# Making Meaning of Meaning-Making

Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Community, Youth, and Education Studies Major at Clark University

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# ABSTRACT

This praxis project seeks to uplift the unique expertise and knowledge elementary age students have surrounding race and racism. We recognize children as key stakeholders in this research and as such, decided to work with students ages 8-13 in Recreation Worcester's afterschool program held at Chandler Magnet Elementary School. Inspired by practices of intergroup dialogue, surfacing knowledge, and utilizing art-based activities, we created a pilot curriculum unit which enabled children to talk about race/racism. Our intentions were to better understand how they talk about race and what facilitation practices best support their learning. Drawing on practitioner inquiry, critical qualitative research, and the epistemologies of Youth Participatory Action research, our research was simultaneously informed by our own reflexivity and the students' participation in our curriculum unit. The data consists of transcribed audio recordings, collected artifacts, and written observations throughout two curriculum sessions and subsequent interviews with four students. Our findings suggest the unanticipated outcomes of the implementation of our curriculum and theorize about the ways in which children construct meaning from race dialogues. As our findings speculate, educators interested in this work must recognize the importance of building relationships of trust, integrating appropriate multilingual practices, incorporating a progression towards structures of racism, and dedicating time for reflecting on facilitation approaches. Furthermore, it is essential to consider how to center the conversations, activities, images, connections, and stories students find meaningful — it is their powerful imaginations for social change that are at the core of this work.

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both inspire me to return to this work everyday and have modeled teaching with love. You both are my whole world, I love you and dedicate this paper to you.

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**INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This project is rooted in care, learning, meaning, and mutual relationships. Its foundation is concerned with how we, Kaila and Sophia (as learners, facilitators, educators, co-researchers, and good friends), can investigate where meaningful experiences come from, who/what facilitates them, and what change or transformation comes from them. To us, meaningful experiences are moments in which we have agency to grow, learn, and connect with others (other people, environments, etc). We've shared many of these moments as the two of us have collaborated on various projects throughout our time together at Clark University; from class assignments to organizing/social justice work. These experiences have led us to have a solid relationship of trust, accountability, shared responsibility, and excitement for the work we produce together. Additionally, it has helped us to know one another's strengths and how to best support the other when needed, which is critical for collaborative research. We were able to quickly transition into these roles and enthusiastically strategized together as we imagined what our praxis could be. We brainstormed some captivating (yet truthfully improbable given the limited time we had) ideas, almost all of which related back to race, racism, and identity. In all the work we've done together, addressing race/racism has been a consistent theme that we are interested in deconstructing, exploring, and acting on.

Furthermore, the creation of our project is based on our shared love for education, working with youth, and learning from all that children have to teach us through their perceptions of the world. In our experiences in the classroom, summer camp, tutoring, babysitting, and researching with children of many ages, we've found that what they have to say is not only endearing but, often, they also have truly insightful and valuable knowledge to share. As such, we knew our project had to place children's knowledge at the center of the research and as essential to our thesis. This, along with our interest in examining social constructions of race/racism, led us to become co-researchers and embark on this collective journey to explore the complexities of race dialogues and arts-based learning with children.

This paper is for the most part collaboratively written, using "we" throughout to reflect the ways in which both of our thinking informed our research. This collaborative process looks different throughout the paper, with some sections written entirely by one of us, and edited and revised by the other, and other sections where we wrote each sentence together. Additionally, there are points in which we split off into our own individual voices to speak on how our very different

positionalities have impacted our relationship to and experience with this research and our praxis site.

*Our Collective Journey to Praxis*

There are many studies, resources, and outlets that show the benefits of race dialogues in our society. In his book "Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence," Derald Wing Sue states that "Learning to talk about race is crucial if we hope to achieve the equal society that has long been part of the American mythos," (Sue, 2018, p. xviii, ). Sue's use of "mythos" insinuates that society's perceptions of the United States as an "equal society" is a falsity rooted in white supremacy. Racial inequity was foundational to the creation of schooling in the United States, and remains upheld institutionally and interpersonally within schools. The continuation of this legacy has made discussions of race and racism not just uncomfortable, but terrifyingly taboo within popular discourse and casual conversations, specifically amongst white folks who benefit from a culture of silence surrounding race relations. For white students, this can lead to dangerously large gaps in awareness about how race has shaped and continues to shape our society. Without this understanding, they often have limited ability to confront these issues. Additionally, lack of conversations about race in the classroom can be deeply harmful for BIPOC[1] students who so often have their experiences of racism in schools dismissed, and are not given space to explore and celebrate their identity. Sue proceeds to dive into the psychology of racial dialogues, arguing for the importance of these conversations and the benefits they hold for our society. An understanding that race dialogues are meaningful and important for both white students and BIPOC students is an essential step towards change.

Despite this stated importance, it is especially uncommon for people to have grown up cultivating the skills to engage in critical and honest intergroup dialogues with people who share *different* racial identities than themselves. If these dialogues do take place, it is often not until much later in life, and only through access to institutions of higher education. College was our personal entry point into learning more about race dialogues as we had the opportunity to take Jie Park's and Eric DeMeuleanere's class, "Difficult Dialogues on Race and Racism."

Offered within the Center for Gender, Race, and Area Studies department, this course emphasized the ways that intergroup dialogue[2] is a necessary tool for surfacing and addressing racial inequities

[1] We use the term "BIPOC" here to mean "Black, Indigenous, and People of Color"

[2] In intergroup dialogue, "facilitators and participants alike learn core skills useful for participating in a functional democracy: how to listen generously, question previously held beliefs, think openly, share personal experiences,

in the classroom. We took the class during the intersession semester of winter 2020 in which we were entirely online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Though we were unable to physically be together, we had constructed a community over Zoom, and the two of us still felt connected through the shared experiences we had in the class. Throughout the course, we were in conversation with Kaplowitz, Griffin and Sheikathe's (2019) critical text *Race Dialogues: A Facilitator's Guide to Tackling the Elephant in the Classroom*, which provides an in-depth curriculum and hands-on activities geared towards high school and college classrooms. The curriculum's goal is to facilitate dialogue in a way that promotes "deep understanding, empathy, and collaboration across different racial identities," (Kaplowitz et al. 2019, p.5). Throughout the course, we were invited to question what aspects of the curriculum presented in *Race Dialogues* we felt were effective, and ways we would adjust the set curriculum and activities to further meet the intended goals stated by the authors. Here we learned the skills needed to facilitate intergroup dialogue and the tactics used to generate a community within the dialogic space in order for each participant to feel willing and comfortable to share openly.

We found these honest, critical dialogues around race and racism, and ways to facilitate them, incredibly helpful, yet were frustrated when reflecting on the fact that they are often reserved for college students. Studies continue to show that the racial dynamics that make these dialogues "difficult" in the first place are in part due to the fact that these conversations aren't happening sooner. White students in higher education are generally resistant to engaging with issues of race and racism, a discomfort that can be traced back to their childhood and was likely produced through the denial of accepting any complicity in perpetuating racism (Zembylas, 2018, p. 6). In many of our other classes at Clark, we noticed this fear and knew through our experiences growing up and from hearing the educational pasts of others, that this was due to the lack of a comprehensive and explicit education on race. Further, for our literature review, we continued to investigate this notion via scholarly journals, books, past course assignments, and people in our communities (family members, etc) to help inform the construction of our project. We looked to these resources to support our interests in race education and seek out how we, as educators in training, could facilitate this comprehensive and explicit production of knowledge.

We decided to do research with children as dialogue participants – not only to introduce this content at an earlier age, but also to hold their voices and knowledge at the center of a conversation that they are so often excluded from. In the curriculum itself, we facilitated

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acquire new information, understand others perspectives, and act to create social change (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001)," (Kalpowitz et.al 2019, p.3).

intergroup dialogues about race and racism, and provided space for participants to reflect on their racial identity through art projects involving drawing and painting. We added art-based activities as an important part of our curriculum because our previous work with children has proven the benefit of art as an alternative outlet of expression. Our research sought to incorporate art into a curriculum for elementary through middle school aged children as not just a communication tool *in place* of dialogue, and not just a tool *to initiate* dialogue. Inevitably, there was a conversation and reflection that happened before, during, and after the creation of this art, both between the participants as well as between participants and the facilitators. We wanted to understand moments in which art created by participants spoke for itself, and moments when, regardless of language barriers, we worked to communicate with each other about what our art means to us, and in a larger cultural context. This intent guided our literature around the construction of meaning making as we hoped to learn how participants could engage in this collective communication and co-created understanding.

Furthermore, as will be discussed in greater detail in our literature review, many scholars have researched the ways in which art "can bring people to the conversation who might not otherwise participate. It can bring forward the voices of those often silenced or left out of public discourse," (Korza et al. 2002, p.5). When constructing the curriculum, we had hoped that the artwork the participants created would enhance how they processed the conversations we had in a way that dialogue could not. The children may not feel as exposed and are thus able to express their thoughts in a creative format. We sought out literature which would speak to our experiences observing how children often feel more comfortable and willing to participate in projects that do not require speaking in depth about their thoughts, opinions, and experiences. Thus, our investigation of and personal experiences with both intergroup dialogue and arts-based education are foundational to this praxis project.

Our praxis research investigated the following questions:

1. What can we learn from the implementation of our curriculum about what makes race dialogues meaningful to 8-13 year olds?
2. How does having an explicit race dialogue surface the knowledge 8-13 year olds already hold about race in their own lives and in their communities?
3. How do 8-13 year olds respond to the art-centered activities in our curriculum?

In addition to these three questions, our research retrospectively explores incorporating multilingual practices into our curriculum. After reflecting and analyzing the implementation of

our curriculum, we developed two additional questions:

4. What multilingual practices can we implement that allow for meaning-making for *all* participants?
5. How do we mitigate the inherent power imbalances of translation, while also recognizing the positive potential translation has in multilingual spaces?

We did not initially form our research project with language as a central theme in mind. Since Kaila speaks Spanish, it was implied that she would translate when needed. Additionally, we assumed that Spanish and English would be the primary languages at our site after researching the demographics of our site, as well as from personal experiences working in Worcester Public Schools. However, upon spending time at our Praxis site and conducting our pilot curriculum, we soon realized that it was necessary to make language differences a central theme of our research, and that relying solely on translation is not sufficient. By retroactively developing a theoretical framework and facilitation practices related to differing language needs, we hope that we also would have been more equipped to support students from a varying degree of language backgrounds, not just the ones that we speak.

However, as will be examined throughout this paper, before arriving at these questions, we were primarily focused on how we would construct a unit on race and racism for this age of students. As such, we worked to align our curriculum on race and racism to a younger audience because we hoped to address these dynamics of discomfort earlier, before they emerged as tensions, denial and ignorance later on. Research has shown that frequent, honest, age-appropriate conversations about race and racial differences are associated with lower-level bias in children, who by two or three years old are already using racial categories to reason about people's behavior (Winkler, 2009, p. 5). Yet despite these studies, educators continue to create curricula that avoid, deny, and undermine the role that race plays in the classroom, as well as the capacity of elementary and middle school age students to discuss these topics. While we did not influence any dramatic change, focusing on a younger age group allowed us to create a moment or memory of engaging in a racial dialogue for people who are rarely provided a formal space to express their identities and discuss the impacts of racism in their everyday lives.

Ultimately, our research aligns with Paulo Freire's understanding of praxis. He writes that praxis "becomes a locus of knowledge generation, equitable, stakeholder-generated change and true social transformation" (quoted in Ravitch, 2014, p. 9). For us, this suggests that praxis has the potential to jumpstart or inspire change with crucial stakeholders. It can (and has) motivated us to

reflect on our current and future facilitator roles and how we can actively work towards "social transformation" in these positions and through dialogue, art, and multilingualism. As our curriculum is in the pilot stage, we were unable to incorporate youth feedback as directly as we would've liked to, but we hoped to incorporate other ways of allowing youth to feel like stakeholders in the curriculum, primarily through interviews. Our research refers back to these interviews, as well as our analytic memos and audio recordings, to try and understand what made racial dialogues meaningful to our participants (if at all), and how these findings could help make curricula that grapple with race and identity as beneficial to youth as possible. While this is the goal we were working towards, we do not believe that our project had any radical immediate impact on the children and we definitely cannot claim to have been at all close to facilitating the depth of change we initially hoped. However, as mentioned, we hope to have provided an opening, a memory, for the youth to look back on and recognize a moment in which they were given the space to learn about and discuss with one another the complexities of racial identities and the social construction of race.

**ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT: Initial Understanding of Praxis Site**

Our praxis research took place through Recreation Worcester's afterschool program. Recreation Worcester is a free, year-round, out-of-school time program for youth run by the City of Worcester, open to all students from ages 8-13. The program operates in a number of different schools, but our specific location was at Chandler Magnet Elementary School. Given that neither of us had had experience working with Recreation Worcester in the past, we met with Recreation Worcester's Program Coordinator to learn about the structure of the site and develop a plan for our curriculum. We were informed that the structure of the program is built around three core areas, or "enrichment activities,": athletics, arts, and academic programming. The size of a group depends on enrollment, but, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Chandler Magnet had around 50 students enrolled in the program. As such, the size of each group was somewhere between 15-20 students. Students were split into three different groups and rotated to the different activity areas (arts, athletics, and academics), spending about 30 minutes at each. The program runs from around 3-5pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. However, as a result of the pandemic, Recreation Worcester had significantly less enrollment at Chandler Magnet and there were only about 10 students who had signed up for the afterschool program. Additionally, not all the students would attend everyday, and on a given day there would be 5-8 students present. Because there were so few students, the staff for Recreation Worcester at Chandler Magnet did not split up the students and, after 20-25 minutes of homework and snack time, they were free to utilize the gym, art materials, and games as they wished.

The organizers of Recreation Worcester that we met with informed us that Chandler Magnet is a school of predominantly students of color, specifically Latine[3]. Data from 2018 indicates that Chandler Magnet is 77% Latine, 14% white, 4% Asian, 3% Black, and 2% Multiracial. This proved to be true as the majority of the students we worked with were Latine. Many of whom were bilingual or primarily spoke Spanish with a limited understanding of English. Chandler Magnet is also predominantly low income, with 92% of students qualifying for free lunch, and 4% qualifying for reduced lunch. As a part of Recreation Worcester's programming, the students had a snack provided through their cafeteria — this was usually leftover food from previous school lunches (i.e. pizza or chicken fingers with some fruit or vegetable and juice).

When we met with the Program Coordinator of Recreation Worcester, we were also informed that programming for the first trimester is predetermined by one of Recreation Worcester's primary organizers, and carried out by someone hired by the organization. During the second and third trimesters, Recreation Worcester looks to community partners, ranging from athletic coaches, musicians, self-defense experts and art instructors to support their programming on a more part-time basis. Although we were not hired through Recreation Worcester and weren't getting paid, our role was most similar to that of a community partner in the arts area. Once at the site, we learned that each of the staff members was hired to lead particular activities (such as art, athletics/gym time, etc), but again, due to the low enrollment, activities were not as strictly structured so that the students had time to play and enjoy their time altogether.

As we will go into deeper detail on in sections "Practitioner Inquiry: Curriculum Creation Analysis" and "Timeline of Visits," prior to the week in which we piloted our curriculum, we spent some time getting to know the students so as to build trust with them before discussing sensitive topics such as race and racism. We know trust to be essential given our previous experiences working with young people. We've seen the differences in engagement between initial interactions and after time spent together in which we continually establish ourselves as people who support and care for youth. Not only does engagement progress, but we (ourselves and the children we work with) also eventually develop a genuine relationship that we mutually value.

During the weeks of November and January, we came in to hang out with the students and support

[3] We use Latine as it is a gender neutral term for people who identify with countries in Latin America. It is used as an alternative to Latino or Latina to include transgender and non-binary people who do not identify with these gendered terms. For a deeper/additional rationale, reference "The X In Latine is A Wound, Not A Trend" by Alan Pelaez Lopez (2018): https://www.colorbloq.org/article/the-x-in-Latine-is-a-wound-not-a-trend

the Recreation Worcester staff. As we'd hoped, we were able to spend time with the youth in settings that were more playful, such as sports and assorted art activities, rather than school aligned contexts. From our visits, we found that the structure of first getting to play, relax, and run around especially after a long school day, then moving into a calmer arts-based activity was the most successful[4]. Thus, we incorporated our curriculum during this calmer section when the children were most willing and ready to participate holistically in an activity that required more focus.

*Timeline of Visits*

As outlined above, we were present at Chandler Magnet from 3pm-5pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays throughout January and February of 2022. We also visited in November and early December of 2021 — during which there were some times, due to other commitments, that only one of us was available to go. The following is a linear timeline of our visits:

**Wednesday, November 17th** (Kaila and Sophia)

**Tuesday, November 30th** (Sophia)

**Wednesday, December 1st** (Sophia)

**Wednesday, January 19th** (Kaila and Sophia)

**Thursday, January 20th** (Kaila)

**Tuesday, January 25th & Wednesday, January 26th** (Kaila and Sophia; consent forms distributed)

**Tuesday, February 1st & Wednesday, February 2nd** (Kaila and Sophia; consent forms collected)

**Tuesday, February 8th & Wednesday, February 9th & Thursday, February 10th** (Kaila and Sophia; 2 day curriculum implemented)

*Participants*

(All participants have pseudonyms)

Delilah: 13 years old, sister to Arabela, Latina, fluent in Spanish and English

Arabela: 8 years old, sister to Delilah, Latina, fluent in Spanish and English

Julieta: 8 years old, sister to Kenny, Latina/white, only speaks English

Kenny: 10 years old, brother to Julieta, Latino/white, only speaks English

Sol: 9 years old, Latino, speaks Spanish and can speak/understand limited English

[4] See our later section "Visits Leading up to the Curriculum" for more detail.

NC: Non-consenting student, white, only speaks English
NC1: A non-consenting Recreation Worcester participant who is referenced in conversation but was not present during the curriculum

**POSITIONALITY AND IDENTITY**

*Kaila*

When considering my relationship to all those involved in our Praxis site, I believe it is important to consider my relationship with not only the youth we will be working with at our future site, but also with Sophia, who is the co-designer and co-researcher on our project. Sophia and I have been friends since our first year at Clark, which I think is really important to this project because it gives context to the fact that working together on our Praxis Project is just one aspect of our relationship. Sophia is also a friend who I feel incredibly comfortable brainstorming with since we've done a number of projects together, from creating a podcast on the impact of COVID-19 evictions on Black and brown communities and co-organizing a pilot program for race-based Affinity Housing our sophomore year, to participating in the Difficult Dialogues Fellowship through the center for Race, Gender and Area Studies our junior and now senior year. Our work together has always directly related to addressing race and racism in a variety of spaces, which helps us begin our praxis project with a lot of similar theoretical frameworks and reference scholars. Our distinct educational backgrounds and racial identities are also very important in bringing different perspectives to the curriculum we construct.

In relation to the participants at our future site of Recreation Worcester Chandler Magnet after school program, I consider myself an outsider in most ways. I am not from Worcetser, and I grew up in rural Spain and rural Vermont. Additionally, as a white person I do not reflect the majority demographic of Worcester as Black, Latine, and Afro-Latine. Yet growing up in Spain and immigrating to the U.S. at age 9 is an important point of connection, as so many Worcester youth have a story of migration from one, or multiple countries. Of course, as a white person with a British and U.S. passport, my family's moves are completely distinct from those who are displaced by/impacted by the violence of borders, colonialism, and imperialism. Nonetheless, I think it's still important to acknowledge that having grown up somewhere in a different culture, and that I speak Spanish, are grounds from which I've repeatedly connected with Worecter youth and their guardians, from both a logistical and social standpoint.

My connection to the school itself was very recent. Sophia and I visited the school before our research to connect with the students so that we didn't show up to discuss race without ever having met them, but that was still a minimal history with the space and the students. Coming from a University to do research in a community I am not from and am mainly connected to through Clark also positioned me as an outsider.

My work as an educator is shaped by my belief that being self-aware in one's identities is essential to connecting with those who may share a different identity than yourself, especially if you hold identities with more power. For example, age will always be an active power dynamic in my work with youth, as well as race since the majority of youth I will be working with are people of color. Navigating the assumptions and understandings of the world that we internalize based on our given identities is something that the researcher Alan Peshkin talks about in his article "In Search of Subjectivity - One's Own" where he explores his own experience navigating his subjectivities. He discusses having been caught off-guard by his own implicit biases throughout the research process, and says that next time "I would actively seek out my subjectivity. I did not want to happen upon it accidentally as I was writing up the data" (Peshkin, 1998 p.18). I feel that part of my responsibility as an educator and person in a position of power is to learn as much as I can about my own identities and how they influence my subjectivities, as "happening upon them accidentally" could cause harm to someone.

A question I think lends itself to reflecting on my positionality is asking "How do real people navigate landscapes of power?" This question acknowledges that landscapes of power exist and must be named in order to see a situation with clarity and context, but also recognizes that the people experiencing oppression know best how to navigate, resist, dismantle, and reimagine these oppressive systems. I think that it is important to name identity categories and systems, while also exploring how those categories operate in real people's everyday lives. In a class that I took called "Participatory Action with Youth" with Professor Jie Park, I noticed that she would always ask for concrete examples in response to questions about how we feel our identities may impact our interactions with youth. This practice takes identity, research, and systems of power from the abstract, and situates them directly in our lives. Naming that I am a white, cisgender, middle-class, thin, disabled, multilingual woman signals some of the different planes of power and privilege I am navigating, but it says nothing about *how* I am navigating them, and the ways in which they intersect. Making discussions of identity concrete is important as it pushes me to reflect on what it is that I actually do to work towards addressing the myriad of ways that my whiteness creates an

inherent racial power dynamic, and “gets in the way” of my relationships with youth of color. Or, alternatively, how I can actually foreground my identity as a Spanish and English speaker to help strengthen my relationship with youth.

As I consider my positionality and commitments as a researcher, I keep circling back to the notion of surfacing youths' brilliance and curiosity. In the word “surface” there is the built-in assumption that that brilliance and curiosity is already present in all youth. As a researcher, I want to be fully dedicated to finding different ways to surface this brilliance and curiosity, and trust that this process will always look different for every group/individual I work with.

Yet I want to be cautious of the fact that so often, resilience and brilliance are used interchangeably as a way to applaud the ways that low-income youth of color find ways to navigate the structural violence and oppression they face, rather than providing the material support and resources necessary to changing the social conditions that require this resilience in the first place. I am not under the impression that any educator can single handedly change these conditions, especially because when I say material I literally mean material. Multicultural children’s books and literature that helps children see themselves and their language in a story is necessary and always good, but it will not be enough to support a youth who is unhoused and food insecure. Advocating within and beyond the school institution for eviction moratoriums and learning about food justice and sovereignty, alongside donating to the Worcester Free Fridges when possible, would be a start. Reflecting seriously on one’s own assumptions about poor, unhoused people, about people using stigmatized drugs, about mentally ill and formerly incarcerated people, about BIPOC people and trans people, would be a start. Reading books and watching movies on social justice, growing a community garden, having students do self portraits and autobiographies; there are many ways to orient your praxis as an educator towards co-creating liberatory futures with youth, rather than perpetuating and upholding harmful systems and positioning yourself as the only knowledge producer in the room.

Ultimately, I hope to, in the words of academic and writer Billy-Ray Belcourt, to treat others' stories “so as to read and act in the direction of the world it begets,” (Belcourt, 2020, p. 117). I believe in both listening and acting. And then listening again to the ways that the impact of your actions were felt. Constantly adjusting and readjusting to develop a framework of change that honors and works towards genuinely supporting and transforming social conditions for all marginalized youth.

*Sophia*

As I embarked on this research, I worked to navigate my positionality with distinct relationships to space, students, and my co-researcher. I have found that developing an awareness of oneself as a researcher helps to facilitate individual growth and capabilities, as well as produce an authentic relationship with those we research with. For most of my life, this awareness centered around my identity as a cis middle-class woman of color, as these identities have been most prevelant in both constructing my sense of self and my relationships to others. While these identifiers remain critical to my positionality in research, learning more about theoretical approaches to research has deepened my understanding of relationships to others and the lenses I use to look at the world.

My approach to research has consistently aligned with the criticalist philosophical tradition, though it has become more complex as I have grown as a person. For my whole life, my parents were explicit in teaching me about social justice which helped to formulate my world view in a way that "uncovers, examines, and critiques the social, cultural, and psychological assumptions that structure and limit our ways of thinking and being in the world" (Merriam, 2002, pp. 9-10). In this praxis project, the criticalist philosophical tradition is important as it ensured that I was aware of the ways in which power hierarchies are deeply embedded in every institution and relationship. As mentioned, our focus is on the construction of our curriculum and the young people we work with, rather than Clark and our praxis site (Recreation Worcester at the Chandler Magnet School), the two institutions we are working within. Generally, institutions prioritize financial gains, neglect to center the voices of those most marginalized in their space, and lack transparency and inclusivity within their upper administrations. When entering research in these spaces, I was critical of these and other ways in which institutions construct environments that perpetuate harm. However, upon further involvement at our site, my interpretive and post-structuralist (see below) lenses quickly moved to the forefront of my mind.

Throughout the past four years, I have developed more of an interpretive lens as I've interacted more with youth and understood what it meant to be attentive to each of their unique lived experiences. The "use of stories as data" was something I learned to practice in my interactions with people in an effort to truly value their individual narratives (Merriam, 2002, p.9). Though Recreation Worcester does truly impactful work, it is again still an institution that serves primarily youth of color. Thus, my interpretive lens saw my identity as a woman of color as a potential source of support, comfort, and relief for the students with whom we worked. In this aspect, at the start of our research, I felt I was an insider as I shared some meaningful similar experiences with the participants.

While I and the majority of the students were Latine, many of the students were bilingual or only spoke Spanish — something I had not fully considered before entering our site. I don't speak any Spanish outside of a handful of common vocabulary words and it was concerningly presumptuous of me to assume that sharing an ethnic identity would be the only thing that mattered. As it turned out, basic communication was a huge issue as language revealed itself to be a critical component of my and the students' positionality. Therefore, working with the students on an individual level meant that, in this project, critiquing institutions and structures was not my immediate thought. Rather, I was much more focused on working to connect with each students' lived experiences in ways that don't directly involve talking (i.e. playing games, making jokes, body language, etc). While criticalist frameworks both acknowledge macro structural levels and micro individual levels, my headspace was significantly around the students at the individual level.

More recently, I've recognized the significance of post-structuralist theory to really do the work of imagining beyond the realities we've constructed and imagining new knowledges/practices that actually promote equity and justice. I'm intrigued by the post-structuralist framework of "uncertainty, fragmentalism, diversity, and plurality" as a way to not only critique power structures, but also investigate alternative ones (Merriam, 2002, p. 10). After working with Kaila in multiple organizations and projects, I know she is fantastic at bringing this theoretical approach to research. She asks deep and thoughtful questions that push my thinking to embrace the "uncertainty." Together, we have created many successful projects.

Additionally, learning about this philosophical underpinning helped me grapple with my position as an outsider in this praxis project. This language (criticalist, interpretive, post structuralist) is intensely academic and, at the start of this project, I assumed that this clearly demonstrated how the exclusivity of the level of academia Kaila and I have obtained could generate a barrier between us and the students we worked with. Again, because language was such an immediate matter, I became much more concerned with barriers of communication and familiarity. However, I am always amazed by how creative children are when they ask questions and imagine new possibilities or ways of being. As Black feminist scholar bell hooks (1991) states in "Theory as Liberatory Practice", children make some of the best thoerists as they ask "general and fundamental questions" and can "imagine possible futures, [or] a place where life could be lived differently" (pp. 1-2). The students we worked with have found ways to communicate beyond the constrictions of talking — whether it be through body language or working together to translate for one another. As such, I also began to recognize the power of language in its many forms and codes. These children (and all kids) are wholly engaged in post structuralist theory, and it's my

hope that Kaila and I further encouraged their imaginations and ways of being as we worked, talked, and created together.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Introduction*

A curriculum that works to cultivate race-consciousness through the particular methods of dialogue and art must be supported by scholarship which offers both a critical epistemological foundation, as well as research which affirms the significance of engaging in this work with young children. As we developed our curriculum and deepened our understanding of dialogues on race/racism and art as an alternative approach, we utilized a variety of sources which informed the pedagogies, practices, and rationales we employed throughout our praxis project. Many researchers, activists, and scholars have written about how to understand, plan, and successfully implement race dialogues. Furthermore, we sought out not only information on what to do, but also research on why it must be done. This is equally crucial as it exposes the dangerous consequences of neglecting to introduce conversations about race/racism in elementary education and affirms the work we hope to enact. Together, these research elements allowed us to seek out specific academic literature on race-consciousness to produce a meaningful curriculum, as well as pinpoint the gaps in research that our project could potentially address.

### *Intergroup Dialogue in Curricula*

There have been a number of studies and research efforts to point to the fact that children, contrary to a belief that is often portrayed in the school system, start forming judgments around race and racism as young as two years old (Winkler, 2009; Van & Ausdale, 2001; Husband Jr., 2012; Edmonds, 1986). Our research has brought us to conclude that children are aware of race and racism due to the observations and learned behaviors seen around them through research which challenges the notion that children are colorblind (Winkler, 2009). Further, there is a strong correlation between childhood development and learning about race (Van & Ausdale, 2001). And finally, the assumption that children are too young to talk about race can be refuted (Husband Jr., 2012), for example children's books implicitly convey a multitude of messages about race (Edmonds, 1986).

This research has shown that frequent, honest, age-appropriate conversations about race and racial differences are associated with lower-level bias in children, who by two or three years old are already using racial categories to reason about people's behavior (Winkler 2009). Yet despite these studies, educators continue to create "colorblind" curricula that avoid, deny, and undermine the role that race plays in the classroom, as well as the capacity of children and youth to discuss these

topics (Winkler, 2009, p. 5). Much of the research concludes that anti-racist education is a crucial component for educators to bring into the classroom at an early age and some researchers, such as Husband Jr. in "I Don't See Color": Challenging Assumptions about Discussing Race with Young Children," reference curriculum suggestions for early childhood social studies classes (Husband Jr. 2012, p. 367). There were few concrete curricula, or pilot curricula that we came across in our research; rather we'd often find proposed theoretical frameworks for curricula, and specific materials such as children's books and conversation topics. The lack of publicly available, theoretically and conceptually robust curriculum led us to consider the importance of creating a pilot model of the kind of curriculum that could be beneficial in addressing the issues raised in elementary schools surrounding a lack of conversation around race and racism.

In a research study done to investigate the wonders children have about race, scholar Efleda Preclaro Tolentino (2009) found that, "Using their own schema, children were addressing their peers' uncertainties about race. In other words, children were not only *informing* each other of race; they were *transforming* each other's construct of race" (p. 114). Tolentino suggests that in a facilitated dialogic space, children are able to engage in this co-construction and transference of knowledge through each of their unique understandings of how race/racism shows up in their own lives. We see this as critical to our research and foundational to our pedagogy as educators. As Tolentino goes on to confirm, "children's questions about race, ethnicity, and culture remain invisible until we create a space within our environments for them to articulate their inquiries and to explore their working theories of race" (p. 124). Our intended role as facilitators was to support these wonderings by uplifting the knowledge that already exists and offering children the agency to investigate with each other.

Creating a curriculum which puts into practice dialogue and art as methods of approach requires diligence, appropriate frameworks, and intentionality to ensure students are learning constructively. Our training from the course Difficult Dialogues on Race and Racism has strengthened our capacity to construct and facilitate a conversation with distinct dialogic tools. The text we used throughout the course, *Race Dialogues: A Facilitator's Guide to Tackling the Elephant in the Classroom* by Donna Rich Kaplowitz, Shayla Reese Griffin, and Sheri Seyka (2019), is at the heart of our praxis project too as it offers comprehensive lesson plans and key strategies for intergroup dialogue facilitators. The authors emphasize that intergroup dialogue is "a very specific set of practices developed to facilitate conversations between people who have antagonistic socio historical legacies due to unequal social power, stereotypes, implicit and explicit bias, and values" (p. 17). The students we worked with go to a racially diverse school with

predominantly students of color, thus we knew we must be able to employ these specific dialogic practices to help organize our curriculum unit.

Moreover, the lessons this text provides pushed us as facilitators to frame "the dialogic space as a brave space [which] invites participants to take risks, expect discomfort, and view conflict as a learning opportunity" (Kaplowitz et.al 2019, p. 30). Dialogue has the potential to bring up a multitude of different experiences, beliefs, or values, and we wanted the students to feel comfortable engaging with what comes up in whatever way allows them to feel safe while still participating in the conversation. Our decision to volunteer with the students significantly before the start of our research was the primary strategy we used to cultivate a relationship of trust in which the students would feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences. Additionally, based on our lived experiences, we made the deliberate decision to incorporate our own lives and stories into our curriculum in order to model risk taking, potentially uncomfortable topics, and sources of conflict. Relationship building and modeling dialogic behavior are two key strategies we used to help frame our curriculum as a dialogue and, more specifically, demonstrate how to participate in conversations about race and racism.

*Incorporating Art-Based Activities*

Despite heavily incorporating the dialogical tools from *Race Dialogues,* we also sought to adapt them to our specific needs through introducing arts-based activities into our pilot program. The book is designed to facilitate dialogue in high school and college classrooms, and lesson plans and guides rely on ideas and opinions being communicated through speaking, as well as writing. This assumption poses two challenges for our particular research. The first is concerned with age, and the second is concerned with language access. We worked with 8-13 year olds at an afterschool program that minimally incorporates academics through homework support and, rather, is more focused on children having fun through sports, art, and extracurricular activities[5]. Given this reality, we knew it was unlikely that extensive writing or projects would be the most engaging activity for participants as that would feel more like a homework assignment than an opportunity for meaningful self expression. Our second challenge, which relates to our research questions developed after completing our curriculum (*What multilingual practices can we implement that allow for meaning-making for all participants? How do we mitigate the inherent power imbalances of translation, while also recognizing the positive potential translation has in multilingual spaces?*), was that the majority of participants were bilingual or spoke Spanish as their first language and did not speak English at a conversational level. As mentioned, this became

[5] See our later sections "Visits Leading Up to Curriculum" and "Traversing Transitions" for further detail.

especially important considering that race and racism are already personal and often intense topics that are difficult for people to discuss[6].

For these reasons, we also drew from scholarship surrounding the benefit of art in multilingual education, such as Daniel & Huizenga-McCoy's (2014) piece "Art as a Medium for Bilingualism and Biculturalism: Suggestions from the Research Literature." Daniel & Huizenga-McCoy point to the fact that art is often taught as something that is decontextualized and apolitical, rather than deeply intertwined with race, history, culture, geography, and language. They assert that "infusing the visual arts into elementary school curricula offers a safe place for second language learners to express, formulate ideas, and become interested in a topic without depending as heavily on their language level" (Daniel & Huizenga-McCoy, 2014, p. 173). Although the book *Race Dialogues,* and the course Difficult Dialogues on Race and Racism incorporated visual elements to enhance instruction, such as mind-maps and timelines, we worked to center art in our curriculum by making it the primary means of communication for exploring values and racial perceptions. Our activities included drawing our families to bring up conversations around skin color and different features in our families, as well as creating a group mural to encourage participants to locate the inequalities in their school and envision how they wish the educational system was different.

Despite recognizing that art can act as a way to minimize spoken language barriers and communicate through alternative methods, Daniel and Huizenga-McCoy do not assume that art-making happens in a vacuum. Dialogue and art, especially with the added complexity (as well as enrichment) of multilingualism, are also powerfully intertwined and build off each other in ways that are important to explore. Scholars Korza, Assaf and Bacon researched the ways in which dialogic processes have long been foundational to the creative methodologies of community-based artists, especially those working in theater (Korza et al., 2002). They draw on examples from community-based cultural work and concepts of civic dialogue, and assert that art can be viewed as a tool to explore multiple perspectives as well as serving as a space and invitation into and for civic dialogues. It is important to note that they are specifically focused on "civic dialogue," which is more concerned with the duties and activities of people in relation to their town, city, or local area and is explicitly political. The dialogue in our curriculum was not framed in this way, but our hope was that connections could be drawn between the personal and political through conversation and reflection on the art pieces created. As the authors write, "Art is often effective because it explores what is unresolved or in conflict between people or even within an individual. Art can humanize civic issues, bringing forward the human impact and

[6] See our later sections "Language, Translation, and Meaning-Making" for more detail.

implications," (Korza, et al., 2002, p. 10).

*Surfacing Knowledge*

There is existing research on the importance of dialogue and curriculum surfacing knowledge that youth already hold about the given topic. For example, Aldana, Richards-Schuster, & Checkoway (2016) researched how the intergroup dialogue approach can be used to engage different young people from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in PAR (Participatory Action Research). They establish three dialogic stages: (1) group formation and relationship building, (2) exploration of differences and commonalities, 3) discussion of controversial issues, and 4) action planning and alliance building. At the heart of the first stage is youth seeing themselves as experts in their communities, building trust, seeing where everyone is at in terms of their understandings around systems of race and racism. This activity also emphasized the importance of not only highlighting what participants know but also what they *don't* know, and that to do this in a way that feels supportive it is important to create a culture where curiosity and question-asking is the standard.

In our curriculum design, we adopted similar frameworks to Aldana, Richards-Schuster, & Checkoway, only applied to a younger age-group with less of an emphasis on PAR, as well as far less time to achieve our lesson goals. We hoped to surface the knowledge children already hold about race, racism, and identity given their lived experiences and the environments they exist in (school, home, neighborhood, country, etc). Our second research question (*How does having an explicit race dialogue surface the knowledge 8-13 year olds already hold about race in their own lives and in their communities?*) brought us to studies like Adrianna Alvarez's (2016) "Experiential Knowledge as Capital and Resistance among Families from Mexican Immigrant Backgrounds" which explores why it is critical to value the experiential knowledge of families from Mexican immigrant backgrounds as well as the ways in which this knowledge works to resist systematic power structures in our society. We use Alvarez's (2016) definition of experiential knowledge as "the validation of the experiences of people of color as knowledge and strengths, and integrates these specifically in methods of sharing that challenge racism" (Solórzano, 1997, pp. 1-2), to inform this component of our research. While Alvarez' article is specific to Mexican immigrant families, and our focus is just on youth and includes any racial background, we found that her definition and central arguments/theories within the research were in alignment with our praxis. Additionally, Alvarez confirms that using pedagogy which celebrates these students' experiential knowledge and sees it as an indispensable form of capital has the potential to facilitate radical change in the classroom.

Black feminist scholar bell hooks' article titled "Theory As Liberatory Practice" has also helped to structure our rationale for embarking on praxis that centers experiential knowledge. hooks researched the opportunities for (analyzing, creating) theory as a way to strive towards or enact liberation. As mentioned in Sophia's positionality piece, hooks writes that children make some of the best theorists as they ask "general and fundamental questions" and can "imagine possible futures, [or] a place where life could be lived differently" (hooks 1991, pp. 1-2). The ages of students we facilitated have this capacity to ask provocative, thoughtful questions and to envision a more just society as a result of their current positionality and experiences in the world around them. This quote emphasizes the importance of allowing space for children to be seen as theorists and have their knowledge validated by us and each other. However, hook's piece does not directly connect to our research in that the bulk of the article considers theory as liberatory more generally, rather than examining how children specifically engage in theoretical conversations. As such, we envisioned our final art project with the children — to imagine their ideal school — as a way to strive towards filling this gap in research as we sought to uplift the voices/experiences of children from children.

Furthermore, this project aimed to resist and confront popular rhetoric that kids should not yet be discussing race/racism as well as the general hesitancy around explicit anti-racist teaching. In "Teaching Anti-Bias Curriculum in Teacher Education Programs: What and How," Lin, Lake, and Rice (2008) researched how "implementing a diversity curriculum may not be easy because of the fear, uncertainty, or discomfort of many teachers and teacher educators" when engaging with anti-bias curriculum work in their classrooms (p. 188). While this article mostly focuses on teacher training rather than the impact this work has on the children themselves, — again contributing to gaps in literature coming from youth as co-producers of theory and knowledge — it directly exemplifies our belief that it is vital for teachers to be actively implementing anti-racist curricula. The authors write that "the aim of anti-bias education is inclusion, positive self-esteem for all, empathy, and activism in the face of injustice" (p. 189), which cannot be understood exclusively in the theoretical realm, but rather must involve consistent action in and outside of the classroom. Our praxis served to put into practice this knowledge and ideally demonstrate how to not only incorporate, but center, anti-racist teachings with young children. hooks (1991) further affirms this notion as she writes that when "our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice," (p. 2). The reflexivity our project involves lended itself towards "collective liberation" and a space in which theories on anti-racism and activism relating to its use in the classroom happen simultaneously.

*Meaning-Making and Evaluating Meaning Making*

Centering experiential knowledge that participants possess in regards to race and racism and how it operates at a personal, as well as communal, level was vital to the formation and implementation of our curriculum. Yet, we were also hoping that we could work to understand and evaluate not only what participants know before and during our pilot curriculum, but also gain an understanding of the value and meaning they gained from the experience, if any. This brought us to our decisions to uplift children's experiential knowledge and investigate the question: *What can we learn from the implementation of our curriculum about what makes race dialogues meaningful to 8-13 year olds?* There is a body of scholarship around this concept of "meaning-making" specifically in an educational context, which also addresses that to try and measure meaning, there has to be a way for research to explore how we *know* something is meaningful. Our study is connected to Paugh (2015), Zepke & Leach (2002) and Franco, Ward & Unrath (2012) who all focus on researching meaning-making in educational settings.

Meaning-Making as Multilayered: Zepke & Leach (2002) outline important ways to help us understand meaning-making, in that it is always contextualized and multilayered. The first layer exposes the immediate experience of a group in a formal learning setting, and the second layer is concerned with underpinnings: the beliefs, values, emotions and attitudes of those participating. A "teacher" can surface these for richer discussion, but this teacher does not have to be the facilitator or recognized instructor; a teacher can be a classmate, a stranger, a work of art, etc. The third layer is concerned with what the authors call the "unheard voices group" which are people who are part of historically excluded groups in dialogic and educational settings. In our research, we incorporated opportunities for individual learning such as individual family drawings, but the primary focus was on this contextualized meaning-making that happens in relation to others. As Zepke & Leach emphasize, there is a place for individual learning, but this can be limited and lead to people narrowing their scope of knowledge by only working within the bounds of the rational "self".

Meaning-Making as Textured: Patricia Paugh's research on relational dynamics in a predominantly Black and Latine fourth grade classroom is also of particular relevance to our focus. She asserts that, "If schools are to prepare students to engage in the social, academic, economic, and political demands of the world, the curriculum must be meaningful and relevant to them and allow their learning to contribute to the well-being of community life (Paugh, 2015, p. 133). Paugh works alongside a fourth grade teacher in an urban classroom setting over the course of 6 years and conducts a deep analysis of the communication, both verbal and non-verbal, between students and

their classmates, as well as students and their teacher. Although our pilot program took place over a significantly shorter period of time, we adopted similar methods to Paugh in that we recorded and coded all our sessions as well as marked points at which participants and/or facilitators openly shared their experiences. This may indicate that the conversation is "textured," a term referenced by Paugh and borrowed from Hasan (1985). The term "textured" refers to "what meanings were created through the interactions of discourses in a classroom literacy discussion and how those meanings interacted with the larger social context in which the talk occurred" (Paugh, 2015, p. 144). This is especially crucial, in that we worked to get direct feedback on how the art-based activities in our curriculum were perceived by the participants through interviews.

Meaning-Making and Art: There is literature specifically that connects meaning-making to art, such as Franco, Ward & Unrath (2012) who identify, relationship, story, celebration, and identity as the four avenues of meaning making. Students were asked to contemplate the meanings of ubiquitous items and then had to write the stories they might tell about the object. The authors were hesitant to make any grandiose claims as their curriculum is in its primary stages, but based on the high-quality and engaged responses written by students, they concluded they were relatively successful in drawing connections between art and meaning for students.

Additionally, Silvia Rodriguez Vega is an educator and researcher who developed art-centered methodological and pedagogical tools specifically designed to serve those who work with Latine immigrant children and under-resourced populations, a mirror of many of the students we worked with. Her work significantly impacted our approach to this research as it demonstrated the impacts child-produced art can have for both the people observing the art and the children themselves. Vega begins her research by creating a space for participants to talk through what issues most impact their lives, and after establishing patterns and common concerns, introduces the art activities, in her case Image Theater and Self-Portraiture, to express these concerns through creative outlets. She found that artistic and expressive methods were particularly beneficial when working with children who have experienced trauma, as there are meditative, reflective, and innately healing properties to the art-making experience (Vega, 2018, p. 136). Considering the trauma of race and racism for youth, including art in our curriculum also gave space to address this, and provided a way for students who may be less comfortable with verbal communication, or who have a language barrier with the rest of the group, to express themselves and engage with the content of the curriculum.

There are overlapping goals and ways of understanding and measuring meaning-making between

our research and that of Paugh, Vega, and Franco, Ward & Unrat. An important distinction in the way we assessed meaning-making is that in addition to classroom observations, we conducted interviews with participants. This was to try and get a sense of what aspects of the curriculum and activities held significance for them. We understand that there are many reasons, due to age, language, and racial power dynamics (among other factors) why participants may not have given their honest feedback, but we hope to have discerned to some extent what the participants in our curriculum found meaningful in order to reveal what practices best help cultivate a rich dialogue on race/racism.

There is a unified consensus in the literature that we encountered that asserts that conversations about race are important in the classroom, and that it's necessary that they happen at an early age considering how quickly children pick up on the ways race structures every aspect of our society and interpersonal relationships. Yet there was no specific consensus within the literature reviewed about what the best methods are for bringing up these conversations with youth. Many sources pointed to how diversifying the children's literature in the classroom can help create dialogue around race, especially with younger age groups (Edmonds, L., 1986). Other researchers dug deep into the ways that intergroup dialogue, specifically in a space representing a variety of racial identities, can help students work towards more just school spaces and communities (Kaplowitz et.al 2019). We also came across a wide span of research on art as a tool for communication, as well as a generator of dialogue, as well as examples of meaning-making in the classroom and how educators and researchers have worked together to understand and operationalize how meaning is constructed in their classrooms.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: What ideas does our research grow out of?**

Our theoretical framework is reflective of the larger, core assumptions we enter our work with. It is a crucial moment to pause and clearly communicate not only how we are interpreting and operationalizing the key concepts of our research, but how we got to this understanding through works of established theory. In the words of researcher Margo Okazawa-Rey, our conceptual frameworks are the ideologies that "shape the kinds of truth we believe are possible" (Okazawa-Rey, 2009, p. 213). As Okazawa-Rey does in her research, we hoped to challenge dominant epistemologies rooted in racism and patriarchy, and critically explore what it means to be knowledge producers and the ways that knowledge is socially and historically constructed. Our research questions are direct outputs from this thinking process, and are informed by specifically Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth and Critical Multiliteracies.

Arriving at a theoretical framework for our research was a long process spurred by constant questioning, of ourselves and for each other. What did we feel was lacking in our own elementary education that prompted us to want to make a dialogic curriculum around race and racism? How would we ensure that our participants did not find talking about the topic of race and racism boring, but stayed engaged and got meaning from the program? These broader questions led to even more inquiries. What is it that makes a program meaningful? Are we concerned whether it is meaningful to the majority of the group, or are we only concerned with it being meaningful to at least a couple students? How are we going to go about measuring what is meaningful? How do others measure it? You may notice, as we began to, that there were certain recurring terms or keywords that were clearly important to our research, in this case the concept of "meaning," which is often how we would arrive at our research questions.

*Community Cultural Wealth*

Coined by Tara J. Yosso, Community Cultural Wealth serves as a grounding epistemology of the work we did related to surfacing knowledge and helped inform many of the decisions we made both before and during the implementation of our curriculum. Using Critical Race Theory[7] within education as a lens, this term seeks to challenge traditional theories around cultural wealth through six often unacknowledged strengths, specifically students of color hold in each space their in (particularly within school). Traditional theories suggest that white communities are culturally wealthy and communities of color are culturally poor. Rather, Yosso explains that cultural capital instead must point to the ways in which *certain* cultural knowledge is more *valued* by white supremacy. To contend with the deficit narratives especially around children of color, Yosso (2014) names Aspirational capital, Linguistic capital, Familial capital, Social capital, Navigational capital and Resistant capital [*see Figure 1*] as six notable funds of knowledge students of color embody. Later in this paper, we will further explore how these "forms of capital draw on the knowledge Students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom" (p.82). While we do not examine each form of capital in detail, we will draw from some to specifically connect this theory to a given claim — nevertheless, the theory as a whole is central to our praxis project.

When unpacking how this framework relates to our research, it's important to additionally break down key terms, such as how we're understanding the concept of culture. Yosso defines culture as

[7] Critical Race Theory (CRT) "is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses," (Yosso 2014, p.70). See Ladson-Billings, G. (1998) Preparing teachers for diverse student populations: a critical race theory perspective, *Review of Research in Education,* 24, 211–247 for more information on CRT within education.

"behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people… [it's] evidenced in material and nonmaterial productions of a people, and the characteristics of a culture are neither fixed nor static" (Yosso, 2006, p. 75). For the purpose of our research, we used this definition as well. We worked to surface the knowledge youth already have about race and racism from their own lives, and work to find patterns within their cultural knowledge and connect it to larger frameworks of thinking. Evidently, when forming our second research question, *"How does having an explicit race dialogue surface the knowledge 8-13 year olds already hold about race in their own lives and in their communities?,"* we utilized Yosso's work as she outlined the various funds of knowledge students of color enter a space with. Moreover, she directs attention to understanding this as *valuable* knowledge, rather than dominant deficit frames around children of color.

Children's cultural knowledge continuously evolves and is informed by their environments, socialization, and schooling. Our research aimed to support this evolution as we worked to recognize their knowledge as wealth that has immense value and can teach us so much about how they interpret our radicalized world (meaning, the world which we live in that is historically, politically, and socially constructed by race). As referenced in the literature review, Tolentino (2009) investigates the wonderings that children have about race and reveals the importance of recognizing how children co-construct knowledge about race. To create an environment in which this generative co-constructed learning can occur, we knew we had to approach our work in ways that counter deficit mindsets and instead adopt what researcher Adrianna Alvarez (2020) names as "strength-based approaches that have advocated for a pedagogical shift toward meaningful instruction to be crafted around students' experiences and knowledge" (p.1). Our pedagogy had to center and celebrate what the students entered the space with and intentionally attempt to not only recognize this, but also encourage students to see themselves as intelligent "educators." This involved utilizing children's experiential knowledge which refers to "the validation of the experiences of people of color as knowledge and strengths, and integrates these specifically in methods of sharing that challenge racism" (Alvarez, 2020, p.2). Each person is rich with expertise cultivated from their individual lives that, when placed in conversation with others, can produce such an effective and lively dialogue in which we all learn from one another.

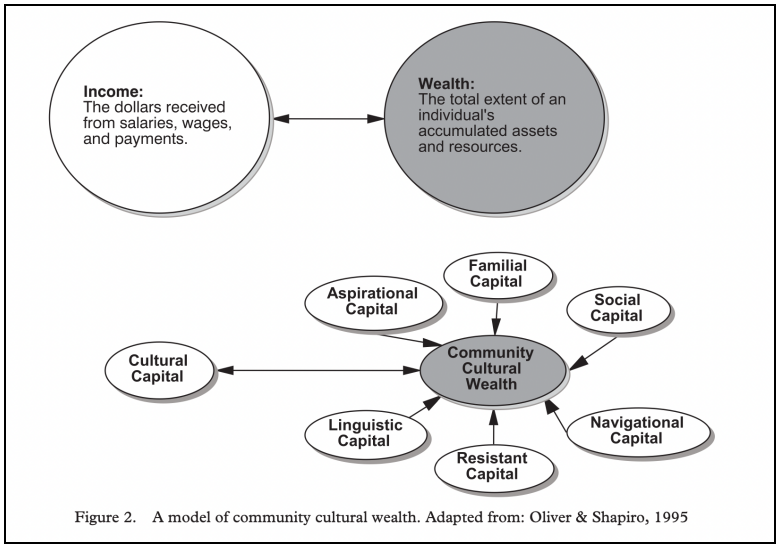



**Figure 1:** Visual of six components within Community Cultural Wealth

*Critical Multiliteracies*

The second theory we are drawing from is Critical Multiliteracies, coined by New London Group, a group of educators who got together in New London, New Hampshire in the mid-1990s to discuss the state of literacy pedagogy. The text that resulted from this gathering, titled "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures" has become a cornerstone for both researchers and educators. The article has been heavily used and cited in doctoral programs, edited volumes, books, journal reviews, and calls for conference papers, and has been viewed in many ways as a guiding document to the new literacies movement (Leander & Bolt, 2013, p.23).

The New London Group seeks to broaden the understanding of literature and literacy beyond what they refer to as "mere literacy" which remains centered only on a singular national form of language which is presented as a rigid system based on mastering rules. Because of these rules, it's assumed that there are "correct" and "incorrect" ways to use language, which translates to "a more or less authoritarian kind of pedagogy" (Cazden, et al. 1996, p.64). In contrast, multiliteracies deepen our understanding of literacy beyond formalized, monolingual, monocultural and rule-governed in two ways, the first by accounting for the cultural and linguistic diversity in our schools and worlds, and second through including visual, audio, spatial, behavioral and gestural in our understanding literacy (Cazden, et al. 1996, p.61).

The article moves to the "what" (what it is that students need to learn) and the "how" (range of appropriate learning relationships) of Critical Multiliteracies, and creates a metalanguage based solely on the concept of "design". This concept, although used differently in the context of

multiliteracies, immediately felt familiar to our research as designing and redesigning a pilot curriculum has been central to our project. As the group states “The notion of design connects powerfully to the sort of creative intelligence the best practitioners need in order to be able, continually, to re-design their activities in the very act of practice. It connects as well to the idea that learning and productivity are the results of the designs (the structures) of complex systems of people, environments, technology, beliefs, and texts.” (Cazden, et al. 1996, p.71). When reflecting on how we built our curriculum and considering the ways that it would be interacted with, we thought critically about this concept of design and how we can construct something that is meaningful to ourselves, as well as to the participants.

When it comes to linguistic design and making meaning from linguistics, there are many well-known elements of design that people use to communicate, as well as use to analyze communication such as delivery (features of intonation, stress, rhythm, accent, etc.), vocabulary and metaphor (colocation, lexicalization, and word meaning) and information structures (how information is presented in clauses and sentences). Yet, through Critical Multiliteracies, we also seek to consider designs for other modes of meaning. These include but are not limited to Visual Meanings (images, colors, composition) Spatial Meanings (the meanings of environmental spaces, architectural spaces), Gestural Meanings (body language, dance), and Multimodal Meanings (Cazden, et al. 1996, p.80). In the context of Critical Multiliteracies and our research, Multimodal is the most significant, as it relates to all the other modes, as the New London Group states “In a profound sense, all meaning-making is multimodal.” (p.81). In our pilot curriculum, we seek to incorporate Multimodal meanings through using not only dialogue for communication, but also art, body language, and photographs.

Art is especially central to our curriculum, as we wanted to create additional pathways for self-expression and communication beyond dialogue. We were inspired specifically by the work of Silvia Rodriguez Vega, the educator and researcher referenced in our literature review who developed art-centered methodological and pedagogical tools specifically with Latine immigrant children. Her work showcases that art can be a transformative medium for children — as she states: “Educators and researchers should include artistic and expressive methods when working with children and develop new methodologies that include performative and visual epistemologies" (Vega, 2018, p. 124). Although she doesn’t explicitly reference Critical Multiliteracies as a framework for centering art in her teaching, she is aligned with the goals of validating and affirming alternative modes of communication and meaning-making beyond linguistics. It’s also important to note that the population she is working with, Latine immigrant

children, is very similar to the children we worked with for our curriculum, and demonstrates how Critical Multiliteracies can be an especially crucial lens when considering language and cultural differences.

As the theory of Critical Multiliteracies has taken root in educational research and spaces, the "how" of Critical Multiliteracies has remained central as many people want to better learn how to incorporate this pedagogy into practice in their classroom. The ways we think about meaning-making also inform our role as facilitators in the classroom. The work of Zepke and Leach (2014) delves into this dynamic by pointing to the fact that meaning-making is always contextualized, which is a key tenet of Critical Multiliteracies. Although Zepke and Leach (2014) are not explicitly drawing from or speaking to literacy pedagogy, by situating additional scholars in conversation with the work of the New London Group we seek to demonstrate how many scholars and educators are considering the expansion of how we understand communication.

The work of Zepke and Leach (2014) helps us consider our role as facilitators when it comes to supporting meaning-making. They discuss how when constructing meaning, learners are in some way always connected to other people and contexts. This connection can be through family, their past, the media, reading, conversations with acquaintances, or observations of interactions between strangers, etc. Through the activities in our curriculum, which vary from discussion-based to reflective, we hoped to create an environment where students are encouraged to think more critically about these connections they make in their everyday lives, and what their context, or location is and how this influences what is meaningful to them. Having a teacher guide these conversations so that learners have support interpreting their experiences is important, but like Zepke and Leach, we hoped to expand the notion of who is a "teacher," beyond the two of us, and emphasize that a teacher can be another learner, an author, or anyone else in our lives.

Both critical multiliteracies and Community Cultural Wealth simultaneously informed how we interpreted data and drew conclusions. When examined in relation to each other, these theoretical frameworks reveal a recurring theme in our ideological stance: positioning youth as valuable knowledge producers whom we are learning *with*, rather than teaching to. Within this overarching assumption was our desire to then learn from how our participants engaged with different aspects of our curriculum, and what content was the most conducive to learning they found meaningful.

**METHODOLOGY**

Methodology is "a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed," (Nordstrom,

2015, p.92), and there are many, often overlapping, methodologies that researchers can adopt. Throughout this project, we used Practitioner Inquiry, which is broadly defined as research conducted by individuals who also work — or practice — at the site of study (Nordstrom 2015, p. 95). Inquiry, which is often used interchangeably with stance, represents "a worldview and habit of mind" that prompts practitioners to continually reflect on their practices with the end goal of improving educational outcomes in specific contexts (Nordstrom, 2015, p. 95), in our case curriculum that centers race and racism for 8-13 year olds. Through the process of designing and implementing a curriculum, we had to reflect on the strategies and assumptions that underlie our choices, which led to adjusting those choices when necessary as we disrupted and further questioned our assumptions.

Practitioner inquiry describes the ways in which we see our research as a cyclical, rather than linear process. This is central to the tenets of praxis projects, which we have come to understand as a process that involves first identifying and theorizing a problem at a particular site, taking action to address the problem, and then reflecting on this process and its impact on those at your site. This connects directly to what Sharon M. Ravitch, a researcher at the University of Pennsylvania writes regarding practitioner inquiry wherein, "questions emerge from practice and then practitioners design research studies to collect and analyze practice-based data that respond to these questions within their organizational or communal contexts" (Ravitch, 2014, p. 6).

We sought for this cyclical process to be generative and central to our conception of how we learned as teachers through this research. To make sense of this, we turned to the work of Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (1999), who have done considerable research on teacher learning and "Communities of Inquiry" with teachers. They distinguish between three concepts, first what is referred to as "knowledge-*for*-practice," where it is assumed that university-based researchers generate formal, or theoretical knowledge that is then used to improve practice. The second is "knowledge-*in*-practice" where it is assumed that teachers learn when they have the opportunity to dig into what is referred to as "practical" knowledge, which is embedded in practice and can be studied through interactions in the classroom. Although these two concepts have the cyclical nature of Practitioner Inquiry mentioned above, they draw a clear separation between "formal," and "practical" knowledge when it comes to teacher learners, which is why we aimed to disrupt this separation by moving toward the third concept outlined by Cochran-Smith and Lyttle, "knowledge-*of*-practice." From this perspective, it is assumed that the knowledge teachers need to teach well is generated when "they generate local knowledge of practice by working within the contexts of inquiry communities to theorize and construct their work and to connect it to larger

social, cultural, and political issues." (Cochran-Smith & Lyttle, 1999, p. 250). Through this idea of "knowledge-*of*-practice" we viewed our site as a place for investigation while also synthesizing and interrogating theory alongside what we learned.

Although our methodology differs from Youth Participatory Action Research, which directly involves youth in all aspects of research from developing research questions to data collection and analysis, we have incorporated collaboration among and across participants within our methodology. Philosopher of education, John Dewey, touched upon this collaborative nature of Practitioner Inquiry in his writings, as he conceived inquiry as "transactional, open-ended, and inherently social" (quoted in Schon, 1992, p.122). We worked as co-researchers in the creation of our curriculum, as well as with a group of participants whose engagement with the curriculum was the primary factor on which we based our assessment and adjusted our content and strategies. We have taken the time in our conceptual framework to describe how "meaning-making" is the lens through which we are interpreting engagement, and will review in the data analysis section how we operationalized this concept.

We also drew from critical qualitative research, of which Practitioner Inquiry is within, which "uncovers, examines, and critiques the social, cultural and psychological assumptions that structure and limit our ways of thinking and being in the world" (Merriam, 2002, p. 9). We wanted to ask questions that center the influence of race, class, and gender, as well as other intersections, and explore how these power relations advance the interests of some groups while oppressing others. (p.10). Given that complex concepts like race, racism, and identity are the focus of our study, this form of research is best supportive of our endeavors and allows for a concrete foundation with which our data can be most effectively examined.

*Data: Sources, Collection Methods, and Management*

Our methods of data collection involved a variety of approaches to ensure we cover as much ground as possible to generate a well rounded project. With the curriculum creation and practitioner inquiry component, we used audio recordings and analytic memos. We audio recorded ourselves each time we met to discuss and produce the curriculum unit together either over zoom or in person through a smartphone recording app. After audio recording, we split the time in half for each of us to transcribe as this allowed us to look back at exactly what was discussed, how sections of the curriculum were formulated, and the rationale for each decision. We highlighted key decisions, ideas, and analyses as a part of the transcription process to keep track of the data. Each of us also wrote a few analytic memos after meeting to discuss curriculum creation to

document our thoughts individually. We used Google Documents to keep track of our analytic memos and keep them to be reviewed after the unit was complete. For both transcribed audio recordings and the analytic memos, we made sense of the raw data individually then analyzed it together to draw conclusions about our curriculum design.

We used audio recordings, collected artifacts and documents from the children, and conducted interviews to gather data on the curriculum implementation (see Table 1). Each method had a distinct purpose and involved slightly unique processes to gather a wide range of information from a variety of scales/sources.

Table 1

| *Data Collection Method* | *Explanation* | *Rationale* | *Challenges/Limitations* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Audio Recordings** | Throughout each session, we placed the recording device in the middle of the table and began the recording for the entirety of the 30 minutes.<br><br>We split up listening to and transcribing the two sessions and four interviews. To locate specific/significant data, we highlighted and coded key findings after the transcription process. | Audio recordings produced a general narrative which helped us understand/contextualize specific stand out moments within the larger session. These moments included questions asked, talk between students, talk between students and the two of us, and whole group conversations which affirmed, countered, or raised noticings relating to our research questions. | Despite our best efforts, audio recordings did not capture all the voices in the room and, when working on art projects, we frequently spoke at the same time – especially when Kaila translated into Spanish and Sophia was speaking English. Thus, we missed some comments/questions from the students.<br><br>One non-consenting participant only came during the curriculum unit and often contributed to the conversation, however we could not use their words in our research which made the transcripts slightly confusing to read. |
| **Artifact Collection** | We collected the students' artwork after they finished, scanned it, and returned it back to them the following session. However, the majority of students were content to be finished with their work and did not ask for their drawings back. There were a total of two art projects that were used to inform our research.<br><br>*Art* -- (1) Students were asked to draw an image of their families and were encouraged to think about different skin colors, hair | We collected student work because we wanted to observe how youth utilize art to interpret our conversations and the concepts we discussed (race/racism, identity, culture, etc.).<br><br>This method works on a more individual scale as it illuminates how each student understood the art activity, what they learned, and their way of engaging with the content through this alternative educational approach. As | While artwork and writing may have served as a successful alternative outlet for some students, others were uninterested or rushed their family drawings. This could be because they found the projects frustrating as they do not enjoy art, it's challenging for them, or they were upset that they could not complete their work in the way they wanted to. Two students crumpled up and tried to throw away their drawings because of their frustration with how it turned out. They both tried again and one of them eventually was satisfied with |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | textures/colors, etc in their families; (2) As our final project, we asked students to all participate in a group mural. We drew an outline of their school and asked them "What do you wish your teachers knew about your identity?" and "What would you change about your school?" as prompting questions for the mural. The students then proceeded to fill in the outline of Chandler Magnet with their ideal imagined school. | explained at the start of this paper, art functions as an outlet for students who may not be comfortable or able to express their thoughts through dialogue. | their final drawing. |
| **Interviews** | We audio-recorded and transcribed interviews with ⅘ of the consenting students following the curriculum unit in a separate table from the rest of the students. The students also had the option to do their interview in Spanish with Kaila. One participant who primarily spoke Spanish opted to do this.<br><br>We asked: 1) What did you enjoy most about the activities we did? Why? 2) What is one thing you learned during our time together? 3) Will you please describe your artwork? 4) Is there anything you wish we had talked about?<br><br>Depending on the responses of the student, we asked additional prompting questions. For example, "Can you say more?" when a student gave one word answers, or, if a student had a lot to say, we asked the participant questions relating to their answer. | Interviewing helped generate feedback about the work we did together and summarize participants' experiences throughout the three sessions. We asked about the art projects we did, how students created their work, their overall experience in the unit, what they liked/disliked, and what they felt was missing. | As mentioned, some students gave one-word or one sentence answers to our interview questions which meant we do not get as holistic of an understanding of that student's experience. Additionally, students may have felt intimidated or pressured to respond positively, rather than give honest answers.<br><br>Interviews occurred the week following the curriculum unit and oftentimes children have difficulty recalling what happened when it is far from the time they participated. As such, some interviewees may not have been able to give as in-depth responses as we hoped. |

Data Analysis

To analyze and process our data, we worked collaboratively to explore the narratives our raw data produced. As we moved from "concrete descriptions of observable data to a somewhat more abstract level," we searched for and coded crucial "concepts to describe phenomena" that connected to our research questions (Merriam 2002, p.188). However, coding the data we collected on the creation of our curriculum was done separately from data collected from the implementation of the curriculum. For each component, we first went through all transcriptions,

scanned artwork, and analytic memos, to pick out key findings/patterns across this data — essentially similar questions, ideas, experiences, stories, etc that could be identified multiple times. With curriculum implementation, we each synthesized meaningful findings through our transcribed meetings and analytic memos which helped us structure and work through data analysis. For the curriculum implementation component, we created a comprehensive chart to display the many factors which contributed to the codes, categories, and subsequent themes we eventually made (see Table 2).

Moreover, as we worked to reduce the data, we used a few crucial strategies to attempt to avoid exclusively selecting data that supports our thesis because, as qualitative researcher Dey (2003) writes, "we tend to make more of the evidence that confirms our beliefs, and pay less attention to any evidence that contradicts them" (p. 230). It is easier and truthfully more exciting to point to data which showcases the outcomes we hoped and/or imagined, therefore it was important to us to create a structure to reduce what we've collected in a more thoughtful/deliberate way. The following approaches to data reduction/analysis significantly helped us to work through the data and strive towards an objective lens:

1. Cross referencing – It was a huge benefit to work together as there are consistently two people with distinct backgrounds/experiences (see section on Positionality and Identity). As we analyzed data, we were able to check in with one another after we worked independently.
2. Attention to both patterns and discrepancies across the data collection methods – All the students who consented, consented to every form of data, so we were able to trace connections or see differences in each method of data collection.
3. Locating key words/ideas used regardless of the context – Terms like race, racism, identity, family, culture, etc. stood out as relevant to this study and were analyzed even if they didn't work in alignment with the story we hoped to tell.

<u>Coding Process</u>

Our methods worked simultaneously to provide multiple perspectives as well as reveal varying connections, patterns, and surprises within the data (Moss and Haertel, 2016). We each went through the data to scan for recurring concepts, interactions, shared stories (from both us and the participants), and facilitation moves, and spoke together to determine which felt most significant. For example, when we met to discuss our coding process, we recognized that, if we hadn't done interviews, we would not have known that students particularly enjoyed the mural art activity

because of the freedom they were given to add anything they wanted or change something they wished was different about their school. Instead, if we were to only interpret the artifact itself, we could've overlooked the mural and assumed that the students were not as interested in this project because they did not label explicit differences. Coding both the transcribed interviews and audio recordings together unveiled this consistent response to the project and informed the code "Identifying issue and offering solution," (see coding scheme below). It was essential that we analyze each aspect of our data with this level of criticality so as to work towards a fully comprehensive understanding. As such, to analyze the artwork students created, we similarly met to discuss questions like: "What do we see?" "What is happening?" "Why is it happening?" "How does this relate to ___ research question?" "How does this relate to ___ [key concept]?" This process helped to uncover ideas we did not initially predict, surfaced questions left unanswered, and pushed us to be attentive to data that existed outside of any code we'd written for the transcriptions.

Once our codes were established, we determined which findings felt most "responsive to the purpose of the research" and placed these into "mutually exclusive" categories (Merriam 2002, p.185). We also used the key constructs from our conceptual framework (meaning-making, Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2006), and art as an alternative approach) to inform the codes and subsequent categories and themes we produced. All sections work in conversation with our research questions which are, again, as follows: (1) What can we learn from the implementation of our curriculum about what makes race dialogues meaningful to 8-13 year olds? (2) How does having an explicit race dialogue surface the knowledge 8-13 year olds already hold about race in their own lives and in their communities? (3) How do 8-13 year olds respond to the art-centered activities in our curriculum? And/or — our more recently added questions — (4) What multilingual practices can we implement that allow for meaning-making for *all* participants? And (5) How do we mitigate the inherent power imbalances of translation, while also recognizing the positive potential translation has in multilingual spaces?

Some codes and categories affirmed and others contended with our research questions. For example, the code "C7: Participants share personal experiences relating to race" directly relates to our second research question on surfacing knowledge as the students demonstrated an understanding of racialization from their own lived experiences. On the other hand, the first code "C1: Shortened/different information in Spanish" contends with the final research question on utilizing multilingual practices that are generative, as it illuminates moments in which we rushed translation rather than integrate it carefully. However, though this code does not work to answer

what constructive translation looks like, it pushes a critical lens on the realities of our research and thus fostered a more holistic, honest and useful analysis.

Additionally, given that data analysis is "inductive and comparative," we considered any and all relational qualities of the categories and how they could be better understood collectively (Merriam 2002, p.185). We first worked individually to grapple with the relationality of our categories as we each have our own subjectivities that impacted how we understood the data. In this individual process, we also made note of these biases/lenses and their role in influencing our analyses. Then, we met to think through our findings together and link both of our analyses in a meaningful way.

Table 2: From Codes to Categories to Themes

The following is a table which exemplifies how we synthesized our codes into categories, and, subsequently, into themes:

| CODES | CATEGORIES | THEMES |
|---|---|---|
| C1: Shortened/different information in Spanish<br><br>C1.5: Translation to Spanish<br><br>C2: Spanish conversation in whole group<br><br>C3: Translating Spanish conversation back to whole group | Navigating language needs<br>Meaning-making<br>Agency in multilingual spaces<br>Translation as power | Language as a social practice |
| C4: Facilitators sharing personal experiences<br><br>C5: Facilitators sharing personal experiences relating to race<br><br>C6: Participants share personal experiences<br><br>C7: Participants share personal experiences relating to race<br><br>C8: Joking/Laughing | Give and take between facilitators and students<br><br>Meaning-making<br><br>Operationalizing trust | Relationship building and (re)building |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| C9: Facilitators prompting curriculum learning goals<br><br>C10: Facilitators moving on rather than asking prompting questions<br><br>C11: Facilitators ask prompting or clarifying questions<br><br>C12: Affirmation without specification | Facilitation approaches<br><br>Facilitators prioritization of learning goals | Facilitator metacognition & reflection |
| C13: Identifying current racial dynamics between other people<br><br>C14: Connecting racism to emotions<br><br>C15: Connecting racism to right vs. wrong<br><br>C16: Participants interpreting conversations as (or as not) "race conversations"<br><br>C17: Race in informal space referenced<br><br>C18: Race in formal space referenced<br><br>C19: Referenced racial dynamics outside of participants' lifetime | Surfacing assumptions and understandings of race/racism<br><br>Community Cultural Wealth<br><br>Scale/temporality of racial dynamics | Structural vs Interpersonal Race Dialogues with Children |
| C20: Identifying issue and offering solution<br><br>C21: Explaining/justifying rationales | Imagining alternatives<br><br>Art as a tool for addressing relevant issues through art | Practicing Imagination |

**PRACTITIONER INQUIRY: Curriculum Creation Analysis**

As introduced above, we have elected to be reflexive in the creation of our curriculum unit to examine the

decisions, tactics, inspirations, and pedagogies embedded in this process. With the exception of a final project Sophia completed for a class her sophomore year, neither of us have had extensive experience constructing a curriculum unit. As such, we thought that engaging in practitioner inquiry would add a critical element to our praxis project by allowing us to be metacognitive about the procedure behind the research. It may also reveal to our readers more of "the whole story" as this section illuminates many of the choices we made going into our site. This is why we decided to use our analytic memos and record ourselves as evidence — this data helps us see exactly what was happening in the moment as we created, revised, and imagined our curriculum. Additionally, on a practical level (due to shifts in our praxis site), we were behind on data collection during the Fall 2021 semester yet needed to turn in a draft of our paper that included data analysis. Practitioner inquiry additionally functioned as our first form of data. It may not have been included as in-depth as will follow if we hadn't needed a draft with data analysis. It also would not have been written in the future tense because it was before we had entered our site. Regardless of this practical requirement, it was ultimately beneficial to track and examine the story of our journey to curriculum implementation.

Analytic Memos: How are we reflecting on our facilitation roles?

*Kaila's Approach*

The practice of writing analytic memos was intended to be a way for us to process the data we were collecting for our praxis projects, but it turned into a reflection space for me on my role as a white facilitator of a racial dialogue, and the strategy of dialogue itself in comparison with other strategies to move towards more racially just classroom spaces. When reviewing my analytic memos as a form of data, I tried to identify similar patterns and themes that were coming up for me, and how/if these come up in conversation with Sophia about decision-making for our curriculum.

One theme I noticed was a concern about the limits of dialogue, where I write "I believe that dialogue is only one way to bring about change, and it can be limiting when it comes to disrupting the colonial and white supremacist frameworks of our current education system," (Analytic Memo, 10/15). This is also followed by a concern about the time frame of our dialogue, which is something that has come up repeatedly for Sophia and me as we built our curriculum plan. I noticed that both these concerns came up later in the conversation between Sophia and me, but were not as explicitly stated.

*Sophia's Approach*

As I went through my analytic memos, I recognized that I ended up with more questions than answers after reviewing our raw data. Many of these questions circulated around processes and the ways in which Kaila and I could develop processes that would best support our research and help it go as smoothly and effectively as possible. While it is unrealistic to avoid all challenges, given the messiness of research, I hoped to proactively establish a framework which would prepare us for the challenges we faced: the minimal time, resources, and lack of control over the structure of our site. I imagined (ideally) this could allow us to then be attentive to the focus of the project, offering a space for kids to engage with race through art and dialogue.

Within the aforementioned larger goal of creating this environment for youth, Kaila and I also frequently spoke about the importance of building mutual relationships of trust with the students. In my second analytic memo I wondered: "What is the relationship between building trust with students and our first research question surrounding a "meaningful experience"? How do these concepts intersect and how can we use the former to generate the latter?" (Analytic Memo, September 9/27). This focus on mutuality was something we then recognized recurred throughout our data and thus the code "give and take between facilitators and students" was created.

*Recording 1 (9/21/21): Social Change in Praxis*

We met on September 21st, 2021 to begin seriously discussing the structure of our curriculum. Earlier in the spring of that year, we had created an outline of the curriculum to send to Girls Inc., and later Recreation Worcester. Yet this curriculum model was more of a summary of our lesson plans, and we had put minimal intentional thought into the reasons behind our decisions to why we were including art in our curriculum, and what aspects of our "Difficult Dialogues on Race and Racism" course we wanted to include and how they would be modified. We decided it would be beneficial to meet together to have these conversations, as well as reflect together on the different sources we'd found on curriculum design and implementation and how they could inform our thinking. In this way, we made the construction of our curriculum a part of our research as well.

Below is a segment of this conversation where we discuss an article Kaila read about an intergroup racial dialogue program in a high school in Detroit.

1. **Kaila:** The article that I read was so cool, like the one that I read for my annotated
2. Bibliography. It was just about this program in Detroit and it was like about an
3. intergroup dialogue with like kids from the city, and it was like pretty mixed up and
4. they, they did it for a whole year. In the end they not only did art show but they also
5. talked to policy makers! So it was like touching on different parts of social change and

6. then they got to do it at the end of their project–
7. **Sophia:** That's so cool!
8. **Kaila: –**yeah it was so cool, and I know obviously in our curriculum we won't be able
9. to do that but maybe if it was something like in our curriculum, we had suggestions for
10. like whoever was going to use it for final things we could do, it could be like an art
11. project. Or even if it was like sending emails to people and figuring out where the power
12. is even like power mapping kind of like we did at Highlander. Do you remember when
13. we had to do like, it was something kind of similar to that?
14. **Sophia:** Oh yeah I think I remember what you're talking about like who would be the
15. person you have to address.
16. **Kaila:** Yeah and like who's the audience for it.
17. **Sophia:** I like that, yeah thinking about an audience is important to do with the kids,
18. like when I did that, when I made that um, curriculum unit for um children's book and
19. stuff like –
20. **Kaila:** Oh yeah! That one was so good.
21. **Sophia: –** thank you at the end it was like all the kids would have to do
22. like mini organizing *(Kaila sneezes and it interrupts the conversation,*
23. *Sophia and Kaila laugh)*
24. **Sophia:** Anyways um, at the end we had them like draw little signs and march around
25. their building or something like that. That was my dream they would march around the
26. building saying something they felt was important that they wanted to change about the
27. school.
28. **Kaila:** Wait, that's great. That's so cute.
29. **Sophia:** I feel like also in a larger curriculum it could be something where you talk
30. with the kids about what they're even interested in because it's about community
31. too. It's like what is going on in your community you know after we have all these
32. conversations give them kind of that basis we're talking about, like addressing and
33. then kind of being like okay, like what's going on you know
34. **Kaila:** Mhm
35. **Sophia:** But that's kind of a larger idea but because our curriculum is focused on
36. individual and community knowledge I feel that would be a way to then help them
37. understand, well not understand but like help them feel, or I think the audience would
38. then be the community.

Throughout this conversation, Kaila began by discussing another curriculum she found while researching and the ways it incorporated action as a result of intergroup dialogue between participants of a number of different races for over a year. In lines 4-5, she is excited about the fact that, at the end of their project, the students "not only did an art show but they also talked to policy makers." In this conversation, we noticed Kaila is putting value on a curriculum with a diversified set of strategies for achieving what she referred to as "social change" in line 5. It's interesting how she seemed very focused on the outcome of the curriculum and how much time we have to achieve that, and said very little about relationship building throughout the conversation. There's also very little time spent referencing the learning goals of the curriculum, which never mention

"social change" but rather a more specific set of goals surrounding race dialogues and comfortability around talking about race. From this interaction, as well as from my reflection in Kaila's analytic memo, we noticed that she had an anxiousness around this idea of Praxis needing to include some aspect of action, and that dialogue as a stand-alone is not enough. This anxiousness is paired though, with an acute understanding of how much time trust-building and praxis takes. After she told Sophia about the art and policy work that the curriculum in Detroit included, she said "I know obviously in our curriculum we won't be able to do that," (lines 8-9).

Sophia brings up a curriculum she planned out for a different education class in lines 18-19, in which by the end of the course students would have articulated something that they were passionate about and plan a small demonstration around the school, she says "that was my dream they would march around the building saying something they felt was important that they wanted to change about the school," (lines 25-26). Using the word "dream" implies that this demonstration would be an ideal outcome for Sophia for her curriculum. Another term that caught our attention when transcribing and reading our conversation was the term *mini organizing* that Sophia used to refer to this demonstration the hypothetical students in her curriculum were putting on.

Just like when Kaila used the term *social change* in an undefined way, assuming that Sophia would understand and it wasn't necessary to articulate, Sophia uses *organizing* here similarly, and then later goes into more specific detail of how she had envisioned what organizing would look like. It's important to note here that we have spent a lot of time together thinking about and trying to implement changes on our college campus, specifically in relation to creating affinity housing that prioritizes Black students. We also attended a virtual conference held by the Highlander Research and Education Center[8] that works to support college students in better advocating for justice on their respective campuses. This experience is referenced in our conversation when Kaila was talking about a power mapping activity we did together. All this being said, we have never sat down together to discuss what we feel constitutes organizing for social change, or integrated these concepts into our research questions and framework. Despite these topics not coming up in our curriculum goals, it is clear we both like the idea (Sophia uses the word *dream* and Kaila use the word *cool* repeatedly in relation to curricula that have a component of action as well as dialogue) of our curriculum not only inciting dialogue around social change in the participants community, but actually including action.

[8] Clark University takes a group of students and faculty to the Highlander Research and Education Center each year to learn in community with students and faculty from other universities about grassroots organizing and movement building (https://highlandercenter.org)

At the end of the segment of the conversation (lines 29-38), Sophia draws the conversation back to our curriculum and learning goals, saying that "our curriculum is focused on individual and community knowledge," and the ways in which considering who the audience is, which we'd discussed earlier, was important. The most frequent code throughout this segment was "Dialogue not being a means to an end," which is reflective of a larger concept of the definition of Praxis including action. Ultimately, returning back to Freire's notion of "stakeholder- generated change and true social transformation," we are clearly working through how our curriculum potentially fits within this overarching goal (quoted in Ravitch, 2014, p. 9). Our *dream* is to see some form of action — or movement towards action — in the project.

*Recording 2 (9/27/21): Mutual Relationship Building*

While we have both participated in curricula which seek to engage with the complexities of race and racism, the process of constructing one is relatively new and thus necessitated additional support. In the early stages of our curriculum development, we recognized that we would benefit from speaking with someone who has had successful experience implementing race dialogues with young children. Both of Sophia's parents have facilitated workshops, units in elementary classrooms, and affinity spaces centered around discussing race and racism. Their work has significantly impacted her and she knew that it would be helpful to speak to her mom Laura Stewart, the Ethics elementary teacher at Fieldston Lower School in the Bronx, New York, who currently teaches about race and racism with first - fifth graders. On September 27th, we met with Laura over zoom to gather general insight to her experiences, receive specific strategies and activities to guide discussion, and ask her opinions on our questions/concerns regarding our curriculum construction.

Below is a segment of this recorded conversation in which Laura shares that a significant component of her facilitation is the established relationship she's created with the kids she works with:

1. **Laura:** So by the time they're in 5th grade, I've been teaching them since they were
2. in first grade. And we've been having conversations about identity in a variety of
3. ways for three years. Now, they only see me once a week, so it's not a ton of time,
4. but we have a relationship – like I think that's a helpful thing; they trust me. And we
5. are open to having conversations because we've created a sense of community. And
6. that, I think for you two, having this challenging or what could potentially feel like a
7. challenging conversation –
8. **Sophia:** Yeah
9. **Laura:** – will be had more positively if you work to have a sense of
10. community with them.
11. **Kaila:** Yeah

**Laura:** And one of the things you can do is some 'getting to know you' activities. And share some things about you….Connecting with kids in ways with things that are important to you, what you love to do, who's in your family. You know, I think Sophia you have the added advantage of having a multiracial family and being able to talk about that and share that, it allows you to talk about, with some familiarity, a range of racial experiences. And I think that's a good thing to share.
**Sophia:** Yeah, and we were thinking, maybe we could bring in some pictures [laughs]!
**Kaila:** Yeah that's what we were thinking! [Laughs] and it would just be your family and then mine with all the white people, we were laughing when we were saying how we would share this stuff.
**Sophia:** [Laughs] Yeah but then I was saying, you know some kids do have monoracial families -- and that's important to show too.
**Kaila:** And yeah we were saying getting to know you and getting to know us is important as well. Um and like see that we're comfortable talking about race because that's what we're going to be doing with them…

*Images shared with the students:*
Sophia's Family:

Kaila's Family:

In this conversation, Laura had been providing us with both abstract and concrete tools that she's

used when facilitating conversations about race and racism with elementary age students. While the books and activities she shared were immensely useful, we were particularly drawn to larger ideas such as mutual relationships and community building. In lines 4-7, Laura states that, with the kids she works with, "we have a relationship -- like I think that's a helpful thing; they trust me. And we are open to having conversations because we've created a sense of community," which implies the necessity of community to the production of dialogue. Laura uses the word "trust," which is a simple word for a truly complicated action. Trust is a process, something that requires genuine time and active effort, especially on the part of facilitators as we are responsible for because, as Laura states, "what could potentially feel like a challenging conversation will be had more positively if you work to have a sense of community with them," (lines 6-7).

This idea is not entirely new to us as, through the *Difficult Dialogues on Race and Racism* course and Highlander Research Institute and Education Center, we have experienced ourselves how a sense of community allows for dialogue to be more rich, interesting, honest, and enlightening. However, as much as we are aware of how crucial this is, it was incredibly valuable to discuss with Laura *how* we'd go about it.

Laura talks about how part of this process is sharing details about our lives with the kids -- to show them that we are simultaneously facilitators and real people with interests, values, and families just like them. When Laura offered this, it felt like an obvious "ah-hah" moment as we realized that we had been primarily focused on what the kids would be sharing and neglected the fact that mutuality is a foundational principle of dialogue. More specifically, Laura points to the fact that the multiraciality of Sophia's family is valuable to share as a way to talk about a variety of racial experiences with the children. In her immediate family alone, Sophia has Latina, Black, white, and both culturally and religiously Jewish people. She hoped that this could serve as a source of familiarity between myself and the students as we may have had similar racialized experiences or have at least grown up understanding race from a unique standpoint. Or, Kaila grew up speaking Spanish and this may be another area in which shared experiences can be exchanged given that, in Worcester, many of the children are bilingual or mostly speak Spanish. Additionally, in this segment of data, Kaila mentions how sharing with the students the same way we hope they will share with us also models how we are comfortable talking about race and racism in our own lives. If anything, this decision would demonstrate a vulnerability to the students in hopes they'd return the same through the drawings of their families. As seen here, the way we talk to one another (laughing, building off of ideas, sharing personal stories) is very relaxed, which may translate to the students. Our relationship can model that discussing race/racism can happen in day to day conversations similar to the back and forth we had about our families' differing racial makeup.

We thus decided to categorize this salient idea as "give and take" between facilitators and students to uplift moments in which we were working to (or neglecting to) develop a non-extractive relationship of trust with the students. The question Sophia asked in her second analytic memo: "What is the relationship between building trust with students and our first research question surrounding a "meaningful experience?" How do these concepts intersect and how can we use the former to generate the latter?" works well with this concept of "give and take" and shows a clear connection between this category and the larger framing themes of this study which will be further explored in the following chapters.

*Recording 3 (11/17/21): Restructuring Language*

On November 17th during a work period in our Praxis class, we spent the time revising our curriculum plan to fit the new half hour framework we had been given by Recreation Worcester after a meeting with the people who developed the afterschool program structure. This planning session was specifically designed for us to provide a very detailed account of what the intention of our curriculum was, and how we wanted to take advantage of every minute since we only had half an hour. During the planning session, we were building upon a rough template we had made for the purpose of showing the two people from Recreation Worcester who were supporting us. Throughout our revising session, it became clear that, although we had of course been intending for the curriculum to be for children ages 8-13, because our audience for the summary was adults, the language and lesson structures reflected this reality. Given this, a primary theme throughout conversation when reconstructing the curriculum was trying to ensure that the language and content used language that was age-appropriate as well as being considerate of the fact that many students are learning English as their second or third language. We also want to always affirm that body language and non-speaking communication is valid communication, and important to consider in research as well.

Below is a segment of conversation which highlights some of the ways we were grappling with word choice.

1. **Kaila:** I'm also trying to think of language that's a little like 'what would we like this
2. space to be like' I feel like I use the word space in my organizing but like they're going
3. to be like, what are you talking about?
4. **Sophia:** So we could say like, well we're talking about doing community norms we
5. could say 'what do we want to agree on to make sure everyone feels comfortable and
6. safe to share their thoughts and stories' yeah
7. **Kaila:** Yeah I think that's good
8. **Sophia:** That might still take ten minutes honestly

9. **Kaila:** And materials I think we'd want a sheet of paper like you know those big sticky
10. notes and markers
11. **Sophia:** Yeah
12. **Kaila:** Should we have all the kids, I think it would be nice to have them all
13. sign the agreement
14. **Sophia:** Yeah so it feels like they're part of it
15. **Sophia:** Okay next bit [reads 'what is dialogue' on the curriculum summary and
16. laughs] I don't think they're going to want to do that [laughs]
17. **Kaila:** They're not going to want to do that! [laughs] 'What is dialogue?' I don't think
18. I even know what dialogue is [laughs]
19. **Sophia:** yeah they're not going to want to do that [laughs]
20. **Kaila:** I think the, the, the activity that we did where you pick summer and winter and
21. you try and convince someone else because that's way more, I think we can get at
22. what is dialogue without saying it even once. I think we can say it as a vocabulary
23. word like we can list them off like there's conversation, debate, also body language
24. making sure we're covering that and then we could talk about like we're going to do
25. an activity to see the difference but that's going to take the whole time

In this conversation segment, a certain word is proposed that then gets altered to be more age appropriate, or minimize difficult vocabulary. Starting in line 4, regarding community norms, the original question (lines 1-2) "what would we like this space to be like?" gets changed to "what do we want to agree on to make sure everyone feels comfortable and safe to share their thoughts and stories" (lines 5-6). There is a lot more specificity in that rephrasing of the question, and it doesn't rely on "space" being understood as a word that encompasses the interactions that happen in a physical room. When you think about the word "space" from the perspective of someone learning English, it especially complicates the meaning as there are so many different uses. For example one could be talking about a physical space, such as "what space are we going to use today for our class," or using it in reference to capacity "there's not enough space," or using it to reference the universe such as "the rocket is going to space." A participant, when posed with the question "what do we want this space to be like," might rightly start listing off aspects of the physical room, such as wanting it to be clean with nice decorations. The alternative Sophia poses in lines 4-6, is much more specific, using "agree on" to emphasize that this is a decision that is being made by everyone, and talks about participants feeling comfortable and safe to share their thoughts and stories, which also then reminds participants that they can, and are encouraged to share their opinions and experiences. The issue that we were trying to address was around word choice, and how to better express our intentions behind a given activity.

The solution we landed on was not always switching one word for another, but rather sometimes meant letting an activity speak for itself. For example in the segment below, the proposed topic, or

theme of the lesson was titled “what is dialogue?” which we decided didn’t make sense to center at the core of the lesson in such an explicit way. We also both assumed that the participants wouldn’t want to learn about it. Instead, we focused on a game that we had played in our *Difficult Dialogues on Race and Racism* course that allowed us to explore how debate and dialogue feel different. There is one round of debate where students have to pick a side and argue for or against a simple topic such as “which season is better, winter or summer.” The debate round is set up so that they are basically given a free for all to make their case, and often results in loud yelling over each other, even when practicing at the college level. The second round has the same prompting question, but instead, students can only ask and answer each other's questions, which as one can imagine produces an entirely different result. Doing this activity, and using it as a basis from which to understand and introduce the vocabulary words “debate and dialogue,” is a very different activity than starting with “what is dialogue.” There is some contradiction in what Kaila saw regarding the activity, in lines 21-23 where she states: “I think we can get at what is dialogue without saying it even once, I think we can say it as a vocabulary word like we can list them off like there’s conversation, debate, also body language making sure we’re covering that.” In one phrase Kaila was suggesting it’s possible to get at a concept without ever naming it, and in the second she’s suggesting we pose it as a vocabulary word. These are two different ideas and, as Kaila talks, she realized that there is value in still naming a concept and putting it into words, even if the name is not what sticks. This was a critical realization as it helped inform how we approached language and vocabulary generation throughout the curriculum unit. We want the students to resonate with the concepts *and* have exposure to language to name them.

*What does this mean for our roles at the site?*

Reaching these three facilitation/curriculum creation themes (Social Change in Praxis, Mutual Relationship Building, and Restructuring Language) proved to be immensely beneficial as we had concrete intentions upon entering our site. We had high hopes and dreams for this project because we imagined how solidified mutual relationships of trust and utilizing language in a meaningful way could be a catalyst for social change with young people. When creating the curriculum unit, we had this progression in mind to help frame each activity with the goal of centering relationships, language, and striving towards social change. However, it was complicated to have this intention/hope/imagination yet simultaneously know we had to be realistic about our actual impact. As stated in our introduction, we knew we likely would not achieve the depth of change we hoped. Due to the many unanticipated aspects of actually enacting the curriculum unit, our priorities slightly shifted to adjust to the matters that presented themselves to be increasingly urgent.

*Middle: At Praxis Site*

**VISITS LEADING UP TO CURRICULUM**

Throughout the analysis of our conversation with Laura, we frequently referenced how we felt it was crucial to build relationships with the participants at Chandler Magnet before trying to implement any kind of curriculum or dialogue process. Additionally, coming into the school beforehand also felt necessary from not only a social/emotional standpoint, but also logistically. Before our volunteer visits, we didn't know what to expect of the day to day structure of the afterschool program, other than the information we'd received from a meeting with Recreation Worcester's Program Coordinator (detailed in our "Ethnographic Context"). We felt like it was important to build familiarity with the routines and structure of the afterschool program, to ensure that our curriculum would take place at an appropriate time. While a lot of the information may have been valuable in the Ethnographic Context, we felt it belonged in the middle section of our story because of how impactful these visits were in restructuring our understanding of Recreation Worcester's afterschool program, and providing more insight into who our participants were.

*Developing a New Understanding of Praxis Site*

Our first day volunteering at Recreation Worcester was by far the most hectic. From the first few minutes of being unable to find parking or the building entrance, up until dismissal we were pretty overwhelmed. We spent the two hours non-stop playing with the kids as the only two staff there other than the site coordinator, as well as navigating the fact that all of the students there spoke Spanish and only minimal English. We left feeling overwhelmed at having had to essentially run a segment of the program (as first-time visitors!), but also excited that we were now getting to meet the participants we would be spending the next few months with. This day ended up being an anomaly, as we soon realized that we would be working with five other college students who had been hired through Recreation Worcester to staff the afterschool program.

Although the program had a lot more structure than on our first visit with so many staff helping out, it was still not the three unit (art, athletics and academics) rotation we'd imagined. There were no split groups of students for each rotation, or fixed staff for each activity area. Participants and staff moved fluidly between different activities. Additionally, the relationships between us did not feel strictly designated to staff and supervisor, as we would always engage in activities with the participants. This fluidity meant that students who had more interest in one particular area were free to spend the majority of their time there, which held true for the staff as well. Kaila spent the majority of her time in the gym [*see Figure 2*] playing soccer or volleyball with students who

primarily or only spoke Spanish. These students were older (ages 9 and upward), and chose to play physical activities throughout the sessions though sometimes became intensely focused on an art project or a card game together. Meanwhile, Sophia spent most of her time in the cafeteria [*see Figure 3*] with two or three of the younger children (ages 8 or 9) who either could speak English fluently or only spoke English. Here, she would support the students in art projects, board games, puzzles, and other low key activities.

While the activities that we were engaging in were clearly distinct, something that stood out to us even more than that was the many shifting structures of communication in our given spaces. The first day at the program had given us the impression that only Spanish was spoken among the children, however after the introduction of staff who (for the most part) only spoke English, as well as the addition of more bilingual or English speaking children, the dynamic shifted. Given that this dynamic relating to language and communication became increasingly salient, we decided to record ourselves debriefing in the car ride home from Chandler Magnet to document our experiences in the moment. Below is a section of a transcript of a conversation we had on February 1st, 2022 — a week before we implemented our curriculum — which exemplifies these complexities of language and multilingualism at this afterschool program.


**Figure 2:** Chandler Magnet's ground floor gym (2/15/2022)

**Figure 3:** Chandler Magnet's ground floor cafeteria room (2/15/2022)

Car Talk (2/1/2022):

**Pseudonyms:**

Eddie – Rec Worcester staff, Latino man

Kira – Rec Worcester staff, white woman

NC – Non-consenting student

1. *Kaila:* But yeah, you were saying that like, he [NC] always gets in trouble and stuff, and I also
2. think it's like, it just feels so unfair that like, and obviously Eddie isn't white, and grew up in
3. Ecuador and all these places, but he just can't really speak Spanish really well, and he [NC]
4. only has, like I'm the only one who can really talk with him, but he probably has like nothing
5. to relate to me on, you know, and I just like, I don't know, I can just imagine you get really
6. frustrated.
7. *Sophia:* No yeah, and that's always the shitty part too that on top of the fact that like, people are
8. always making him, he's always in trouble, people can't communicate with him, like what is
9. happening or like why?
10. *Kaila:* Exactly! Like why he's in trouble and he can't defend himself to them if they only speak
11. English? Also like I was thinking about how, like, how I feel like I haven't really been in
12. multilingual spaces like that, where, it just feels like there's a lot more leniency and
13. understanding and willingness to have other ways to, like I noticed when he was playing UNO
14. with Kira, who like, who like, I don't know she was trying to pull her weight with speaking
15. Spanish, and he was-
16. *Sophia:* Yeah I feel like she was just saying what she could.
17. *Kaila:* Yeah, and I feel like it was interesting to see spaces where it's like, we understand we
18. can't really communicate with each other.
19. *Sophia:* [laughs]
20. *Kaila:* But we still are just going to engage, and I feel like, I don't know, it just makes me, I
21. don't know whenever I'm trying to communicate in Spanish but can't remember something and
22. am feeling embarrassed about it, like they have to like, if they have to try and speak English all
23. the time and probably don't feel
24. super confident, this is the least I can do.

In this segment, we are focused on the experiences of one student in the afterschool program who only speaks/understands Spanish and, from our observations, must consequently navigate the challenges of communication. More specifically, we are reckoning with the fact that he was constantly 'getting into trouble' because of behavioral matters (ex. throwing a soccer ball at another child), yet was always reprimanded in English (lines 10-11). He was pulled aside a lot and, interestingly, we noticed that (besides Kaila) the staff member speaking to him would speak in English while the student responded in Spanish. Both parties utilized body language, tone, and sometimes other people to explain themselves. This use of linguistic capital — or capacity to communicate in alternative forms (Yosso, 2014) — was common throughout the afterschool program as we would play games in which we all relied on gesturing, body language, tone, examples, or translations (via Kaila or other students) to understand, for example, who would play goalie in soccer or what animal you were in charades. As Kaila mentioned (lines 13-15), when the same non-consenting student was playing UNO with Kira, they both shared the labor of working to understand one another as Kira used the Spanish vocabulary she knew while the student used the English vocabulary he knew. Again, while English was still clearly dominant throughout these spaces, there was a stronger mutuality that existed in regards to language. Additionally, the activities we were engaged in (games, art, sports) provided entry points for everyone to engage regardless of language barriers, in a way that simply trying to build relationships through conversation does not. Spanish speaking students could still engage in the predominantly English-speaking art space, and students who only spoke English still joined in on games in the gym.

During our time volunteering together at the program, we gained new insight into the role of language, the program's structure, the children themselves, as well as ourselves. We felt it was important to provide this additional context to our praxis site because the edits we made to the first draft of our curriculum before presenting it are directly informed by this knowledge. It also provides the reader with the necessary background knowledge to make sense of our findings, and piece together the narrative of how we came to the conclusions we did following the curriculum implementation and reflection.

*Curriculum Overview*

Before delving into the findings we drew from the curriculum, it's important to provide some context on the content and sequence of the curriculum[9]. Below is a succinct overview of the three days; we will go into all of them more in-depth when reviewing our themes and claims.

[9] See later section "Revised Curriculum – Draft 2" to view the curriculum we used for our lesson plans.

The Missed Day: Tuesday, February 8th:

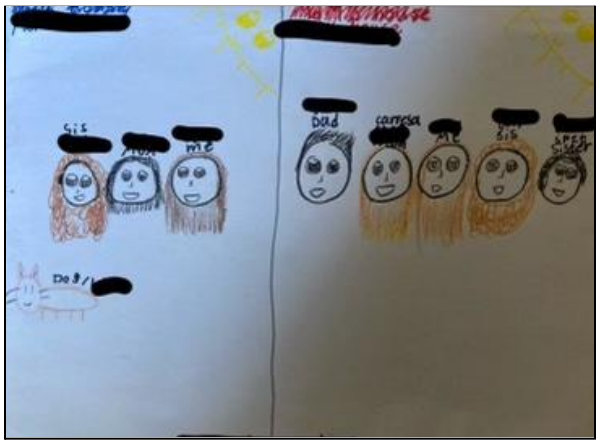
Our initial plan was to start the first day of our curriculum on Tuesday, February 8th, but due to a number of logistical, as well as relational factors, we did not end up facilitating any part of our curriculum that day. A more in-depth discussion of the factors leading up to this decision are covered in the secion Traversing Transitions: Relationship Building and (Re)building.

Day 1: Wednesday, February 9th

Although Wednesday was initially intended as our second day, we were set back a day so it is now referred to throughout this paper as "Day 1". On this first day, we created community norms and read the book "Our Skin", which covers definitions of race and racism in an age-appropriate way. Following the reading, we opened up the space for questions and presented the group with our own discussion questions. Lastly, we did an art activity focused on talking about race within our families, and drew pictures of our families using colored pencils[10].

Day 2: Thursday, February 10th

We chose to skip the middle day of our curriculum, and went straight to the plan for our final day. The goal of the last day was to focus on thinking about how race and racism shows up structurally. We brought in a large aerial outline of Chandler Magnet School that we had painted beforehand, and asked them to add anything to the mural[11] that they felt would make their school better. Through this activity, we hoped students would get a chance to practice imagining how institutions can be bettered and changed.





[10] See "Figure 4" for examples of student drawings.
[11] See later section *Practicing Imagination*

**Figure 4:** Student Family Drawings (2/9/22)

## FINDINGS: Curriculum Implementation Analysis

### *Introduction*

In this section, we turn our analysis to the complexities of transitions, language and meaning-making, facilitation tactics, imagination, and the challenges of a curriculum centered around race/racism with children. The implementation of our curriculum was a long-awaited, stress inducing, personal, surprising, deep learning experience for both of us. Though many of our hopes were met, the simultaneously fantastic and chaotic nature of research with children pushed us to confront various issues we had not anticipated. We found that a curriculum unit cannot begin with a sudden transition from hanging out together in an afterschool program to a formalized teacher/student-like dynamic. This change impacted the start of our unit as the children were dissuaded from this new relationship it seemed we were trying to enforce. Next, we recognized that rushing Spanish translations without thoughtfully integrating the language was detrimental to the one primarily Spanish-speaking student, as he could not make meaning from the sessions in the same way the rest of the participants could. Further, this caused disruptions to our conceptions of us as facilitators and individuals with differing relationships to the Spanish language.

In response to our research questions relating to race dialogues, we found that maintaining the familiarity and comfortability of discussing interpersonal racism with children was due to their developmental stage and information learned at school. Though we didn't push towards discussing social change and structures (as we had hoped), we were struck by *how* children talked about race and the ways in which their comments, questions, and artwork still alluded to a more complex level of understanding. Specifically when discussing race, racism, and identity with the students, we found ourselves caught up in the moment — doing things we may not have with less pressure — which subsequently prompted us to look externally at our facilitation moves and become metacognitive about the entire implementation process. Finally, when considering our research question on the impact of art activities, we discerned that students made meaning by practicing imaginating new realities through art. With more time, we found these imaginations could have been powerful ways to structure future sessions. All these themes significantly stood out as powerful and unanticipated elements of our unit. Our claims are organized through five themes to capture the conclusions we drew from acting and reacting in the moment as well as from later examination of our pilot unit. Although we were prepared, organized, and developed relationships of trust, our findings seek to explore the ways in which the implementation of our curriculum revealed both what was effective and truly challenging about this work.

***Traversing Transitions: Relationship Building and (Re)building***

From the start of our research process, we were on the same page about how sensitive and personal the topic of race is. Neither of us felt it would be fair to show up in an unfamiliar space with a group of children we had never met, and start initiating conversations about race. The way we chose to address this concern was through volunteering at our praxis site for nearly two months prior to conducting our curriculum, in order to build trust and relationships with participants. Despite their centrality of "trust" and "relationship building" to the design and timeline of our research, these terms remained vague and unexamined, as if they were simply a precursor to implementing our curriculum. Yet after conducting our curriculum and reflecting on the process, we realized that our analysis of what happened during the curriculum would remain limited if we did not integrate the relationship building that came *before* those two days. To understand this transition from volunteers to researchers/facilitators and its impact on our relationship with participants, we turned to the theoretical framework of "formal vs. informal spaces."

Scholars Junghyun Yoon & Maria Rönnlund define the difference between the "official school" and the "informal school" in their case study of control and agency in student–teacher relations in Finnish and Korean schools. The official school "consists of the national/school curriculum, teaching-learning practices, pedagogy and formal hierarchies, such as timetables and school rules," while the informal school "indicates unofficial interactions among students, among teachers and between school members whose positions are different, such as the interactions between students and teachers," (Yoon & Rönnlund 2020, p.3).

Yoon & Rönnlund draw from Basil Bernstein's concepts of "classification" and "framing" to emphasize the ways in which different schools have practices in place that influence how strict the boundaries between the "official" and "informal" are. According to Bernstein, power always operates in relation to different social categories within the school (Yoon & Rönnlund, 2020, p.5). In a school with strong classifications, the boundaries between different social categories, such as students, teachers, and principals, will be highly enforced and legitimized, while a school with weak classifications may have more porous boundaries between these categories, allowing for power dynamics to be more complex and flexible. Bernstein's concept of framing is different from classification because it is related to who has control over the pedagogical practices of the classroom or school. A classroom with strong framing is one that is "pedagogically stratified because a teacher exercises explicit control over the selection, sequence and pacing of lesson content and the criteria of knowledge to be evaluated." (Yoon & Rönnlund, 2020, p.5). In a

classroom with weak framing, the students have more input in these areas.

Bernstein's theoretical framework, although reached after we designed our curriculum, is immensely useful in helping us understand the relational dynamics within our praxis site. It gives us a language to make sense of why the transition from volunteering to our curriculum proved to be so challenging, to the point that we started our curriculum a day later than we had anticipated and never made up the content we had planned to cover. "The missed day" and *why* we feel this happened, are explored in more detail below as we feel this discussion contributes to our overall understanding of relationship building.

The Missed Day

On Tuesday, February 8th we planned to facilitate the first day of our curriculum. We had texted the site coordinator ahead of time to let him know when we would get there so that the children wouldn't be engaged in a different activity or outside, but he missed our call and when we got there every child was either doing art, or playing in the gym. After about 20 minutes of joining in on activities with the children, we tried to get everyone sitting at the cafeteria tables and ready to talk, but found ourselves at a loss of how to go about this, especially considering the other staff were just as engaged in the activities as the children. Kira, Eddie, Arabela, Julieta were doing a dance competition in the cafeteria, and when we weakly tried to motion to Arabela and Julieta and say we were doing a different activity, they looked at us with what felt like a mixture of confusion and dismissal. We both decided that it didn't feel right to try and push the curriculum when they were clearly uninterested, and we hadn't planned well enough to ensure the other staff were in the loop.

This "missed day" initially was a cause of defeat and disappointment for us. At the time, we attributed the disappointments of the day solely to our own lack of capacity as facilitators, as we had failed to adequately brief staff and pique the children's interest. Yet the framework of formal and informal spaces gives us a lens from which to view it as an important point of analysis. A moment that surfaced relationship dynamics that had been there all along; we just hadn't taken the time to explore them. We had been viewing relationships and trust building almost as if it was a box to check at the beginning of our curriculum, and once that was done we were good to move forward with our program. Yet we never considered the fact that facilitating our pilot curriculum would signal an explicit shift in the relationships we'd spent time building with the participants. Facilitating our curriculum essentially required us to "rebuild" a new, more formal dynamic with the group, while simultaneously maintaining aspects of our previous, less formal dynamic.

The lens of "informal vs. formal space" allows us to reflect critically on the kinds of containers we create for learning, and how trust and relationship building takes place in those spaces. For Yoon & Rönnuld, ensuring the boundaries of these containers are permeable is important for more democratic schooling. "Our findings suggest that democratic schooling is conceivable when boundaries made by strong classification among school members are permeable (Bernstein, 1996, pp. 24−25) and when active and unconstrained interaction among school members across the school hierarchy (students, teachers, principals) is fostered" (Yoon & Rönnuld, 2020, p.16). Although we were not operating at the level of a school, their findings help us connect the ways in which us having engaged with students in an informal setting before conducting our curriculum can help create formal settings that foster more trust. Students were able to view us not simply as teachers or facilitators, but as people who they'd spent the last two months getting to know through playing games and hanging out together, which we believe was part of the reason they were so willing to open up about their experiences and understanding of race and racism. We intentionally decided to code joking/laughing throughout both days, which we coded a total of 28 times on Day 1 and 12 times on Day 2, with roughly 60% of the codes pertaining to Sophia and Kaila laughing at something a student said, and 30% participants laughing at something Kaila, Sophia, or a participant said. We felt that laughing and joking between participants was made possible by the time we'd spent getting to know them prior to the curriculum. Coding this throughout the transcripts helped us to track how the relationship we'd built continued to be at the base of this research.

It was immensely beneficial that we chose to spend so long getting to know participants through volunteering at the more informal setting of the Recreation Worcester after school program as it created familiarity between ourselves and the participants. Yet it still would've been valuable to have had more of an awareness of formal vs. informal spaces in order to best transition students into our curriculum, especially as language dynamics were profoundly impacted by this shift.

***Language, Translation, and Meaning-Making: Language as a Social Practice***

This section is focused on the ways in which language emerged as a theme throughout Day 1 and Day 2 of our curriculum implementation. This theme names how we arrived at language as a social practice — something that could not be rushed or overlooked, but rather a topic with deep meaning and implications. We illustrate the need for including theoretical frameworks and facilitation practices around language differences by reflecting on the ways that Sol was excluded from meaning-making within the larger group, and how his response to this exclusion reflects his

agency as a learner.

The majority of our curriculum took place in English. When Spanish was included, it was rarely through Kaila translating something within the whole group, but rather when Kaila would turn to Sol to translate something to him, or they'd engage in one-on-one dialogue alongside the rest of the group speaking in English[12]. The codes C2: Spanish Conversation in the whole group, happened very rarely in comparison with C1: shortened/different information in Spanish. This illustrates how Sol, and also Kaila, were experiencing the curriculum very differently from the rest of the group. One moment in particular that stood out was when Sol and Kaila were talking separately about historical examples of racism, and he was telling her about what he knew about Martin Luther King.

1. Kaila: [Inaudible Spanish]…pues si, para terminar con el racismo.
   **[Yes, to end racism]**
2. Sol: [Inaudible Spanish]…Martin Luther King quería terminar con el racismo, entonces le
3. mataron.
   **[Martin Luther King wanted to end racism, so they killed him]**

This statement, if heard by the entire group including Sophia, could've been an incredibly generative point of conversation to discuss structural racism, and more generally about the kind of race conversations that students have experienced in school. Additionally, there are likely more comments that Sol would've made unprompted had he had access to the whole group conversations.

Comparatively, throughout the second day, the separation between English and Spanish did not appear as intense, given that the context was significantly different. Working on the mural was more similar to the roles we'd adopted within the program as supervisor/playmates because we were all focused around dialogue though an art project, rather than strictly conversation. This allowed for some of the alternative language practices the students utilized to be employed in this session. It was interesting to observe how the Spanish speaking students' linguistic capital complicated traditional talk structures (Yosso 2014). By this we mean that, throughout the second day transcript, it seems as if Sol rarely contributes; but in fact, he was using body language, gesturing, facial expressions, and other modes of communication that cannot be picked up on an audio recording. Thus we relied more on our field notes and discussions post program to affirm how he interacted with the activity. However, this only further affirms how verbal English was the

[12] For an example of overlapping conversation, see the section "Feelings, Morals and Temporality"

dominant mode of social interaction in the space as there was no encouragement to use Spanish as a whole, even though some of the other participants were fully bilingual. There was a moment during the second transcript (2/10/22) that shows a translation between students:

1. Sophia: Oh the light green [marker], yeah Kaila can, and if anyone needs anymore of any color
2. let us know.
3. Arabela: Yeah because Sol ruined it.
4. Delilah: Mira Sol.
   **Look Sol.**
5. Sophia: It looks like a beautiful garden to me.

Delilah and Arabela (sisters) can both speak Spanish, yet line 4 in the section above is one of very few times either of them uses it in our sessions. Delilah spoke directly to Sol in Spanish in this line, gesturing to him to be attentive to how his action impacted Arabela. She then switched quickly and, after this exchange, continued back into English. All of these Latine students are navigating unique relationships with language and socializing that we could not possibly have learned in the brief time we were together. Evidently, their constructions of meaning are not exclusively linguistic or surface level, as they move between verbal and non-verbal and English and Spanish.

Understanding communication as multifaceted, as well as contextual, is essentially what we mean when we say "language as a social practice". We came to this understanding through engaging with scholars such as Jie Park (2017) who explores language practices of African-Born Muslim Refugee Youths in an American Urban High School. Park grounds her theoretical framework in sociocultural theories of language, and writes that "language is not merely a fixed system of signs and symbols, and language users are not autonomous beings with a stable set of linguistic competences. Instead, language is a complex social practice, and language users are "differently-positioned members of social and historical collectives, using (and thus learning) language as a dynamic tool (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 419)," (Park, 2017, p.3). To understand Sol's engagement (or lack thereof) in the curriculum, it was important to think of language not as something rigid that translation immediately bridges, but as fluid and dynamic, a "resources of social practice that speakers use in an agentive way in order to deal with what they do in the world" (Zavala, 2018, p.5). This way of understanding language validates all the ways in which Sol was still communicating with the group throughout both Day 1 and Day 2 of our curriculum.

As well as body language, facial expression, and sounds, Sol choosing to remain silent at many points during the curriculum should not be viewed simply as a passivity. As Park (2017) writes in

reflection on her own research, “In the discussion, Monique highlighted the role of the classroom in influencing a student’s silence or participation. That is, students choose to be silent as a *response to* their environment, situation, or people” (Park 2017, p.6). Without seeking input from students as to why they might be remaining silent in class, or analyzing the environmental factors that might incentivize a student to remain silent, this act may be misconstrued as passive. But it is often an active choice, and honestly an incredibly appropriate and understandable one. Neglecting to recognize this not only dismisses the agency of students, but also misses an opportunity to reflect on one’s own facilitation practices.

When debriefing these language and communication complications from both sessions, we shared with one another how we wished parts of it had gone differently, though we recognized that these feelings were grounded in dissimilar experiences. As such, we felt it was necessary to further reflect separately given our unique positionalities and differing interactions with the students. The following individual pieces on personal connections to language and retrospective learnings from both days of implementation illuminate how our understandings of language and communication dramatically shifted in this project.

Kaila

Throughout my time as a Community, Youth and Education Studies major, I have written an abundance of papers reflecting on my positionality in relation to my advocacy and youth work. Very rarely is language a focal topic for me in these papers, instead I have focused extensively on my relationship to whiteness, gender, queerness, disablity, and class, usually including just a couple sentences about often being able to connect with students due to not being born in the US and speaking Spanish, since Worcester has a large Latine immigrant population. I’ve used this as a brief example of the ways I’ve been able to connect with my students, without ever further exploring the limitations of this connection, or how I could lean into and explore it. Part of this comes from a place of my own relationship to bilingualism as being incredibly privileged, thus not pushing me to prioritize an understanding of the ways in which English-dominant classrooms can be deeply inaccessible and oppressive to students, and how I can better understand this social inequality in order to address it in my youth work.

Growing up, I spoke English at home in Spain, and then Basque and Spanish at school and with friends. When I moved to the United States at age 8, I only had to navigate cultural shifts, rather than racial and language-based dynamics. This is a very different experience than a lot of children and people who immigrate to the United States. Additionally, as a white person moving countries,

I was not subject to the pressures of assimilation, and don't have a history of my home country being subject to colonial and imperial violence, or experiencing the violence of the enforcement of borders or living undocumented. My experience with implementing our curriculum at Recreation Worcester has pushed me to want to go beyond the surface "it's helpful I can speak and translate Spanish" to wanting to develop a framework for how I would engage with language differences in the classroom.

This question of translation, and its power, is important. When stated without additional context, the phrase "the power of translation" has an inspirational ring to it. But the moment we pause to interrogate it, it quickly loses this definitive quality. Who has power when it comes to translation? How has translation, or lack of, been used to strip people's agency and power? What are the responsibilities of a translator? In what contexts is translation an appropriate means of relaying information? What is the purpose of the translation, and is it a tool that can ever effectively ensure that a space allows for all those involved to create and co-create meaning?

Translation is, without a doubt, a powerful tool, but this power must be interrogated thoroughly to ensure that it is not one-sided. In other words, "translators must make choices, selecting aspects or parts of a text to transpose and emphasize. Such choices in turn serve to create representations of their source texts, representations that are also partial. This partiality is not to be considered a defect, a lack or an absence in a translation; it is a necessary condition of the act" (Jensen & Fischer 2012, p.12). Although I still feel translation is an important and valuable skill I bring to classroom spaces, after conducting our pilot curriculum, I feel that there are more other ways to design spaces that include students who don't speak the dominant language in the classroom, that do not isolate them from the group. Translate is one tool, but it should not be the only one. We reflect further on additional tools we could have used in our curriculum to foster a more inclusive environment for Sol in the third draft of our curriculum under our curriculum.

Sophia

In my experience, simultaneously navigating an ethnic and linguistic identity as a Latina creates a complicated internal conflict due to the seemingly intrinsic linkage between the Spanish language and Latinidad — especially in multilingual social environments. In reflecting back to my positionality and identity piece, I still feel naive that — before entering our site — I neglected to truly consider the ways in which language would be a significant component of this project. I wondered if this is partially related to the fact that, within Latinidad, the immense diaspora of identities (racial, ethnic, linguistic, geographic, etc) is the source of such different ways of

experiencing the social aspects of language. As scholar Lorena Garcia (2018) writes as a part of her research on Latine people's identities and their relationships to language, "Latines' views on the relevance of Spanish in their lives,...can further our discernment of their linguistic lives, including how they understand and construct their ethno-racial identity," (p.1). While I consider Spanish to conceptually be relevant in my life, in terms of actual linguistics, I have not been in many spaces where I've had to restructure the way I communicate in order to talk about my experiences. As a result, when I was immersed in the curriculum, my use of language as a social practice was in contention with how much easier it was to quickly revert back to English and more familiar actions/behaviors. This changed how participants could communicate with me, and I with them.

The language tactics I used/didn't use and the structure of each session impacted how participants experienced the unit given the multilayered nature of meaning-making (Zepke & Leach, 2002). From the outside, looking at how both the students and Kaila and I engaged with the material, it may have seemed very straightforward — we were seated with the children and going through a lesson together. Yet, as explored in our literature review, modes of meaning-making below the surface-level conversation, such as our internal values or emotions and the "unheard voices group" (Zepke & Leach, 2002) additionally influence our collective experience. With this in mind, reading through the transcripts of our curriculum felt rough. We went back and forth between a split Spanish and English conversation, and an English dominant whole group conversation. I had intentions to build off of what Kaila said in Spanish and work to integrate the language as much as I could. Yet, Sol was consistently in an isolated conversation. And, if it wasn't for Kaila bringing him into the conversation, he could've been an unheard voice, and even greater meaning might have been lost between him and the other students, myself, and the group as a whole.

Despite the fact that I primarily contributed to an English dominant way of interacting, there were moments that the students still engaged in varying social moves. Though this was not a choice as I cannot speak Spanish, as a facilitator there were moves that I could've taken to restructure my approach. I now wonder how they understand the connection between language, ethnicity, and culture given that they have a diversity of experiences with these concepts as well. On top of that, I myself was (and still am) internally grappling with my own relationship to language, race, and ethnicity — I wonder how (or if) this specific experience could've been a locus of meaning-making and connection, rather than assuming Latinidad in general would be sufficient.

***Structural vs Interpersonal Race Dialogues with Children***

How do children talk about race? Where and with whom do children learn to talk about race? In this section we uncover how, while the way students talk about race may be indicative of their stage of development and the learning environment they're surrounded by, the language and understandings they've obtained could be used to have more challenging conversations. We structured our research project to not only open space for students to voice their personal and interpersonal experiences, but also build towards an understanding of the structural nature of racism and injustice specifically in schools. However, we later realized we would have honestly been surprised if the students brought up structural instances of racism on their own volition. Thus we examine: Why is this the case? Why do children primarily recognize racism at the interpersonal level? We've come to the conclusion that the students' developmental and in-school learning contexts have foregrounded racism at an interpersonal scale. What's more, given that racism functions in invisibilized ways (that is, it is so deeply ingrained in our society it is challenging to name) these students can more easily access the interpersonal interactions which occur in their daily lives. Yet, their age does not insinuate their capacities are limited — rather, there were many instances in which students demonstrated their curiosity around and ability to grasp structural racism.

Developmental Stages and Race Dialogues

The children we worked with are at a stage of their development in which they have moved beyond the realm of exclusively the personal, and are working to understand interpersonal relationships (Feagin & Ausdale, 2001). Based on the literature we've researched, the students—ages 8-13—while still in elementary school, are grappling with complex topics as they work to interpret the world around them which includes their family, neighborhood, school, and everything they absorb from mass media (Feagin & Ausdale, 2001). After our curriculum completed, we wondered about how this developmental moment might help us to understand students' capacity to discuss racism at a structural level. How can understanding their stage of development help inform future curricula that seek to engage with systems, structures, and institutions? This inquiry was necessary given the claims we began to make in response to our research questions on surfacing knowledge via race dialogues.

The literature suggests that, at this time in their lives (after ages eight or nine), children can consistently recognize the racial group they identify with, distinguish it from others, and are aware of the implications of these differences (Feagin & Ausdale, 2001). For instance, on the first day, after the students defined identity, Sophia asked if they had ever talked about race or racism at school. Most of the students responded with yes or nodded their heads and the oldest participant,

Delilah, additionally stated: “Yeah like if you’re a certain race you can’t say a certain word,” (2/9/22). At first, her comment went unacknowledged by us or the students; so she repeated again: “I’ve heard many people at recess say a certain word and they can’t say — or, they’re a certain race and they say —” (2/9/22). Delilah is naming how, during recess, the informal space (Yoon & Rönnlund 2020) that was created amongst students unfortunately held multiple racist encounters. Her repetition of the comment suggests that she was understandably angered and was persistent about inserting this issue into our discussion (which we then did soon after the second time).

This moment reveals the knowledge students already have about race and racism from their own lives. Our conceptual framework Community Cultural Wealth helps further explain how we understand the significance of Delilah’s comment. As Yosso (2014) writes, the forms of capital students of color hold “draw on the knowledges [they] bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom,” (or in our case the curriculum unit) as Delilah did not simply reference this story (p.82). Instead, her emotions confirmed her awareness of an instance of injustice. Her experiences outside the classroom and in her peer community offered crucial knowledge to the group conversation. This is not to say she stood out as the only student capable of this, but rather, the story she shared is one way in which these students used their Community Cultural Wealth to demonstrate their knowledge on race and racism.

Despite popular discourse insisting that young people are unaware of racialized dynamics (Winkler 2009), Delilah’s emotional reaction to and firm statement about her observations of interpersonal racism exemplifies that she is *already* thinking critically on the matter. Evidently, while the literature suggests that all children can be understood through strict developmental stages, Delilah’s comment complicates this notion as her input demonstrates this deep intellectual noticing. As readers may have inferred, Delilah was most likely talking about students saying the ‘n word’ during recess. Many would consider the discussion of who is and is not “allowed” to be reserved for adults, if not at least older students, yet our research affirms that this is happening in real time for these young students as they construct thoughts and theories about what they’re noticing. As scholars Feagin & Ausdale (2001) write in their research on childhood development and forming understandings of race/racism, “a partial, developing understanding of the adult dynamics of racial-ethnic relations does not hinder children from developing their own complex racial and ethnic dynamics in interaction with others” (p. 16). Students are absorbing a ton from the world around them, but this knowledge does not necessitate adult presence as, clearly, students are forming their own thoughts and opinions from these interpersonal interactions even amongst peers. Thus, at this stage in their development, this is a critical component of *how* they are

interpreting our racialized world. These students already have a critical comprehension of race and racism as it impacts the relationships around them.

Feelings, Morals and Temporality

In alignment with their stage of development, we found that the students frequently used 'feeling words' (i.e. sad, hurtful, disappointed, angry, fairness) and/or opinionated morals (i.e. right vs wrong) and/or instances of before their lifetime (i.e. slavery, civil rights movement) when describing or reacting to racism. These are the ways in which children are working to interpret race dialogues. Firstly, the language or tone they used was always in reference to interpersonal events of which the kids seemed to both be comfortable sharing, yet they were simultaneously grappling with how they feel/what they think. For instance, to return back to when we prompted the kids to share whether or not they'd discussed race and racism at school, when looking at the entire interaction, it's clear the students' responses are primarily rooted in emotions and/or morals. The transcript read as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. *Sophia:* Have you all, or have you talked<br>2. about race or racism in school?<br>3. *Arabela:* [to Sophia] Yes!<br>4. *Sophia:* What have you talked about?<br>5. *Delilah:* Yeah like if you're a certain race<br>6. you can't say a certain word.<br>7. *Kenny:* Like don't judge someone…<br>8. *Arabela:* Don't judge someone before<br>9. you get to know them!<br>10. *Sophia:* Mmm<br>11. *Julieta:* One time we were talking about<br>12. racism, um, because Kenny didn't know,<br>13. but he said a racist joke. So we were<br>14. talking about racism because usually<br>15. racist people say Mexico, say Mexican<br>16. like it's a joke. | 1. *Kaila:* ¿Has hablado de la raza y el<br>2. racismo en la escuela? Como la palabra<br>3. raza, o cómo de qué color es su piel?<br>**Have you talked about race and racism in school? Like the word race, or like what color your skin is?**<br>4. *Sol:* No.<br>5. *Kaila:* No, nunca ¿Has hablado de ser<br>6. latino?<br>**Never? Have you talked about being Latino?**<br>7. *Sol:* Yo soy Latino.<br>**I'm Latino** |

Julieta's comment stood out to us as she was visibly explaining a formative moment that impacted her perception of racism[13]. Julieta's tone was rather matter of fact and empathetic toward her brother's experience, both of which were indicative of this recurring connection to emotions and morals. After these comments, we moved on and neglected to follow up and dig deeper into the meaning behind what they said. What's more, Sol was not integrated into the whole group conversation which meant that the

[13] For context, Julieta and Kenny are siblings and neither of them speak Spanish.

students could not *all* co-construct an interpretation and make sense or meaning from one another's stories. This revealed a discrepancy in our data on how participants made meaning from our dialogue as a result of the two conversations happening simultaneously rather than being integrated fluidly. His comment uniquely stands out as a solid statement of identity, rather than an emotional or moral connection, as he proclaimed to Kaila "Yo soy Latino" in line 7. This response is related to identity, rather than racism and — if integrated into the whole group — may have opened discussion for further clarification about the differences between identity (ethnic and racial) and talking about racism.

While we did not follow up with most of the students, we were, in a way, able to return to Julieta's response as it seemed like she was alluding to a similar instance again during her interview with Kaila when she shared: "...Because lots of people get judged from their skin color and I feel like that's not fair and that's racist and like things that are just basically like teasing you can't take that as racism because it's just teasing," (Interview, 2/15/22). The first part of this comment, in which she talked about fairness, again demonstrates a connection between racism and emotions as Julieta expressed concern about how people feel and are treated based on skin color. The second part of this sentence becomes more complicated as she is working to distinguish teasing from racist comments. She is working to connect the emotional aspect with her morals regarding teasing/bullying. Yet again, this confirms that understanding these interpersonal interactions is accessible, especially for younger participants like Julieta (age 8), but this does not mean there is no room for structural analysis to be integrated in as well.

Moreover, our data suggests that the students consistently understand race in a historical context, which once again limits their comprehension of its structural (and still present) nature. The code 'C19: Referenced racial dynamics outside of participants lifetime' was created to track the moments in which students contributed their understandings of race/racism specific to a historical time period. Some examples include when Delilah said: "Also, the other day, we were in a Zoom about Jackie Robinson," and proceeded to describe what she remembered from the discussion (Curriculum Day 1, 2/9/22). Or when Julieta exclaimed: "Oh! Also I feel like this is something that relates: slavery? ...Because they went to kidnap black people," when we asked the students if they'd talked about race and racism (2/9/22). Or finally, when Arabella recalled "I don't know why I brought this up, but Michael Jackson was like brownish then he turned white," while the children drew images of their families (2/9/22). All of this can be categorized under temporal reflection of race/racism as the students' talk circulates around understanding racial dynamics in the past. Interestingly, all of the aforementioned statements as well as the majority of C19 are referenced from school. To investigate this further, we turned to the Massachusetts Department of Education's (2018) History and Social Science Framework to see what these students are immersed in.

These students are taught a social studies and history curriculum which often frames racism in a historical context. From 1st-5th grade they are primarily expected to utilize primary sources and historical texts to understand Massachusetts and United States history with enslavement, the Civil Rights Movement, colonies, Indigenious genocide, and more (MA Department of Ed., 2018). Not until 6th grade does a standard specifically link the past to the present; the standard states: "Give examples of ways in which a current historical interpretation might build on, extend, or reject an interpretation of the past," (MA Department of Ed., 2018). When participants spoke about their understandings of race, the majority of them surfaced knowledge learned in school relating to these topics. Much of this framing further contributes to an interpersonal understanding as specific people are labeled "good" (i.e. Martin Luther King) vs "bad" people (i.e. confederate soldiers). Interestingly, the only student who really spoke at great length about current instances of racism was Delilah — the oldest and only 6th grader of the group — when she mentioned how students were saying the 'n word' at recess (2/9/22). Although this context can provide some insight as to *how* participants are learning about race/racism, it is evidently not the only factor at hand given that the students did not ever mention the genocide of Indigenious people. We are not insinuating that children should not learn historical context, but rather it's quite the opposite. If we know this information to be vital, what is preventing us as teachers from connecting histories to structures of racism at all ages and reframing how history is taught?

Clearly, the students already have the tools and language necessary to engage in discussion. Our research question on surfacing knowledge has, in part, been affirmed by the noticings and stories they've shared. With more practice and spaces to freely engage with this topic, it seems they have the potential to not only comprehend structural racism, but also emotionally react, offer distinct opinions, and create critical historical connections. So often, as Feagin & Ausdale (2001) write, "adults evaluate children using a deficit model, assuming without questioning that children do not possess maturity or sophisticated knowledge of the social world," (p.4). Instead, what if adults saw their capacity for empathy and firm points of view as radical and insightful? What if we understood their comments, questions, and theories to be incredibly "mature" and evidence of valuable knowledge (Yosso 2014). Evidently, the issue is not only the deficit model of children, but also the ways in which larger society constructs problematic and invisibilized understandings of race and racism.

***Facilitator Metacognition and Reflection***

One of our research questions directly connects the section above with the theme of reflecting on

our own facilitation tactics — “How does having an explicit race dialogue surface the knowledge 8-13 year olds already hold about race in their own lives and in their communities?” As facilitators, it would have been valuable for us to revisit what kind of concrete strategies can surface student knowledge and build generative conversations. This could look like following up with “Can you say more about that?” or “Can you clarify what you meant by _____” or, specifically in regard to the conversation between Julieta and Kenny “Why do you think people say Mexican as a joke, did you first hear someone else say that Kenny?” We tried to take note of when we were and weren’t utilizing prompting strategies in our facilitation with the following codes: C9: Facilitators prompting curriculum learning goals, C10: Facilitators moving on rather than asking prompting questions, C11: Facilitators ask prompting or clarifying questions, C12: Affirmation without specification. These codes helped us be self-reflexive when it came to our facilitation practices, such as moments where we neglected to follow up on what could’ve been an important point, as mentioned above, or the example below, where Kaila asks a question, but doesn’t engage with Delilah’s response and gets caught up in the following comments, leaving it unanswered.

1. Kaila: Do you know what — because I remember Delilah you were saying earlier Latine, do
2. you know why people say Latine instead?
3. Delilah: To count all the Latinos…like from the Caribbean?
4. Kaila: Mmm
   [NC asks about word Latino]

Interestingly, during individual interviews with students, we both asked more clarifying questions. In response to the question “what was your favorite activity that we did?” Kenny, Arabela, and Julieta all said they liked the mural activity, and we both prompted them further, reiterating their response and then asking “why?” and this prompting happened again in Kaila and Julieta’s interview, when Julieta said she liked when we talked about things that are racist and not racist. It’s possible that the one-on-one space, which was significantly calmer and felt lower-stakes, allowed for us to relax and really try and dig deeper into what the children were trying to communicate to us. Further, in contrast, working with the larger group meant we had additional matters to address such as coherence, ensuring the students understood what was happening, etc. In interviews, although we were asking prompting questions, they were not specifically prompting any learning goals, as we didn’t have a set agenda for the interviews, we were just curious to understand more about how the children had experienced the curriculum. This also speaks to the value of being flexible within our learning goals — emphasizing them, but also being able to pause and go on tangents if needed to address important questions that arise. Attention to these moments could surface critical learning opportunities to capitalize on.

Patricia Paugh (2015) explores this relationship between the facilitators role and meaning-making in her research on literacy practices in an urban elementary classroom. As discussed in our Literature Review, she spent 6 years working with one 4th grade classroom, as well as their teacher, Ms. B collecting ethnographic data. As a facilitator, Ms. B used intentional strategies to encourage dialogue by "monitoring the conversation, stepping back to let the discussion progress in ways not anticipated, but also she retained authority to keep students on task or challenge their thinking" (p. 145). Although the focus of Ms. B's writing unit was not explicitly on race, a lot of the books and content she was teaching directly addressed questions of race and racism in the context of the United States. In one class, they were discussing Martin Luther King Jr.'s role as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. One student, Gabriella, was summarizing Martin Luther King Jr.'s role based on information from the reading, but then "she diverted with a question to satisfy a more personal concern," to ask ''Why was Whites bad to Black [sic]? How did it all start?'' (p.142). Before addressing the way the conversation unfolded, it's interesting to note the way in which the purpose of the diversion is noted and categorized as being "to satisfy a more personal concern." Although we did not classify the purpose or intent of diversions throughout our transcript, it's clear to see the benefit of this practice to show the ways in which students may not simply be going "off-topic," but trying to understand something for their own benefit even if it sits outside of a given lesson plan or learning goals. Of course it can be difficult then to assess which diversions to engage with that would lead to a fruitful discussion, and which ones might just take away from the limited time available to the group.  Nonetheless, this can come with additional experience, awareness about the content being discussed, and intentional reflection.

In response to Gabriella's question, another student responds by saying "'People thought that it was funny so they treated ... .'' Ms. B immediately interjects and challenges the student's use of the word "funny" and pushes him, stating "No, no, bigger than that'' and then ''No BIGGER than that'' twice pushing Clarke to further explain his ideas,"' (Paugh 2015, p.142). Ms. B did not hesitate in ensuring that students were using language that addressed questions of racial inequity seriously, and she was firm in her questions. As facilitators discussing race and racism, it is essential that we are able to challenge students through questions in this way. There are moments when the seriousness of purpose and firmness came up throughout our dialogue, but it was usually in the form of strong statements rather than questions. In the transcript segment below, Delilah is talking about non-Black students saying the n-word during recess at school.

1. *Delilah:* I've heard many people at recess say a certain word and they can't say — or, they're a
2. certain race and they say —

3. *Kaila:* They say it anyway?
4. *Delilah:* Yeah
5. *Kaila:* That's definitely… I remember when I was in school too that would happen and that's
6. definitely not okay
7. *Sophia:* Yeah not at all

- 2/9/22

In response, we both immediately affirm what Delilah is saying by clearly stating our negative position on the matter, and Kaila adds a personal example of how this would happen at her school as well. Though we wished we'd followed up with *why* we shared a negative position and what about the story was "not okay." Moreover, there are other points during the curriculum, as we mentioned in the section "Feelings, Morals, and Temporality" where we don't pause to question the use of certain language, such as the association with Mexican being a joke that Julieta brought up. Prompting and clarifying questions throughout the curriculum is essential to ensure that students are being challenged to think critically about the language they are using, and how this impacts the message they are trying to communicate.

***Never Enough Time!: Practicing Imagination***

The situational constraints within this project were a large factor in the lack of dialogue around structural racism. We planned for our curriculum to be only three days so as not to be overwhelmed by data, and it ended up only being two days; whereas Laura (Sophia's mom) communicated that she spent over 4 years with the majority of her students building an understanding of race and racism. There is never enough time in curriculum units (oftentimes in education more generally) to achieve the higher level of learning that the educator hopes for. Nevertheless, we acquired so much knowledge from observing how the students interpreted our final art project which sought to bring in how schooling as a structure perpetuates injustice. The mural [*see Figure 5*] was truly exciting to make, both for us as facilitators as well as the students as confirmed in their interviews — three out of four interviewees reported that this was their favorite thing we did together (Arabella, Julieta, and Kenny 2/15/22). It was through examining this session that we recognized how the students were imagining new ideas and disrupting structures within their school. To name this, we created the codes C20: Identifying issue and offering solution and C21: Explaining/justifying rationales.

The students never specifically referenced how the changes they advocated for were at a larger level than the interpersonal examples they gave on the first day. However, their ideas for changes were notably beyond the interpersonal. Food, for example, was brought up as the students felt their school's food was not tasty; or as Kenny said: "Oh it's garbage [pronounces like: gar-bah-ge]," (2/10/22). In response,

towards the middle right of the mural, the students added in a new and improved cafeteria as well as a garden (middle left) which would have plenty of fresh produce. They planned all the many possibilities and meals they wished were at school, including meals of cultural significance. These suggestions and dreams for their school exemplify Yosso's (2014) definition of the power of navigational capital as this form of knowledge "acknowledges individual agency within institutional constraints, but it also connects to social networks that facilitate community navigation through places and spaces including schools, the job market and the health care and judicial systems (Williams, 1997)," (p.80). While the students did not have the language to describe the structural changes they were making, our findings reveal that they have the inherent ability to resist schooling by imagining alternatives to their lived reality. Our research confirms that students could employ individual and collective agency when it came to issues that matter to them and were prevalent in their lives. It was fantastic to observe how art allowed the students to visualize these thoughts in ways that resonated with them (given the feedback we received in interviews). We can contextualize this within our third research question regarding how participants responded to our art-centered activities; they were impacted by the position they took and their freedom to imagine what they wanted. To connect back to our literature review, this research thus upholds Black feminist scholar bell hooks (1991) statement that children make some of the best theorists because they can "imagine possible futures, [or] a place where life could be lived differently" (pp. 1-2). The students' work exhibited how they could utilize one another to build ideas and "imagine possible futures." If we were to have more time, we wondered how we might use this experience/process to explain the nature of structures. What other bases of knowledge do children have that could help cultivate a rich critical consciousness?

**Figure 5:** Completed Mural of a Re-Imagined Chandler Magnet Elementary School (2/10/22)[14]

***Making Meaning: Returning to Research Questions***

*What can we learn from the implementation of our curriculum about what makes race dialogues meaningful to 8-13 year olds?*

Throughout this project, we have returned again and again to the notion of meaning-making and how we can strive to provide this for the children we work with. Initially, we anticipated that most data for this research question would be revealed through the interviews, however, we found that students' willingness and excitement to share their personal experiences was what most clearly demonstrated the meaning they were constructing. We hardly ever had to prompt them to contribute their stories and, if anything, we could've done more to encourage or deepen what was said. We had cultivated a dynamic with the students that was built on mutual trust and shared responsibility to one another. Throughout our time together, we had shown them that we were people who supported them and, as a result, they made an effort to support us by actively participating in our discussions and activities.

Our theme of Relationship Building and Rebuilding names how we worked to encourage the students to make connections and access their prior knowledge in the many moments we did ask them follow-up questions and validated their experiences. We understand meaning-making to also be a communal practice as we both (us and the students) collectively worked to generate value from this experience. We couldn't have done what we did without each other and it was critical for us to name that. Relationship Building and Rebuilding *also* involves the jokes and laughter we shared, the experience of drawing our families together and talking about our home lives, and generally how we co-created meaning from our time together.

*How does having an explicit race dialogue surface the knowledge 8-13 year olds already hold about race in their own lives and in their communities?*

In alignment with the connections made above, the students offered so much valuable knowledge in enacting the curriculum specifically around race/racism, making it feel successful and validated. The section in which we explored Structural vs Interpersonal Dialogues with Children showcases *how* the students worked to surface what they knew, such as through discussing

[14] This mural includes a garden, a science classroom with experiments, a re-imagined cafeteria with many different kinds of food, a petting zoo, a rainbow parking lot, and more trees/plants surrounding the school.

feelings, morals, and history. For example, when the children used sad or angry to talk about racism, or when we pointed to how Julieta was grappling with the morals of teasing vs racism. Or, finally, when we discussed the ways in which history in the classroom frames racism as "good" vs "bad" people limited to primarily the past. All this helped us to better understand how students have learned how to talk about race as well as what we feel may be missing from their realm of discourse. All the research we found only spoke to the importance of the interpersonal level, which is in part due to their development, though it left us wondering if there was research we missed that does attempt to intentionally integrate conversations on structure.

*How do 8-13 year olds respond to the art-centered activities in our curriculum?*

From the beginning of the creation of curriculum, including art-activities was incredibly important to us as we didn't want the focus to solely be on dialogue. Throughout the program, we noticed how engaged students always were in the art activities, even students who usually liked to play sports enjoyed painting, drawing, and other forms of art such as constructing a giant paper puzzle, or playing charades (similar to theater). On the first day of the curriculum, students dove straight into drawing their families, and were careful and intentional about picking the right colored pencils for their families skin. During the mural activity, all of the participants were very involved as well as they worked on many different sections and even provided input on areas that other people were working on. During the interviews, three out of four participants who we interviewed said that they liked the activity where we drew the school. When asked why, Arabela said "Because I feel like a picture of my school reminds me of how special my school is and how special I am," Julieta said "I like that we got to paint and do new stuff and add stuff that we would like to the school," and Kenny said "It just felt fun making the dream school," (Interviews, 2/15/22). Together, these quotes signify that the action of imagining new possibilities for their school through art strongly resonated with the children. Positive diction like "special","fun" and "dream" illuminated how they felt even after a few days.

*What multilingual practices can we implement that allow for meaning-making for all participants?*

In the section Language, Translation, and Meaning-Making, we wrote in response to this research question as we deconstructed the complexities of language as a social practice. Sol, the one participant who spoke primarily Spanish, was frequently excluded from the large group discussion because verbal English was the dominant mode of communication. Thus, his constructions of meaning may have been negatively impacted as we did not work to incorporate consistent and explicit multilingual practices. We

observed this to be isolating though noted how, throughout both sessions, Sol still found ways to participate beyond having a separate or translated conversation. While his capacity to do so is important to recognize, as facilitators we could've utilized various alternatives outside of verbal communication. Instead, we could've used images, videos, had students do voice recordings, be able to listen rather than read, or even used games which rely on body language as opposed to speaking. Working to proactively eliminate situations in which students feel isolated is essential if we are to strive towards an environment in which they are all able to make meaning.

*How do we mitigate the inherent power of translation, while also recognizing the positive potential translation has in multilingual spaces?*

After spending time at Chandler Magnet, we made deliberate choices to rework our curriculum with the objective of integrating Spanish as fluidly as we could. For example, in our first session we read the book *Our Skin: A First Conversation About Race* by Megan Madison and Jessica Ralli (2021), and decided that Sophia would read a page of the book in English, and Kaila would subsequently translate the same page into Spanish. We had established a process we both agreed to employ when it came to translation that was informed by observing/learning from the space and the students. Additionally, Kaila prepared by translating the entirety of *Our Skin* into Spanish to ensure she had it for reference, as well as creating a list of vocabulary words that would be key to the conversation. She also did research and talked to Latine friends both in the US and outside of the US for additional support.

Despite our work to be cautious and intentional, the moment we began the session we were so stressed about getting through the curriculum that, when we read the book, for the most part Kaila ended up speaking directly to Sol while Sophia rushed through the text in English. Becoming aware of how translation played a key role during our curriculum unit was challenging as there were multiple moments like this in which we shifted away from our initial plan, which had integrated a balance of Spanish and English. While we can't change what happened, it would've been valuable to address this matter with the students themselves by asking them (perhaps in interviews) what their experiences were with multiple languages being used and how they felt about the translations. Their input could've helped further inform an answer to this question and may have offered insight to future changes to our curriculum.

When considering these research questions in relationship to all of our themes (Language as a Social Practice, Relationship Building and Rebuilding, Facilitator Metacognition and Reflection, Structural vs Interpersonal Race Dialogues with Children, and Practicing Imagination), we've found that we are still

deeply concerned with meaning-making. We both have so much care and love for the work we do with children and want to become educators who can actively utilize this experience to inform our pedagogies and practices. For example, we added the research question on language because we saw injustice in the fact that students may not be able to cultivate meaningful experiences from one another if we do not work towards ensuring that everyone has equitable communication support. Working to understand how meaning is constructed will be an ongoing process for us and will structure the ways in which we move forward in this research and beyond.

*End: Where We Are Now/How Do We Move Forward?*

**CONCLUSION**

Research, when as in-depth, all consuming, and deeply cared for as this project has been, is challenging to conclude as we are left with more questions and interests to further explore. There is so much within our data that we simply could not fit into our analysis. Evidently, we already tried to fit quite a lot — it was challenging to reduce data and limit our analysis to a straightforward cohesive narrative. Especially as two scattered circular thinkers, we both felt wholly encompassed by everything we found meaningful from the meaning-making our participants engaged in. Thus, our center of gravity became (or maybe always was) both our and the students' sense-making throughout our collective journey. The kids opened our eyes to the importance of meaning-making and what challenges come with it. Ultimately, our research confirmed how important play, laughter, relationships, trust, and imagination is for educators to include in their work given that these components are foundational to making meaning of childrens' meaning-making.

As we move forward from this project as educators, we both will continue to hold everything we learned and apply this experience to the classrooms we inhabit in the future. We are both pursuing the Master's Arts of Teaching through Clark's fifth year program and know that the knowledge we acquired throughout this research is directly applicable to the teaching and learning we will be engaging in next year. However, we agreed that we both are unlikely to pursue research in this form again. Namely, the structure of this academic project put pressure on the experience with the children — for example, just like the students, we too were jarred by the sudden transition into a facilitator/participant dynamic. Alternatively, we imagine organically adopting the knowledge we obtained in this research through teaching, but not formalized through the IRB and other limiting confines of research. Therefore, as we conclude this project, we hope to move forward with the meaning we made from the experience itself, rather than the processes which structured it.

Above, we returned back to our research questions, connected it to our themes, and offered final thoughts on the ways in which meaning-making was the lens through which we were analyzing our data. As showcased in Appendix A, we then outlined the trajectory of our curriculum units and rationalized how and why we made the changes we did after learning from actually implementing it. Now, we will end by circling back to the roots of this project: care, learning, and mutual relationships specifically within race dialogues and elementary education. After this (very long) shared praxis journey, these roots still remain central to our work and will help us in future educational spaces. Both of us have learned so much about

meaningful practices when it comes to working with children, as well as the challenges of opening up race dialogues with this age group that we want our readers to sit with. In addition to practical questions to help guide our readers, we also acknowledge that this work can never be fully complete, and as such, we also wrote a series of questions for ourselves that we are still wrestling with given the complexities of this research.

*Meaningful Teaching Practices*

There is no way that we will be able to summarize everything that we have learned through implementing this curriculum, and how we plan to move forward with this newfound information as educators. The reconstructing of a final curriculum draft is just one example of some of what we would change and the activities we would do, but again, it only reflects a fraction of our hopes and ideas about meaningful practices engaging in race dialogues with youth. We also tried to fit a lot of content into a few days and we know that, if we were to do this again, we would be more realistic about the fact that our curriculum would need to be an ongoing course/extended unit.

If we had been working with a more long-term structure, we agreed it would've been valuable to spend a lot more time, months even if needed, on defining the terms and concepts that are foundational to successful race dialogues, such as "what is race? What is racism? What is ethnicity?" By having these questions as a starting point for dialogue, it creates a common ground, rather than assuming that everyone is understanding how race shows up in society in the same way. It also would inevitably lead to discussing the construction and reconstruction of race throughout history, which may also help build a curriculum that addresses the personal, interpersonal, and structural aspects of race and racism. Time is an unfortunate constraint of any research, but given that part of our work aspired to fill this gap, we will conclude with a few guiding questions we think could be beneficial for educators wanting to engage in race dialogues with children. This practical checklist of questions, both preparatory and reflective, are kept relatively broad so as to to apply to curricula anywhere between a week long or one that spans over years.

<u>Guiding Questions for Educators Interested in Creating a Race Dialogue Curriculum with Children ages 8-13:</u>

- How will your curriculum support communication differences among participants, including but not limited to language differences? If there are already bi/multilingual frameworks in place, how might we work to maintain the practices the children are familiar with?
- Do you have a co-facilitator? How are you reflecting on the positionality of your co-facilitator in

relation to your own?

- In what ways will you take opportunities for metacognition after completing the curriculum, both for students and facilitators?
- What strategies will you use to surface students' preexisting knowledge of race and racism?
- How can progression towards larger systems in other disciplines be used as a framework for progression from interpersonal to structural racism?
- What are the limitations of dialogue? How will your curriculum supplement dialogue with additional activities?
- How will you include current events relating to race and racism to further inform discussion?
- How do you plan to gather feedback from participants, and how will you incorporate this feedback into future curricula?

*Making Meaning of Meaning-Making: What Questions are We Left With?*

In the cyclical spirit of praxis, we now return back to our theoretical framework and reflect on the ways in which our research builds upon Community Cultural Wealth and Critical Multiliteracies. Our findings in relation to meaning-making affirmed much of what these frameworks outlined at the start of this project. We learned that building relationships and navigating transitions can complicate meaning-making which upholds Zepke and Leach's (2014) theorizing around the importance of relationships within meaning-making and the impact of forming connections with both people and contexts. Additionally, we now know that we will never enter another space without thinking critically about language access. Yosso's (2014) theorizing around linguistic capital, which "reflects the idea that Students of Color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills," is furthered through our research which takes into account the power dynamics within translation across various forms of communication (p.79). Our findings similarly saw how linguistic capital also involves exchanging knowledge through visual art (as well as other alternative mediums) as participants utilized the medium we offered to share their thoughts and experiences.

Throughout this process we were reminded about the nature of race dialogues and how it is essential to dedicate time to their thoughts and opinions. When striving to surface knowledge, while we wrestled with the lack of discussion around structural racism, this does not indicate that there was a lack of significance in the children's contributions — in fact, we saw their wisdom as the very knowledge Yosso advocates must be regarded as valuable and essential. What's more, the children demonstrated that there is no "correct" or "incorrect" way to use language given that *how* their knowledge around race/racism was brought to light was by way of many different literacies including art, joking/laughing, storytelling, and

more. Although the reflection on our curriculum implementation and the meaning-making that took place for students throughout this paper is specific to the group of six students that took part in our curriculum, we hope that these conversations will act as an entry point for more conversations surrounding the intricacies of conducting race dialogues with children. Throughout our research process, we came across many articles speaking to siloed aspects of our research, such as children's awareness of race and racism, the importance of dialogue, and pedagogies affirming the inclusion of multiple modalities of meaning-making in curriculum. Yet there was very little research on what happens when you bring all of these aspects together, as our project sought to unpack. We are not necessarily advocating for a catch-all guidebook to race dialogues with children, as facilitation and race dialogues should be an ongoing, reflective practice, but it would be beneficial to see research in the future which incorporates data and feedback from the kids themselves.

When metacognitively reflecting on our experiences as facilitators, part of this work included reflecting on our own identities and how we contextualize meaning, to "avoid our positionality becoming unduly dominating" (Zepke & Leach, 2014, p.121). We began this work prior to creating our curriculum through writing portfolio pieces about our positionality, as well as our theories of social inequality and social change, and we continued unpacking and reflecting on these important topics as we moved into the curriculum. Finally, we were inspired by the imagination children brought to the curriculum and all we got through their meaning-making. The students, as mentioned in our findings, utilized Navigational capital (a facet of Community Cultural Wealth) as they co-constructed alternative possibilities despite the structures of schooling.

Though we have woven these connections and grappled with the theoretical impacts of this research, as mentioned at the start of the conclusion, we are still left with wonderings and the sense that there is always more to dive into. As such, we generated the following list of questions for ourselves that expand our understanding of meaning-making and challenge our research to continue seeking the story we want to tell:

1. How do we talk about collective meaning-making while honoring both facilitator and participants' individual meaning-making processes?
2. How do we negotiate compromises in communication?
3. How do we balance creating meaningful, robust curricula within the time constraints of life?

**APPENDIX A: REVISED CURRICULA**

Upon completing data collection, we felt it was necessary to envision how we would move forward given what we learned and how we grew as educators, facilitators, and researchers. Our findings left us with more questions than finalized answers about how we can deconstruct formal vs informal spaces, how to plan and execute a just framework for translation, and how we can engage elementary age students in a dialogue which covers interpersonal *and* structural racism. We've thus decided to once again revisit and revise our curriculum plan, and offer one final draft which incorporates everything we now know from the start of this project. The entire purpose of piloting a curriculum is to assess successes and areas of struggle with a critical lens and the intention to try again. While this is our final semester of undergrad, and we do not intend to implement the final draft curriculum, our hope is that these drafts will collectively function to both map how we've developed, as well as exemplify a potential curriculum unit for other educators. Ideally, they can learn from our challenges and build upon the structure we created. Further, we have learned a lot that will help our own curriculum planning in the future.

*Draft One*

**Day 1: What is Race? What is Dialogue?**

| *Activity* | *Details* | *Time* | *Materials* | *Notes* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Introductions and Group Norms | Sharing names, pronouns if comfortable<br><br>What agreements are we going to make together to make sure everyone feels comfortable to share their thoughts and stories?<br>-If you feel uncomfortable with a conversation, you can always leave the room for a minute, and you can talk to either of us<br>-Speaking from an I perspective<br>-Please don't say people's names outside of our space, if you've learned something new feel free to share but don't use specifics<br><br>Everyone will sign the agreements | 10 min | Big Sticky Note Markers for all participants<br><br>(Some of it filled out already) | Students will be reminded of audio recording before we begin |
| What is | Explain that we are doing this | 5 min | | Connect to |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dialogue? | activity because when we talk about topics that are very personal like race, it's important<br><br>Debate vs dialogue whole group activity:<br>Arguing for your season vs. Asking questions | | | community agreements and future classes |
| What is Race? | *Our Skin* by Megan Madison and Jessica Ralli:<br>Discussion Questions during book:<br>-pg.9 Sophia talks about how acknowledging race and nationality/ethnicity is important<br>-Pg. 10 Comment on how people judge others by things like their eyes or hair<br>pg. 12 describe the picture the picture: white student are yelling but only the Black student is getting told to be quiet by the white teacher<br><br>What did this book make you think about? Did you learn anything new or was there something you already knew? | 10 min | Book | |
| Closing | Draw a picture of your family | 5 min | Markers<br><br>Paper | |

**Day 2: How do I see myself? How do others see me?**

| *Activity* | *Details* | *Time* | *Materials (TBD)* | *Notes* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Welcoming | Reminder of group norms from last session and opportunity to offer more feedback.<br><br>Check in question: If you could | 5 min | Community norms paper | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | have any super power, what would it be? (¿pudieras tener algún superpoder qué sería?) | | | |
| Art Activity: Self Portrait with an object | Pick an object that feels important to who you are<br><br>Create a piece of art that incorporates this object<br>- A drawing that incorporates your object<br>- Think about the story you want to tell through your art | 15 min | Paper<br><br>Colored pencils and markers | Communicate that this is the outline or start ot the project and the kids can finish next week |
| Art Gallery (show and tell) | Students share their art work with each other and are given the opportunity to talk about what they plan to create<br><br>Discussion Questions:<br>- Why did you pick this object? Why is it important to you?<br>- Does it remind you of a certain place or person?<br>- What do you think people think about you based on your object? | 7 min | | |
| Closing | Discuss: How did you feel about what we did today? | 3 min | | |

**Day 3: Race in My Community**

| *Activity* | *Details* | *Time* | *Materials (TBD)* | *Notes* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Welcoming and Check in | Group norms and check in question: | 5 min | Community norms paper | |
| Journaling and Dialogue | Journal reflection: What do you wish your teachers knew about your identity?<br>(Give examples) | 7 min | Lined paper<br><br>Pencils | Students can keep their journal entries private and only share what they'd like to |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Group discussion/sharing back reflections:<br>- What would you do to make your school better for yourself and your classmates? | | | |
| Art Activity: Race in in my school group Mural | Add to a mural of Chandler Magnet, Sophia and Kaila will have added examples<br>- Brown teachers in the classrooms<br>- Draw ramp instead of Stairs<br>- Ice cream machine in cafeteria | 15 min | Mural paper (template of school created by us)<br><br>Markers/colored pencils | |
| Closing: Mural Walk | Spend a minute looking at our mural quietly then share out some things you notice. | 5 min | | Reminders of interviews for kids who consented (gave permission) |

*Draft Two*

**Day 1: What is Race? What is Dialogue?**

| *Activity* | *Details* | *Time* | *Materials* | *Notes* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group Norms | What agreements are we going to make together to make sure everyone feels comfortable to share their thoughts and stories?<br><br>Are there rules in your classroom that you like/don't like?<br><br>-If you feel uncomfortable with a conversation, you can always leave the room for a minute, and you can talk to either of us or to _____.<br>-Speaking from an I perspective<br>-Please don't say people's names outside of our space, if | 10 min | Big Sticky Note Markers for all participants<br><br>(Some of it filled out already) | Students will be reminded of audio recording before we begin<br><br>Keep a posterboard to write up key/new terms. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | you've learned something new feel free to share but don't use specifics<br>-Emphasize dialogue (asking questions)<br><br>Everyone will sign the agreements | | | |
| What is Race? | Surfacing knowledge: Do you think race is just skin color? Is skin color part of race? Be thinking about questions you have while we read.<br><br>Why do you think people feel uncomfortable talking about race?<br><br>*Our Skin* by Megan Madison and Jessica Ralli:<br>Discussion Questions during book:<br>-pg.9 Sophia talks about how acknowledging race and nationality/ethnicity is important – Afro-Latina<br>-Pg. 10 Comment on how people judge others by things like their eyes or hair (la gente juzga a otras personas debido a su pelo y ojos)<br>pg. 12 describe the picture: white student are yelling but only the Black student is getting told to be quiet by the white teacher<br><br>What did this book make you think about? Did you learn anything new or was there something you already knew? | 10 min | Book | We each read a page in English and Spanish |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Was there anything in the book that gave you some ideas about why people feel uncomfortable talking about race? | | | |
| Closing | Draw a picture of your family | 5 min | Markers<br><br>Paper | |

**Day 2: How do I see myself? How do others see me?**

| *Activity* | *Details* | *Time* | *Materials* | *Notes* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Welcoming | Reminder of group norms from last session and opportunity to offer more feedback.<br><br>Check in question: If you could have any super power, what would it be? (¿si pudieras tener algún superpoder qué sería?) | 5 min | Community norms paper | |
| Art Activity: Self Portrait with an object | Pick an object that feels important to who you are<br><br>Create a piece of art that incorporates this object<br>- A drawing that incorporates your object<br>- Think about the story you want to tell through your art | 15 min | Paper<br><br>Colored pencils and markers | Communicate that this is the outline or start ot the project and the kids can finish next week<br><br>Sophia does tattoo, Kaila does film canister |
| Art Gallery (show and tell) | Students share their art work with each other and are given the opportunity to talk about what they plan to create<br><br>Prompting Questions:<br>- Why did you pick this object? Why is it important to you?<br>- Does it remind you of a certain place or person? | 7 min | | |

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| | - What do you think people think about you based on your object? | | | |
| Closing | Discuss: How did you feel about what we did today? | 3 min | | |

**Day 3: Race in My Community**

| *Activity* | *Details* | *Time* | *Materials (TBD)* | *Notes* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Welcoming and Check in | Group norms and check in question: Favorite candy/snack | 5 min | Community norms paper | |
| Journaling and Dialogue | Talk to the person next to you: What do you wish your teachers knew about your identity?<br>(Give examples)<br><br>Connect back to the book: Before you make change you have to imagine what that would look like – visualizing in the school<br><br>Group discussion/sharing back reflections:<br>- What would you do to make your school better for yourself and your classmates? | 7 min | Lined paper<br><br>Pencils | Students don't have to share if they don't want to |
| Art Activity: Race in in my school group Mural | Add to a mural of Chandler Magnet, Sophia and Kaila will have added examples<br>- Brown teachers in the classrooms<br>- Draw ramp instead of Stairs<br>- Ice cream machine in cafeteria | 15 min | Mural paper (template of school created by us)<br><br>Markers/colored pencils | |
| Closing: Mural | Spend a minute looking at our | 5 min | | Reminders of |

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| Walk | mural quietly then share out some things you notice. | | | interviews |

*Draft Three*

The following draft is written under the assumption we would be presented with the same group of children. However, we want to acknowledge that, if there were students who didn't speak English or Spanish, a lot of the translation strategies we have incorporated would not support these students. Given this situation, we would use resources such as images, videos, and other valuable alternative mediums to support mutual understanding. We'd work to ensure students felt they had opportunities to contribute beyond conversing in English, but also recognize the inherent challenges of multilingual spaces.

**Day 1: What is Race? What is Dialogue?**

| *Activity* | *Details* | *Time* | *Materials* | *Notes* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group Norms: Kaila | (Provide snacks for students to eat as we discuss group norms – participants draw their contributions)<br><br>*ALL IN SPANISH*<br>¿**Qué hacen los amigos para que tengas confianza en ellos?** (What do good friends do to help you have trust in them?)<br><br>**¿Hay reglas en su salón que te gustan o no te gustan?** (Are there rules in your classroom that you like/don't like?)<br><br>Norms:<br>**- Si te sientes incómodo en cualquier momento, siempre puedes dejar la conversación para un moment** (If you feel uncomfortable with a conversation, you can always leave the room for a minute, and you can talk to either of us in English or Spanish) | 10 min | Big Sticky Note<br>Markers for all participants<br><br>Markers<br><br>Snacks | Students will be reminded of audio recording before we begin<br><br>Keep a poster board to write up key/new terms. |

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| | **- Por favor hablen de su propio perspectiva, no asumen que sienten los demás** (Speak from an I perspective)<br>**- Si aprendieron algo nuevo lo pueden compartir afuera de esta conversación, pero sin nombrar a los demás com** (Please don't say people's names outside of our space, if you've learned something new feel free to share but don't use names)<br>**- Enfatizar hacer preguntas** (Emphasize asking questions)<br><br>Everyone sign the agreements | | | |
| What is Race?: Sophia | *SPANISH AND ENGLISH*<br><br><u>Surfacing knowledge:</u><br>What is race? **¿Qué es la raza?**<br>Have you heard the word race?<br>*– co-construct initial definition before reading*<br><br>¿Crees que la raza es solo el color de nuestra piel? ¿El color de la piel es parte de la raza? Do you think race is just skin color? Is skin color part of race? — Be thinking about questions you have while we read.<br><br>*Our Skin* by Megan Madison and Jessica Ralli:<br>Discussion Questions during book:<br>-pg.9 Sophia talks about how acknowledging race and nationality/ethnicity is important – Afro-Latina<br>-Pg. 10 Comment on how | 15 min | Book | **Each read a page in English and Spanish**<br><br>**Questions repeated in Spanish or, if asking in Spanish first, repeated in English (explicitly encourage students to use both languages)**<br><br>Clarify difference between race and ethnicity if it doesn't come up from the students |

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| | people judge others by things like their eyes or hair (la gente juzga a otras personas debido a su pelo y ojos)<br>pg. 12 describe the picture: white student are yelling but only the Black student is getting told to be quiet by the white teacher<br><br>Go around (please share in Spanish if you are able): What did this book make you think about? Did you learn anything new or was there something you already knew?<br><br>**What can we add to our definition of 'what is race'?**<br><br>(Was there anything in the book that gave you some ideas about why people feel uncomfortable talking about race?) | | | |
| Closing/Art Activity – Both | *SPANISH AND ENGLISH*<br>Draw a picture of your family – think about how you can show race and how people look different | 10 min | Markers<br><br>Paper | **Explicitly encourage conversation in both languages** |

**Day 2: How do I see myself? How do others see me?**

| *Activity* | *Details* | *Time* | *Materials* | *Notes* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Welcoming | *SPANISH AND ENGLISH*<br>Reminder of group norms from last session and opportunity to offer more feedback.<br><br>Check in question with snacks: If you could have any super power, what would it be? (**¿si pudieras tener algún** | 5 min | Community norms paper<br><br>Snacks | |

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| | **superpoder qué sería?**) | | | |
| What is Racism? – Teasing vs Racism | Reference *Our Skin* to define racism. Have you heard this word before? – Example of Ruby Bridges: she experienced racism from the school and from kids teasing her.<br><br>Have you ever heard or said a joke about someone's race that was supposed to be teasing, but it hurt someone?<br><br>T Chart → Teasing vs Racism (students encouraged to draw representations on both sides) | 7 min | Paper for T Chart, markers and colored pencils for drawing | |
| Creating TikToks | Groups make TikToks in Spanish and English groups: What is teasing vs racism? | 20 min | Smartphones | |
| Closing | *SPANISH*<br>Discuss:**¿Cómo te sentiste con lo que hicimos hoy?** (How did you feel about what we did today?) | 5 min | | |

**Day 3: Injustice in My School Community** *ALL IN SPANISH (with English translations)*

| *Activity* | *Details* | *Time* | *Materials (TBD)* | *Notes* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Welcoming and Check in | Group norms, snacks, and check in question: What is your favorite candy? **Cuál es tu dulce favorito?** | 5 min | Community norms paper<br><br>Snacks | |
| Turn and Talk → Group discussion | Talk to the person next to you: What do you wish you could change about your school? (Give examples)<br><br>Connect back to the book: Before you make change you | 7 min | Lined paper<br><br>Pencils | Students don't have to share if they don't want to<br><br>**Explicitly encourage students to use English and** |

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| | have to imagine what that would look like: What would you do to make your school better for yourself and your classmates? | | | **Spanish** |
| Art Activity: Injustice in my school Group Mural | Add to a mural of Chandler Magnet, Sophia and Kaila will have added examples<br>- Brown teachers<br>- Draw ramp instead of Stairs<br>- Ice cream machine in cafeteria<br>While students are working, ask prompting questions that allude to structural nature of school | 15 min | Mural paper (template of school created by us)<br><br>Markers and paint | **During this section, Kaila talk exclusively in Spanish** |
| Closing: Mural Walk | Spend a minute looking at our mural quietly then share out some things you notice. (Please use Spanish if you can) | 5 min | | **Explicitly encourage students to use English and Spanish**<br><br>Reminders of interviews |

*Ideally continue with additional sessions*

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