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Visions of Childhood, Notions of Rurality, and Anti-bias Education: Emerging Educators Strive for Praxis

Emily A. Nemeth and Heather Hill

Abstract

The work of anti-bias educators is becoming increasingly important across educational landscapes in the United States. While this work is well-documented within K–12 schools, less known are the efforts of educators working on the front lines of the anti-bias educational agenda within out-of-school time (OST) programs. In an effort to explore how this work happens in OST programs, we partnered with Read, a summer literacy program serving children in grades K–8. Through an engaged research framework, we asked what factors mediated their delivery of an anti-bias education in the Read program. Two significant findings emerged. First, White parents and caregivers in rural settings were a significant force shaping curricular decisions. Second, conceptualizations of childhood influenced teaching and learning. We offer implications for practice and research and conclude by discussing future directions of anti-bias education in these sites of teaching and learning.

Anti-bias Education Across Educational Landscapes

In 2017, the FBI (2017b) reported that a startling 7,175 bias-motivated crimes were committed in the United States, an increase of 17% from 2016 (FBI, 2016) and 23% from 2015 (FBI, 2015b). The data, which were disaggregated by identity marker (i.e., race, ethnicity, and ancestry; sexuality; religion; disability; gender; and gender identity), revealed that "Black people or African Americans" were the most targeted group across the three-year span. Equally alarming was the spike in incidents at elementary and secondary schools during this same stretch of time, from 184 incidents in 2015 (FBI, 2015a) to 340 in 2017 (FBI, 2017a), an increase of 85%. Paralleling these spikes in bias-related crimes and incidents are the rapidly shifting demographics of the United States, including population growth in all non-White racial and ethnic groups between 2015 and 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Similarly, in K–12 schools, the enrollment of Students of Color is projected to outpace the enrollment of White students by 2024 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016).

Against the backdrop of these shifting demographics and an uptick in bias-related crimes and incidents, the role of anti-bias educators is becoming increasingly important across educational landscapes. According to Derman-Sparks and A.B.C. Task Force (2012), an anti-bias education "is value based: Differences are good; oppressive ideas and behaviors are not," setting up "a creative tension between respecting differences and not accepting unfair beliefs and acts" (p. 4). This includes "recogniz[ing] unfairness (injustice), hav[ing] language to describe unfairness, and understand[ing] that unfairness hurts" (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2019, Goal 3 section). In addition, it means that children engaging in an anti-bias education "will demonstrate a sense of empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions" (NAEYC, 2019, Goal 4 section). Anti-bias education, then, is movement oriented: It assumes action on the part of individuals and positive, life-affirming changes in communities. Moreover, it conceives of educators and educational landscapes broadly, including teachers in K–12 schools, educators in out-of-school time (OST) programs, and parents and caregivers in homes and communities.

Linked to the rich history of multicultural education (Corson, 1998) and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (NAEYC, 2019), anti-bias education has been especially important in the early grades—one of the sites where countries' shifting demographics first become visible (Corson, 1998). Laying a foundation of anti-bias thinking in these early years clarifies for young people how diverse peoples should treat one another, underscoring that every person has value, everyone should be respected, and no person should harm another person. While K–12 schools have been involved in anti-bias and multicultural

education efforts for decades, as evidenced by the literature (see Banks, 1993; Gay, 2013; Sleeter, 2000, 2001, 2009), the role of OST programs is somewhat unclear. These programs, however, are potentially significant, given that children spend 60% of their waking hours outside of school (Foundations Inc. & The Center for After-School Excellence at TASC, 2010).

Given the sustained presence of anti-bias education in the teacher-education literature, scholars in the field have explored how to prepare preservice teachers (e.g., Lin et al., 2008; Milner, 2003), discussed how to support in-service teachers (e.g., Lawrence, 2005), and identified barriers inhibiting the work of these educators (e.g., Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Renold, 2000). By contrast, the OST literature has been relatively silent, despite the fact that OST educators are understandably being held responsible for delivering anti-bias lessons (Siaca Curry, 2017), intervening in bias-related incidents within programs (Gutiérrez et al., 2017), and playing an increasingly important role in the social, emotional, physical, and academic lives of children after school, on the weekends, and during the summer months (Mahoney et al., 2009).

In this paper, we expand the educational landscape of where and when anti-bias education happens by profiling educators in Read,[1] an OST summer literacy program in the rural Midwest, working on the front lines of the anti-bias agenda. Although OST programs have historically been regarded as mechanisms for safety in the lives of at-risk or troubled youth and as childcare facilities for children of working parents (Siaca Curry, 2017), Read educators were charged with delivering an anti-bias curriculum to children in grades K–8 in the summer months. In light of Read's significant educative role in the lives of young people, we partnered with the program's novice teachers to explore their commitments to anti-bias education and to examine how this work took shape in their classrooms. Collectively, through an engaged framework, we asked: What factors mediated teachers' delivery of an anti-bias education in the Read program?

Partnering with Read

We began working closely with Read in 2013, initially in an advisory capacity; we helped the organization identify funding sources in the region and leveraged our connections in the community to support the program's sustainability. Given the program's emphasis on anti-bias principles, its curriculum featured books like *Child of the Civil Rights Movement*, written by Paula Young Shelton and illustrated by Raul Colón (2013), which offers a glimpse into the childhood of Shelton, the daughter of civil rights activist Andrew Young. In the book, Shelton details her family's journey from New York to the Jim Crow South in the midst of the civil rights movement to energize people to participate in the march from Selma to Montgomery.

Another book, *In Our Mothers' House*, written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco (2009), was used with a multi-aged group of third through fifth graders to explore the lives of a same-sex couple, Meema and Marmee, and their three, adopted, racially diverse children. The embodied diversity of this interracial, multicultural adoptive family living in Berkeley, California, created opportunities for young readers to discuss identity, family, and inclusion. The book's characters live in a queer-friendly community, which is relayed to the reader by the characters who shame the homophobic neighbor, Mrs. Lockner, and celebrate Meema, Marmee, and their children. These books and others in the curriculum served as points of contact among educators and youth in the Read program and as site of rich opportunities for anti-bias dialogues.

We gradually deepened our engagement with the organization as we saw an emerging need to support the program's educators in ways that paralleled the supervisory relationship between preservice teachers and teacher educators. We began to meet with the educators to discuss their work with students, sit in their classrooms and provide feedback on their exchanges with students, share research that connected to the issues they were encountering in classrooms, and engage in email exchanges about pressing matters.

Identifying questions for further exploration became an ongoing intellectual exercise with

[1]Pseudonyms were used for the program and the educators.

the educators as we talked about their work in the program: Why did the student in my class respond that way? How do I deal with an angry parent? How do I redirect a child who is acting out? A more complicated question arising from these discussions, which became the focus of this paper, concerned the challenges instructors faced delivering the anti-bias curriculum. Despite their commitment to this type of education, they struggled to consistently facilitate discussions with their young learners around the themes surfacing in the curriculum's literature. It was out of this tension between their espoused commitment to anti-bias values and their actions with their young learners that our research question emerged. Again, we asked: What factors were mediating the novice educators' delivery of an anti-bias education in the Read program?

In order to deepen our understanding of how educators engage young learners in anti-bias ideas, we turned our attention to the literature, including research in the context of both traditional classrooms and OST programs. The former proved to be quite robust, while the latter is an emerging field of inquiry.

A Review of the Literature

Turning our attention to the literature on pre- and in-service teachers was fruitful in that it helped us anchor our discussion in the ways that traditionally trained educators, committed to anti-bias practices, pursue alignment among their values, beliefs, and behaviors. We began with Milner (2003), who reminded us that learning how to implement an anti-bias, multicultural education begins long before teachers reach their own classrooms. Milner (2003) and Sleeter (2008) both argued that the work begins when these teachers are students themselves, when very few of them, unfortunately, have much interaction with individuals from differing racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Consequently, there is a critical need for teacher-education programs to provide preservice educators with courses in multicultural education as well as "opportunities to learn from cooperating teachers who are knowledgeable about multicultural theory and practice" (Lawrence & Krause, 1996, p. 34). Sobel and Taylor (2005) agreed. In the researchers' surveys of 62 preservice teachers, participants expressed a "vehement request for more" opportunities that would expose them "to realities and perspectives different from their own, more explicit demonstrations of strategies in university coursework, and more candid discussions about issues of diversity for learners and school systems" (p. 85). In addition, participants wanted more hands-on experiences and direction on "how to implement inclusive educational practices" in their classrooms (p. 85).

Equally important to preservice coursework in anti-bias, multicultural education is the level of support offered once new teachers enter their classrooms (Corson, 1998; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Lawrence, 2005; Schmidt, 1996). In fact, regardless of an individual educator's preparedness, isolated attempts at anti-bias education can easily flounder. Schmidt (1996), for example, documented the work of Mrs. Starr, who was shifting her pedagogy to be more in line with multicultural approaches to teaching and learning. In the process, she discovered that she had to balance learning these approaches with defending them against the criticisms of colleagues who "did not see [the benefit of teaching] about other cultures unless they were present" (p. 23). According to Schmidt, Mrs. Starr received inconsistent support from administrators within the school; even though they applauded her efforts, they asked that the project not "become a big issue in the school district" and encouraged her to confine the project to her own school (p. 26). The contradictions at the district level and mixed responses from her colleagues were discouraging, and they forced Mrs. Starr to redirect her energy and time toward her colleagues and away from her classroom and students.

Lawrence (2005) uncovered a similar level of resistance from administrators toward anti-bias educators. She interviewed seven in-service teachers approximately one year after they participated in an anti-racist, multicultural professional-development workshop, wanting to understand how they had translated what they had learned into their classrooms and what factors influenced shifts in their practices. Lawrence conducted her study in light of the fact that "seldom do studies of multicultural professional development examine school context or interactions among school personnel as factors that influence teachers' commitment to, and implementation of, multicultural practices learned during professional development" (p. 350). Unsurprisingly, she found that support from administrators played a key role in whether these educators had sustained their efforts over time.

While the field of teacher education has made significant advances in terms of integrating

anti-bias approaches in teacher preparation and implementing these approaches in classrooms, roadblocks still exist, particularly within early childhood education (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). Color-blind approaches to teaching and learning at the early childhood and elementary levels of schooling run alongside perceptions of child development as a universal process singular and universal perceptions of child development that ignore the inequitable influences of racism and classism on the experiences of childhood (Husband, 2010, 2012). Early childhood and elementary pedagogies that embody notions of "gentleness, nurturance, and cohesiveness" (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006, p. 67) provide preservice teachers with limited opportunities to observe or enact anti-bias practice or to address the harsh historical realities of social inequity. Renold (2000) corroborates these findings; she described the primary school in her study as having an "ambivalent attitude towards sexual knowledge and practice" and documented prevailing "notions of an 'innocent' and 'protected' childhood" (p. 312). Combating this narrow framing of the early childhood classroom as a supplemental protector and nurturer of children and ensuring that children are also challenged (Hymes, 1973) are essential for the success of an anti-bias, multicultural education, particularly in schools that have historically been inhospitable—and at times violent—toward Black, Brown, poor, and LGBTQ children.

Most of the research we reviewed decontextualized the school setting from its surrounding geographies. An exception was Elkert and Petrone (2013), who specifically considered how notions of rurality factored into teachers' work with students around themes of diversity. Elkert and Petrone (2013) worked with students in the English-education program at Montana State University to get a sense of both their experiences of the program and their perceptions of place. They found that "most of these students—despite the fact that most of them grew up in rural communities in Montana—expressed deficit orientations toward rural education" (p. 72). Moreover, the students who had grown up in rural communities assumed that their image of "rural" was universal. In other words, to know one rural community meant knowing them all, and students believed that they could draw on these personal schemas to make sense of new contexts. Elkert and Petrone called for more research focusing on the needs of teaching English language arts in rural spaces and suggested that one potential area of research could be issues of diversity in rural contexts.

While scholars have conducted considerable research on how preservice and in-service teachers enact anti-biased, multicultural education in K–12 classrooms (e.g., Banks, 1993; Gay, 2013; Sleeter, 2000, 2001, 2009), little has been done to understand how this work happens in OST programs for youth. In our search for such scholarship, we came across a number of studies that explored the effectiveness of OST programs in supporting academic skill development among enrolled children (Heinrich & Burch, 2012; Lauer et al., 2006). This focus on quantifiable learning outcomes, we discovered, stems from a framing of OST programs as helping the United States maintain a competitive edge in the global marketplace (Miller & Snow, 2004, p. 2). In addition, many OST programs rely on soft funding streams that require them to report on quantifiable learning outcomes rather than qualitative dimensions of students' experiences (McCombs et al., 2017). The emphasis on skill development in the OST literature was complemented by a wide range of theory-to-practice articles in the journal *Afterschool Matters*, which included practitioner-friendly teaching strategies and approaches to positive youth development, among other topics.

Discussion of the preparation and implementation of anti-bias education was much sparser in the OST literature. Siaca Curry (2017) stood out in our review of the literature as someone pushing the field to consider the role of OST professionals in these efforts. She explored the promise of a critical social pedagogy in OST contexts—that is, an approach to teaching and learning that would attend to issues of power, the implicit biases of the educators, and the history of oppression in the United States. Such an orientation toward youth development, she argued, would allow OST professionals to "take responsibility for empowering youth and working against ideas and behaviors that negatively affect them" (p. 6). Siaca Curry emphasized the role of staff in creating healthy, supportive, and inclusive environments for all youth participants.

Gutiérrez et al. (2017), whose study looked at how OST professionals navigate culture-related incidents in OST programs, reinforced the importance of staff. They interviewed 50 primary program leaders in 27 different OST programs to explore the frequency of bias-related incidents and to examine how professional staff intervened.

It is important to note that these programs did not have intentional curricula designed around anti-bias themes, or at least this dimension of their programming was not discussed in the study. Instead, these potentially educative bias-related encounters emerged from conflict among program participants and/or staff. The researchers categorized the participating staff based on how they responded to these incidents, generating three distinct philosophical orientations: (a) a "universalist philosophy: race-blind approach," (b) "limited and nonengagement, " and (c) "constructive engagement." While OST professionals in the third group were willing to intervene in these conflicts, professionals in the former two groups struggled to act—even when they saw value in that kind of intervention with youth. It is here where our curiosity is situated: Why, despite seeing the value, did these educators fail to intervene? What mediated their failure to transition from valuing an anti-bias philosophy to action?

Before exploring this question in the context of the Read OST program, we use the next section to weave together the writings of Paulo Freire (1970/2000) and bell hooks (1994, 2000), who opened a conceptual frame through which we considered the data from this study.

Conceptual Framework

Teaching and learning occur in face-to-face interactions where teachers and students act and react to one another based on what they think they know, see, and believe is happening and will occur. An exclusive focus on how teachers and students act and in the moment can gloss over the assumptions and worldviews driving these actions, reactions, and inactions. Moreover, students and teachers actions or inactions can reflect an alignment or misalignment between what they value and believe, on the one hand, and what they actually do, on the other. While participants in the encounter might not be aware of the reasoning behind their (in)actions, Freire (1970/2000) argued that awareness is an essential component of enacting and reflecting on one's ideas or beliefs— or *praxis*—with the ultimate goal of aligning one's thoughts and actions.

Living a life oriented around praxis, Freire (1970/2000) insisted, was a radical act because it meant working toward wholeness in a fragmented society—one composed of fragmented selves, fragmented consciousness, and fragmented communities. Concurring, hooks (1994) explained how difficult this work can be in a society where being more fully human challenges "White supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (p. 71). Working to release the grip of these culturally dominant ideologies on one's mind can be achieved through careful reflection and action and a gradual refinement of one's behaviors so they more closely align with one's values. Exposing and then extracting these lesions of White supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy from one's psyche becomes part of the consciousness work of educators striving toward equity-oriented praxis.

Whiteness is one of the more elusive cognizable objects inhibiting the work of well-intentioned White teachers in particular, according to hooks (2000.) Whiteness, she contended, entitles them to unearned power and privilege, which are seductive dimensions of remaining naïve of the White body. Even self-ascribed White feminists, she wrote, who were supposedly aware of these parts of their lived experience, were reluctant to divest of their Whiteness, thereby contributing to inequity through their inaction. Fully committing to equity-oriented praxis requires White educators in particular to become aware of how Whiteness manipulates social encounters and lived experiences and perpetuates systemic inequalities.

Several scholars (hooks, 1994; Gorski, 2008; Hilliard, 1995) discussed Western, White, middle-class male influences on child-development theory and considered how centering these influences in teaching and learning often standardizes, marginalizes, and pathologizes the learning experiences and literacy development of non-White, poor, and female students. While "White supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 1994) views teaching and learning as neutral, generic transmissions of knowledge from the mouth of the teacher to the mind of the student, hooks's (1994) notion of "engaged pedagogy" centered attentiveness to connections and/or disconnections between the mind and the body in teaching and learning. As the body is raced, classed, and gendered, it holds together thoughts, feelings, emotions, and experiences situated in the everyday realities it has lived through, those it has observed, and still those it has never known. As students and teachers come together around texts reflecting familiar and unfamiliar stories that may offer them, as readers, windows or mirrors (Sims Bishop, 1990), the intersectionality of students' race, class, and gender factors into teachers' perceptions of students and their "readiness" for dialogue around the texts' themes and issues.

We used the framework articulated in this section to explore the thoughts and actions of eight college interns who worked with the Read program in the summers of 2015 and 2016. Viewing the data through the lens of praxis enabled us to think about tensions between interns' commitments to anti-bias, multicultural education and their in(ter)actions with students in their classrooms. In the next section we briefly discuss our methodology, and then we turn to our findings and discussion.

Methodology

We turned to the work of Flower (2008) to conceptualize our relationship with the Read program as a kind of *deliberative community*, which Flower described as a community "built around discourse, shared concerns, and different perspectives on change" (p. 29). She went on to distinguish the deliberative community as "a distinctive local public sphere that [would be] unlikely to exist" without the intentional efforts of those who convene it (p. 29). We understood our work as reflective of this notion of deliberative community, with participants brought together out of a shared commitment to the success of the Read program in this rural area. While our conversations with young people about diversity and inclusion, broadly, and race, constructions of family, and discrimination, specifically, complemented the efforts of some educators in the community, they necessarily stretched the efforts of others. Our collaboration was dialogic in nature; we exchanged ideas about the curricular foci of the program and discussed observations and reflections about teaching and learning throughout the two years of the study.

The data in this paper emerged from our collaboration with Read's educators. Using qualitative methods, we collected data in the summers of 2015 and 2016, consisting of eight interviews of Read staff and 50 hours of participant observation. During interviews and observations, we focused on the textual encounters among educators and students and the factors that mediated exchanges aimed at anti-bias learning goals. Our interviews were semistructured in order to elicit reflection and stories from the educators (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Leech, 2002; Whiting, 2008).

Each of the educators in the study was enrolled full-time at a college within a 45-mile radius of Read and had expressed an interest in working with youth following graduation. Only one of the eight educators, Hailey, was connected to the first author's institution, and none were connected to the second author's institution. While all of our participants identified as female, they were racially and ethnically diverse. Two interns identified as Latina, one as African American, three as White, and two as Asian American and White.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was a layered process. We began by transcribing the interviews and classroom observation recordings, which itself is a "selective and interpretive" process (Edwards, 2001). Drawing on the work of Saldaña (2016), we then systematically coded the transcripts and field notes in order to surface themes and patterns in the data. We generated codes through an iterative process, using language from the educators (e.g., "pure," "innocent") as well as from our conceptual framework (e.g., "Whiteness," "praxis"). We used ATLAS.ti for the coding process, which aided in managing and organizing our data. Finally, we analyzed these codes in order to generate conceptual memos (Saldaña, 2016)—memos that became the foundation of our findings.

As engaged researchers, our efforts to fully collaborate with the novice educators fell short with regard to data analysis due to the lack of overlap between the Read program (i.e., limited to summer months) and the timeline of the research project. Although we recognize this as a shortcoming of our project, we believe it also represents an important consideration for engaged methodologies—that is, when the timelines of university researchers and those of community researchers are asynchronous with one another. We take up this issue more fully in the discussion.

Findings

Two significant findings emerged from our analysis of the data. First, we found that perceptions of White parents and caregivers in rural settings significantly shaped curricular decisions. Second, we found that conceptualizations of childhood influenced teaching and learning, with the effect of marginalizing concern for Black, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer students and caregivers in these educational settings.

Perceptions of White Parents and Caregivers in Rural Settings

The majority of students enrolled in the Read program, approximately 89%, were White, but the program also enrolled approximately 11% Students of Color. Despite this racial diversity, the novice educators had a skewed perception of

the influence and expectations of White parents and caregivers, which ultimately constrained the discussions the interns were willing to have with their students about race and racism as prompted by the children's books in the program. Their reluctance to engage in these discussions was partially born out a fear of parental retaliation. Interns perceived White parents and caregivers in these settings as protectors, surveilling the boundaries of what was appropriate and inappropriate for classroom settings and class discussions. Interns also perceived parents to be physically aggressive and retaliatory and imagined their mindsets as narrow, rigid, and fixed. Interns weighed their decisions to pursue or not pursue difficult themes—such as prejudice, segregation, and homophobia, among other themes as they surfaced in the books—against feeling threatened, both personally and in terms of the survival of the Read program. This dynamic runs parallel to the literature on in-service teachers who are working toward these discussions in schools (e.g., Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019). Sarah, for instance, who was committed to combating racism, shared, "I don't want to say the wrong thing. And then a parent comes at my neck …," adding, "without crossing the line. You know how parents get. 'Why did you tell my kid that…"

Similarly, Patricia reflected on how her perceptions of parents influenced her approach to *Heather Has Two Mommies*, one of the first widely read children's books featuring lesbian characters (Newman & Souza, 1989):

> You don't want an angry parent coming at you for telling their kids what their religion[is]…they can be kind of aggressive and that would freak me out a little bit. You want to give these children as many alternate ways of thinking about things as possible without disrespecting [their parents].

Patricia wanted to expand young readers' understandings of family, but she was aware of the tensions that surface when broadening notions of family by way of same-sex couples collides with conservative religious doctrine.

Andrea and Hannah echoed these sentiments. Andrea shared, "I was like, 'If I mess this up, parents are going to come at me.'" Hannah was mindful that talking about sexuality in general had consequences: "I know I'll have parents coming after me if it was something I brought up all the time." According to the teacher-education literature, this fear often comes from assumptions and generalizations that all of the students in a classroom and their parents are straight (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019; Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009). Sieben and Wallowitz (2009) noted that this fear is common among classroom teachers but countered that "while this may be true of some parents, we would also assume that other parents (and administrators) can be our allies and support us" (p. 49). Expanding perceptions of parents in this way—as allies, as existing on the sexuality continuum—might encourage interns to pursue, rather than avoid, themes related to sexuality as they encounter them in the curriculum. It is worth mentioning that these data were collected in the summer of and the summer following the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Obergefell v. Hodges,* 2015; this context was not lost on one of the interns, Hannah, who indicated that the case made her even more fearful of doing anti-bias work with her students.

Isolated instances of prejudice among parents or caregivers were formative in the interns' decisions about texts. Hailey, for example, was preoccupied with one student's grandparents, who she saw as "very racist." She said, "I feel like there was no support. If [the student] went over to her grandparents, there was no support there." Hailey added, "It was difficult for [the student] to read the books because she only had one side to the story. She doesn't really know the good in African Americans." Hailey wanted her student's grandparents to reinforce the program's anti-racist message at home, but she knew that they met the messages with silence at best and more likely countered them with anti-Black sentiments. Hailey was rightfully concerned about the lack of support for a student who was trying to make sense of complicated notions of identity and race. Hailey did her best to encourage this student's anti-racist, anti-biased beliefs about the people around her, but she lacked confidence that she was having the desired effect.

In the most extreme cases of fear, program staff censored books as they read them by omitting words or pages. In rare instances, they removed books from the classroom entirely to ensure the longevity of the program. The staff avoided the theme of gun control in the books, for example, because "this high school has the first day of hunting season off school for bows and guns." In addition, staff removed a book featuring Michelle Obama from the program

because they feared that it made them appear "super liberal." This act had repercussions for the anti-bias capacity of the program, including students' need to see diverse figures in leadership positions. One intern argued that removing the book would not harm the curriculum and instead would ensure the program's survival in the politically conservative community. Her reasoning, while perhaps sound in that censorship has historically been used to preserve the status quo, was grounded in generalized understandings of the rural area's political diversity. In fact, over a third of voters in the community cast their vote for the Democratic candidate in the 2016 presidential election. Even though the majority voted for the Republican candidate, challenging majority ideologies—holding these belief systems accountable by illuminating other possible truths—is at the heart of an anti-bias education, which teaches students to celebrate differences, embrace diversity, and act against bias, discrimination, and marginalization in all forms.

While program staff used censorship strategically, they also did so regretfully. Hannah noted that one of the books was pulled because it discussed same-sex marriage—the same year that same-sex marriage was legalized in the United States:

> Because parents had been complaining [about the book] they took it out. I know families regard that as a personal thing, but with [the older students] they are getting to be old enough where that is something they are not going to be sheltered from. You walk outside and there are gay people. That is not a surprise. They exist. Letting kids continue down a path of parroting what their parents tell them without anyone challenging that or anyone attempting to educate them about that or anyone offering an alternative opinion…the path that sets them up to grow into an adult is not a good one.

Not only do gay people exist, as Hannah stated, but LGBTQ students could have very easily been in her classroom. The interns' desire to protect themselves from retaliation and the program from closure is a reasonable response to fear, but their decisions to censor or remove books were made without wider reflection on their praxis or on the potential ripple effects across the literacy lives of their students and families.

The potency of the interns' fear appeared to be intensified by their underlying assumptions about rural spaces. According to Catte (2019), "Rural spaces are often thought of as places absent of things, from people of color to modern amenities to radical politics" (para. 5). This point is reinforced by the U.S. census, which defines "rural" as that which is not urban (Ratcliffe et al., 2016). One intern exclaimed, "I'm not going to lie, I didn't think Black people lived there." As the interns contended with their own assumptions about rural communities as lacking, some collapsed the diversities of their classroom into a geographic stereotype. The experience of erasure—having one's existence denied through microaggressions as well as through more overt omissions (e.g., from history books)—is not uncommon for minoritized and marginalized populations. In the Read program, it further undercut the interns' anti-bias commitments as well as the learning opportunities afforded by the children's literature.

Childhood as a Stage of Innocence

Conceptualizations of White, rural childhood also emerged in the interns' reflections on how they approached literacy teaching with their summer students. Most interns shared a perception that the children were innocent, which shaped how they structured textual encounters for their students. They approached their readers as immune to bias rather than young people who have both witnessed and perhaps held biases of their own. Counter to their thinking, research has shown that children are not immune to bias (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006). Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2006), for instance, pointed to the harmful effects of everyday encounters with ideas of White superiority and stereotypes about people of color through media such as TV, books, toys, and video games. In addition, many children have a binary framework for masculinity and femininity, which can lead to gender policing in the early grades. Dutro (2001) documented an exchange among kindergartners in which a young boy was taunted by his peers for choosing to read *Beauty and the Beast*, which was considered to be a "girls' book." Due to his embarrassment, the boy chose to select a different book from the library. Renold (2000) has similarly noted that children in early grades experience social pressures to practice heterosexuality. These pressures involve "a complex daily interactive network, from kissing in the playground or cloakroom, computerized matchmaking diaries,

secret love letters, and various tokens of affection" (Renold, 2000, p. 314).

While interns' assumptions of childhood innocence were at odds with research, they were consistent with prevailing notions of childhood and adolescence in the United States (Lesko, 2013; McGinn et al., 2016; Renold, 2000). Lesko wrote that "there is a certain inflection to a phrase like *they're only children*, which reinvigorates the protectionism of adults and the innocence of young people" (p. 28). Such was the case for Read interns, who from a protectionist stance worried that discussions about the segregated history of the United States would forever contaminate their students. Sarah reflected, "I love the little ones, I really do…," but then lamented, "You can't really discuss certain things with them…because they're innocent in the purest form. And they haven't really been tainted by anyone even though they've had a tough upbringing. They're still innocent." Similarly, Arianna shared, "You want [kids] to be aware but you also want to, like, protect them from scariness." In contrast, Siaca Curry (2017) asserted that exploring, understanding, and challenging the history of oppression in the United States is integral to nurturing anti-racist views among young people.

Two other interns saw the program as an opportunity to create a psychic buffer around the children that would insulate them from being socialized into homophobic and racist ideologies. Rita, for example, noted, "There's a lot of chance to change their ideas on race. Because by the time they get to middle and high school there's a lot of racism. And the younger kids, they don't have that." She reinforced her point, asserting, "By the time they get up into middle and high school, they're forming their concrete beliefs about themselves and everything else." Like Rita, Patricia assumed that children had not yet been introduced to bias:

> They still have, like, their parts are still pure. They haven't had that bias, it hasn't crept in. Because that was something that Hannah showed me, some biases they picked up on from society. And my kids don't have that yet.

Framing childhood as a stage of innocence noticeably shaped the contours of book discussions in the Read program. Despite the fact that the interns had the backing of the program to teach and learn around anti-bias themes—which the teacher-education literature has indicated is important in sustaining educators' multicultural, anti-bias efforts—perceptions of innocence intercepted some of these attempts in their classrooms.

Patricia, who was in her second year with the program, began to move past her inclination to hold back with the students in her class. She shared,

> Last year, at the very start, I'd be reading the curriculum, and thinking this is too much. They're not going to be able to do this. And now it's changed drastically and it's not "they can't do this," it's "I need to alter the curriculum so they can do this." Not they can't do this. They can't understand this. If you set high expectations for children, they'll rise and meet them. And they may need some help getting there, but I think that's important. I don't know if I want to say undervalued, what's the word, underestimated. They have a lot more ability and power than they're given credit for. They understand a lot more.

As a second-year intern, Patricia had additional practice scaffolding students' understandings of difficult topics. She understood that an educator could break a complex issue like racism into smaller, more manageable parts that children could understand. Unfortunately for the program, the staff mostly turns over from year to year, which means that few interns were able to reflect and build on their experiences in this way over time.

Three of the interns talked about one particular student, who had been a part of the program for two years, who verbalized racial slurs and sketched them into the surfaces of desks. Rita was the first to work with this particular student:

> A big part of the program is teaching cultural competency. You know, I told you about um, a student in my class last summer who read a book and said, "I don't like Black people." We stopped everything and talked it out. I mean, that's part of the point of the program. We have this big culture that they, specifically, have not been introduced to and if we're going to introduce them to it, we need to make sure that they're well-informed.

Patricia recalled the same student: "I mean it's just a little girl. She doesn't understand what she's

saying. She has suffered abuse, that's where that bias comes from." Patricia did not want the student to face punishment for the racist slurs; instead, she wanted to find some way to help her understand "why that's not okay." This student was also memorable for Hailey, who shared, "[The student] kept writing the N-word down. And now, see that's a really harsh word. She's an eight-year-old who doesn't really know, she knows the meaning and she knew like, the harmful things she wanted to do." Yet Hailey was convinced of the student's purity. Instead of tackling the N-word and hate head on, she chose to emphasize cross-cultural encounters when they surfaced in the books. In fact, she told Read staff that she wanted more children's books that illustrated positive cross-cultural, interracial relationships, such as *Friends for Freedom: The Story of Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass* (Slade & Tadgell, 2014). Despite the student's use of racist slurs, the interns maintained her innocence.

The interns' protectionist impulses were not afforded to all participants in the program, however. One intern shared:

> So I was teaching to kids about racism and segregation and they had no basis for it. Like racial segregation I can maybe understand because they haven't gone through that history yet, but racism is something that, like, I thought at least the kids that were ethnically mixed or Black would know about, because you know, you would experience that. I know in Navarro County it exists. So I was surprised by it.

This intern's reflection unearthed her orientation toward Students of Color, which contrasted with her orientation toward White students: The former, already exposed to racism, could talk about segregation, whereas the latter, perceived as innocent and untainted, needed protection. Scholars (Epstein et al., 2017) have shown that conceptualizations of Black youth are often devoid of the notions of childhood and innocence afforded to White youth. In the context of schools, this perception has had implications for discipline; school authorities are often less lenient in assigning culpability and responsibility to Black youth for their actions (Epstein et al., 2017, p. 2). While discussions of childhood and innocence have been situated in understanding the "harsher punishments" associated with structural systems of incarceration and the gross disparities in the school discipline of Black children (Crenshaw et al., 2015). This "adultification" (Epstein et al., 2017, p. 2) of Black children suggests that, in order to provide equal and equitable protection to Black children engaging in anti-bias teaching and learning along their White peers, anti-racist educators must study constructions of Blackness alongside constructions of Whiteness. As we have learned from education research (Matias & Mackey, 2016; Sleeter, 2001), Whiteness influences pedagogy, and due to its corrosive power in anti-bias curricula, it can lead to approaches in which teachers avoid topics like racism because they implicate White people and illuminate issues of power and inequity.

Discussion

Engaging with Read educators around their commitments to and delivery of anti-bias curricula illuminated the two central findings discussed above. In this next section, we discuss the implications of these findings for practice and research.

Practice

While the Read program strives to be different from school, particularly for youth who do not find school to be a safe or encouraging space for personal growth and development, there is much to be gained from turning to the literature on pre- and in-service teachers enacting anti-bias education with their students. Themes that appeared in the literature, selectively applied notions of childhood, purity, innocence, and protection (e.g., Husband, 2010, 2012; Lesko, 2013), proved to be issues the interns encountered as well. Throughout the study, we shared this research with interns and encouraged them to make connections and reflect on their practice. Studying this literature and using it to inform training and practice in OST programs could aid these educators in their work with youth.

In addition to these significant parallels, we surfaced an important difference in terms of preservice educators' preparation for work in K–12 schools, which is highly structured, and the preparation of OST program staff, which is highly variable. Teachers and administrators in schools must go through "fairly uniform education, credentialing, and licensing systems," whereas "typical afterschool and out-of-school time staff have no such shared base or career ladder" (Foundations Inc. & The Center for After-School Excellence at TASC, 2010, p. 3). Moreover, in cases like Read, where the staff are traditional-aged college students, they—like the young people in the program—are there *to learn*. It is important

to note that this staffing structure is not unique to Read. In fact, Foundations Inc. in partnership with the Center for After-School Excellence at the After-School Corporation issued a call in 2010—following two years of deliberation—for OST programs and institutions of higher education to recognize the potential for a mutualistic relationship. Colleges and universities, they suggested, could use OST programs for experiential and project-based learning placements for students; by extension, these institutions could help meet the needs of OST programs, which are traditionally under-resourced and rely heavily on part-time staff.

Although many college student interns have started working in OST programs, colleges and universities have been slow to provide official, organized support for students in these placements. The majority of the interns working for Read at most were receiving a formal notation on their university transcript at the summer's end. Our study illuminates an opportunity for internship coordinators and/or faculty at colleges and universities to support the learning of their students. For some of the children enrolled in the program, Read represented the first time they encountered a curriculum that privileged discussions of anti-bias themes. Is a week of training sufficient to prepare novice educators to deliver these curricula to these young readers? The college interns reported that it is not. Mechanisms of support offered through university faculty or internship coordinators would help the student staff and, by extension, the youth participants, whose learning opportunities hinge on the reflective practice of their teachers and the fruitful nexus between thought and action.

Research

OST Programs: A Natural Setting

Through our review of the literature, we discovered that research on anti-biased approaches to teaching and learning is largely situated in traditional classrooms. The laser focus of this body of research makes sense given the important role of schools in anti-bias efforts, but it should not preclude the investigation of this type of teaching and learning in other spaces—often referred to as "alternative" or OST programs—including after-school and summer programs. It is necessary to continue to build this dimension of research with OST programs, which are playing an increasingly important role in the lives of millions of children in the United States (Mahoney et al., 2009).

Within the past couple of years, the federal government has called into question OST programs' effectiveness in increasing the academic performance of youth participants, creating uncertainty around the future of major funding streams like the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant (McCombs et al., 2017). Continuing to build the research on the oft forgotten, yet widely present, world of OST programs will further legitimize these programs as distinct spaces of teaching and learning and broaden the scope of what counts as meaningful learning, perhaps to include anti-bias learning goals like those emphasized by Read. In addition, bolstering this body of literature will help the field to account for the various structures, foci, populations served, and duration of OST programs (Hefner, 2013). Further research will reinforce the role of this natural field of practice as a space to understand teaching and learning, thereby contributing to reciprocal knowledge sharing across educational landscapes. The establishment of the Out-of-School Time Special Interest Group within the American Educational Research Association in 2006 has undoubtedly strengthened these efforts.

Time

Finally, the annual turnover of the Read staff posed a challenge for us in terms of fully integrating the interns into the engaged research process. Given that seven of the eight college students were not our own, we also encountered issues staying in contact with them once they returned to school. Time as a variable in all research processes can be difficult to discipline according to research needs—that is, it is a challenge to demand that time facilitate rather than constrain the research process. Tensions inevitably surface as the indeterminate nature of participatory research methodologies collides with the structural and programmatic realities of interinstitutional partnerships. A methodological curiosity that we would like to pursue further, which others are already considering (Hall, 2014) is how time operates in engaged work. How does it facilitate, manipulate, and/or inhibit the engaged research process, particularly working for (e.g., universities) and with (e.g., temporary summer programs) institutions and programs governed by their own temporal structures?

Given how time factored into our own study, we shouldered the responsibility for data analysis and then shared our findings with the Read staff and interested participants. We recognize this

as a limitation of our study, but again, we raise this larger question for engaged researchers to consider: How do schedules converge at the engaged site, and how do we manage the overlapping nature of time in service to the priorities of engaged methodologies, particularly collaborative knowledge sharing and generation?

Conclusion

The task in front of anti-bias educators is immense, requiring well-prepared, skilled, reflective, and well-supported teachers across the educational landscape. This challenge extends to OST programs like Read, which take up this important work during the summer months. It stands to reason that given the diverse trajectories that bring educators to OST programs, supporting these educators through engaged research might be a promising way to nurture their anti-bias efforts while also contributing to this budding area of important research. The capacity, necessary compensation, and reward structures for faculty and staff supporting college student interns would need to be considered alongside structural and pragmatic details. The rise of OST programs and their hiring of college student staff might reinforce the urgency of this discussion.

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