their accents when speaking English. Jessica stated, "I had to

have a hard conversation which led to him writing an apology letter to the teachers" (Pinkney, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Lyla acknowledged her teachers are still struggling with the definition of equity and some staff still equate equity to equal. "It's like really tiny baby steps" (Burgess, meeting notes, March 2022). They responded, but they cannot immediately change staff members' biases.

Another barrier related to financial and professional support. Mira and Lyla, both in rural districts, identified issues with a lack of resources and were unclear about funding decisions in their district. Additionally, neither of them received any mentorship during their first year in the principal role (Burgess, field notes, February 23, 2022; Mackey, field notes, March, 29, 2022). Jessica recognized unequal treatment from the media and board of education because she was considered an outsider to the small coastal community. She reflected on how this affected her equity leadership:

> If you're not from here, didn't grow up here, they're targeting you and I'm currently at target…I wish I was able to be more of an equity warrior at work, but I can't, I'm more…in the background. I'm the tempered radical…that's more of the world that I have to live in. (Pinkney, meeting notes, March 13, 2022)

Michelle reflected on her decision to wear a Black Lives Matter facemask during a school open house when students returned to school after the COVID-19 pandemic. She said, "I posted open house pictures on Facebook…that's how much I didn't think it would be an issue" and then spoke about the group of conservative parents who were unhappy about this and took turns calling the superintendent weekly to complain (Brammer, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). All participants identified external barriers preventing them from furthering their equity and

leadership agendas. As participants identified internal barriers within their control to affect, they felt more power to change.

Internal Barriers

The participants identified barriers related to internal feelings or the heavy load of school leadership; however, while this factor had an influence on their work, they did not typically emphasize this in their conversations. For example, Jessica and Michelle acknowledged feelings of apprehension or the choice to tread lightly in enacting equity leadership, related to their awareness of the positionality in their job and conditions in ENC. Michelle asked herself: "Is it out of fear?" and "am I doing enough?" when she contemplates why she no longer wears her Black Lives Matter jewelry and face mask to school at the direction of her superintendent (Brammer, meeting notes, March 2022). Mira and Lyla spoke about feeling overwhelmed at times with the stress of the job, three of the five participants have young children and felt guilty spending a lot of time away from their young children, and all participants made comments about considering other less stressful positions in the future. Mira and Lyla both stated, "I'm not sure how much longer I can keep doing this" (Burgess, field notes, February 23, 2022; Mackey, field notes, March, 29, 2022). These internal feelings of stress or uncertainty led to apprehension in enacting equity leadership, lack of self-efficacy in personal and professional roles, and affected overall wellbeing; as Gilligan (1982) tells us, women often assume emotional loads that weight them down and make a second assumption that their role is to absorb and handle these emotional loads. In her analysis of women's moral development, women develop an ethic of care, but often get "stuck" at level two, conventional, and tend to privilege taking care of others while they sometimes ignore taking care of self.

I explicitly chose to describe the internal and external barriers in the analysis of PAR Cycle One data due to my personal experience as an administrator in the ENC context. In my experience, for example, I was unaware of how to improve racial and gender disparities in test and discipline data, felt I had less to offer than my male counterparts, and constantly prioritized work over my wellbeing. Some of the barriers I created for myself, yet others were barriers created by systemic issues out of my control. Understanding the difference between external and internal barriers offers an opportunity and possible action space and verifies what Velasco (2021) confirmed in her study of school leaders who identify as equity warriors or social justice advocates: To take care of self is critical if leaders are to assume care for others.

As white women in ENC who enacted equity leadership and aspired to be antiracist, they had multiple layers of work. Guajardo et al.'s (2016) ecologies of knowing describe the layers as self, organization, and community, which I simplify to self and context. Ibrahim's (2020a) framework for becoming antiracist provides statements to guide individual self-reflective work (Self) so the equity work can occur in tandem with people in organizations and/or communities (Context). Ibrahim describes antiracist work as a continuum moving from fear to learning to growth. In understanding the white women's layers of work, I used these frameworks to explain the emerging theme of increased awareness (see Figure 22). The women in this study, particularly as they named the power structures and barriers could "get past" their fears and learn new ways of thinking about the work. As a result, they demonstrated growth as leaders.

In these, participants were able to move from fear or apprehension toward awareness and learning as they confronted racism as a problem, embraced hard questions, and included multiple perspectives in their actions (see Figure 22). For example, recognizing the positionality a leader has to impact classroom discourse and shift language from deficit to asset-based, as well as

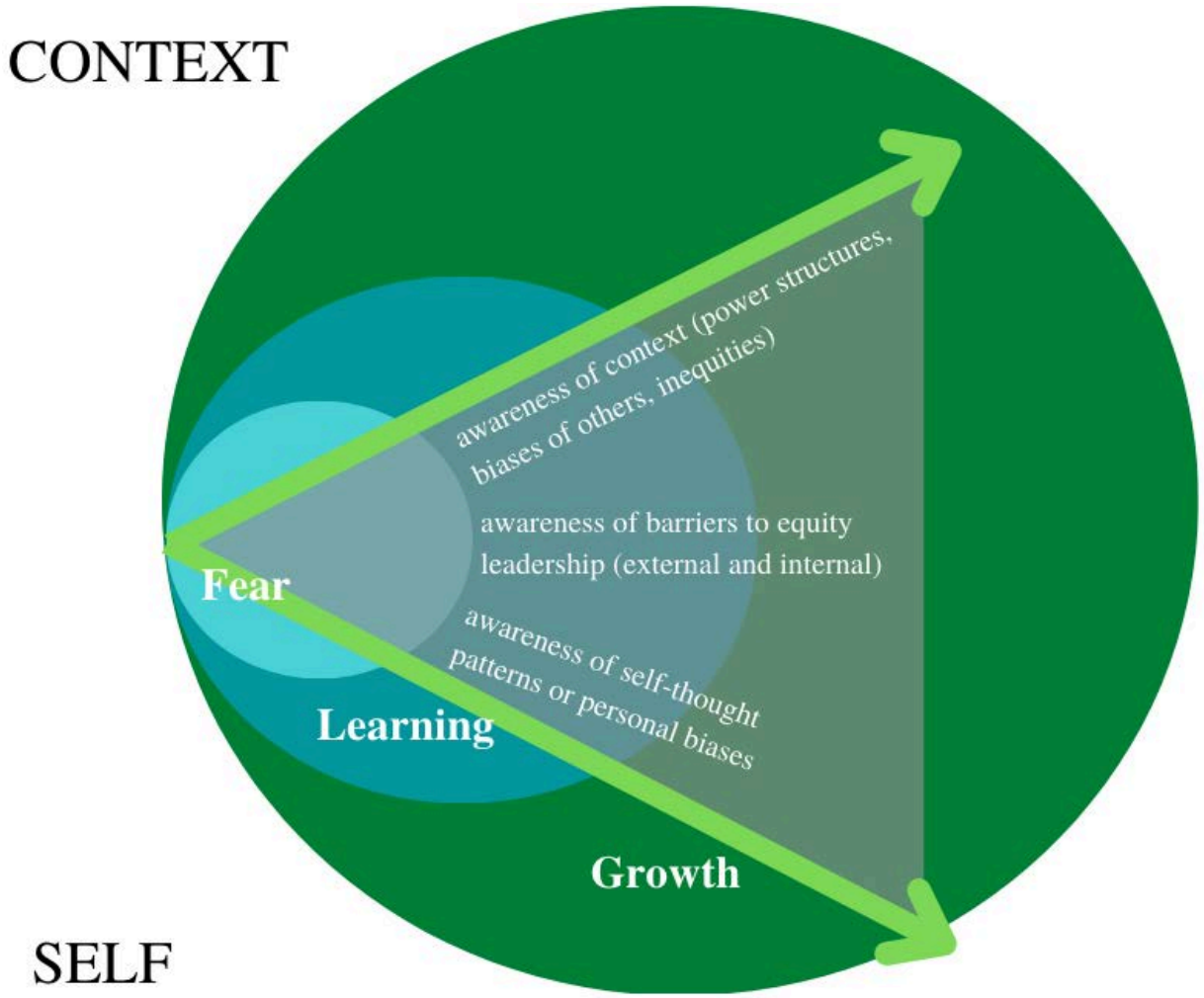


Figure 22. Participants developed new awareness and showed growth in racial equity leadership.

identify internal barriers to equity and antiracist work, increases awareness to potential spaces for action. Understanding the layers of work (self and context) is important for identifying how each person interacts with others. Awati (2013) discusses how professionals need to connect the life world to the systems world by humanizing the systems world – in this case, of schools and districts. The self (the *I*) can only become part of the *we* in the larger context of the school or district if the ways of knowing and being of women and being and becoming anti-racist leaders.

Reflection

The evidence and analysis from PAR Cycle One captured the ways the CPR members worked toward improving their racial equity leadership, even if they did not use that terminology because of the state and district context. In the ENC context, with an abundance of political pressures and other barriers that tended to create apprehension, they made strategic choices to enact their beliefs and hone their knowledge, skills, and dispositions as women who embody antiracism. This required a great deal of buffering–meaning they had to understand their contexts and make strategic decisions about language and actions to achieve equity goals (Tredway et al., 2021). In PAR Cycle One, I observed factors related to historical or sociocultural external forces or internal thought patterns. A few participants revealed they hold back their equity agendas and/or outward expressions of social justice beliefs (or antiracist stance) due to the context in which they live and work. The hesitation may be out of fear of the repercussions related to their job but are not related to the elements of fear (Ibrahim, 2020a).

In the PAR Cycle One data, I highlighted an important distinction. Conflating personal antiracist work and professional equity leadership is problematic. Participants worked on their abilities to become more antiracist (self) while they were not always able to fully enact racial equity leadership due to the contexts in which they work. The white women in the study engaged

in internal reflective identity work to increase their awareness of social constructs such as whiteness and gender norms. However, equity leadership that embodied antiracism depends on reflection and action to actively disrupt hierarchical and status quo structures and increase transparency, inclusivity, and collaboration in the educational setting. The PAR Cycle One evidence showed the participants increased their awareness of internal and external barriers to personal and professional work. In doing so, they laid the foundation for enactment, or, in some cases, enacted elements of racial equity as leader. In PAR Cycle Two, I explored the conditions that led to antiracist growth and improved equity leadership. In other words, what can we learn about the conditions we created in the CPR group to advance and sustain this work for white women leading for equity in eastern North Carolina?

CHAPTER 7: PAR CYCLE TWO AND FINDINGS

> *A lot of material out there that did an excellent job of laying out what white supremacy is and what antiracism or an antiracist lens would include, but there was not as much that focused on how: how to embody antiracist values, how to do the internal healing needed to show up from a place of those values, and how to leverage the institutional power that one holds – specifically as a white educator – towards disrupting the patterns and practices that reinforce a culture of white supremacy. In focusing on the how, it became clear that building strong relationships – learning to grow with and count on each other to be loving accountability partners – was going to be a key factor in taking the theoretical* ***what*** *and turning it into an embodied* ***how****.* (Strader, 2022, para. 4)

In PAR Cycle Two (summer and fall, 2022), I began to understand more about the shifts in practice and conditions necessary to embody antiracist work and enact equity leadership work. Equity leadership work is complicated, notably in an eastern North Carolina (ENC) context, and we, as white women aspiring to be antiracist, contended with multiple layers of understanding related to the ecologies of knowing (self, organization, community) and internal feelings (fear, learning, growth) (Guajardo et al., 2016; Ibrahim, 2020a). The internal antiracist work influenced their racial equity leadership. As they more deeply understood the racial contexts and inequities, they embodied antiracism in ways that adapted to their context of ENC. During the last cycle of inquiry, the participants and I addressed this insight and persisted in our efforts to develop as leaders.

During PAR Cycle Two, two women left their school leadership positions immediately after the 2021-22 school year. Mira resigned from her high school principal position and took a teaching position at a nearby community college. She stated in a message to me, “I’m good. Transitioning [to teaching at the community college] is a really good start to decompressing and feeling good. Thanks for the check in” (Mackey, text message, July 20, 2022). Her data are not included in PAR Cycle Two. Jessica left her ENC school district position and she, her husband, and two small children moved to the western side of the state where she began a new district

position supervising elementary school principals. I shared data from these persons in this chapter: Jessica, Lyla, Joyce, and Michelle. During PAR Cycle Two, I collaborated with the remaining four participants (Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle) over the summer and continued our communication into the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year.

In this final cycle, I documented and analyzed the barriers for the ENC-based participants to enact equity and embody antiracism. School districts added new initiatives and tasks related to the COVID-19 pandemic to their already full plates, including understanding COVID-19 virus variants, mask mandates, CDC guidelines, contact tracing, vaccine and booster recommendations for children, and the political debates surrounding these topics. In addition, study participants were concurrently school leaders, doctoral candidates, wives, and daughters; all, but one, are mothers. The many contextual factors and barriers further affirmed the need for a necessary space for ENC white women leaders to reflect and make decisions, gain support, and reaffirm their values. In the chapter, I describe the last data collection process and activities, evidence from the PAR Cycle Two data analysis, present the final themes, and explain the research findings.

PAR Cycle Two Process

During the final PAR cycle, I focused data collection on the second and third research questions: (2) How do white women school leaders enact their roles as leaders for equity, and (3) To what extent do I shift my perspectives and actions as a white woman leader? As well, I learned more about how white women identify and reflect on their roles as equity leaders. In the PAR Cycle Two activities, I connected individually and collectively with the co-practitioner researchers (see Table 10) as I concentrated on understanding the *how* of embodying antiracism, learning how the participants developed and enacted racial equity.

Table 10

PAR Cycle Two Activities

Activities	Date(s)	Data Collection	Notes
Individual Member Checks	Various times in July	Notes/edits on shared google doc Reflective Memo	Each participant reviewed and edited her Pre-cycle description in chapter 5
Face-to-face check-ins	July 17-23, 2022	Leadership development digital story Reflective Memo(s)	During the summer doctoral course, all participants crafted a digital story about leadership development. I transcribed and coded each leadership development digital story
Virtual CPR Meeting	September 18, 2022	Agenda (see Appendix F) Meeting Notes Group Artifact (digital) Reflective Memo	During the CPR meeting, we shared stories, looked at PAR Cycle One data and analysis, discussed draft conceptual frameworks, updated the group artifact, and considered what Menakem calls "an embodied antiracist culture"
Individual Interviews	Lyla: October 4, 2022 (virtual) Jessica: October 6, 2022 (virtual) Joyce: October 6, 2022 (face-to-face) Michelle: October 25, 2022 (face-to-face)	Notes/edits on shared google doc Notes during interviews Reflective Memo	During the interview, I presented an update to the conceptual framework, asked for input, and asked follow-up questions (see Appendix G)
My personal antiracist work with I.D.E.A.	July 26, 2022 October 12, 2022 November 21, 2022 December 14, 2022	Reflective Memo(s)	I participated in sessions of a "Disruptor's Network" with The Institute for Democratic Education in America (I.D.E.A.)

Activities

The PAR Cycle Two activities included member checks, leadership development digital stories, a CPR group gathering, individual interviews, and opportunities to update the group artifact and individual personal mandalas. In addition, I met monthly with the I.D.E.A. Disruptor's Network to further my personal antiracist work. To conduct individual member checks, I used a shared Google doc. As a part of their doctoral program, CPR members crafted a digital story about leadership development, which I analyzed. On September 18, 2022, the CPR group met virtually to analyze PAR Cycle One data and analysis, provide feedback on a conceptual framework draft, update the group artifact, and consider what leads to the development of what Menakem (2022) calls "an embodied antiracist culture" (see Appendix F). I coded and analyzed the CPR meeting notes and the group artifact. In October, I met with each participant individually.

From the analysis of PAR Cycle Two data, I expanded the overarching theme of increased awareness. Increased awareness was crucial to shifting from fear to learning to growth; based on the additional evidence, I illuminated the complexity of antiracist work for white women, which included the challenges and barriers to enacting equity leadership in eastern North Carolina, and the conditions we needed to create to move this work forward.

Data Analysis

Based on data analysis and building on the Pre-cycle and PAR Cycle One, I identified three themes: (1) a commitment to growth, (2) the ability to recognize and reflect on barriers, and (3) the importance of cultivating relationships (see Table 11). All the participants are career educators and believe in the potential for growth. The themes further clarify the *how:* How do leaders develop the knowledge and skills and take actions as equity leaders?

Table 11

PAR Cycle Two Evidence

Theme	Category	Frequency (% of total; n=182)	Persons Represented	Not Represented
Commitment to growth 40%	Reflection	18/10%	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	none
	Prioritizing wellbeing	16/9%	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	none
	Shifting patterns	13/7%	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle	Carrie
	Radical hope	10/5.5%	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	none
	Improving teaching and learning	9/5%	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	none
	Getting comfortable with discomfort	6/3%		
Recognize and reflect on barriers 35%	Systemic issues	28/15%	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	
	Looking through a different lens	13/7%	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	
	Heavy load of school leadership	13/7%	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	
	Unpack insecurities, build confidence	10/5.5%	Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	
Cultivate Relationships 25%	Core value	21/12%	Lyla, Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	none
	Guiding growth in others	10/5.5%	Jessica, Joyce, Michelle, Carrie	Lyla
	Conversations with teachers	6/3%	Lyla, Joyce, Michelle	Jessica, Carrie
	Students at the center	9/5%	Lyla, Joyce, Michelle	Jessica, Carrie

Note. Mira's data is not included in this PAR Cycle.

They looked through multiple lenses at their internal thought patterns and external barriers to growth, both as leaders for equity and specifically in racial equity work. Additionally, developing relationships with others and between others is an invitation to move toward humanizing educational spaces. Within the three themes, I identified key categories that substantiate the themes. Aspects of the PAR Cycle Two data offer additional evidence of the internal and external components of the work white women leaders in the ENC landscape.

The themes developed over the PAR cycles. I identified the personal identity influences on leadership in the Pre-cycle, and I recognized increased awareness as an emerging theme from the previous cycle of data. The arc of growth from a leader of equity to a leader who embodies antiracism requires a lifetime commitment. While we continue on this journey after this research project and study, the participants were clear that they believe that the commitment to social justice and antiracism will make them better educational leaders and that this experience supported them in enacting their beliefs. With awareness of the current barriers, they demonstrated that they could enact their espoused leadership values. In Figure 23, I trace the data through three cycles of data analysis leading to the final themes and discuss the themes in light of the entire PAR project.

Commitment to Growth

The study participants were committed to their learning and growing as equity-minded leaders and aspiring antiracists. Early in the study, participants revealed a calling and a passion for education, a desire to be better leaders, and increased awareness of the internal and external barriers affecting their work. In Ibrahim's (2020a) continuum for antiracist work, he views growth as essential to moving forward in antiracist work. Michael and Bartoli (2023) suggest that white people engaging in antiracist work must believe in the capacity for growth and

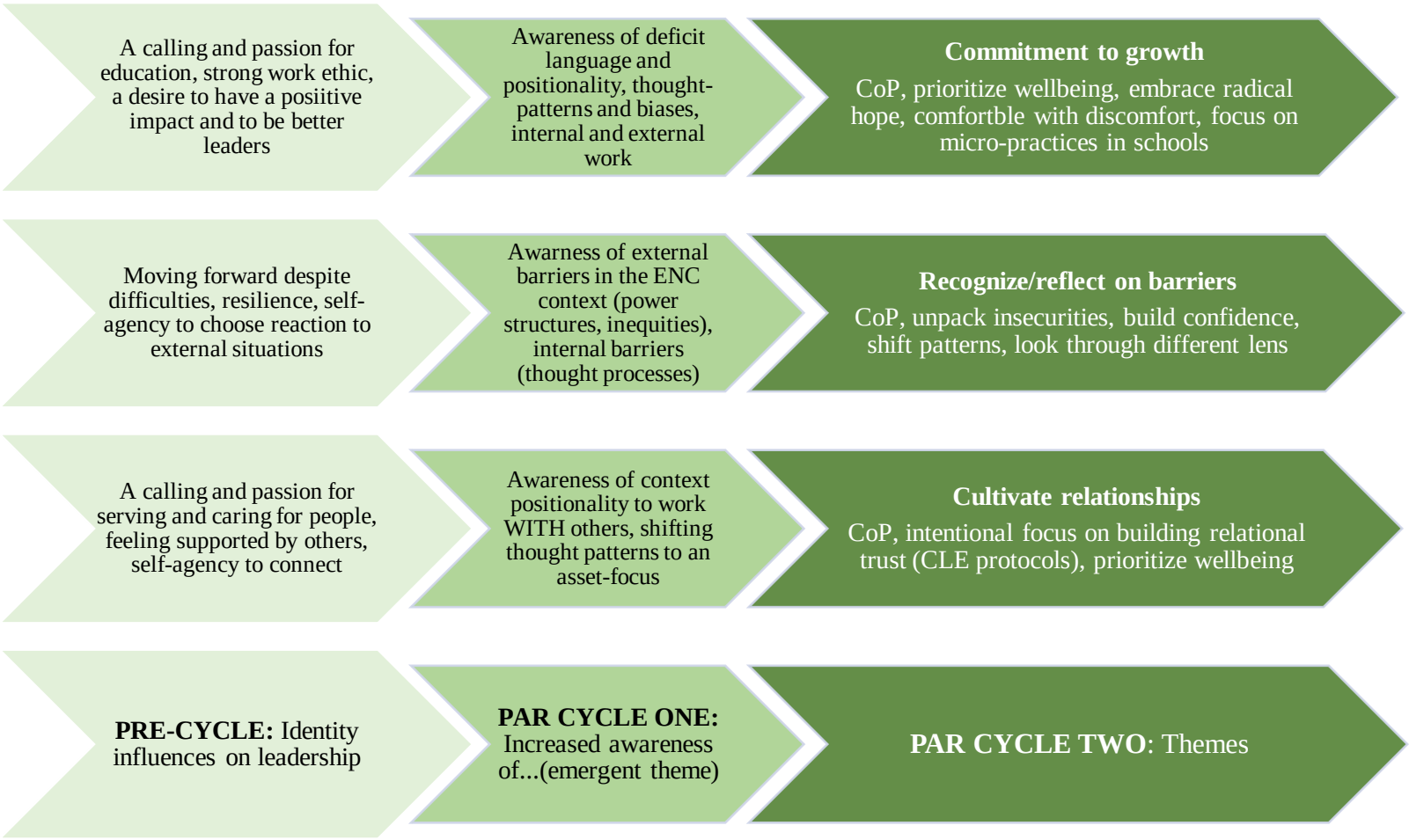


Figure 23. Final themes traced through three cycles of data analysis.

they must be ready to rethink their identity. The authors stated that: “If we actually looked at ourselves from this wider angle [part of the social fabric that socializes us in deeply racist ways], we would see that committing to an antiracist path is committing to a lifelong process of re-socializing ourselves” (Michael & Bartoli, 2023, p. 109). In this process of re-socializing ourselves as antiracist leaders, we learned about ourselves, the contexts where we live and work, and the barriers to equity and antiracist work, which contributed to our growing awareness, knowledge, and skills in these areas. The work is complicated and non-linear; however, designing, facilitating, and developing a strong community of practice was essential to our growth process. In this community of practice, we reflected, prioritized our well-being, shifted our practices, and maintained collective radical hope.

Communities of Practice

A community of practice (CoP) is a group of people with shared passions and concerns who interact regularly to learn how to do something better (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). All the participants began a learning journey through Project I^4, a grant-funded one-year professional development program and continued in an EdD cohort program. They unpacked antiracist literature in a white women affinity space and engaged in a CPR group as a part of this study. Additionally, each participant facilitated a community of practice in her school or district as a part of her Participatory Action Research (PAR) project focused on an element of improving teaching and learning. All participants reinforced the importance of these learning communities on their growth and development (40% of the evidence in PAR Cycle Two; see Figure 24). Jessica spoke about a lack of satisfaction with a previous assistant principalship and reflected, “I needed a learning community” and described the communities of practice as lifelines to her as she embarked on a district leadership role (Pinkney, leadership story notes, July 22, 2022). Lyla

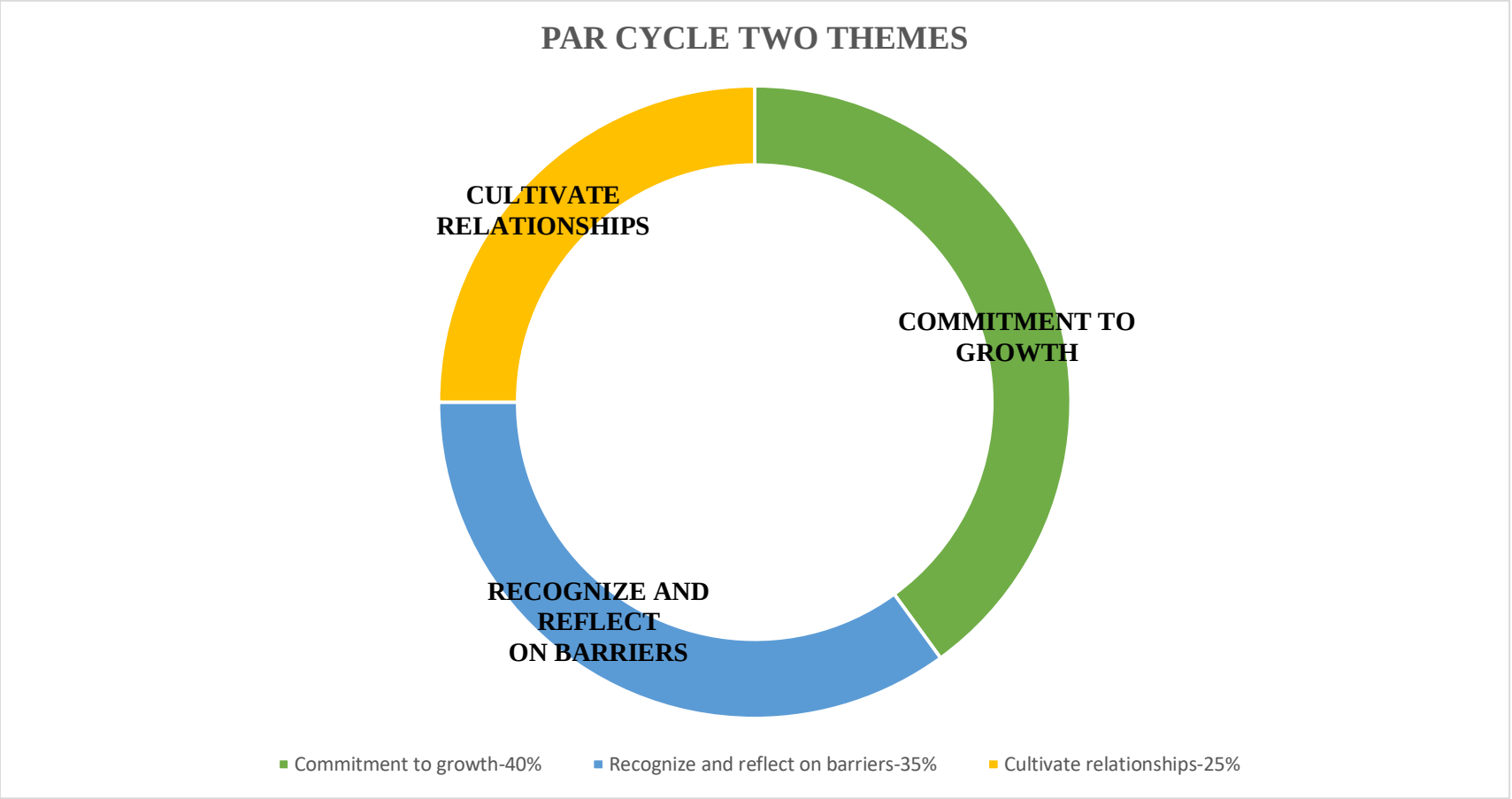


Figure 24. Final themes represented by the data.

explained how by surrounding herself with equity-minded leaders she was able to better reflect on her practice using feedback from others (Burgess, leadership story notes, July 22, 2022). Joyce commented, "it was okay to acknowledge the thoughts that I had" and worried about returning to "old ways" (Jones, meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Participating in a community of practice focused on antiracist growth and equity leadership was a key component in the participants' commitment to growth; I describe how learning with others led to opportunities to reflect in meaningful ways.

Reflection

Participants revealed that reflection was a critical component in their abilities to grow and develop as equity leaders and aspiring antiracists (18 instances of 10% of the data). Lyla regularly asks herself how she can be more aware in her principal role and in the historically Black community where she lives (Burgess, meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Jessica asked herself, "what story am I telling myself", and Joyce described the need to "reflect and interrogate my own thought-patterns" (Pinkney, interview, October 6, 20220; Jones, meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Michelle described antiracist work as a cyclical reflective process:

> It goes like this: I'm working on myself, I'm working in my context, and then I'm gonna talk with other white women in this space [CPR group] …then I jump to community, my students, families, and friends of color and see that I'm still learning about my own identity and awareness of what I bring to the space…this journey challenged me to make choices and take deliberate actions to be antiracist. (meeting notes, September 18, 2022).

When looking at previous cycles of data, Michelle reflected about the "increased awareness of our individual leadership" (Brammer, meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Jessica said, "I can be a shield, I should not be a hero… my positionality can amplify voices and clear barriers"

(Pinkney, leadership story notes, July 22, 2022). All participants acknowledged critical reflection contributed to their commitment to growth and furthered their antiracist growth and equity leadership enactment.

Prioritizing Wellbeing

In one-on-one interviews, I learned that every participant engaged in a regular exercise and wellness routine (9% of the PAR Cycle Two data). While the women in the study were busy educational leaders, doctoral students, wives, daughters, and three of the four participants are mothers, they found time to prioritize exercise or other wellbeing routines. Joyce shared that she had extreme health concerns, and, at the same time, she observed that at least four other staff members struggling with stress-related health issues. She stated:

> For people to be more transformational, they need balance in their lives…it took several months to realize self-care is important. I focused on healthy eating habits, drinking a gallon of water each day, and daily exercise. This further enhanced my self-confidence and now I feel good in my body—these two things are connected. (Jones, interview, October 6, 2022)

Lyla said, "I'm not sure I'd be as level without it [morning exercise routine]" (Burgess, interview, October 4, 2022). Michelle, a regular runner, started signing up to run races on weekends, saying, "A race is something I can accomplish when it is hard to do other things" (Brammer, interview, October 25, 2022). Michelle recently has been using guided meditations to stay positive. She said that educational leadership is a hard job and when others are upset with her, she can go back to a recent meditation and repeat it in her head. She gave an example: "However I show up today is enough" (Brammer, interview, October 25, 2022). Joyce commented that her wellness journey has led her to be more grounded in other relationships,

adding “I have become more understanding of my middle school aged son and more patient” (Jones, interview, October 6, 2022). A commitment to growth not only affected personal wellbeing, but participants shifted previous patterns of leadership and acted in ways different than they had in the past.

Shifting Patterns

Participants recognized their ability to act in different ways than they acted in the past to shift patterns within their contexts (7% of the data). brown (2017) uses the metaphor of a fractal in nature to explain how small shifts at the micro level affect future patterns. All participants utilized CLE protocols in their contexts to encourage people to reflect on their identities and/or create space for storytelling (meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Lyla believes in incremental change: go slow and make small changes (Burgess, leadership story, July 22, 2022). She stated:

> I’ve increased my own awareness of the language the staff use [“these kids”] and shifted the focus to street data information on individual students at my school…I wish I had more control over some of the policies at the district level. I recognize the deficit language used by the district when we talk about students and inequities—this inhibits us from being able to make changes…the language we use matters. (Burgess, interview, October 4, 2022).

Another way leaders shifted was their language patterns internally and externally. Joyce and Michelle recognized their abilities to shift the internal language they use to talk to themselves. Joyce talked about the ways she shifted from “living in a negative space, to a daily space of positivity” and Michelle says that instead of getting defensive when an angry parent or staff member wants to meet with her, she asks herself, “what opportunity do I have to listen and build a relationship?” (meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Jessica described shifts toward more

equitable academic discourse through evidence-based observations and estimates this led to student academic improvements. “I recognize my name won’t be attached [since she moved to a new district] but a lot of growth was made…the middle school made the highest scores in the history of the school” (Pinkney, interview, October 6, 2022). Shifting negative language patterns by focusing on self-talk and community assets meant that leaders improved micro-level interactions, which had an effect on their ability to sustain hope.

Radical Hope

Lear (2006) defines radical hope as “directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is” (p. 103). Michael and Bartoli (2023) dedicated their book for white people’s work to dismantle racism as for the “children’s children’s children’s children’s children’s children’s children,” capturing the idea that antiracist work and equitable schools are not something that can be achieved in the short term. Therefore, radical hope is necessary for equity-minded leaders and white folks aspiring to be antiracist. During the Pre-cycle data, participants identified as resilient in the face of life’s challenges, and, in PAR Cycle Two, they confirmed that the attributes of hope are foundational to their leadership (5.5% of data). Joyce says, “I now see value in my leadership” and Jessica stated, “I’ve discovered ways of being and structures that have the power to transform organizations” (leadership story notes, July 22, 2022). Lyla said that the ability to see students as individuals and recognizing “my own ability to learn and adapt to change” propelled her forward. Joyce said that her personal antiracist work gives her radical hope and is for her community, conveying “radical hope comes from working with staff and students and aligns with my calling to leave the world better” (Jones, meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Michelle acknowledged that she was struggling with her purpose over the summer, but that when the students entered the school building for a new

school year, she recognized her radical hope came from the students and a hope for the future. Additionally, the co-practitioner research group helped her see that "we need white people to step up to teach white people about what's up" and she recognized how she has changed over time. This gives her hope for the ability of other white folks to learn and grow in her historically Black ENC community (Brammer, meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Hope could be considered an esoteric element of equity leadership; however, participants described specific strategies they utilized to find hope in their educational contexts to improve teaching and learning, partially by getting comfortable with discomfort.

Improving Teaching and Learning

As a result of reflecting and prioritizing wellbeing, members of the community of practice shifted patterns of language and action and maintained radical hope. As a result, they told stories of improvements in equitable teaching and learning. They conducted evidence-based observations and utilized evidence about calling-on and questioning practices to have more fruitful conversations with teachers, and that became a vehicle for discussing racial equity as they observed patterns of student participation that were inequitable. Michelle said that a throughline of her work to improve as an equity leader was rooted in "taking opportunities in her actions" which Joyce and Jessica further described as modeling equitable teaching strategies when they facilitated meetings with staff (meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Increasing academic discourse in the classroom was the focus of Lyla's PAR project, and she reflected that "a key factor is that teachers assume responsibility for their teaching and changes to their teaching", and she recognized her ability to alter teaching and learning practices through conversations based on evidence that revealed racial disparities (Burgess, leadership story notes, July 22, 2022). In Jessica's PAR study, participants learned how to conduct evidence-based

observations and looked at their leadership through an equity lens as a part of the yearlong Project I^4 professional development. Jessica said that a change in the mindset of the middle school principal led to big changes. “The middle school has one-third of its original staff, and the administrative team is different other than the principal. This has led to a ton of growth” (Pinkney, interview, October 6, 2022). Michelle found excitement in partnering with an outside entity to gather feedback about her school’s teaching and learning in a design-thinking/inquiry cycle process. “Right now, we’re talking to our ‘users’ [teachers, students, parents] and asking what you like about our ‘product’ to influence our school design” (Brammer, interview, October 25, 2022). Foundational to improving teaching and learning were conversations between the people at the school and in the community, and, while implicit rather than explicit in their language, they were strategically making decisions to focus on racial equity (Rigby & Tredway, 2015).

Getting Comfortable with Discomfort

Participants began to express how their growth was partially about being more comfortable with uncomfortable feelings. Lyla and Michelle grappled with doubt about their leadership and career path forward (meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Jessica described the importance of “being okay with the gray” and of not always having the answers right away (Pinkney, interview, October 6, 2022). Michelle acknowledged discomfort at a new awareness of how “my biases are creeping in” to decision making (Brammer, leadership story notes, July 22, 2022). Joyce mentioned her frustration with extended family members whose biases clouded their views of the world and says that she no longer sits in silence. Although it was uncomfortable at first, she described, “I now speak up to family members—I can’t just listen to a one-sided conversation” (Jones, meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Although this is a small

feature of the evidence, getting comfortable with uncomfortable feelings is an aspect of the research on antiracist work for white people and necessary for a commitment to growth (DiAngelo, 2011; Menakem, 2017; Michael & Bartoli, 2023). While not a large part of the data, these data offer a topic for future study.

During the study, I acknowledged my discomfort and hesitancy to facilitate learning opportunities for school leaders and recognized the ways I prioritized comfort over enacting a space for reflection about antiracist work. To develop my skills and move from fear to growth, I continued to participate in communities of practice as a commitment to growth. I read and discussed literature specifically directed toward white folks interested in antiracist work. I participated in a national network, through The Democratic Institute for Education in America (I.D.E.A.), focused on unpacking whiteness in community with others and on disrupting white supremacy characteristics. I presented at conferences and welcomed feedback from other researchers on my work. I wrote reflective memos and agreed to co-facilitate one of the I.D.E.A. sessions to build confidence and practice facilitating a space of white people focused on antiracist work. I reflected in a memo:

> The evidence shines a light on the importance of learning in a collective space, separate from work colleagues, with opportunities for individual and collective reflection. School administration can be a lonely position and school districts can negatively stifle innovation in the iron cage of institutional structures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Weiss, 1995). The PAR participants described various groups (Project I^4 colleagues, dissertation coach and research groups, doctoral classmates, etc.) that pushed them out of their comfort zone and pulled them toward the leader they strived to be. (Morris, reflective memo, October 23, 2022)

I recognized how communities of practice moved my growth in antiracist leadership forward. In these spaces, I could vulnerably share insecurities, ask questions, admit mistakes, recommit to learning, reflect with others, increase awareness and confidence, consider my action spaces and opportunities in my context.

The evidence from PAR Cycle Two tells the story of co-practitioner researchers committed growth and development as educational leaders. The women recognized and reflected on the barriers to their equity-minded leadership goals and their personal antiracist growth.

Recognize and Reflect on Barriers

An important facet of the data was how the participants increased their awareness of the barriers to antiracist and equity-leadership work and reflected on the barriers they identified (35% of the data for PAR Cycle Two). While recognizing and reflecting on the barriers has been a feature of all three data collection cycles, the participants identified barriers unique to the ENC context. In the Pre-cycle, participants admitted the ways they moved forward through difficult situations with resilience and the self-agency to make strategic choices about their reactions to external situations. These four barriers proved critical to the participants' understanding and growth: (1) systemic issues; (2) looking through a different lens; (3) heavy load of school leadership; and (4) insecurities and building confidence. Awareness of internal and external barriers was an aspect of PAR Cycle One data, and data from this cycle further illustrates the way the participants made sense of their abilities to disrupt these barriers to engage in personal antiracist work and equity leadership.

Systemic Issues

Systemic issues are akin to an invisible cloud that influences every context but are not immediately visible. By explicitly naming structural and systemic issues in our group,

participants not only developed awareness but were able reflect on barriers, counter impediments, and support others to do the same (Rigby & Tredway, 2015). Participants identified systemic issues as barriers in the PAR Cycle One data and confirmed that issue in PAR Cycle Two (15% of the data). Wildman et al. (1996) discuss the importance of making invisible systems of privilege visible so we can identify them as rooted in the forces that have shaped society. Pointing fingers at "the -isms [racism, sexism, etc.] obscures patterns of domination and subordination…and gives the illusion that all powers of domination and subordination are the same and interchangeable" (Wildman et al., 1996, pp. 657-658). In other words, we must be able to talk about the systemic issues that were barriers to equitable education and perpetuated racist or sexist structures in schools and communities. A key factor that specifically applies to the eastern North Carolina context and others like it—participants needed a safe place to be explicit and to vocally embody antiracism as a value; as they had a safe space to confirm their experiences and be affirmed in their leadership, they learned ways to then be implicit in enacting their understandings and values.

Participants recognized the ways they felt silenced or unable to act because of ENC contextual barriers. For example, Michelle recognized the way a former district supervisor [white male] treated her differently than the way he treated her husband [another white male]. "My husband and I would say basically the same thing…my husband came away feeling empowered, I felt stupid…he got kudos, and I got, 'that's nice, now go sit down'" (Brammer, meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Additionally, Michelle told a story about how some children from migrant worker families showed fear at school after the Trump election and how she had an internal struggle with that reality while pacifying vocal white families by no longer wearing Black Lives Matters accessories. She was disappointed the district had not discussed or outwardly displayed

support for families of color in her community. She asked, “at what point do we step up politically?” (Brammer, interview, October 25, 2022). Joyce shared her perception that the district office spent time justifying what they purchased, rather than thinking about what is best for students and stated, “here in ENC it is super easy to get bogged down in policies and procedures…you’re [those who talk about antiracism or equity] the outlier” (Jones, interview, October 6, 2022). Lyla said that she has learned to reflect on the systems that affect students and does not believe in blanket discipline policies. “Kids today are under such a fine microscope” and she has advocated for students when blanket discipline policies do not consider individual student situations (Burgess, Interview, October 4, 2022). Jessica admitted the times when she reacted quickly and without reflection, she contributed to the already polarized ENC context (Pinkney, leadership story notes, July 22, 2022).

Increasing awareness to systemic issues that created barriers for antiracist work or equity leadership required participants to assume another load; they have to buffer district and state priorities with their knowledge and beliefs. As they developed critical perspectives about race and equity, they are caught in the middle and took on an additional emotional load. PAR Cycle Two participants recognized that reflection added to their abilities to name and address the barriers, and, at the same time, acknowledged how complex their positions were – the in-between roles they felt they must play. While all participants acknowledged reflection opportunities and conversations enhanced their learning, they realized that looking through a different lens was an asset and, to some degree, now an added burden.

Looking Through a Different Lens

Participants revealed a new awareness of themselves or their contexts and often the awareness came after a conversation in the group (7% of the data). For example, Lyla

appreciated learning about equity dilemmas in other ENC schools by listening to other white women's stories in the CPR group. She reported that this helped her reflective process to her see things she may not have seen before in her personal or work environment (Burgess, interview, October 4, 2022). Jessica reflected on previous antiracist work and that, in the past, she felt shamed as a middle-class white woman but now recognizes the need to cast a wider gaze and look at the presence of whiteness in school policies and procedures instead of individuals. "Shaming people will not work and will lead to white flight, but the idea that 'white is better' comes out in all these little ways in our schools. We have to look at policy" (Pinkney, interview, October 6, 2022). Joyce recognized that reading Kendi's (2016) book and having conversations with others increased her awareness of unconscious stereotypes and biases. She said, "I now reflect on education through the lens of equity and breaking the status quo" (Jones, leadership story notes, July 22, 2022). Michelle was mindful about how she defines community and how others define community. She said,

> I've learned more about the [historically Black] neighborhood and I'm more consciously aware of unconscious biases affecting even the route I drove home. There are more and more minority-owned businesses showing up on teachers' and students' community maps…I thought I would know more in our small town…I'm aware of how we all stay in our own lane. (Brammer, interview, October 25, 2022)

She reflected on shifts in her leadership due to increasing her opportunities to listen to the perspectives of others (Brammer, leadership story notes, July 22, 2022). Often the reflection included seeing things in a way they had not seen before, giving voice to the adage: "Once you see, you cannot un-see."

The Heavy Load of School Leadership

As participants became more aware of inequities–and particularly racial inequities, they shouldered a heavier load, which is largely an emotional load of recognizing inequities and needing to buffer situations in the school or district while remaining true to their values. They encountered other difficulties that often had inequity at the core–management complexities, including funding, and the stress of COVID-19 when teacher hiring and attendance were problematic. As early college principals, Lyla and Joyce contended with conflicting regulations from an ENC public school district and the university/community college system (meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Additionally, neither had a full office staff (assistant principal, data manager, and secretary/treasurer); consequently, they took on these extra roles as a part of their leadership. Lyla substituted as a math teacher and taught two classes during her school day in addition to her principal duties (Burgess, interview, October 4, 2022). Michelle identified the main stressors as extra day-to-day tasks: substitute teachers, frustrated parents, paperwork that does not seem purposeful, long district meetings. She said, "I've gotten better at creating personal boundaries. I don't check email on the weekend. I see others [ENC leaders] with high blood pressure or who are martyrs. I can't do that" (Brammer, interview, October 25, 2022). As participants identified both internal and external barriers, they recognized the importance of acting as advocates for creating better conditions in ENC schools.

With increased awareness of contextual inequities, the participants embraced attempting to identify and disrupt the inequities they named. As the participants identified the ways they made growth in antiracist journeys and equity leadership enactment, they observed so much more to do within the contexts in which they lived and worked. Michelle, Joyce, and I wondered what was next in our equity leadership journeys; feeling a sense of confusion and frustration, we

recognized inaction at every turn (meeting notes, September 18, 2022). Michelle described the space of inaction:

> We've all had opportunities to have small victories in our own spaces. Now, what's next...I'm just living in this kind of purgatory…I know my values and I know what I want but am not pushing others due to micropolitical reasons…trying to find that sweet spot of being able to encourage and create space, provide space, and hold space before turning the corner of where I've just pushed everyone away and the [personal] space where I just don't completely disengage from my work. (Brammer, meeting notes, September 18, 2022)

Jessica recognized a space of inaction in the district. When a like-minded colleague accepted a leadership position in another district, the superintendent retired, and open school board seats appeared uncontested and resulted in a far-right majority, she accepted a position on the other side of the state (Pinkney, interview, October 6, 2022). Embarking on an equity-focused leadership journey in the ENC context imposed an added layer of complexity to the already challenging position of educational leader. In the revised lenses with which they viewed their work as equity leaders, they assumed an emotional responsibility.

From Unpacking Insecurities to Building Confidence

Internal barriers of insecurity and lack of confidence appeared as a factor in all three cycles of data; however, participants reported that unpacking internal insecurities through identity work built their individual and collective confidence. Helms (1992) describes the final stage in white racial identity development as autonomy, the stage in which a white person has an increased awareness of one's whiteness, confidence in one's identity, and the ability to act as a supportive agent for change. The participants recognized that discussions in the white women's

affinity group had not only increased their awareness but gave them a safe space to discuss insecurities and then to act; they recognized that they had a responsibility to each other and to create these spaces for others. In the September 18 CPR meeting, Michelle noted, "We've all had opportunities to have small victories in our own spaces. Now, what's next?" She discussed the importance of creating spaces for other white people in her context to have the opportunity to learn and grow. She said:

> I'm talking out two sides of my mouth because I'm not giving the white women the same space…we need to do it in a space that is gracious, and I'm going to use the word tolerant…giving the space and time for the self and context work that I was allowed….and as much as it burns me up to say this out loud, specific to the east North Carolina context, we need to engage powerful white men…we can do this work as white women but at some point we're gonna face a white man…I wonder what it looks like to create spaces where white men hear from white women. (Brammer, meeting notes, September 18, 2022)

Recognizing potential action spaces began with gaining confidence. Joyce attributed increased confidence to identity work leading her to understand and counter insecurities. In her leadership story (July 22, 2022), Joyce revealed increased confidence as a leader and researcher and in her decision-making abilities. In the past, she felt overwhelming emotions but did not act because she did not feel empowered to say the right thing. "I didn't think I was smart enough to engage with highly educated people…I learned I am smarter than I thought" (Jones, leadership story, July 22, 2022). Creating a space to learn and grow was pivotal to uncovering internal barriers and building confidence for moving equity leadership work forward.

Documenting my journey toward being and becoming antiracist and a better leader for equity is a key part of the study. I recognized my past personal and professional thought and behavior patterns were unsustainable. In my experience, I could not maintain the role of an ENC school leader, push against inequitable structures within the school, unpack and reflect on my biases, antiracist work, and leadership actions, while supporting the students, families, and staff at my school, care for my personal family, and bring my best self to all the roles. Looking back, I now recognize that much of the stress I carried came from internalized barriers rooted in socio-cultural expectations for women and external pressures I shouldered as my individual responsibility to address. In a reflective memo, I stated,

> It has taken a lot of "identity mining" to understand where these thoughts and a fear of conflict come from—the home I was raised in, the patriarchy, a need to please others/not disappoint, caretaking habits, white supremacy culture, etc. So, for me—issues of equity begin with understanding my own identity and recognizing my own complicity in systems of oppression, especially those I internalize. It must start with me finding my own voice. (Morris, reflective memo, September 26, 2021)

For me, seeing the barriers empowered me to reflect on how to deconstruct them. Recognizing and reflecting on the obstacles, internal and external, led me to curiously interrogate my own thinking and engage with like-minded educational leaders to further my skills. Recognizing the barriers to personal antiracist work and to leading more equitable educational spaces in the ENC context was enhanced by relationships with others. All participants discussed the importance of cultivating relationships, a final theme in PAR Cycle Two data.

Cultivate Relationships

Trust between staff and leaders is essential for effective and equitable leadership and the ability to strengthen relationships in educational settings is grounded in day-to-day social exchanges between the people in the setting (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014). Data from previous cycles revealed that participants valued connections with others (25% of the PAR Cycle Two data); key factors in cultivating supportive relationships helped the participants grow as equity leaders were identifying and acting on core values, guiding growth in others, having critical conversations with teachers, and keeping students at the center of their work. A core value among all the participants was a calling to work in educational settings to serve and care for people. As they felt supported by others on their leadership journeys, they wanted to ensure that for others. Connecting with others was important to their agency and commitment to people and shifting from deficit language and thoughts to an asset-focused approach empowered their leadership actions.

The final data collection cycle highlighted specific ways the participants cultivated relationships with others in their contexts as a core value and practice. Lyla stated, “I am a leader who values people and relationships” (Burgess, leadership story notes, July 22, 2022). Jessica categorized face-to-face time with school leaders in her district as “magical-sacred time” and recognized the importance of building in CLE protocols to deepen relationships (Pinkney, Interview, October 6, 2022). Michelle reflected, “I thought I was good at building relationships, but I’ve learned it doesn’t happen on its own". Her intentional use of CLE protocols to cultivate relationships is evident in a more in-depth relationship with a teacher, and Michelle affirmed, “I know her on a deeper more personal level” (Brammer, interview, October 25, 2022). Participants recognized that by focusing on relationship building, they engaged in professional conversations

with teachers and staff about improving teaching and learning practices, while centering the needs of students in school improvement (meeting notes, September 18, 2022).

As a teacher, I knew I valued relationships with my students, and I created intentional opportunities to connect with students and families. When I became an administrator, building relationships with a large staff and student body seemed unattainable. I tried to do this in individual interactions but felt unskilled at creating conditions in which relationships deepened between others. In a reflective memo, I summed up my feelings about the importance of nurturing relationships with others:

> I now see the importance of understanding the macro/meta big picture influences on public education; those of North Carolina history, the history of public education in America, power structures, white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy, hegemony, and other large-scale pressures…AND I now see that focusing on relationships in schools is essential if we are going to impact future patterns. I always knew this. It really is simple. And then again, it is complex. (Morris, reflective memo, October 23, 2022)

The three themes of PAR Cycle Two -- committing to growth, recognizing and reflecting on barriers, and cultivating relationships – in combination with the data from previous cycles revealed how white women desiring to embody antiracism and lead for equity in ENC educational settings moved their individual and collective critical consciousness forward. The key findings from the study provide a roadmap for others who want to travel the road to equitable and socially just leadership. They all expressed a commitment to sentiment in a Nikki Giovanni (2003) poem, *The Journey.* We traveled on a journey together and we were committed to enacting – albeit adapted to the eastern North Carolina context – our values as antiracist equity leaders.

It's a journey . . . that I propose . . . I am not the guide . . . nor technical assistant . . .
I will be your fellow passenger . . .
Though the rail has been ridden . . . winter clouds cover . . . autumn's exuberant quilt . . .
we must provide our own guide-posts . . .
I have heard . . . from previous visitors . . . the road washes out sometimes . . . and passengers are compelled . . . to continue groping . . . or turn back . . . I am not afraid . . .
I am not afraid . . . of rough spots . . . or lonely times . . . I don't fear . . . the success of this endeavor . . . I am Ra . . . in a space . . . not to be discovered . . . but invented . . .
I promise you nothing . . . I accept your promise . . . of the same we are simply riding . . . a wave . . . that may carry . . . or crash . . .
It's a journey . . . and I want . . . to go . . .

Findings

The PAR study underscored the complexity of their work and highlighted the necessary prerequisite steps to sustaining equitable practices and building capacity as antiracist leaders. Two findings emerged:

1. White eastern North Carolina (ENC) women school leaders implicitly embodied antiracism to create more equitable and accessible public school settings. To maintain their values of antiracism, they critically reflected on their identities, their contexts, and their roles and responsibilities for dismantling historical, political, and sociocultural systems of oppression. While school leaders are not responsible for solving systemic issues, they did not want to be culpable for perpetuating oppression and inequities. As a result, they found implicit strategic and intentional ways to act on behalf of their racial equity values.
2. A community of practice focused on antiracist growth and equity leadership nurtured a *necessary space* so that white leaders moved past their fears and hesitancies toward learning and growth. In the space, the study participants critically reflected on internal thought processes (self) and external influences (context) and considered ways to enact core values. As a result, necessary spaces such as these are places where leaders

> are “held” by other participants so they can self-author and transform (Drago-Severson, 2012).

The ENC context is rife with invisible ways to silence voices and oppress people whose identity is different from dominant social identities (male, white, heterosexual, Christian, etc.). School leaders who are equipped to uncover barriers to personal and professional development can be a vanguard in supporting different systems–one in which leaders can grow personally in developing their knowledge, skills, and dispositions as antiracist equity leaders committed to equitable learning environments for all students. Just like the students need a safe and trusting classroom space and leaders require what I named a *necessary space* in which they can grow in their courage and commitment to their values (Quadros-Meis, 2021; Velasco, 2021). In Figure 25, I map the evidence leading to the two findings.

Through the study, I endeavored to understand more about what embodying antiracism means. I believe embodying antiracism is a lifelong undertaking, but the evidence tells a story of how a small group of white women moved forward. The work was internal and external. Figure 25 shows evidence leading to the findings and reveals an interesting perspective about the eastern North Carolina context. In PAR Cycle One, the participants showed an increased awareness of power structures in their contexts (school, district, or community). In PAR Cycle Two, the participants described the ways they enacted leadership within their circle of influence, using their positionality to create more equitable and accessible educational spaces. This work was supported and nurtured by a *necessary space* focused on antiracist growth and equity leadership.

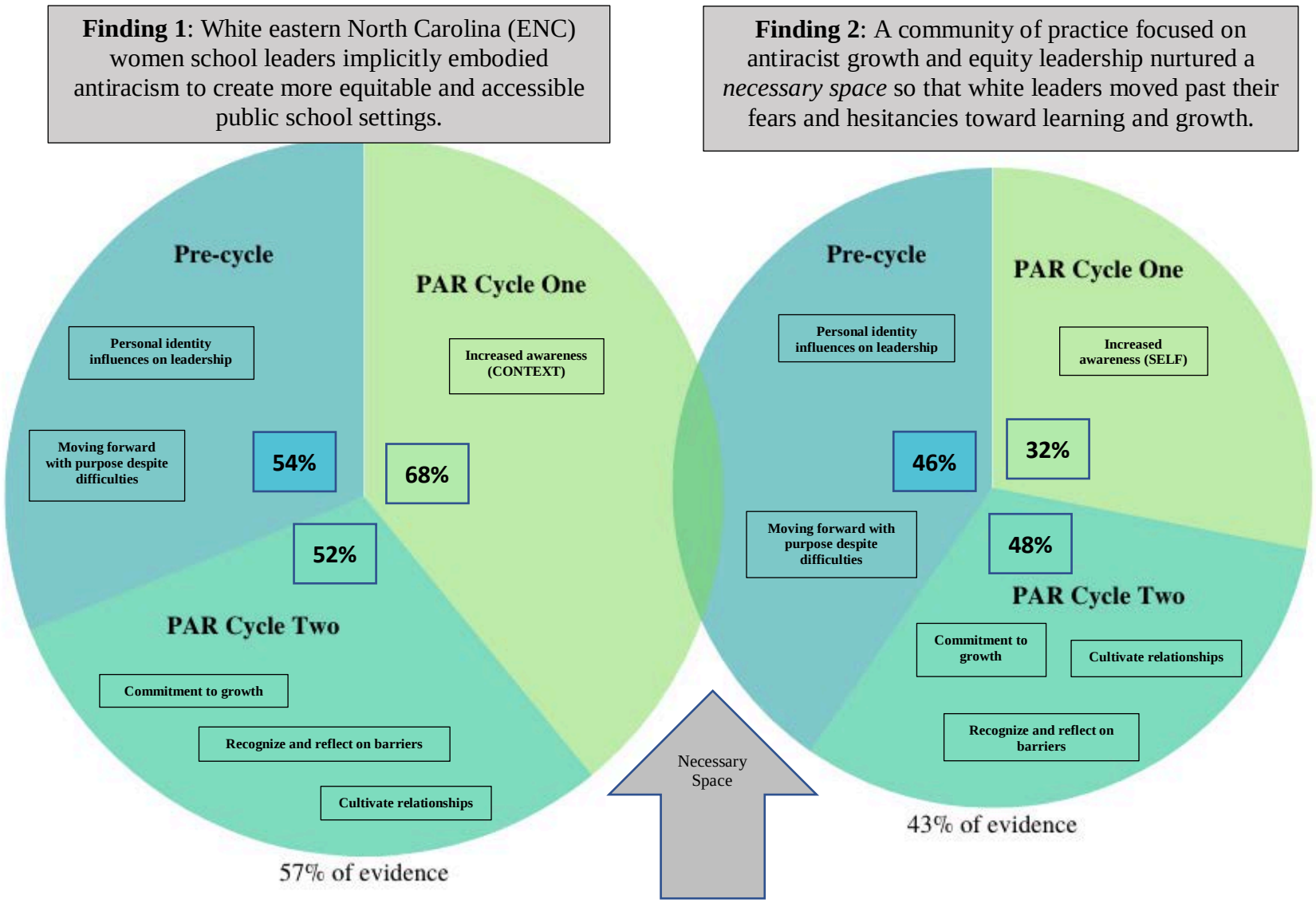


Figure 25. The evidence from three cycles of inquiry leads to two findings.

New Leader Responsibilities: Making the Invisible Visible in the ENC Context

Fraise and Brooks (2015) describe leadership as a process of unlearning perceptions deeply engrained in habits, skills, and dispositions. Most schools perpetuate achievement gaps along racial lines; therefore, explicit dialogue about racial inequities is crucial if leaders are to transform school cultures and practices (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2021; Hammond, 2015; Shields, 2004). Ray (2019) identifies unmarked whiteness as a central component of mainstream organizational culture. The narratives of meritocracy, colorblindness, and/or nationalism mask the underlying culture of domination, often invisible to those who benefit most from social contracts that support social reproduction (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2021; Jackson, 1999; Pateman & Mills, 2007).

As previously described, persons use niceties and Southern hospitality to glaze over and suppress difficult or unpleasant topics of conversation that could lead to discomfort (Huler, 2012). They name political correctness as a negative result of raising such issues. Thus, educational leaders dedicated to equity and antiracism must deconstruct identity and contextual barriers and reconstruct and reflect on the ways their leadership can create alternative conditions for growth, change, and connection. Aware of their context, they had to embody antiracism differently; often they needed to be implicit rather than explicit, revealing truth in an old adage: "There is more than one way to skin a cat". Much of the antiracism embodiment literature typically encourages explicitly naming of inequities (Leverett, 2002; Menakem, 2017, 2022; Michael & Bartoli, 2023; Rigby & Tredway, 2015). However, the leaders in this context contributed to our understanding of how to embody antiracism in complex circumstances; they became a tight knit group supporting each other to interrogate their beliefs and practice, decide about strategic and intentional actions they could take, buffer district or state contexts to do so,

and lead for racial equity. In so doing, they provide a beacon of hope about how to approach antiracism and equity in complicated circumstances in which mentioning equity or antiracism is cause for alarm among some community members and more often school boards and district office administrators.

As white leaders in an ENC context, we identified the visible and invisible power structures at work in our schools and communities, and we deconstructed whiteness and reconstructed counternarratives (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Michael & Bartoli, 2023). For example, Joyce recognized the power of shifting her language to focus on assets when speaking about the students at her school (Jones, meeting notes, March 13, 2022). Michelle noticed her white lens and listened openly to a parent [Black] describe how her son was being policed at school. Together she and the parent put support in place for the student that felt more caring (Brammer, Sightings protocol, April 15, 2022). School leaders have an essential role in creating conditions that lead to growth, change, and connection and reconstructing the role and responsibilities of leadership is part of this process.

School leaders cannot pretend to solve all societal ills through education and should identify a focus within their circle of influence (Covey, 1989; Labaree, 2008; Schneider & Berkshire, 2020). However, educational leaders have the positionality to affect growth and change within their respective schools or districts by strengthening connections among the people in the school. While many macro or systemic issues affect schools in their circle of concern (Covey, 1989), school leaders can determine micro-practices within their spheres of influence that concentrate on being acting on their values (Rigby & Tredway, 2015). In their cases, as white women in their contexts that meant being aware of the structural analysis of any decision and being intentional about actions that would result in improving racial equity while

not explicitly naming that as a goal. The group provided support so they could build knowledge and skill, troubleshoot situations, and share decisions and missteps. We, as white women who aspired to be antiracists and better leaders for equity, approached our work together as a community of practice focused on examining our critical consciousness about issues of equity. Jessica identified that she was always a learner; Lyla garnered hope from recognizing her own ability to adapt and change; Joyce reminded herself how far she's come; and Michelle shifted her equity leadership to focus on practices that improve academics for students who struggled in the past. The leaders focused on micro-practices related to improving teaching and learning through evidence-based observations and conversations with teachers and intentionally focused meeting time on building relationships. In our *necessary space*, we created conditions for growth, and, as a result, the school leaders challenged and changed conditions in their schools to promote change.

To make the invisible visible in our contexts, we uncovered and addressed barriers to antiracist equity leadership. School leaders centered their wellbeing as a part of the process. They were clear about self-care as women who care for others do not always attend to self-care (Gilligan, 1982). Universal ethical principles define the importance of caring for self and others as social justice leaders, creating an *espacio sano* – a sane and healthy space for self-care so that they can fortify themselves for the work of social justice (Velasco, 2021). Joyce and Lyla prioritized morning exercising and Michelle and Jessica set goals to run races. We practiced mindfulness in our CPR group meetings. We unpacked insecurities through identity work and built awareness and confidence in addressing issues of race. Recognizing and reflecting from within led to the potential for external dismantling barriers, thus creating the conditions for change.

Necessary Space for White Leaders: Moving from Fear to Growth

School leaders manage educational organizations focused on learning and growth but seldom are prepared to facilitate honest conversations about issues of equity rooted in the historical, political, or socio-cultural framing of whiteness and patriarchy. In the ENC landscape, political polarization, southern sociocultural norms, and white emotionality create conditions where people are afraid to bring up issues of race, yet school leaders have an immense responsibility to the people in their care – particularly for students who are marginalized because of race or economic situations. School leaders must build their skills for seeing inequities and guiding professional conversations resulting in more equitable academic spaces (Khalifa, 2018; Radd et al., 2021). School leaders must take care of themselves so that they can address the very issues that confound their roles – issues of race and justice. They need a space –a necessary -- where they feel held and taken care of – in this case, a space they co-created. In these spaces they can move from fear or hesitation to growth and act as transformative leaders. In the case of this study, a group of white women self-authored the road map to becoming leaders of equity (Drago-Severson, 2012; Quadros-Meis, 2021; Shields, 2010).

White women's psychological and emotional discomfort historically has led to violence or silence (Hamad, 2020; Irby, 2021; Lorde, 1984). We aimed to disrupt this norm and support each other through the emotionality of antiracist work; by reflecting on our roles to disrupt the standardization of whiteness in our schools or districts, and as doctoral candidates and women in leadership (Michael et al., 2017). We had the opportunity to move from our *necessary space* to create those spaces for others. When asked to consider how our work together contributed to their antiracist growth and/or leadership practice, participants described the experience as a vital component of building awareness and sustaining a commitment to the work. For example, Lyla

said that she found it valuable to hear others' stories: "I don't have anyone who looks like me that I can talk to in my [historically Black] district. Hearing other white women unpack inequities in their buildings added to the reflective process for me" (Burgess, interview, October 4, 2022). The participants described how our space together led to their learning and interrupted feelings of fear and loneliness in the work. Joyce worried about who would facilitate a space like this for her in the future, Jessica openly shared struggles about leaving a position for a more equitable-inclined district which meant moving her entire family across the state, and Michelle admitted she was hesitant to meet with white women but recognized important qualities of her leadership as a part of our space together (meeting notes, September 18, 2022).

In the final data collection cycle, participants emphasized that as white women aspiring to be more antiracist and leaders for equity, they recognized spaces of inaction in the ENC landscape, and they navigated these spaces in nuanced ways to "show up" for racial equity. Michelle likened a space of inaction to a place of waiting, knowing what she wanted to do but fearful of micro-political repercussions in her district. She felt compelled to make bold statements about the safety of students and families at school when media hype led to students' fear after an election. She wanted to display visual signs of support and solidarity for the historically Black community she lives in. She accepted that her job was at stake if she proceeded with these bold statements without district support and she acknowledged an apprehension in embracing an audacious social justice stance (Brammer, meeting notes, September 18, 2022). However, by deciding not to be quite so overt about her beliefs, she learned methods of implicitly driving the equity agenda in her school and community.

Lyla recognized how oppressive disciplinary conditions at the community college level countered the decision she made in her role as the principal of the early college in a situation

with two students who were Black females. She chose to advocate for students in ways that did not upend the restrictive system and supported the students' aspirations to attend a four-year university (Burgess, interview, October 4, 2022). Joyce identified how stress was affecting her ability to lead and of staff members' abilities to thrive. She and others were missing days of school due to health issues. She prioritized wellbeing to discard the narrative that working harder meant better and instead promoted a personal/professional balance (Jones, interview, October 6, 2022).

My experience as an ENC school administrator was a catalyst for the study. I left public school administration frustrated with my lack of knowledge about how to address issues of equity, fear about explicitly naming racial inequities in teacher data, and discomfort in situations of conflict (Morris, reflective memo, October 5, 2022). I acknowledged insecurities about facilitating a group of school leaders in antiracist work, identifying the ways I prioritized my own comfort in Pre-cycle interactions (Morris, reflective memo, October 24, 2021). The spaces of inaction and fear led me to engage with communities of practice focused on antiracist work. We, the CPR group, identified spaces of inaction, trepidation, or stress but rejected these narratives through personal or professional shifts. In sharing these stories together, we found ways to sustain our antiracist work and/or social justice leadership and claim a future with hope and possibility.

Having the *necessary space* to name equity dilemmas and reflect highlights the importance of creating opportunities for white women to increase their awareness of issues of race and other inequities in the ENC context. We had a space where women prioritized our wellbeing and find renewed strength to continue onward despite the challenges of being a school leader in eastern North Carolina. As a result, we built confidence and solidarity for our work as

equity leaders by sharing stories, both of success and failure, and enacting equity leadership implicitly but intentionally in our contexts. As we cultivated relationships, we gained strength and courage, and our journey toward critical consciousness accelerated. Participants reported that the use of CLE protocols were key as they intentionally created the conditions for connection among people in schools. By humanizing micro-interactions between and among the people in the schools (teacher to student, teacher to teacher, leader to teacher), they created the conditions for cultivating relationships and increasing connections among people in their individual PAR research projects and schools. They became more aware that they needed to connect the lifeworld (self, social, family, values) to the systems world (school policies and practices). As a result, they found ways to interrupt power structures that had previously confounded them (Awati, 2013; Habermas, 1984; Suarez, 2018). As a result, they were able to garner internal support and confidence for their external decisions and actions.

In Figure 26, I build upon an earlier figure representing a white person's journey toward critical consciousness (see Figure 4). We must create conditions for growth, change, and connection by committing to growth personally (self) and in our organizations and communities (context), recognizing and reflecting on the barriers we face, and by cultivating relationships with others. These conditions are the key provisions on the journey. The journey starts slowly and accelerates as people gain courage and knowledge. Michael and Bartoli (2023) state that preparing for antiracist action must include training for courage (p. 179). The path is not straight and as setbacks, fear, or spaces of inaction arise, engaging in a *necessary space* with others committed to embodying antiracism revives a forward trajectory. While we cannot expect to eradicate cultures of domination completely, antiracist work impacts future patterns. brown (2017) likens this work to a fractal, a never-ending pattern representing a relationship between

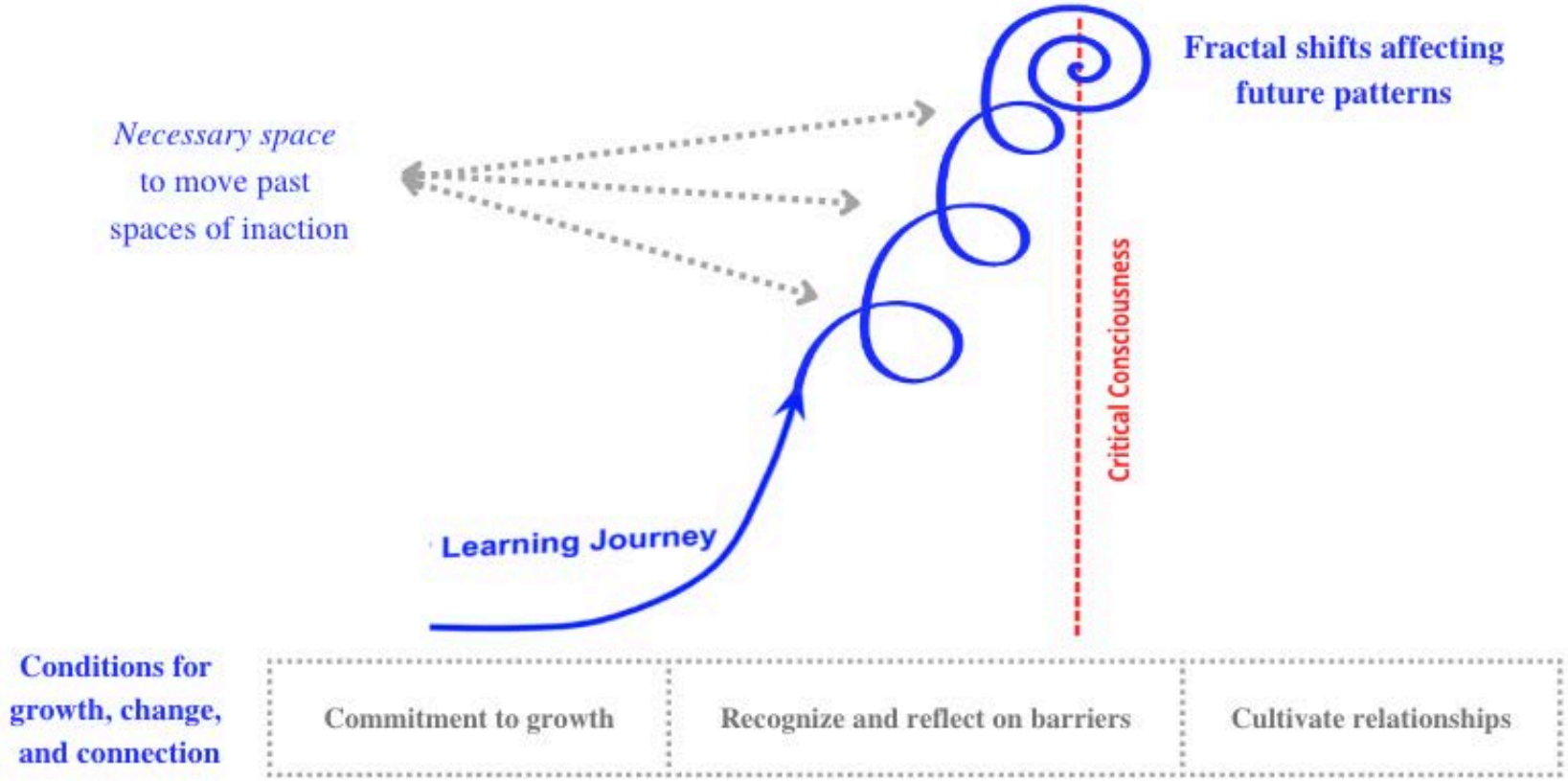


Figure 26. The journey to critical consciousness starts slowly and accelerates as persons gain knowledge, skill, and courage.

the small and the large. Examples of fractals are present everywhere in the natural world, from broccoli, trees, and pinecones, to snowflakes, foam, and in chemistry (Gunther, 2022). White supremacy culture promotes individualism, perfectionism, and a belief that "I'm the only one" and dispelling these patterns will take time and collaboration (Okun, 2019, 2021). Figure 26 provides a visual to understand the work leading to embodied antiracist cultures begins with micro-practices, rituals, and routines, that affect future patterns (brown, 2017; Menakem, 2017).

Specific to this study, the conditions for growth, change, and connection are rooted in the ability of white women leaders in an ENC context to commit to growth, cultivate relationships, recognize and reflect on barriers, and yet choose intentional actions to interrupt inequities. The journey toward critical consciousness is not straight; spaces of inaction and internal and external barriers are always present. However, a *necessary space* focused on antiracist work can support white people to move past fear toward confidence and actions that matter. A *necessary space* is focused on supporting leaders to understand the political context and develop tactics for disrupting inequity and challenging status quo practices and policies. The journey white women school leaders embarked on in this journey of developing critical consciousness has the potential to lead to fractal shifts in how leaders in contexts like eastern North Carolina take on the work of antiracism. As a result, the women embodied antiracism explicitly in the support group so that they could embody antiracism implicitly in their school contexts.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the PAR Cycle Two process, shared evidence leading to themes, and identified two findings from the study. First, white ENC women school leaders implicitly embodied antiracism to create more equitable and accessible public school settings. They developed their leadership abilities and critically reflected on their identities, roles, and

responsibilities as leaders for equity. In contexts with historical, political, and sociocultural systems of oppression engrained, educational disparities show up when looking at student success data through multiple lenses. These women wanted to disrupt inequitable patterns and align their leadership actions with their core beliefs that all children can learn. They found implicit approaches to embody antiracism through leadership enaction in their circles of influence.

Second, white women engaging in a community of practice, which I named a *necessary space*, provided an opportunity for the participants to identify and understand more about the internal and external barriers arising in their antiracist and equity leadership work. Through analysis of multiple data sources, participants moved from fear to learning and growth, at times in personal antiracist work and in other instances in enacting equity leadership in their ENC educational context. The findings highlight the importance of learning in a collective space, separate from work colleagues, with opportunities for individual reflection, and increased awareness and confidence. School administration can be lonely, and school districts can negatively stifle innovation in the iron cage of institutional structures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Weiss, 1995).

The journey toward critical consciousness is complicated for white women engaged in antiracist work and for leaders for equity, yet once someone sees the inequities and systemic structures, one cannot un-see them. Developing the knowledge and skills to dismantle internal and external barriers becomes a part of the journey to lead a personal and professional life that brings espoused values and enacted values closer together (Weiss, 1995). The graphic of the process is related to original asymptote diagram shared in Chapter 2 (see Figure 4), further illustrating the complexity of the work. The figure represents the iterative journey toward critical

consciousness coupled with foundational practices that support forward progress. New awareness, conversations with people with different lived experiences, uncovering deeply seeded biases, grappling with the emotionality of the work, or contextual barriers can often cause us to sit in a space of inaction. Instead, the participants persevered to embrace radical hope and a belief that the future would be different from the past, exemplified in the title of Joyce's dissertation: "Leave this place better than you found it" The journey, in North Carolina and in the American context, may not be finished in our lifetimes, but the work we do leads to fractal shifts, highlighting "what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system" (brown, 2017, p. 53).

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Together we will create "necessary" space
Because there is no such thing as a "safe space."
We exist in the real world
We all carry scars, and we have all caused wounds.
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,
We call each other to more truth and love
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.
We have the responsibility to examine
what we think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be
But
It will be our necessary space together,
And
We will work on it side by side

–Adapted by I.D.E.A facilitators from Micky ScottBey Jones' *Invitation to Brave Space* and based on Beth Strano's original work.

The women in this study co-developed a necessary space of possibility and hope. As a result, they are transformative leaders who focus academic excellence and on social transformation and act in the name of liberation, democracy, equity, and justice (Shields, 2010, p. 5). The background of the term *necessary space* is convoluted but provides an example of how leaders can solve small and large conflicts. I learned the poem and concept necessary space at an I.D.E.A. session I attended on September 22, 2021. I have since learned that Beth Strano wrote and posted the original untitled poem in 2015 (Joiner, 2022). Jones (2021) saw a photo of the poem but said she could not remember where she had seen it; she added her own lines, titled it *An Invitation to Brave Space*, and began sharing it as her own work. As the poem gained popularity online, the backstory emerged. In an example of how to repair wrongs, Jones admitted to plagiarism, and both parties committed to a restorative process (Jones, 2021; Tippett, 2019). I.D.E.A. facilitators and members retitled the work *Necessary Space*, replacing Jones's word

brave with necessary, to represent the importance of creating a space for white folks to learn about antiracism. As the poem *Necessary Space* has a complicated and iterative story (Eaton, 2021), each human has a complicated and iterative story, as does the story of a nation founded on democracy and the violence of slavery. Holding these truths and tensions and looking for a restorative, healing path forward is a moral imperative that guides the women in this study who are focused on equity leadership and antiracism. The poem *Necessary Space* sums up the work that the participants and I created and enacted to move forward on the path toward critical consciousness and embody antiracism as leaders of equity.

What I now know is that we must travel such a journey with tenderness and care if we are to inhabit a *necessary space* and take on the roles of responsibilities of school leaders devoted to equity and social justice. Embodying social justice principles and building embodied antiracist cultures in schools and communities is a lifelong endeavor and must be rooted in healing and growth (Menakem, 2017; 2022). Aguilar (2018) reminds us that powerful educators talk about emotions in school, but white women's emotionality is problematic when centered in discussions of race or as leaders in an eastern North Carolina (ENC) context (DiAngelo, 2011; Gilmore, 2019; Matias et al., 2016). Naming an emotion or experience is needed to be able to process it in a useful and restorative way, yet emotions emerge that we do not understand, from our ancestry, lived experiences, and daily life situations (Brown, 2021c; Menakem, 2017; van der Kolk, 2014). We, as a Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) group used our *necessary space* to reflect, share stories and emotions, committing to learning and growth as aspiring antiracists and as equity-minded educational leaders. The *necessary space* offered an opportunity to understand our identities, increase awareness of systemic power structures often disguised in the ENC landscape, and build confidence and skills in interrupting inequities. White educational leaders in

the ENC context have a responsibility to critically reflect on their identity and their leadership so that they do not perpetuate systems of oppression within educational spaces. As a result of the study, I better understand how to implicitly embody antiracism by enacting leadership that leads to more equitable and accessible public schools – to be and become transformative leaders (Shields, 2010; Shields, 2018).

The experience shed light on an important distinction for me—antiracism work and equity leadership have different knowledge and skill sets. While the work of each can complement the other, white women aspiring to be antiracist and better leaders for equity must engage in multiple levels of work. The internal work was rooted in their moral imperatives, and the external work through observations and behaviors. School leaders in today's schools are fatigued and overwhelmed (Steiner et al., 2022; Sullivan, 2022), and women often shoulder burdens that are not theirs to bear (Gilligan, 2014; Lesser, 2020; Walters, 2023). Leaders must focus on avoiding social reproduction of inequitable practices and re-humanizing educational spaces (Awati, 2013; Baxter, 2011; Habermas, 1984), restoring their wellbeing (Velasco, 2021), and committing to the work of dismantling systems of oppression that exist in schools (Kendi, 2019; Ibrahim, 2020a; Irby, 2021; Khalifa, 2018).

In the final chapter, I connect the extant literature to the two findings and respond to the research questions. Then I discuss practice, policy, and research implications of the study and reflect on my leadership learning.

Discussion

What began as a journey to be better educational leaders became deeply personal interrogation of identity, leading to new awareness and actions. Simultaneously, participating in an equity-focused dissertation program, all of us were conducting participatory action research

focused on issues of equity. By interacting with other white women interested in antiracist work and equity leadership, we co-created the necessary space to understand what to do and how to use opportunities for action despite a political and social context not always amenable to our beliefs and practices. The women in the study in their research projects and studies concentrated on systemic issues of equity through the lens of teacher actions that would promote student access to learning in classrooms. Their collective findings shed light on understanding more about the work of white women educational leaders in an eastern North Carolina (ENC) context and how they enact equity leadership through focusing on classroom teaching.

The PAR was a one-year action and activist research study continuing over three cycles of data collection. In North Carolina, where racial inequities are both blatant and unseen or disregarded, school leaders had to find strategies to challenge status quo practices and policies, internal perceptions, and external leadership behaviors. The study is autoethnographic as I wrote about my perspectives and reflections and ethnographic in which I shifted the gaze from my experience to the experiences of the study participants. The methodology captured the connections between scholarship and life, essential to understanding antiracist work and educational leadership. Table 12 provides a map of data collection activities.

In discussing the findings through connections to the extant literature, I expand the emergent conceptual framework to explain an understanding of the leadership journey for white women leading for equity in ENC educational settings. In Chapter 2, I presented literature related to the North Carolina landscape, the journey of equity leadership, and women who lead educational settings. I admit there are tensions in this work. We, who identify as white, benefit from a socially built-in advantage yet are often blind to racial power structures. We, as educational leaders, have the positionality to affect change or uphold the status quo. We, as

Table 12

Mapping Data Collection by Participant over Multiple Cycles of Inquiry

Activities	PAR Pre-cycle (Oct., 2021-Jan, 2022)						PAR Cycle One (Feb-May, 2022)						PAR Cycle Two (July-Oct, 2022)					
Participant	LB	MM	JP	JJ	MB	CM	LB	MM	JP	JJ	MB	CM	LB	MM	JP	JJ	MB	CM
Self-as-leader artifacts	*	*	*	*	*	*							*		*	*	*	*
Member check	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*		*		*	*	*	*
Field notes							*	*	*	*	*					*	*	
Group artifact addition	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*			*	*	*
CPR meeting using CLE protocols	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*			*	*	*
Sighting reflection							*	*	*	*	*	*						
Individual communication	*	*	*	*	*								*	*	* *	*	*	*

Note. Participant MM did not participate in PAR Cycle Two data collection activities.

women in leadership, are affected by social hierarchies, some of which authorize us to disrupt entrenched patterns within ourselves and our context and others that drain our confidence and have us questioning our resolve. In the CPR group, we contended with our intersectional identities and as a result, participants recognized and reflected on barriers, cultivated relationships, and committed to actions.

New Leader Responsibilities: Making the Invisible Visible in the ENC Context

The educational leaders found ways to implicitly embody antiracism by enacting equity leadership in their school or district context. They had to strategically act withing the ENC context; however, while they needed to make the invisible visible, they had to act as tacticians who understood the context and were often not verbally explicit about their goals of equity and antiracism. However, in our community of practice, by nurturing and sustaining their abilities to understand more about antiracism and equity leadership, we could grapple with how to enact equity in their contexts.

In the *necessary space* together, we acknowledged the hidden power structures in the ENC context that presented barriers to equity work. By openly talking about and critically reflecting on some of the barriers, thus making the invisible visible to each other, we embraced our roles as equity leaders and considered our responsibility for dismantling historical, political, and sociocultural systems of oppression. We strengthened our resolve after the Leandro ruling in which the NC Supreme Court affirmed: "the foundational basis…has remained unchanged: today, as in 2004 [and in previous inquiries], far too many North Carolina schoolchildren, especially those historically marginalized are not afforded their constitutional right to an opportunity to a sound basic education" (Hoke County BOE et al., v. State of NC, 2022, section 2). Additionally, there are multiple state sources that cite problems with equitable structures in

North Carolina's public schools (Ferguson, 2022; Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2020a; Triplett & Ford, 2019; UNC Center for Civil Rights, 2013). North Carolina needs leaders equipped to understand the causes of inequity and make strategic choices about actions.

Educational leaders have the positionality to affect change in their circles of influence but cannot be responsible for fixing systemic issues of equity maintained for centuries in America, and leaders did so, aware of the backlash of right-wing media sources, conservative parent advocacy groups, and politicians are pointing fingers directly at school districts, administrators, and teachers as being the source of educational problems (Rincones et al., 2021; Schwartz, 2022). Educational leaders countered negative narratives in their schools and worked for change in their circles of influence (Covey, 1989; Labaree, 2008; Rincones et al., 2021; Schneider & Berkshire, 2020). As a result, they urged school staff to focus on assets, reframe from using deficit language and blaming students or families for educational failures. and utilized specific classroom evidence to improve teaching and learning (Eubanks, 1997; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Safir & Dugan, 2021; Shorters, 2019). They identified rural cultural wealth, wisdom of the people, and other assets of the community (Crumb et al., 2022; Guajardo et al., 2016). Leaders created learning organizations in which they honored and valued intersectional identities, and intentionally created and sustained relational trust in the daily interactions with students, families, and school staff. Equity work is identity work for leaders and the school staff (Hancock & Warren, 2017; Irby, 2017), and they changed foundational elements of school improvement in their micro context, including sustaining relational trust as a necessary abstract resource of school change (Grubb, 2009).

As eastern North Carolina educational leaders interested in disrupting inequities in their context, they recognized that they needed to develop knowledge and skills. Ishimaru and

Galloway (2021) state the importance of school leaders engaging in explicit conversations about race and equity. The *necessary space* furnished a space to fortify our leadership so we could have explicit conversations in a safe space with like-minded equity partners in our contexts and consider how we had to be more nuanced and implicit in our actions in schools (Irby, 2021; Radd et al., 2021). As a CPR group, we considered the various characterizations of equity leaders (see Table 13), and participants named their leadership efforts. As we recognized our commitment to antiracism and equity, we could observe that all actions – explicit or implicit – can be consequential. For example, when Mira advocated for an individual student, she was a love warrior (Love, 2019); when Joyce and Lyla provided side-by-side coaching to a colleague, they were equity coaches (Aguilar, 2020); and when Jessica contained heated emotions to forward an equity agenda in small wins, she was a tempered radical (Meyerson, 2004).

In the equity and antiracist literature, the researchers largely advocate explicit leadership for equity (Khalifa, 2018; Radd et al., 2021; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis, 2010). As Michelle acknowledged, acting as a transparent equity champion by explicitly advocating as she did for "Black lives matter" was difficult. What we learned in our context is that we needed to be more strategic and that meant being implicit about our external equity actions. In the case of the four of the women in this study, they used classroom observation tools to improve equitable teachers practices and ensure more access and rigor for students who were historically marginalized. In our group, we discussed the problems of the heroic leader narrative and provided space for self-reflection and understanding how to involve teachers as advocates and use daily school data to make improvements (Dugan, 2021; Irby, 2021; Kim & Maudlin, 2022, Menakem, 2017; Quadros-Meis, 2021; Saad, 2020). The necessary space for reflection was a critical element for understanding what equity leadership and personal

Table 13

Approaches to Lead for Equity

Characterization	Description	Supporting Literature
The Transparent Equity Champion (Radd et al., 2021)	Takes an explicit, strong equity stance Works persistently to increase awareness of equity (self and others) Provides clear and transparent action steps and pairs clear expectations for the school community Disrupts dominance, decenters whiteness and privilege and gives up the right to comfort in a position of power	(Radd et al., 2021) (Rigby & Tredway, 2015) (Theoharis, 2010) (Tilghman-Havens, 2020) (Okun, 2021)
The Equity Coach (Aguilar, 2020)	Takes a side-by-side approach to consistently advancing equity Works to cultivate resilience, improve reflective abilities, and helps build skills Provides guidance for others and models equitable practices Coaches others to see how equity issues show up in micro-level classroom practices and macro-level systems	(Aguilar, 2018; 2020) (Radd et al., 2021) (Fullan, 1993) (Rigby & Tredway, 2015)
The Tempered Radical (Meyerson, 2004)	Engages in small battles and leverages small wins to push against the status quo Works to make subtle, incremental changes Provides researched-based articles to improve current-school practices Begins change in a small, networked improvement community Manages heated emotions to fuel an agenda for equity and "picks a hill to die on" when leading for equity in oppressive organizations	(Meyerson, 2004) (DeWitt, 2012) (Theoharis, 2010) (Ryan & Tuters, 2017) Bryk et al., 2017)
The Love Warrior (Doyle, 2016)	Takes a collective approach to lead for equity by lifting others Works to flip the paradigm of school to be more student supportive and culturally responsive than adult-comforting Redefines leadership to equate power with connection and relationships Advances others' values and beliefs about equity with a commitment to care	(Doyle, 2016) (Leverett, 2002) (Pucci, 2017) (Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998)(Ah Nee-Benham & Napier, 2002)

antiracist work looked like in our context. As we deconstructed familiar narratives, we reconstructed our role and responsibility in leading for equity within our contexts (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Quadros-Meis, 2021; Velasco, 2021).

With the cries for change coming from People of Color and Native peoples, we wondered how white folks cannot see racism in action, but we knew that voicing those concerns explicitly might damage our abilities to act in our contexts. Multiple organizations in NC present research, policy briefs, and resources to equip NC leaders (CREED [n.d.], Public School Forum of NC, Southern Coalition for Social Justice, Education Justice Alliance [n.d.], and SJREI [n.d.]), but district leaders or politicians approach school reform with business-as-usual efforts, and leaders had to tread carefully (Triplett & Ford, 2019; Pollock & Rogers, 2022). We aimed to tell a new story about transformative school leadership in ENC. By engaging in a *necessary space*, we rejected the business-as-usual efforts of school improvement and identified personal and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions that guided our implicit actions to act on behalf of our beliefs. In the necessary space of the white women's affinity group, we examined those beliefs and were able to fortify ourselves for the external equity work.

Necessary Space for White Leaders: Moving from Fear to Growth

A community of practice focused on antiracist growth and equity leadership nurtured a *necessary space* for white leaders to unpack emotions and advance their knowledge and skills. Discussing race is difficult for white leaders and those who do risk recentering whiteness or harming colleagues who identify as People of Color as they stumble toward racial consciousness, but this work is necessary for lasting organizational change (Irby, 2021). Kendi (2019) offers that the opposite of being a racist is not being *not* racist, but instead antiracist. An antiracist does not see problems as rooted in groups of people but rooted in power and policies, and an antiracist

confronts racial inequities rather than letting them persevere (Kendi, 2019). Ibrahim (2020a) proposes that aspiring to be an antiracist requires one to move from a place of fear to learning and growth. Michael and Bartoli (2023) assert issues of racial inequity are kept in place by white supremacy structures, and white people should solve this problem with each other. As white leaders grew in their own awareness, they were able to challenge racial inequities in their contexts, and lead transformative, socially-just change in ENC educational settings. The reflective space has key criteria to help leaders become "self-authoring and self-transforming knowers" who used the white women's affinity space to "scaffold their decision-making through dialogue and make time for the discussion of the complexities and generation of personal goals" (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 41).

The findings suggest a community of practice focused on antiracist growth and equity leadership nurtured a *necessary space* so that white leaders moved past their fears and hesitancies toward learning and growth. A community of practice has a shared domain or purpose and comes together in a community to affect practices (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The purpose of the CPR group was to support each other in understanding what it means to embody antiracism. In the space, the participants reflected on internal thought processes (self) and external influences (context) and considered ways to enact core values. In sharing equity dilemmas, participants vulnerably disclosed feelings, situations, challenges, and successes in their work.

We sustained a space that allowed for healing, beginning each session with dynamic mindfulness or body practices (Bose et al., 2017; Menakem, 2017). In that space, we held each other, and the strength of the group held each of us; we had what Drago-Severson (2012) names as the "innermost growth ring of care, trust, respect, intentionality, and collaboration" (p. 63).

This holding environment offered support that felt meaningful to each of us in our work (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018). We created a space for storytelling and listening in a personal narrative circle, ensuring equitable time for each participant (Militello et al., 2020). During each CPR meeting, I facilitated a learning reflection related to equity leadership or antiracist work. The necessary space provided a reminder that we did not need to be perfect; we had a right to grow and learn; and, as leaders, we had a responsibility to the people in our care. Thus, we had conversations that were not happening in other personal or professional spaces (Brown, 2012, 2021c; brown, 2017; Denevi, 2021; Mitchell, 2015; Najarro, 2022). We did not attempt to solve problems for each other and instead offered space to attend to whatever surfaced during the time together, rejecting the white supremacy characteristics of a right to comfort, perfectionism, individualism, "I'm the only one" tendencies, fear of conflict, and instead nurtured conditions for a learning space (Okun, 2019, 2021; Menakem, 2017). We discarded the idea that by working harder and sacrificing our wellbeing, we could be better leaders, and instead supported each other's efforts at improved wellness (Gilbert, 2022; Raphael, 2022). Through individual conversations and member checks, I reinforced the value of creating this space for growth in both the antiracist and equity leadership journeys. As a result, we had the necessary opportunities for critical reflection about the roles and responsibilities of white school leaders in the ENC context.

Considering Embodiment

The theory of action for this study was, *if* we, as white women, understand how we embody antiracism, *then* we can better understand how to be leaders for equity. While my aim was to learn more about what it means for white women to embody antiracism, my analysis revealed that explicitly embodying antiracism as an ENC public school leader is tricky due to the

school and district micro-political pressures and historic and sociocultural barriers. I understood that antiracist work for white folks begins with identity work. Menakem (2017; 2022) insists that the body is the key, and he advances somatic practices to understand what is coming up in our bodies. Michael and Bartoli (2023) discuss antiracism in the human body and outline the ways white bodies respond to perceived danger. They explain:

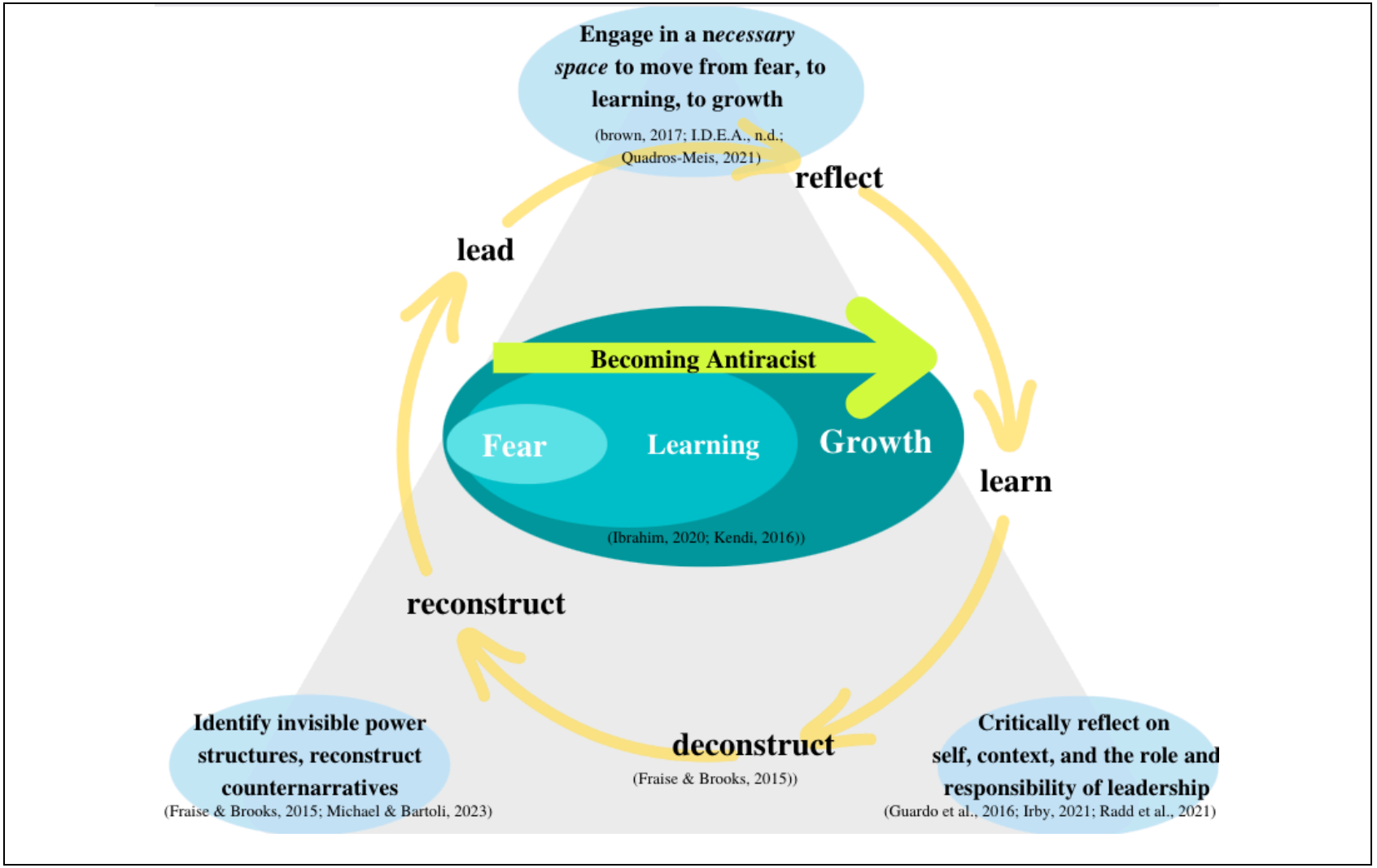
> I am pointing to the perceived danger our bodies detect in merely talking about race, in taking a risk of getting something "wrong" and unwittingly offending a Person of Color or Native person, or in being excluded from a respectable social circle. In other words, People of Color and Native people are not the threat that triggers our nervous systems in ways that impair us from acting in antiracist ways. It is challenging racism in other white people or in our institutions that scares and limits us. It is the intensity of our guilt or shame that we find profoundly threatening. It is the fear of losing community and belonging that makes us retreat and stay silent. These pitfalls plague us the most while being the least visible to us. (p. 39)

We must make visible these fears and reduce the perceived threat of isolation by acting together in community. Deconstructing societal messages and reconstructing new epistemological and ontological ways of knowing is an ongoing cycle and connecting with the feelings in the body provides a guide to embodying something not part of our historical understanding of self (Menakem, 2017; Michael & Bartoli, 2023). While the CPR group may not be able to say we fully embody antiracism, a lifelong aspiration, we understand more about the journey. We implicitly embodied racism in leadership enactment resulting in more equitable and accessible educational spaces.

A *Necessary Space* to Deconstruct and Reconstruct

As a result of the study, I better understand the enduring work of white women educational leaders in eastern North Carolina and my journey in this work. The work is complicated and entails multiple levels (Guajardo et al., 2016). To present a conceptual framework for understanding this work, I expanded upon the emergent conceptual framework I presented in Chapter 1. Before the study, I understood the complicated landscape the ENC context provided, I acknowledged becoming antiracist meant moving past fear to learning and growth, and I understood that white women leaders must engage in a cyclical process to reflect, understand their identity, and accept their role in shifting leadership actions leading to more equitable educational settings. What I did not know was *how* white women do this.

The conceptual framework presents a reference for how white women leaders can actualize their beliefs (see Figure 27). The unlearning process of leadership is at the center of antiracist learning and equity leadership. In the PAR study, white women engaged in a necessary space that helped them reflect, learn, deconstruct, and reconstruct internal perceptions and external actions to better align espoused leadership values with enacted leadership (Bourdieu, 1977; Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Weiss, 1995). The necessary space was a brave space where the leaders could grapple with fears in discussing issues of race and equity while admitting insecurities in the ENC context (Arao & Clemens, 2013; brown, 2017; I.D.E.A, n.d.; Quadros-Meis, 2021). Leaders considered their school communities carefully by reflecting on relationships and conversations (Guajardo et al., 2016; Irby, 2021; Radd et al., 2021). As the women identified invisible power structures, they developed counternarratives to address perceived dangers and deficit narratives (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Michael & Bartoli, 2023). The deconstruction and reconstruction process is at the core of unlearning societal messages and \



Note. A cycle of leadership learning supported by a *necessary space* focused on social justice and critical reflection, can lead white women from fear, to learning, to growth.

Figure 27. A conceptual framework for white women educational leaders in ENC

increasing one's confidence and capacity to embody antiracism (Ibrahim, 2020a; Kendi, 2016; Michael & Bartoli, 2023). Additionally, the necessary space provided a restorative space or *espacio sano* (Velasco (2021) for leaders to attend to their needs and emotions so that they were effective equity leaders.

Concurrent Work: Internal and External

The overarching question steering this study was: *how do white women embody antiracism to lead for equity in North Carolina public schools?* The three sub-questions were:

1. How do white women identify and reflect on their roles as leaders for equity?
2. How do white women school leaders enact their roles as leaders for equity?
3. To what extent do I shift my perspectives and actions as a white woman leader?

Throughout the study, the CPR group and I engaged in conversations and activities focused on understanding antiracist work and equity leadership in ENC settings. However, we could not wait until we were fully confident in leading the work or wait for others in the ENC context to be ready for antiracist work. Ishimaru and Galloway (2021) emphasize the need for leadership expertise to spur organizational change in issues of equity. There is no time to shift everyone's hearts and minds, especially those of white folks, but leaders and educators can do things differently (Irby, 2021; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2021).

As we engaged in identity work and reflection and concurrently endeavored to enact more equitable leadership practices, we focused on micro-practices—identifying our use of deficit language and shifting to a focus on assets. Other times, we effected change in the meso level of school culture by intentionally adding mindfulness practices and relationship-building protocols to meeting spaces. We accepted that the work began with each of us, but we desired more than just personal change and engaged with each other and others in our context to fortify

possibilities as believed this motto: “Transform yourself to transform the world” (brown, 2017, p. 53).

Affinity Spaces: Conversations Lead to Courageous Leadership

As ENC politics, ideologies, and opinions become more binary and people discount and dismiss others based on social media posts, bumper stickers, political party associations, and identity markers and beliefs, the need for courageous conversations about issues of equity that harm children in schools are even more important. While the issues are rooted in systemic issues, power structures, and master narratives, the conversations begin with identity reflection (Fine, 1994; Jupp et al., 2019; Michael et al., 2017). Michael and Bartoli (2023) suggest that often people are not aware of the ways they are privileged; instead, they live out the pain of their marginalization through the arrogance of their mainstream identities. Conversations in affinity spaces support people to acknowledge their mainstream privileges.

> When other members of the group are able to acknowledge their cisgender privilege, their heterosexual privilege, their male privilege, their class privilege, their able-bodied privilege, their Christian privilege, and so on, it enables white people with marginalized identities to feel fully seen enough to acknowledge their white privilege. This is not just strategically helpful in how it enables white people to open up to their responsibility in facing racism; it also builds a stronger community in which people are better able to support one another fully in the intersections of their identities. (Michael and Bartoli 2023, p. 120).

For leaders, they need to understand their own identities and build skills to facilitate conversations about topics that often make people uncomfortable as they shift their schema about a topic. Piaget (1957) described schema as the basic building block of organizing knowledge and

when we encounter a new situation that we cannot explain using our existing schema, we feel disequilibrium. This unpleasant sensation may stimulate reaction and the hanging on to former beliefs, or, more hopefully, the motivation to learn or relearn (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Mcleod, 2023). Educators must unlearn and relearn to stay current in their contexts and to best teach the students arriving in public school classrooms. While people often talk of creating safe spaces, educational leaders must consider who are the people who feel safe in their schools and classrooms and who do not.

When leaders engage in affinity spaces, they have a safe place to examine their fears and unlearn their current schema so that they have the strength to dismantle echo chambers in classrooms and schools. Many leaders know and experience that the dominant voices and ideas come from the top down, from dominant identities, and from mainstream thought. Ng (1993) suggests that three power axes exist in the classroom (teacher-student, student-teacher, student-student). A normalized way of thinking is that the teacher has the power, but students exert power over other students and even over their teachers. For example, Ng (an Asian woman) describes an instance when a white male student called her “a woman out of control” (Ng, 1993). Milkman (2021) suggests that behavior precedes beliefs. Therefore, teachers may say that they believe all children can learn; however, when a leader collects evidence about how a teacher engages students in the learning process, often the evidence reveals inequitable patterns related to a teacher’s biases or preferences. Dismantling engrained power structures, leading conversations about unconscious bias, and challenging educational norms require sustained and intentional efforts.

In addition, Fine (1994) reminds us to constantly analyze the master narrative and consider counter stories. The people in our communities and schools are best situated to voice

their aspirations and sense of belonging but many students do not feel heard in their classrooms (Fine, 1994; Guajardo et al., 2016; Shorters, 2019). A leader affinity space can be a refuge to release emotion arising from community voices of resistance and personal insecurities; such a space provides critical friends and confidants to bolster individual and collective courage to challenge the status quo and disassemble power structures resulting in more equitable and accessible schools.

Educators gathering in a white affinity space should be cautioned that the space has the potential to be uninformed and dangerous resulting in the very echo chamber leaders aim to dismantle. I appreciate Fine's (2016) candor:

> In my words, we have been cautioned that epistemological masturbation can cause blindness; self-pleasuring with one's own canon of knowledge/research can blind us to the colonial histories, structures, and the perverse consequences of seemingly neutral policies (p. 357).

White people need People of Color and Native People as critical friends, allies, and co-conspirators in this work. Conversations and collaborations with the people closest to the concerns in schools, districts, and communities are necessary to move this work forward.

The leaders in this study gained emotional readiness and courage within the affinity group of other leaders interested in building capacity for facilitating conversations about equity and access in their contexts. Then the conversations continued in each leader's school or district context with a small group of committed educators. The participants acted as co-practitioner researchers in a participatory action research project, but they acted as transformative co-conspirators implementing leadership that transformed teaching and learning practices in

classrooms (Love, 2019; Quadros-Meis, 2021). The implications of small-scale changes have the potential to affect future patterns in schools and communities.

Implications

The participatory activist action research study led to a better understanding of what social-justice leadership looks like in the ENC context. In a state where the Lieutenant Governor does not care what “blue-haired freaks say”, who likens homosexuality and transgenderism to “filth”, who claims systemic racism does not exist, and who preaches from his pulpit that “we are called to be led by men” not women, we need social-justice leadership to admonish narratives of hate and othering (Childress, 2021; Fain, 2022; Fisher, 2021; Forbes Breaking News, 2022; Powell & Menendian, 2017). Schools must be spaces for inclusivity where staff, students, and families feel as if they belong. Leaders play a significant role in establishing the culture of respect, trust, diversity, and inclusiveness (Eubanks et al., 1997; Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014).

During PAR Cycle Two, I had an opportunity to present the study’s emerging findings at a national conference. The facilitator of the session, Dr. Chezare A. Warren, whose research includes white teachers who teach Black boys, asked me, “How do we know that these white women have made progress?" (Hancock & Warren, 2017). This question gave me pause. I used this question to guide a discussion of the micro, meso, and macro implications of this study. I recognize that change is incremental, but durable change can occur if we institute practices and local policy by depending on those closest to the work to solve local issues (Guarjardo et al., 2016).

Micro-Level Implications

The daily interactions between the people in educational spaces are the ground zero for

changing the organizational culture, and the leader plays a significant role in influencing the micro-level practices. DiAngelo (2011) suggests that antiracist education is most effective when starting at the micro level. Systems of advantage and oppression can be preserved when leaders intentionally focus on cultivating relationships and confronting deficit language, enabling and expecting all people "to be active initiators for change" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; DiAngelo, 2011, p. 66; Eubanks et al., 1997; Grubb, 2009). A community of practice supported the personal and professional growth of each leader as they investigated a focus of practice intent on improving an aspect of teaching and learning through cycles of inquiry; their projects and studies offer an example of investigating small shifts in leadership practices that have possibility for enduring changes (Bryk et al., 2017; Jenson et al., 2021; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) suggest a high-leverage equitable practice is engaging in self-reflection, beginning with awareness. The participants concentrated on improving micro-level routines, believing slight shifts at the small scale impact overall patterns (brown, 2017). The women made progress by shifting internal and external micro-level practices.

The processes we used can be transferred to other groups. We used a set of processes and protocols that are transferable to micro level practice contexts. The adaptations that others make offer possible research projects and studies (Morel et al., 2019). As with all participatory action research, the context matters, and exact replication is not possible, but school level researchers can use action and activist research methodologies to investigate local adaptations.

Meso-Level Implications

Educational leaders who look through an equity lens at the meso-level school culture and policies have the potential to identify barriers and opportunities in improvement efforts. For white women, gathering diverse perspectives and listening before making decisions institutes

meso-level safeguards ensuring shifts do not maintain a culture of whiteness as normal (Love, 2019). Prioritizing wellbeing by incorporating meeting protocols, like dynamic mindfulness, fosters a culture where people take care of themselves and attend to their own needs (Steiner et al., 2022; Velasco, 2021). In the ENC context, educational leaders had to be aware of hidden power structures and diagnose and design school and district-level processes that reduce polarization and increase connection (Spillane, 2013; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). This means rejecting cultures of domination such as good "ole" boy power structures or shining a light on the presence of whiteness (Tilghman-Havens, 2020). The study participants actively looked for opportunities within their circles of influence leading to more equitable learning environments. They sustained inspiration for the work in a community of practice and understood and embraced their positionality as leaders to participate in and lead conversations about social-justice leadership (Quadros-Meis, 2021; Velasco, 2021; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The participants made progress by increasing awareness of meso-level barriers to equity and identifying opportunities to act.

In schools and districts interested in more equitable outcomes, they can use such processes to reframe professional development practices for school leaders. Working in affinity groups, school leaders who make choices about their goals and collect evidence to meet those goals can have conversations that matter to their change in practice. In addition, district and state policies as well as administrative preparation programs should shift teacher supervision and evaluation practices to prepare leaders to be leaders of equity (Tredway & Militello, 2023; Tredway et al., 2021).

Macro-Level Implications

In the ENC context, most families send their children to public schools for an education,

yet public schools are slowly being dismantled by macro-level narratives and private entities focused on profit (Labaree, 2008; Schneider & Berkshire, 2020). ENC school leaders must disrupt political messages of hate that divide communities, which further complicate the ability to create brave spaces of critical dialogue and learning in schools (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Michael & Bartoli, 2023; Quadros-Meis, 2021). School leaders in North Carolina must be aware of historical and sociocultural frames that lead to entrenched belief systems and bravely lead and prepare others to have conversations uncovering systemic issues of equity (Roy & Ford, 2019; Teaching Tolerance, 2020; Wormeli, 2016). Ignoring the language of hate, such as the NC lieutenant governor's language of othering, is dangerous for democracy and takes courage speak out against (Kendi, 2016; Powell & Menendian, 2017). The women in the study showed progress by rejecting narratives of white supremacy and in engaging in uncomfortable conversations about macro-level systemic issues of equity.

At the state or national policy levels, this study provides evidence of how leaders can fortify themselves to change. The state efforts, including policy statements, research efforts, and conferences, should include content and processes that support leaders in their quest to offer equitable education for all North Carolina students.

Recommendations for Future Research

> *The myth of the charismatic racial equity leader is a lie. So I hope no one emerges in the story as a hero.* (Irby, 2021, p. 233)

None of us, the white women who aspire to be antiracist and better leaders for equity, should be at the center of this work. Our radical hope for a better future for our communities, our schools, our families, and our country should be at the center of this work. In a time where nationalism has divided America, I want to be part of the citizenship able to hold the tension of America's brutal past of Anti-Blackness and hate and see the dream of a true democracy. I write

this paragraph on a day designated by America as a day of racial healing. Vincent Harding stated, “I am, you are, a citizen of a country that does not yet exist…we are citizens of a country that we still have to create” (Wright Edelman, 2014). People of Color and Native peoples are tired of saying the same things. It is time for white people to see and act.

And white people must tend to their healing. Many of us have been shocked at how quickly schools were supposed to get back to business-as-usual after a global pandemic. Our families, neighbors, and the world have experienced catastrophic loss in the past few years. The loss of lives is one measure but loss of life as we knew it is something we are still processing. Additionally, the callous way even the smallest things, such as mask wearing, has led to further divisions and hate, illuminates a need for healing.

The study participants all completed participatory action research projects in their ENC contexts. In the future, I hope to work collaboratively to understand more about the work they did, the work we did together, and the implications of creating necessary spaces to learn and grow, unpack dilemmas and emotions, and forward antiracist and equity leadership.

While this study revealed ways to implicitly embody antiracism through equity leadership, more research is needed on how we establish schools as healing and learning organizations that resist othering and embrace a sense of belonging. How do we prepare teachers to do this work, administrators to lead this work, and district leaders to educate communities about this work? Additionally, how do we support the teachers, administrators, and district leaders to be social justice leaders who implement transformative change (Quadros-Meis, 2021; Radd et al., 2021; Shields, 2018; Velasco, 2021)? How do we ensure the equity and antiracist movement becomes more than just a hashtag, leads to real change for People of Color and Native people, and is not just another way to other people (McWhorter, 2021; Menakem, 2022)? How

do we create communities of practice that support women in leadership and reject the lonely road of administration (Walters, 2023)?

Limitations

The study was an ethnographical and autoethnographical study with a small group of participants, and we uncovered an important way forward – enacting leadership implicitly by participating in an affinity group, but the study had limitations. This study included data from six participants, including myself, and the findings cannot be generalized to all white women school leaders in eastern North Carolina. There is a threat, in any work in which white people center their learning separate from People of Color or Native people because they lose the perspective of the very people who can be a sounding board and provide input from communities of color. As Dr. Chezare Warren pointed out, measuring the progress of white women in antiracist growth or equity leadership is challenging, but not impossible. Each of these participants had successful participatory action research projects in their schools in which they improved teacher practice in changing student access and rigor.

Leadership Development

> *The healing of our world may lie in how we make space for stories to be told, how we listen to stories, and that we tell our stories…storytelling is political. Telling your story can be an act of liberation. Listening to the stories of others can be an act of solidarity.* (Aguilar, 2018, p. 84)

At the point in my career when I became aware of the systemic forces dismantling public education, I realized that I had unknowingly perpetuated racist narratives in personal and professional interactions. When I understood my life's work in public education could have caused more harm than good, rage filled me. I wanted someone to blame. Pointing fingers at politicians, laissez-faire leaders, ineffective professional development, and historical actualities solved an immediate need to shift my uncomfortable feelings of anger to blame external sources.

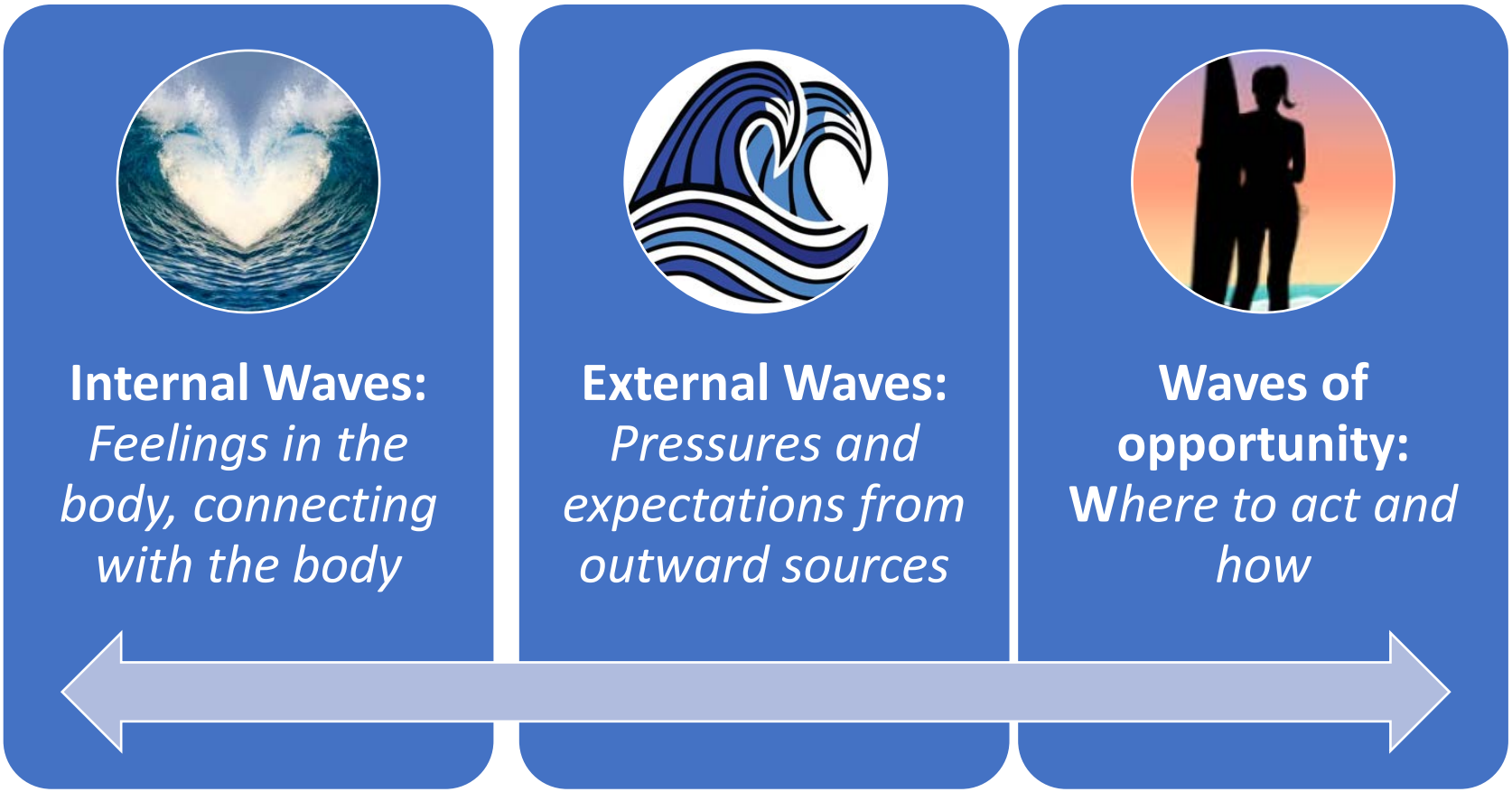
I now know my rage was and is warranted. I sit with it and am emboldened to act to affect change within my circle of influence. I am in the process of accepting my role and acting on my responsibility to disrupt systems of oppression, whether they are internalized within my thought processes, functioning in interactions between people, embedded in policies and procedures, disguised in familiar narratives, or shrouded by Southern niceties. At the same time, I sit with the discomfort and fear of making mistakes, of "not getting it" as a white person, and of allowing my mind and pervasive narratives trick me into believing my efforts are either incredibly useful or futile.

I use a wave metaphor to understand and explain what I have learned about embodying antiracism and leading for equity in the ENC context (see Figure 28). Internal waves flow through our bodies in the form of emotions, thoughts, and instinctual responses. External waves are the outward circumstances that influence our lives, some of which are out of our control. Waves of opportunity are action spaces. As I explain this metaphor, I recognized how other white women school leaders in the ENC context inspired me to critically reflect and consider my action space.

Internal Waves

> *Do more so you can get by…We're so inured to the idea that we can win by just working a little harder, when what we really need are radical structural overhauls that might make having children, demanding jobs, and elderly relatives less of an all-consuming load.* (Gilbert, 2022, para. 14)

I use the metaphor of internal waves to describe the feelings a person has within the body and how it is relevant to leadership and antiracist work. Through my identity work, I recognized internal barriers holding me back. I began to see how societal messages for women plagued my self-confidence. In the past, I quelled strong emotions, chose to remain silent to avoid conflict, and endlessly attempted to please people and work harder, all while never feeling that I was



Note. This figure presents a metaphor for exploring the embodiment of antiracism and leading for equity in ENC educational settings through an autoethnographic lens.

Figure 28. A wave metaphor.

giving or doing enough. I still struggle to resist these patterns and must critically reflect on my thought processes. These thought patterns affected my leadership. As a school leader, I felt that I needed to have answers, and often did not, especially to complex issues such as racial equity in schools. I found it difficult to show up in a leadership role as my authentic self, overwhelmed and insecure, psychologically numbing myself as a defense against the pressures.

The feelings and emotions within our white bodies have much to tell us about our antiracist work (Michael & Bartoli, 2023). Phrases like white fragility, white rage, white fear, white supremacy, white savior, white guilt, white silence, white tears, white comfort, and white innocence have been used to describe the feelings of white folks, i.e., white emotionality (Anderson, 2021; DiAngelo, 2011; Hamad, 2020; Love, 2019; Okun, 2019; Saad, 2020; Tippet, 2021a, 2021b; Yancy, 2015). Menakem (2017) proposes white people need to heal from past trauma and recognize white supremacy is about power. He specifically speaks about a white woman's emotions:

> Whenever I do these things [antiracist workshops], inevitably, I have some white woman that comes up to me afterwards and starts crying. White tears, white women's tears, can move a nation. They will move people to mobilize. An Indigenous woman's tears ain't gonna move nothing. A black woman's tears ain't gonna move nothing…And that's the piece that I'm trying to get people to understand, specifically white people, is that you're gonna have to build culture and community to be able to hold this. Your niceness is inadequate to deal with the level of brutality that has occurred. (Tippett, 2021a).

White folks must build awareness and confidence to engage in this work with each other (Michael & Bartoli, 2023). An important part of the work of the I.D.E.A. network focuses on building community through breathing, noticing what was coming up in our bodies as we unpack

antiracist content, and creating a community to grow with through antiracist work. After engaging with this group, I was empowered to continue this growth with another community of practice, the co-practitioner researchers.

External Waves

> *Just keep swimming, Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming.*
> *What do we do? We swim, swim.*
>
> –Dori, *Finding Nemo*

Managing the stress of a school leadership position in ENC requires commitment, daily resilience, and a vision of *radical hope*—a belief that things can be better in the future (Lear, 2006). School leaders contend with challenging careers. The participants faced common external pressures for school leaders, some of which are unique to this point in time. Participants spoke of hiring practices, addressing disciplinary matters, communicating with parents, staff, and educational consultants, and analyzing their leadership based on district and state measures. School leaders are expected to comply with the mandates of locally elected officials, but a global pandemic and America's racial reckoning after the highly publicized death of George Floyd, have led to an increased scrutinization of public-school activities and leadership actions.

Within the past few years, school leaders faced unprecedented pressures in their leadership positions (Graham, 2021). Additionally, participants shouldered a heavier load as they endeavored to be more antiracist and disrupt racial inequities within their circles of concern. In my experience as a school leader and as a teacher, I worked tireless hours and put my personal family and wellness activities behind school responsibilities. In a 2022 study by the RAND corporation, teacher and principal wellbeing was identified as poor, with at least half of the educators of color reporting racial discrimination (Steiner et al., 2022). Formidable external

waves are a part of school leadership and in the ENC context where teacher unions are illegal and other advocacy groups suppressed; navigating the crushing currents is a part of the role.

Thus, I have learned over and over again that I must engage in self-care so that I can care for others. I had been a person who was a bit trapped in the Gilligan (1982) stance of caring so much for others, that I did not take care of myself. That has changed and I understand that my personal *espacio sano* – healthy and sane space is necessary if I am to be effective as a leader of equity and a white woman who is an ally and co-conspirator (Love, 2019; Velasco, 2021).

Waves of Opportunity

> *It's an invitation to contribute to a dialogue that moves us beyond the false dichotomy of hierarchy we have been unintentionally fostering through our anti-racism organizing. It is an invitation to recognize the more connected to our humanity we become, the less we will tolerate the dehumanization of others.*
>
> –Tawana Petty (2017), *Shifting the Language: From Ally to Co-Liberator*

The internal and external waves school leaders in ENC face have the potential to crush even the most determined school leader but finding the opportunities to pursue an equity agenda and further one's journey toward being and becoming antiracist are necessary for maintaining balance and moving forward. As I facilitated a space for others, I had to overcome feelings of inadequacy. Finding a community of practice with the I.D.E.A. network, taking time for mindful activities, spending time surrounded by nature—wellness activities for me, and learning alongside the CPR members built my confidence and restored a *peripheral vision*. Bateson (1994) describes peripheral vision as the opportunity to be schooled by complexity, to practice curiosity, and to act courageously even as we continue to learn. Leading in ENC requires a peripheral vision including a historical understanding of racialized structures from the Jim Crow past, an attuned awareness of the insidious ways the same structures are maintained in today's ENC context, and confidence to plunge into reflections about self and context.

I am a different leader moving forward because I embraced my role outside of the classroom; my role as an educational leader in ENC with the potential to impact public school leaders and educators. I am more confident in my ability to lead white women to reflect on their positionality as educational leaders in ENC. I recognize my responsibility to support school leaders in reflecting on identity, praxis, and leadership, for the purposes of creating more equitable educational spaces in ENC.

I Am a White Woman: I Am Going to Mess Up

In my journey toward a critical consciousness about issues of equity and race, I recognize mistakes I have made and acknowledge that I will make more mistakes moving forward. There are times when I should not be involved in conversations and other times when I should lead conversations – times when I need to step up and others when I need to step back. There are times when I will stay silent when I should speak out and times when I will speak out but should remain silent. There are times when I think I know something but do not understand at all. There are times when my ignorance could cause harm or grief to a Person of Color or Native Person. I need to know this, apologize, and relearn by rejecting niceties and inauthentic explanations, by forgiving myself, and by embracing the opportunity to grow and develop. The importance of strong friends and allies who represent multiple intersectional identities to guide me on the journey cannot be understated. I am a woman who grapples with feelings of insecurity, of wanting to show up authentically as I am, but when I do "mess up", I relive the experience, and the fear of messing up again tortures me well after a mistake occurred. This and other negative thought patterns cause physical strain on my body, building toxins, and affecting the overall systems in my body.

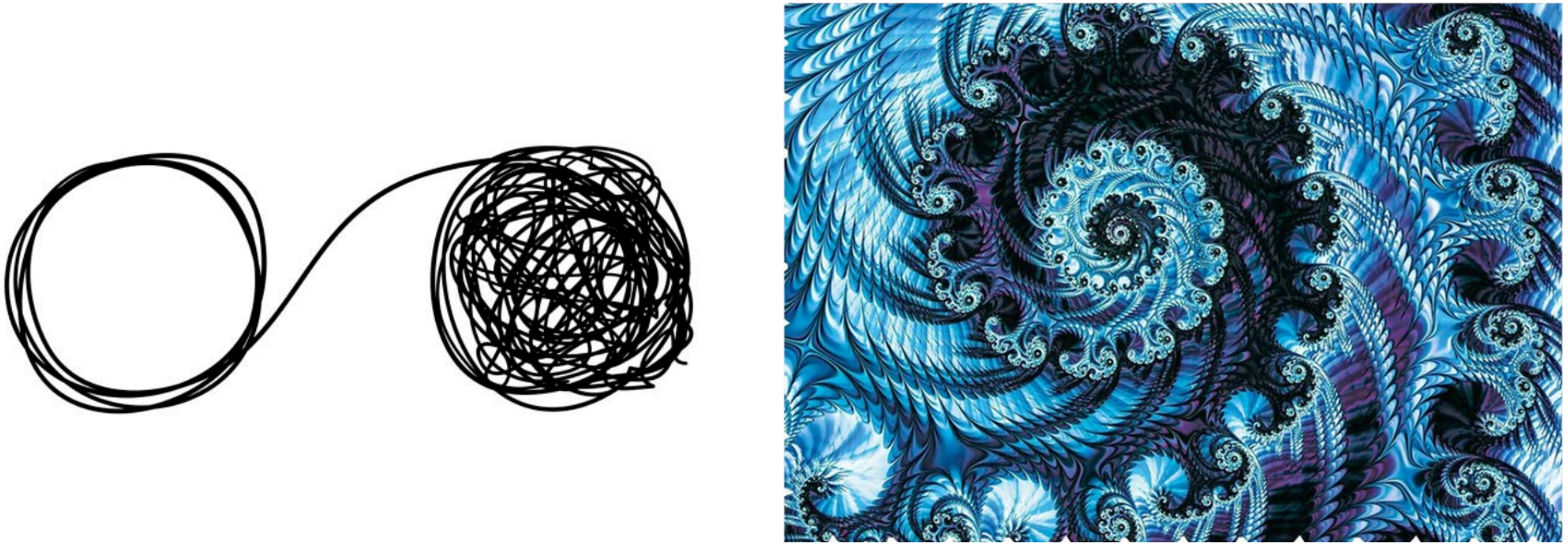
Just as the micro-interactions in a school affect the overall school climate, the micro-thought patterns occurring in daily life affect overall health and stability. I, and others engaging in social justice work, must attend to self-care through this work. During the doctoral journey, I was plagued with unexpected health crises. On the other side of these situations, and after learning with the co-practitioner researchers who prioritized self-care, I now know I must pay attention to the ways my body is alerting me and the way I need to care for my personal life system while sustaining strength and commitment to dismantle and deconstruct patterns of oppression and develop humanizing educational spaces where adults and children reflect and relearn together.

Humanizing Educational Spaces: Embracing Complexity and Fractal Shifts

When I reflect upon the micro, meso, and macro-level processes affected by the past and impacting the future, I return to the fractal image: how we are at the small scale is how we are at the large scale (brown, 2017). So, while solving inequitable systems in America seems infinitely complicated, chaotic, and insurmountable, the small steps I take, and other leaders take, can impact future patterns. Mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot (2010) highlights the underlying concept that fractals can find order within extreme chaos, and Janes (n.d.) asserts "our perceptions are collectively shaped by perspective and awareness. These perceptions are influenced by the mindsets we adopt when observing something (perception), and how deeply we observe it (awareness)". In the PAR study, I considered how we, as white women leaders for equity, perceive our roles in a racist society and how increasing awareness is a part of the leadership journey. I continue to stay curious about the many ways humans perceive situations and how awareness can grow through conversations with people whose life experiences are different from my own.

None of the work to shift systems is simple, but leaders have opportunities. Educational leaders interested in dismantling and deconstructing internal and external barriers must develop new knowledge, skills, and dispositions beginning through fractal steps. Affinity spaces for women leaders are useful; these spaces, separate from district/state professional development, can accelerate personal and professional growth for the women as happened in this study. Personally, I found solidarity in understanding more about feminist leadership with a classmate who researched women's voices as voices of resistance. Collaborating with women in leadership who identify as a People of Color reminds me of the importance of building relationships, identifying allies in the work, and humanizing learning in educational spaces. The work to upend cultures of domination takes time and requires intentionality.

Two images represent my attempt to communicate these diverging thoughts (see Figure 29): A ball of yarn represents the complexity of moving from simplified quick fixes and simplified explanations to embracing the complexity of self, organizational, and community change; a fractal image represents how shifts at the small scale affect future pattern shifts at the large scale. As an educational leader in eastern North Carolina, I cannot simplify school improvement to a quick fix, an external program, or a single professional development experience for teachers. The work of school improvement begins with listening to the people in the community, understanding their aspirations, building relationships, and crossing boundaries to learn and grow (Guajardo et al., 2016). At a time when North Carolina legislators mandate programs for educational change, leaders must advocate for change that values and centers people, not expensive curriculums or agendas that pad the pockets of private companies or external experts (Helms, 2021; Schwartz, 2022).



Note. Embracing complexity is part of the journey white women educational leaders can make toward fractal shifts affecting future patterns of personal and professional growth.

Figure 29. Shifts toward humanizing educational leadership in eastern North Carolina.

As I conclude the writing of the dissertation, I reflect on my identity, my journey, and on an "aha" moment in June 2022, during PAR Cycle One. In discussions with my dissertation coach, my fellow doctoral classmates, the CPR members, my friends and family, and other educational colleagues, I talked about the PAR study in numerous ways. My goal was to document the hard work, growth, stories, dilemmas, conflicts, successes, and journeys of white women leading for equity and aspiring to be antiracists. I focused on the women and on myself, on the ways we needed to change to be better, the things we needed to learn, and the ways we needed to grow. In referring to the wave metaphor (see Figure 28), an intuitive instructor, Dr. Ah Nee-Benham, pointed out that I used images of huge, rough waves to show internal and external pressures. She pointed to the image of the woman contemplating her actions while looking at the ocean (waves of opportunity image, see Figure 28). "Are there sometimes when you do not go in the water?" she asked.

Up until that moment, I believed we, the white women, needed to change, as opposed to seeing the need for systemwide change. We needed to unpack our whiteness, we needed to lead in different ways, and we needed to build awareness, confidence, and skills toward facilitating more equitable learning environments. I documented all the ways we changed, shifted our thinking, or adjusted our leadership actions. As Michael and Bartoli (2023) state, racism is a white person's problem, yet we *cannot* accept the responsibility of fixing systemic issues in ENC educational settings. This problematic thought pattern absolves those who perpetuate meritocracy, nationalism, and other hegemonic narratives that dehumanize people. We *can* commit to growth, create conditions for change and connection in our circles of influence, and we have a responsibility to ask the system to change. To be transformative, school leaders need to prioritize their wellbeing and encourage others to do the same. Just as the surfer pauses, looks

over the ocean, and considers the waves, women have the right to reject the crushing waves of hierarchical and patriarchal systems and live differently. As a result of this study, I strive to live lighter, love deeper, step forward when needed, and step back more often (on the toes of others, if necessary), illuminating a path forward leading to a better place.

Conclusion

> *I am now convinced that integrating body, mind, and spirit not only is disruptive to established educational conventions in North America but is a method of decolonizing—undoing—ways in which we have come to be in the world.* (Ng, 2018, p. 45)

As a result of this study, I better understand the realities of sustaining hope through creating the *necessary space* for enacting and embodying equity and antiracist leadership. I am beginning to understand embodiment and the importance of staying open and curious about how our bodies communicate with us. I understand that, as a result of my formal education and American upbringing, I compartmentalized learning, rewarded compliance, created a narrow standard for excellence and success, and concealed strong emotions. Our bodies can take only so much before we "flip the survival switch and stop communicating and start protecting or attacking" (Brown, 2021c, p. 198). As acts of violence continue to rise in American communities and schools, I need to continue to question the purposes of our educational spaces and rehumanize learning and growing together with people in our communities.

Embodying antiracism is a lifelong journey. The unlearning, decolonizing, and undoing process of white female ways of knowing requires deconstruction and reconstruction. The wisdom for reconstructing an epistemic and ontological stance comes from many sources: scholars and community members with different lived experiences, indigenous ways of knowing, children's honest observations, mentors and elders' perceptions and guidance, powerful places in each community, lessons from nature and the environment, and the authentic voice residing

within each being. In the future, we must look toward all sources grounded in healing and humanity for all as guides on the journey.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Carrie Morris
CC: Matthew Militello
Date: 10/12/2021
Re: UMCIRB 21-001528
White Women Embodying Antiracism

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 10/12/2021. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1 & 2ab.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Morris Chapters IRB Proposal_FINAL_Sept.26.pdf(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Morris_Consent Form.pdf(0.01)	Consent Forms
Protocol_CLE Artifacts 9-21.pdf(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Protocol_Consultancy 9-21.pdf(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Protocol_Interview 9-21.pdf(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Protocol_Reflective Memo 9-21.pdf(0.01)	Additional Items
Protocol_Written Reflection 9-21.pdf(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Recruitment_Script for Email and phone 9-21.pdf(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: CITI TRAINING CERTIFICATE

LINK to Citi training certificate (PDF)

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Carrie Morris (ID: 9715445)
- **Institution Affiliation:** East Carolina University (ID: 316)
- **Institution Email:** morrisca19@ecu.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Department of Educational Leadership
- **Phone:** 9103262395

- **Curriculum Group:** Human Research
- **Course Learner Group:** Group 2.Social / Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 40033373
- **Completion Date:** 18-Dec-2020
- **Expiration Date:** 18-Dec-2023
- **Minimum Passing:** 70
- **Reported Score*:** 95

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	17-Dec-2020	3/3 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	17-Dec-2020	4/5 (80%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	17-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	18-Dec-2020	4/5 (80%)
Research with Prisoners - SBE (ID: 506)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)	18-Dec-2020	4/5 (80%)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
International Research - SBE (ID: 509)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees (ID: 483)	18-Dec-2020	4/4 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?kd0b8ecd4-9cff-4ce7-85a5-edc1a3df4240-40033373

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citiprogram.org
Phone: 888-529-5929
Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Carrie Morris (ID: 9715445)
- **Institution Affiliation:** East Carolina University (ID: 316)
- **Institution Email:** morrisca19@ecu.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Department of Educational Leadership
- **Phone:** 9103262395

- **Curriculum Group:** Human Research
- **Course Learner Group:** Group 2.Social / Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 40033373
- **Report Date:** 18-Dec-2020
- **Current Score**:** 95

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	17-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	17-Dec-2020	3/3 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	18-Dec-2020	4/5 (80%)
Research with Prisoners - SBE (ID: 506)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)	18-Dec-2020	4/5 (80%)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
International Research - SBE (ID: 509)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	18-Dec-2020	5/5 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	17-Dec-2020	4/5 (80%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees (ID: 483)	18-Dec-2020	4/4 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?kd0b8ecd4-9cff-4ce7-85a5-edc1a3df4240-40033373

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citiprogram.org
Phone: 888-529-5929
Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: White Women Embodying Antiracism for Equity Leadership in North Carolina School Settings

Principal Investigator: Carrie Morris
Institution, Department or Division: Department of Educational Leadership
Address: 216 Marsh Hen Ct. Swansboro, NC 28584
Telephone #: 910-554-1550

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems, and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in the research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?
The purpose of this research is to understand more about the ways white women identify their roles as leaders for equity and about how they enact this role in their North Carolina public school context. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a school or district leader in North Carolina who previously participated in Project I^4, a program focused on equity-driven instructional leadership. You are also a white woman. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn about how white women embody antiracism for equity leadership in North Carolina School settings. Your participation in this study is voluntary. The decision to take part in the research is yours to make. You have the right to participate, to choose not to participate, or to stop participating at any time without penalty.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of six people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?
I understand I should not volunteer for this study if I am not committed to equity-driven instructional leadership in my role as a school leader. I also should not volunteer for this study if I do not identify as a white woman.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?
You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?
The research will be conducted in meeting sessions virtually through a Zoom platform. There is a possibility of meeting face-to-face, if agreeable to all participants. The lead researcher will also visit you at your school setting. The total amount of time you are asked to volunteer for this study is twice per semester (approximately 2 hours each session), with individual interviews (one hour) each semester (Fall 2021, Spring 2022, Fall 2022).

What will I be asked to do?
You are asked to do the following twice per semester in a group session:

- Participate in Community Learning Exchange pedagogies to document your work as a leader for equity
- Engage in a Sightings protocol to share an equity dilemma in context or reflect upon an equity dilemma
- Provide brief updates to a group CLE artifact and written shared doc (between lead researcher and self)

You are asked to do the following as you and the lead researcher agree upon:

- Allow the lead researcher to visit you at your school setting and collect field notes
- Participate in individual interviews to clarify CLE artifacts or written reflections

What might I experience if I take part in the research?
We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?
We ***will not*** be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?
It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?
ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?
The information related to this study is kept for three years and will be destroyed after that time. Data security will be ensured by obtaining permissions for participation and use of artifacts and evidence from participants throughout the study. All physical artifacts and data will be stored in a locked location and electronic files password protected utilizing university standards for confidentiality. All Internal Review Board (IRB) guidelines and standards will be followed to safeguard the findings against breaches in confidentiality, researcher bias, and unethical practices.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?
You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop, and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Whom should I contact if I have questions?
The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at 910-554-1550 between 7am-7pm, ET.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

Is there anything else I should know?
Most people outside the research team will not see your name on your research record. This includes people who try to get your information using a court order. Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used, or distributed for future studies.

Will I receive anything for the use of my private identifiable information?
If the research conducted on your private identifiable information leads to a commercially valuable product, you will not be eligible for any of the profits either because it will be impossible to identify the information that led to the product or because you are transferring ownership of that sample.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?
The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

_____ _____

Participant's Name (PRINT) **Signature** **Date**

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

_____

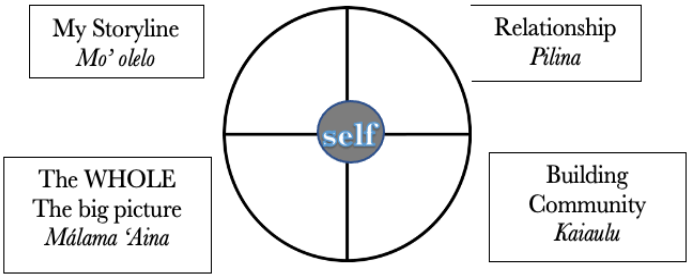
Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT) **Signature** **Date**

Approval letters received (pseudonyms):

L. Burgess (December 14, 2021)
M. Mackey (December 11, 2021)
J. Pinkney (December 11, 2021)
J. Jones (December 15, 2021)
M. Brammer (December 20, 2021)

APPENDIX D: FIGURES

Sketch your own personal Mandala as you think through the quadrants and questions below. Often a Mandala represents what cannot be explained in words or language. The experience of developing your own personal Mandala can be revisited to "keep relearning and retelling the big story" (Herman, 2013, p. 389).



Quadrant I: My Storyline	**Quadrant II: Relationship**
critical moments in your life/your history/a succession of stories • Consider who your family/ancestors are. • Where do you come from? • Key points on your journey line • Define how you see the work that you do today "Learn and express your story. Deepen self-awareness by seeking opposite experiences" (Herman, 2013, p. 388).	*associations & connections—people, perspective, passion, power* • Who are you in relationship with? • Consider the quality of the daily relationships that ignite your passion. • What do these relationships feel like? Sound like? Taste like? (elements of safety and play?) "Diverse perspectives of school leadership will lead to richer development of educational theory and practice" (Benham, 2002, p. 134).
Quadrant IV: The WHOLE, the big picture *care for the land and for all that nourishes you* • What is the change you want to be in the world? • What is your imperative? • Allow yourself to wonder… "The more completely we understand the big story telling us into being, the better able we are to respond creatively to the challenges of our moment" (Herman, 2013, p. 133).	**Quadrant III: Building Community** *the land, ocean, sky and "holding place" where everything and everyone can flourish* • Who are included in your networks? • Consider all the "webs" of connection in your life • Who are you responsible to and for? "What counts is how much we give to our communities" (Benham, 2002, p. 138).

Note. The Mandala protocol was created using the work of Benham (2002) and Herman (2013). An example of a CLE artifact protocol development used in the Self-as-Leader course

Figure D1. A self-as-leader artifact.

Sightings Protocol

PROTOCOL: Sightings

"Between the nearly and the utterly lies a small space that leaders enlarge with beliefs – beliefs about what children might accomplish, about how schools might function, about what accountability might really mean." Joseph McDonald 1996

Change in school happens iteratively and not always because we have a plan. As we observe what is actually happening day to day, we, as school leaders, use those observations – what we term sightings -- to take leader actions that **reframe the situation and support an inclusive community of learners**.

Sighting: The opportunity, often sudden and striking, as if an epiphany, to see and understand the beliefs that animate the behaviors and policies of a school. This may result in mulling over an incongruity. A moment when a belief intersects with a practice that "bubbles up" and **causes one to rethink direction**.

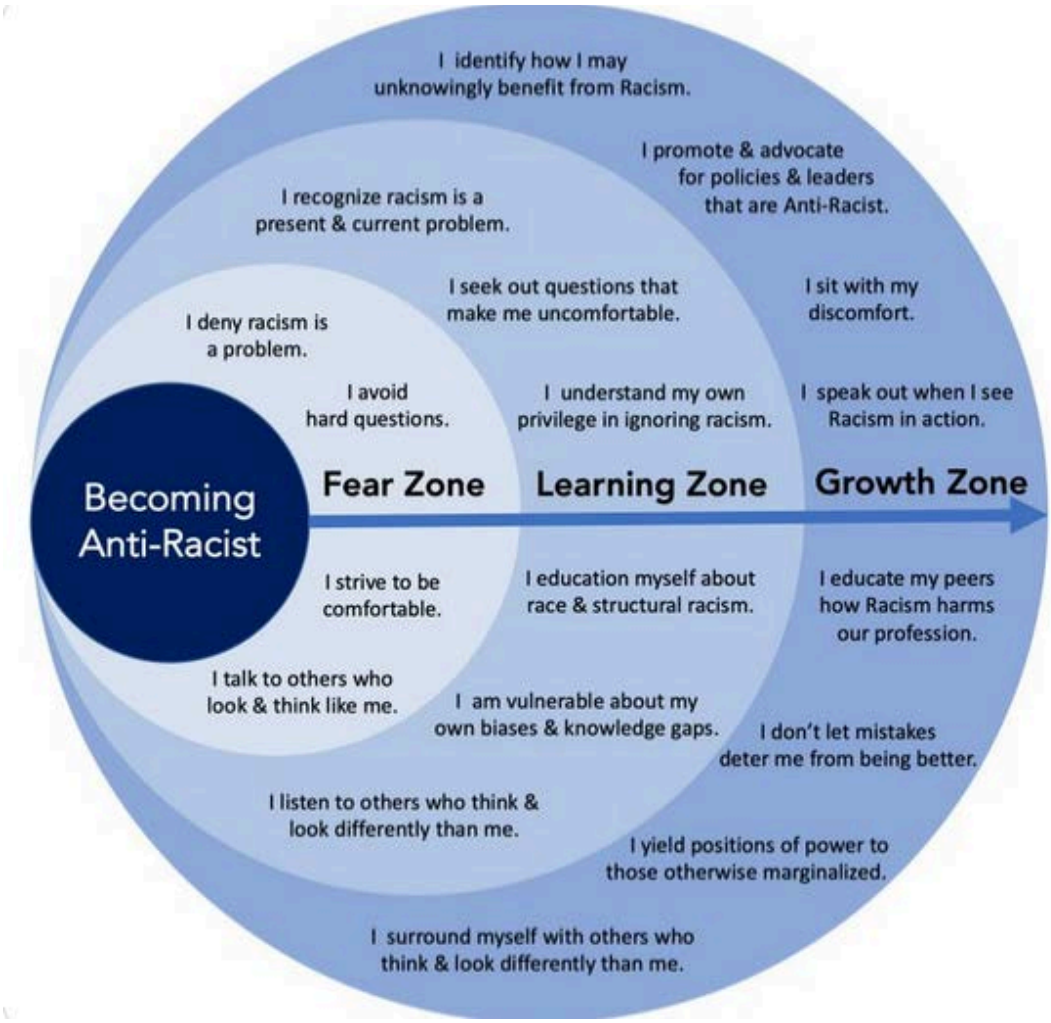
A sighting is a moment in time in school change/school improvement work in which your values match an observation and you can see the way forward – as in an epiphany, this is a manifestation of something you did not perhaps see before, or a conversation you had that you would not have had before, or an intentional action you took to move the work forward. It is the essence of the work to "do the right thing" as a school leader.

You had an opportunity in the March 13 virtual gathering to discuss an equity dilemma and your equity leadership characterization. By using asset framing as a guide, I want you to send examples of what you thought, what you experienced and how you acted in your school(s), what you did, or what you intend to do to support full inclusion of all school stakeholders: teachers, support staff, students, families, etc. Particularly I am interested in examples that respond to your role as a leader for equity and as a white woman striving to embody antiracism.

I will send a reminder between now and the July Summer Learning Exchange. Please take a few moments to acknowledge the work you do and write a short response to a sighting you had, an action you took, or a plan you are hatching. These short stories of leadership work are important to uncovering and holding up the strong work you do as principals/educational leaders to foster inclusion and school success for all students.

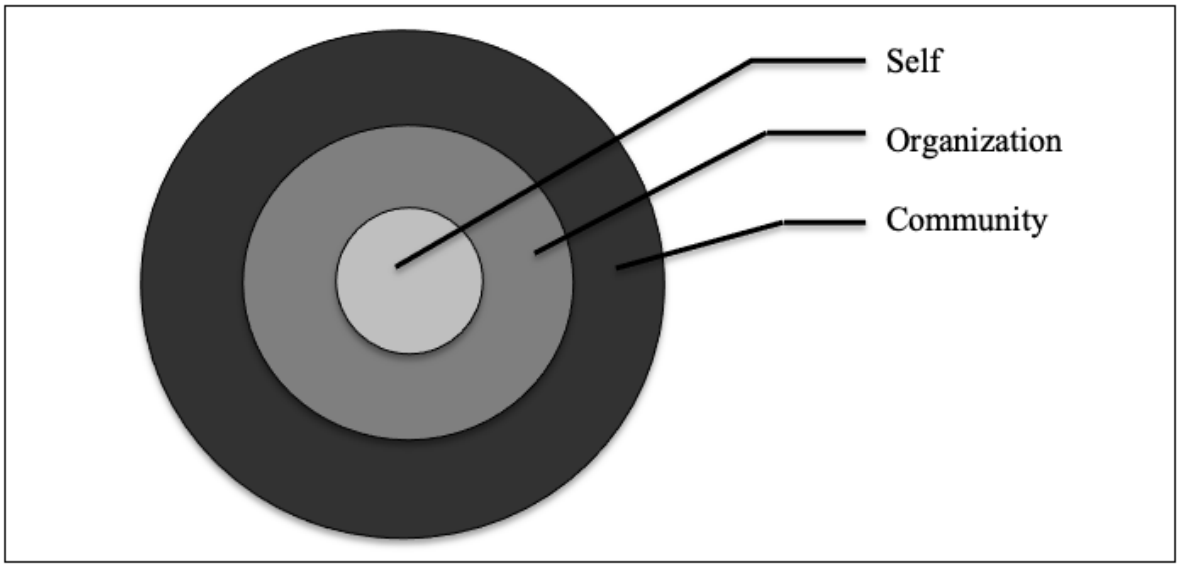
Note. The Sightings protocol was adapted from a similar protocol created by Lynda Tredway, and based on the work of McDonald (1996).

Figure D2. The Sightings protocol: A written reflective opportunity.



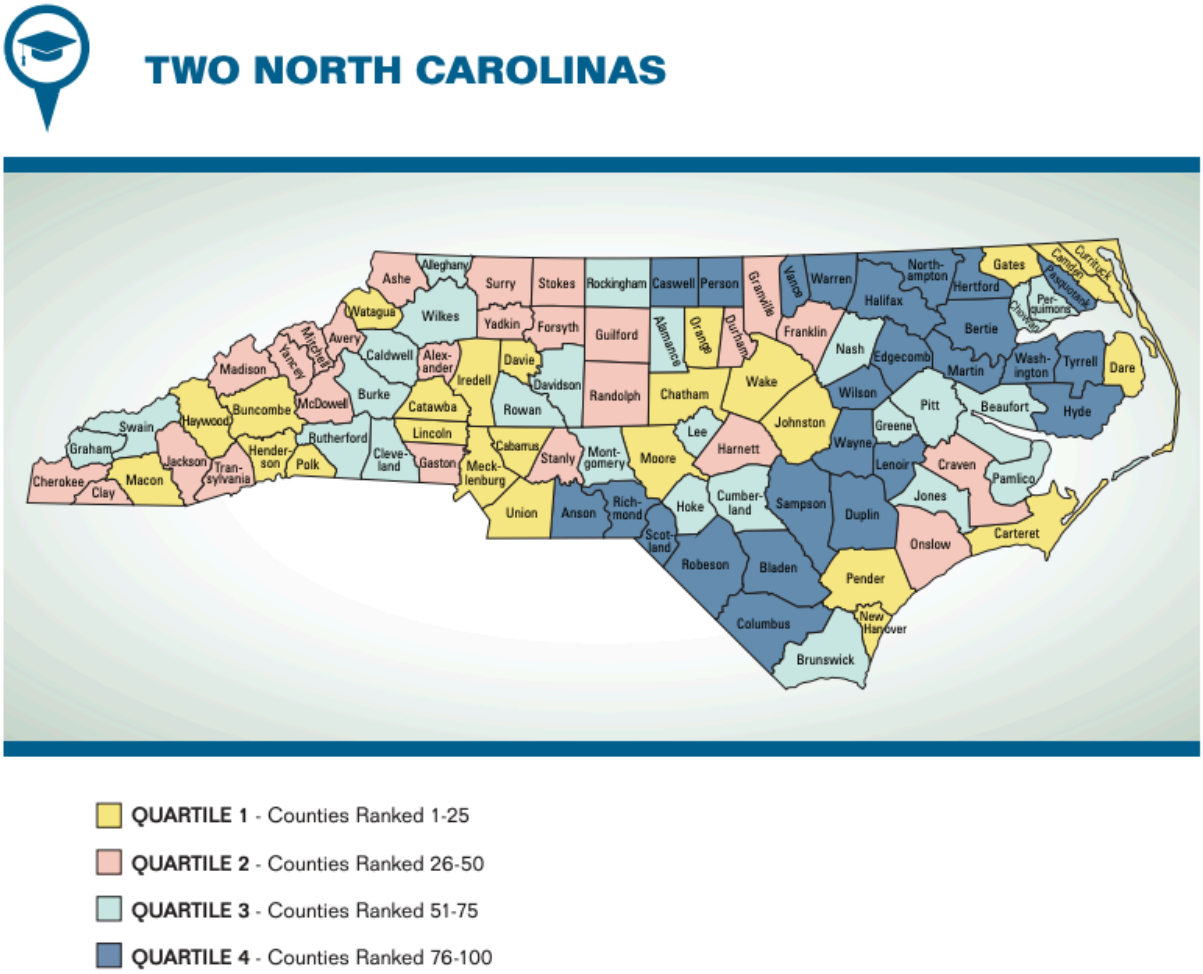
Note. Framework by Ibrahim (2020), inspired by the work of Kendi (2019). In the framework, Ibrahim suggests a willingness to learn can move individuals out of the fear zone and toward becoming antiracist.

Figure D3. Ibrahim's Model-Becoming Antiracist: Moving from fear to growth (2020).



Note. The figure is from Figure 2.2, Ecologies of Knowing (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 28). Inserted with permission.

Figure D4. Ecologies of knowing: Multiple levels of work.



Note. From The *Roadmap of Need* (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2020b). The district pseudonyms in Appendix D are not found on this map but are in the eastern part of the state and labeled by Quartile for comparison.

Figure D5. The NC Roadmap of Need.

APPENDIX E: NORTH CAROLINA DISTRICT INFORMATION

North Carolina Rankings by County

NC County and School District (Pseudonyms)	Quartile	Overall Rankings*	Youth Behavior and Safety Rankings*	Education Rankings*	Economic Development Rankings*	Approximate Median Household Income	White Non-Hispanic population percentage	Black population percentage	Hispanic population percentage	Indian American population (*Lumbee)	Asian American population percentage
Brookside County	Q1	**4**	19	2	19	$65,000	91-99%	0-5%	0-10%	0-5%	0-2%
Lakefront County	Q2	**32**	35	34	32	$51,000	61-80%	6-20%	11-20%	0-5%	3-5%
Pinetop County	Q3	**59**	88	69	60	$43,000	61-80%	31-50%	0-10%	0-5%	3-5%
Riverbend County	Q4	**86**	53	90	88	$38,000	0-40%	51-85%	0-10%	0-5%	0-2%
Creekland County	Q4	**93**	98	92	80	$44,000	41-60%	31-50%	0-10%	0-5%	0-2%
Oceanview County	Q4	**95**	79	93	98	$39,000	41-60%	51-85%	0-10%	0-5%	0-2%

**Ranking out of 100 North Carolina Counties/Districts*
Note. (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2020b).

APPENDIX F: CPR AGENDA EXAMPLES

Outcomes	Agreements
Participants will: 1. Pause and breathe (embodiment noticings) 2. Reflect and respond about Pre-cycle data and emerging categories. 3. Unpack and explore asset-framing. 4. And, as always: Cultivate relational trust and commit to supporting one another.	· Be patient with each other and technology · Speak your truth to your level of comfort · Support equitable dialogue · Take risks in engaging in conversations

Time	Activity	Format
4:00pm 5 min	**Welcome & Overview**	
4:05pm 10 min	**Dynamic Mindfulness** (Embodiment exercise) Breathe, Ground, and Resource From Resmaa Manekem's *My Grandmother's Hands* (p. 155)	Carrie
4:15pm 25 min	**Personal Narrative and Opening Circle** Equity leadership comes in many forms Tell a brief story about an equity dilemma you recently faced and how you addressed this dilemma. Would you describe yourself in any of these characterizations? ***The Transparent Equity Champion*** ***The Equity Coach*** ***The Tempered Radical*** ***The Love Warrior***	Group share

4:40pm 20 min	**Reflection on Pre-cycle Data** Open shared google doc from the email. **Silent Review Reflection (5-10 minutes)** Read, highlight, add comments/questions to the following: · Emergent Categories Table · Chapter 4 paragraph and table—Context description **Group Share/Discussion (10 minutes)** By seeing how I have summarized the identities of our CPR group, consider these questions: *What story is coming up for you as you look at the data?* *What is resonating with you?* *What do you wonder about?* *What do you question or disagree with?* *What is missing?*	Individual Group Discussion
5:00pm 15 min	**Shifting Perspectives—Asset Framing** Asset Framing with Trabian Shorters—VIDEO *"And even this idea of equity itself, which is — many of the folks who employ us ask us to help them work on issues of equity and engagement and community-building and the like. And so I always like to point out to foundation leaders and corporate leaders, in particular, that every other time you use the word "equity" — financial equity — every other time you use the word* ***"equity" you are literally talking about what has value****. In all of our conversations about equity, they're all about what or who has value. And if you're going to start a conversation about equity around people, then you have to value the people at the center of the question"*—from Trabian's interview with Krista Tippett: On Being Podcast We are white women engaging in equity leadership and antiracist work in eastern North Carolina. Why is asset framing important?	Carrie

Outcomes	Agreements
Participants will: 1. Pause and breathe (embodiment noticings) 2. Reflect and respond about Cycle 1 data and emerging theme/categories. 3. Unpack and explore visuals. 4. And, as always: Cultivate relational trust and commit to supporting one another.	· Be patient with each other and technology · Speak your truth to your level of comfort · Support equitable dialogue · Take risks in engaging in conversations

Time	Activity	Format
4:00pm 5 min	**Welcome & Overview**	
4:05pm 5 min	**Dynamic Mindfulness** Breathing, grounding, envisioning	Carrie
4:10pm 30 min	**Personal Narrative and Opening Circle** Sketch/jot notes on individual google doc (from email) *10 minutes* Choose a story to tell from one of the reflection questions or give an overview of your responses. *20 minutes*	Think time Group share

4:40pm 20 min	**Reflection on Cycle I Data** **Overview of Chapter 5** *5-10 minutes* Read, highlight, add comments/questions to outline/table/figures. **Group Share/Discussion** *10 minutes* *What story is coming up for you as you look at the data?* *What is resonating with you?* *What do you wonder about?* *What do you question or disagree with?* *What is missing?*	Carrie Group discussion & individual comments
5:00pm 15 min	**The Journey** **We are white women engaging in equity leadership and antiracist work in eastern North Carolina.** **What are the key components of this journey?** Making sense of my own story. *WAVES analogy* **A "wow" or a "wonder"** *Share something that resonates or something you wonder about.* Video: What a living, embodied, antiracist culture really means Resmaa Menakem https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wy8EkFz5b2s	Carrie Group discussion
5:15pm 15 min	**Closing Circle** *Read Shawn Strader's quote (p. 18 of Group Artifact)* *Open-ended addition…* *Add to Group Artifact*	

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

To what extent, if any, did you **move forward in either your equity leadership or personal antiracist growth as a result of participating in conversations with other white women**? (in our affinity space or other white women's affinity spaces?) *Specifically, what was helpful, or what would have been more helpful?*

Is there something **you wish you could have/would have done** to move forward your equity leadership or personal antiracist journey **but you felt you could not do, due to the context** (family, school, district, community, ENC context)? *For example, is there something that a Pi4 colleague (California or other) that you would have liked to have done but thought, "Oh, I could never do that here."*

How are you, or **how do you, "carry the load"**--of wife, mother (if applicable), educator, school leader, family member, neighbor, etc.? *In other words, what lightens your load (helps you move forward, find resilience, keep radical hope) and/or what adds to the load (burdens you, weighs you down, or drains you)?*

Internal waves leading to progress or barriers? *What inner work/patterns have you done to move yourself forward in your work and in your life? Or what inner work/patterns are barriers to forward movement?*

External waves assist/support you or overwhelm/stymy you? *What external conditions move you forward? What external situations/events/conditions stop or create barriers to your forward progress in your work and in your life?*

Waves of opportunity? *What are the opportunities you have taken advantage of or you see as action spaces to move yourself forward in your role as a leader for equity and/or in your personal antiracist journey?*

Ibrahim describes the antiracist journey as one that moves from fear, to learning, to growth. Is there something you used to fear (as a white woman leading for equity or aspiring antiracist) that you recognize learning or growth has occurred?

Looking at the Emerging Conceptual Framework–so what do you think is next, or should be next?

Does thinking about equity leadership in **different characterizations** (which we talked about before), help you think about the multiple ways to be an equity leader? Yes/no, why, or why not? (*Transparent Equity Champion, The Equity Coach, The Tempered Radical, The Love Warrior*)
What else do you want me to know?

What else do you wonder about?

APPENDIX H: REFLECTIVE MEMO TEMPLATE

Reflective Memo #__: Template

Think about the experience from an **ontological** (your perspective) and an **epistemological** stance (what you currently know). Then integrate the experience into re-examining your perspective and knowledge. 2-3 pages, 750 words.

Kolb (1984) experiential learning process (cyclical process):

- Engage in an experience
- Refection on the experience
- Conceptualize the experience (within current knowledge base and perhaps changing knowledge)
- Plan for experimenting

What:	Where:	When:
Who:	Why:	Other information:

STEP 1: Concrete Experience (summary) (what the memo is about, specific time (e.g., the week of), or an episode (e.g., a CLE or observation).

STEP 2: Reflective Observation (feeling, watching, thoughts)

STEP 3: Abstract Conceptualization (Think about how the observation/participation and reflection fit into a larger concept or idea. How does the experience relate to what you know or have read in the literature, for example?)

STEP 4: Active Experimentation—Now what? Next steps (Use the reflection to act differently. What might you do differently? OR: How does the reflection support metacognitive (learning) and meta-affective (emotional or dispositional) learning?)

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source for learning and development.* Prentice-Hall.