“I Didn’t Have a Lesson”: Politics and Pedagogy in a Diversifying Middle School

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This article examines the tensions between a diversifying middle school’s efforts to create an antiracist school community and instructional practices that frequently marginalized the experiences, knowledge, and questions of students of color. It uses teachers’ responses to the 2016 presidential election as a window into the challenges of developing asset-based pedagogies in classrooms that include White students.

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Structured Abstract

Background/Context: Despite its emphasis on pluralism, empirical research on asset-based pedagogies has typically focused on culturally, linguistically, or racially homogeneous groups of students. The rise of interest in culturally relevant pedagogy in the 1990s coincided with the resegregation of many school districts. As a result, few scholars have considered what it might look like to decenter Whiteness in classrooms that include a significant number of White students.

Purpose: In this article, I strive to understand the tensions between a diversifying school's efforts to create an antiracist school community and a classroom pedagogy that frequently marginalized the experiences, knowledge, and questions of students of color. I use the school's response to the 2016 presidential election as a window into the challenges involved in developing asset-based pedagogies in racially and culturally diverse classrooms. By exploring the texture of teaching and learning in a school that endeavors to sustain its racially and culturally diverse students, I complicate widely held, but often underexamined, assumptions about the benefits of diversity in the classroom.

Setting: Data collection took place in a politically active, racially and socioeconomically diversifying middle school in New York City. The school, which had previously served almost exclusively low-income children of color, now included a growing number of children from White and professional families.

Research Design: Data collection took place over the course of the 2016–2017 academic year. The unit of analysis was one focal cohort of sixth-graders. Data included participant observation in sixth-grade classrooms and other school spaces, interviews with school staff, interviews with students, and document analysis.

Findings: The school's response to the presidential election illustrated not only teachers' dedication to developing students' cultural competence and critical consciousness, but also their struggles with tying these goals to students' academic learning. Many teachers made instructional moves that—often inadvertently—centered Whiteness in the classroom. Tensions between teachers' political, relational, and academic goals and practices led to multiple missed opportunities for both students and staff.

Conclusions: In almost every interaction outside of the classroom, educators centered their advocacy for and relationships with their students of color. At the same time, their instructional choices pushed these students' experiences and concerns to the margins of academic spaces. I explore implications for school leadership, teacher professional development, and teacher preparation, as well as future research.

Executive Summary

In this article, I strive to understand tensions between one school's efforts to create an antiracist community and a classroom pedagogy that frequently decentered the questions, interests, and knowledge of students of color. I look closely at teachers' relational, political, and instructional responses to the 2016 presidential election, exploring the tensions that arose between the school's values and practices and classroom curriculum and instruction. I join ongoing conversations among scholars and practitioners about the nature of caring and the texture of power in racially diverse classrooms. I consider these questions in light of the goals of culturally relevant pedagogy—academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness—and of decentering Whiteness, a focal point of culturally sustaining pedagogy.

I situate my inquiry in the responses to the political events of the 2016–2017 academic year of educators who were explicitly committed to social action. In 2016, M.S. 917's student body was 27% Black, 29% Latinx, and 36% White, with a small yet substantial group of students identifying as "biracial" or "other." A small group of students also identified as Arab or Arab American. Teachers told me that they knew several students came from mixed immigration-status families or were themselves undocumented, and a substantial subset of students came from families affected by the Trump administration's so-called Muslim ban. Although M.S. 917 has a long history of advocating for students of color, White students have only recently become a visible presence within the school, growing from less than 5% of the student body five years ago to more than 30% of the student body in the 2016–2017 academic year.

I conducted observations at M.S. 917 two or three times each week, for a total of 58 days of observation (typically 3 to 5 hours per day) throughout the 2016–2017 academic year. I selected one focal cohort of 25 sixth-graders to follow throughout the day, accompanying them from class to class, on field trips, and during fire drills. In addition, I frequently observed other, more adult spaces, including the teachers' lounge, staff meetings, collaborative teacher planning sessions, and PTA events. In addition to multiple informal conversations with students and teachers throughout the school day, I conducted semistructured interviews with 9 of the 11 staff who worked regularly with the focal sixth-grade cohort, as well as two of the school's four administrators. I also interviewed a racially diverse group of 14 students in the focal cohort and conducted one focus-group discussion with a subset of these students.

In a year spent with sixth-grade students and their teachers, I witnessed multiple conversations about social justice and political action. However, I rarely observed classroom discussions of racialized inequity or the impact of politics on students and their communities. When sixth-graders raised these issues in class discussion, teachers typically moved the conversation on to other, safer topics, apparently reluctant to interrupt the orderly progression of classroom curricula. The extreme political context of the 2016–2017 academic year, together with the exceptional racial and cultural diversity of M.S. 917's student body, surfaced deep-rooted tensions in the school's efforts to foster students' academic success, cultural consciousness, and sociopolitical awareness. While the political climate foregrounded these pedagogical disjunctures, they were not limited to discussions of electoral politics. Contradictory assumptions about the most effective and appropriate way to sustain a culturally diverse student body ran throughout the school's norms, values, and practices.

As the M.S. 917 student body became increasingly White, M.S. 917 staff carefully considered the implications for students of color. Teachers and administrators saw integration as a means to the end of racial justice. Although almost one third of M.S. 917's students were White and fewer than half of the kids at M.S. 917 were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, faculty and staff discussions frequently focused on how to best serve their low-income students of color. As part of the school's activist stance, M.S. 917 faculty and staff made sincere, sustained efforts to support immigrant students, their families, and their communities during the 2016–2017 academic year. Among other efforts, they provided individual students with counseling and support and organized a “No Ban, No Wall!” rally at the school. However, teachers seemed to see this work as relational or political, rather than instructional; they considered these issues more appropriate for arenas such as advisory periods, after-school, or extracurricular spaces than for academic spaces. While their instructional responses to the election and its aftermath differed, the sixth-grade teachers at M.S. 917 shared a reluctance to center the emerging problems and questions that could develop students' critical consciousness and contribute to a culturally sustaining curriculum.

Even as they worked to decenter Whiteness in their school, teachers often inadvertently centered it in their classroom instruction. Despite their evident, consistent concern for the growth and well-being of their students of color, these educators frequently failed to address students' urgent questions and concerns, despite having considerable latitude in designing their curriculum and instruction—they were not expected to strictly adhere to state-adopted curricular standards or to prepare their students for standardized tests. Their principal had built a school culture explicitly focused on anti-racism and actively encouraged staff to engage students in discussion of issues central to their lives. In this and many other ways, M.S. 917 was a best-case scenario for teachers who wished—as most M.S. 917 teachers clearly did—to engage with the diversity in their classrooms. However, the school's leadership faced constraints that led to missed opportunities for teacher learning; they had not developed a collaborative vision of anti-racist classrooms that centered the prior knowledge, lived experiences, and critical questions of their students. M.S. 917 was full of people working very hard to serve students very well. Instructional planning and support were not always the most pressing priorities.

The extent to which the classroom practice at M.S. 917 did not differ from that of many other schools was particularly notable in the context of the school's political and relational norms and values. The fact that M.S. 917 teachers struggled with how to decenter Whiteness points to the enormity of this task; the persistence with which students asked questions that destabilized their curricula points to the exigency of this task. As a result of pedagogical tensions, silences, and missed opportunities, a school that was intended to be culturally sustaining could not be fully so.

The difficulty of decentering Whiteness, even in circumstances that may appear favorable—an anti-racist school in a political context that provides multiple opportunities for discussions of race, rights, and difference—raises important questions about the possibilities of culturally sustaining pedagogy in racially diverse classrooms. These findings have important implications for practitioners, theorists, and researchers who seek a better understanding of what such a body of work might explore: the interconnected aspects of teachers' relational, political, and instructional work; the impacts that silences and missed opportunities have on pedagogical goals

and practices; and the urgent need to support teachers in grappling with the challenging work of sustaining culturally diverse students.

When you enter the main hallway of M.S. 917,¹ right next to the main office, you face a student-created mural showing a crowd holding protest signs. At the bottom of the mural, a painted banner proclaims, “Diversity is Our Strength.” When xenophobic rhetoric became increasingly common during the fall of 2016, the M.S. 917 student council created posters that translated the school’s motto into Arabic, Creole, Spanish, and French. For the rest of the school year, multilingual posters asserting, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” were squeezed between bulletin boards sharing science quizzes, literary essays, and student-created “artifacts” from Ancient Egypt. Following the election of Donald Trump in November 2016, Shepard Fairey posters depicting a Black woman in dreads, a Latina woman wearing a United Farm Workers T-shirt, and a woman with a hijab made of American flags took over one of those bulletin boards. Underneath the art, the posters’ slogans proclaimed, “We the people are greater than fear,” “We the people defend dignity,” and “We the people protect each other” (adapted from field notes).

M.S. 917 identifies as an anti-racist school. The physical space of the school reflects a set of political commitments that school administrators, teachers, parents, and students frequently and proudly proclaim. In the year that I spent with sixth-grade students and their teachers, I heard multiple conversations about social justice and political action. However, I rarely observed classroom discussions of racialized inequity or the impact of politics on students and their communities. When sixth-graders raised these issues in class discussion, teachers typically moved the conversation on to other, safer topics, apparently reluctant to interrupt the orderly progression of classroom curricula. By shifting discussions of social power to extracurricular spaces such as bulletin boards and assemblies, M.S. 917 effectively taught students that anti-racist work lived in the margins of their school community.

Many members of the M.S. 917 community experienced the 2016 presidential election as a moment of extreme disjuncture between their political values and the nation’s political realities (Rubin, 2007b). In almost every interaction outside of the classroom, M.S. 917 educators centered their advocacy for and relationships with their students of color. At the same time, their instructional choices pushed these students’ experiences and concerns to the margins of academic spaces. Using theories of culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogy as “an explanatory tool . . . to make sense of teachers’ observable instructional practices” (Milner, 2017, p. 9), I join ongoing conversations among scholars and practitioners about the texture of power in racially diverse classrooms (Fine et al., 1997; Rubin, 2003) and educational responses to contemporary political events (Costello, 2016; Miranda, 2017; O’Connor & Mangual Figueroa, 2017; Rogers et al., 2017). As I examine the nature of teaching and learning in a school that endeavors to sustain its racially and culturally diverse students academically, relationally, and politically, I complicate widely held but often underexamined assumptions about the benefits of diversity in the classroom.

The 2016 presidential election and its aftermath highlighted not only M.S. 917’s teachers’ dedication to developing students’ cultural competence and sociopolitical awareness, but also their struggles with tying these goals to students’ academic learning. In this article, I strive to understand tensions between the school’s efforts to create an anti-racist community and classroom pedagogy that frequently decentered the questions, interests, and knowledge of students of color. I look closely at the consequences of teachers’ relational, political, and

instructional responses to the events of the 2016–2017 academic year, exploring the tensions that arose between the school’s values and practices and the classroom curriculum and instruction. After providing background information about my theoretical approach and methods, I introduce M.S. 917’s norms, values, and practices. I then use the school’s response to the 2016 presidential election as a window into the challenges involved in developing asset-based pedagogies in racially and culturally diverse classrooms.

BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL APPROACH

SUBTRACTIVE SCHOOLING AND THE POLITICS OF CARING

In her landmark ethnography of a high school on the U.S.-Mexico border, Valenzuela (1999) put forth a framework of pedagogical care: the ways in which teachers as individuals and schools as institutions can demonstrate that they care for students and that they recognize that students care about learning. Valenzuela’s detailed account of *subtractive schooling* illustrates the multiple ways that schools strip resources from students by framing their cultures, their histories, their families, their home languages, and the knowledge that they bring to school as deficits. She, like many others before and after her (see, for example, Gutiérrez et al., 1999; Moll et al., 1992), called for pedagogies that view students’ home languages, cultural identities, and out-of-school experiences as assets. According to Valenzuela (1999), *additive pedagogy* may, in fact, be synonymous with authentic caring; both build upon “profound love of community” as well as deep understanding of marginalized students’ struggles for educational opportunity, and so “each unfolds naturally into the other” (p. 271).

Indeed, caring for students who are frequently pushed to the margins of schools is, by its nature, an act that is both political and instructional. As Ladson-Billings (1995b) wrote, the “common thread of caring” among successful teachers of African American students was “their concern for the implications their work had on their students’ lives, the welfare of the community, and unjust social arrangements” (p. 474). Similarly, in their study of how skilled and experienced teachers taught civics in classrooms in which some students had citizenship status and others did not, Dabach et al. (2018) found that “trusting relationships” were central to effective teaching (p. 28). Without these relationships, even very carefully planned lessons might fail to reach students. Effective social studies teachers saw their roles as simultaneously relational, political, and instructional; these teachers viewed helping students who might be isolated due to their immigration status “feel more fully connected to their teachers and fellow students” as an essential part of their work (Dabach et al., 2018, p. 24). This authentic care is simultaneously pedagogical and political: it teaches minoritized students whether, how, and where they belong within the school community (Abu El-Haj, 2015; Gonzales, 2016).

CULTURALLY RELEVANT AND CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PEDAGOGIES

In her seminal essay, “Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” Ladson-Billings (1995b) articulated a set of questions that a pedagogy addressing “the specific concerns of educating teachers for success with African American students” (p. 466) must explore—questions that are all too often overlooked by both researchers and practitioners:

What constitutes student success? How can academic success and cultural success complement each other in settings where student alienation and hostility characterize the school experience? How can pedagogy promote the kind of student success that engages larger social structural issues in a critical way? How do researchers recognize that pedagogy in action? And what are the implications for teacher preparation generated by this pedagogy? (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 469)

Ladson-Billings offered a theory designed to address these questions. Based on her research with expert teachers of African American youth (Ladson-Billings, 2009), Ladson-Billings proposed that culturally relevant pedagogy would “produce students who can achieve academically, produce students who demonstrate cultural competence, and develop students who can both understand and critique the existing social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 474). These three pedagogical goals—academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness—became the basis for decades of further inquiry into culturally relevant teaching.

The acronym CRP, used as shorthand for both “culturally relevant pedagogy” and “culturally responsive pedagogy” (Gay, 2000), is now commonplace in discussions of pedagogical best practices. However, Ladson-Billings (2014) has asserted, contemporary practices being described by many educators as “culturally relevant” are, in fact, a “distortion and corruption of the central ideas I attempted to promulgate” (p. 82). All too frequently, advocates of CRP simplistically define academic success in terms of standardized test scores; treat cultural competence as unidirectional, something that students of color must acquire to succeed in a White world; and ignore the goal of critical consciousness altogether (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Recently, Ladson-Billings joined Paris and Alim (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) in calling for a new approach to teaching and teacher education. Called “culturally sustaining pedagogy” (or, as Ladson-Billings, 2014, dubbed it, “culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0”), its focus is to “perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 95).

CSP is, in many ways, a natural outgrowth or “remix” of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 2014). However, its emphasis is distinct from that of the original CRP framework. In the 1990s, educators frequently told Ladson-Billings that CRP was “just good teaching.” Her response was “to affirm that, indeed, I am describing good teaching, and to question why so little of it seems to be occurring in the classrooms populated by African American students” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 159). This call for attention to the teaching and learning of Black students was, in itself, a political act. However, Paris and Alim’s (2014) “loving critique forward” argued that it is not enough to normalize the learning of minoritized students or to treat their experiences as assets. In addition, we must “reimagine schools as sites with diverse heterogeneous practices that are not only valued but sustained” (Alim et al., 2017, p. 16). A key part of this reimagination is an understanding of schooling as part of an oppressive system that measures youth of color according to the yardstick of “White middle-class norms of knowing and being” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 86). Indeed, as time has passed, Ladson-Billings has framed the project of CRP in increasingly political terms; recently, she explained that her work had always been a refusal of “the White supremacist ideology” at the root of the dominant ways in which “teaching and learning have been organized” (as cited in Alim et al., 2017, p. 6). CSP centers this goal of decentering Whiteness.

In this project, I analyze data from a racially and culturally diverse school through the lenses of decentering Whiteness and the goals of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Despite its emphasis on cultural pluralism, empirical research on asset-based pedagogies has typically focused on classrooms serving culturally, linguistically, or racially homogeneous groups of students (see, for example, Bartlett & Garcia, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Paris & Alim, 2017, selected chapters). What is more, many recent studies of CRP underexplore the “processes, roles, salience, centrality, and outcomes associated with race” in favor of an emphasis on ethnicity and language (Milner, 2017, p. 7). Previous studies in more heterogeneous settings tend to focus on interactions and language practices among youth of color or newcomer immigrant students (Irizarry, 2007; Lee & Walsh, 2017; Malsbary, 2014; Paris, 2011). These classrooms do not include significant numbers of White students. This is not, in and of itself, surprising. CSP’s goal of social transformation is distinct from the project of racial integration itself, which, as Alim and Paris (2017) cautioned, all too often centers Whiteness. However, it leaves unanswered a question of critical importance to the many educational researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who advocate for increased school diversity: What does it look like to decenter Whiteness and sustain youth of color in a classroom that includes White kids?

CLASSROOMS AS CONTACT ZONES

One explanation for the dearth of research on asset-based pedagogies in classrooms with racially diverse students, including classrooms with significant numbers of White students, is the scarcity of research sites. The rise of interest in culturally relevant pedagogy in the 1990s coincided with the resegregation of many school districts (Orfield et al., 2012; Wells et al., 2005), resulting in few opportunities to examine what these pedagogies might look like in racially diverse settings. Even in schools that serve diverse student bodies, academic tracking frequently sorts students along predictably racialized trajectories (Noguera & Wing, 2006; Oakes, 2005). Recent research has thus tended to examine the differentiated experiences of Black and White students in these institutions, noting that they rarely share the same classrooms (Carter, 2012; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Tyson, 2011). There is little research that explores the nature of teaching and learning in racially diverse classrooms, and even less that includes students who differ not only in how they are racialized, but also in socioeconomic status, home language, and religion (for exceptions, see Fine et al., 2000; Lewis, 2003; Rubin, 2007a).

One way to conceptualize racially and culturally diverse classrooms is as contact zones: spaces where “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (Pratt, 1991, p. 33). In reflecting on her own efforts to transform undergraduate courses into contact zones, Pratt noted that this was simultaneously the “hardest” and the “most exciting teaching” she had ever done, because teachers “had to work in the knowledge that whatever one said was going to be received systematically in radically heterogeneous ways that we were neither able nor entitled to prescribe” (p. 39). As Patel (2012) argued, the significance of Pratt’s conceptual model of contact is not the observation that these spaces exist, but that “they all too often exist without ensuing engaged discourse that productively lifts up difference, discord, power differentials and conflicts” (p. 334). Contact zones offer unique opportunities to center the questions and concerns of students of color; they also offer unique challenges to efforts to decenter Whiteness.

METHODS

STUDY CONTEXT

As a racially, culturally, and linguistically diversifying school in a gentrifying area of New York City, M.S. 917 was an ideal site for inquiry into the possibilities and challenges involved in transforming classrooms into contact zones. Courses at M.S. 917 had never been tracked, due to the principal's political commitments, and classrooms were quite heterogeneous in terms of students' race, socioeconomic status, home language, and performance on academic assessments. In 2016, the school's student body was 27% Black, 29% Latinx, and 36% White, with a small yet substantial group of students identifying as "biracial" or "other." Very few students at M.S. 917 identified as Asian or Asian American, but there was a small group of students who identified as Arab or Arab American. 7% of the student body was classified as English Language Learners (ELLs). Teachers told me that they knew several students came from mixed-status families or were themselves undocumented, and a substantial subset of students came from families affected by the Trump administration's so-called Muslim ban.² These axes of difference became particularly salient in the school's response to the political events of the 2016–2017 academic year.

While M.S. 917 has a long history of advocating for students of color, White students have only recently become a visible presence within the school, increasing from less than 5% of the student body five years ago to more than 30% of the student body in the 2016–2017 academic year.³ When this demographic shift began, Principal Myers (a White man) made clear to families and teachers alike that although he was eager to lead a more integrated school, he would not recruit White families by making changes to school programs or culture that would result in centering Whiteness. In interviews, students, teachers, and parents told me, unprompted, that fighting racism is "part of the culture of the school." Indeed, the school's motto was "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Susan Apple, a White sixth-grade teacher, stopped me in the hallway one morning to tell me angrily about a small group of teachers who did not appear to support the school's advocacy for racial justice, saying fiercely, "I'm not going to smile at you. You're on the wrong side of history." Even teachers who responded with a greater degree of analytical detachment—such as Matt Tello, a White social studies teacher who said to me with a wry smile, "It's a lot to put on schools to, like, fix racism, right?"—were explicit that their primary professional commitment was to serve low-income children of color. As Ms. Apple reminded me, "every school has a mission, whether or not it's explicit. Ours is social justice."

In many ways, M.S. 917 is an exceptional case. The data I have gathered are not representative of public schooling in the United States. Few U.S. schools are so racially and socioeconomically diverse, and few have such an explicitly stated commitment to fighting racism. What is more, I collected my data during the 2016–2017 academic year, a year noted by many educators for its extreme political climate (Costello, 2016; Rogers et al., 2017). However, the atypical nature of these data are also their strength. Exceptional cases such as those of M.S. 917 and the 2016–2017 academic year can "bring into relief relational patterns that otherwise lack visibility" (Ermakoff, 2014, p. 235). The 2016 presidential election and its aftermath were marked by both continuity with and rupture from longstanding policies, politics, and discourses (Abu El-Haj, 2017). In this pressing political moment, teachers were "compelled to think about" their pedagogical choices, to explicitly consider decisions which might otherwise be "safely relegate[d] to the background

of their consciousness,” thus making explicit “beliefs and standards that, in unproblematic situations, remain tacit” (Ermakoff, 2014, p. 234). The extreme political context, together with the exceptional racial and cultural diversity of M.S. 917 student body, surfaced deeply rooted tensions in the school’s efforts to foster students’ academic success, cultural consciousness, and sociopolitical awareness. While the political climate of the 2016–2017 academic year foregrounded these pedagogical disjunctures, they were not limited to discussions of electoral politics. Contradictory assumptions about the most effective and appropriate way to sustain a culturally diverse student body ran throughout the school’s norms, values, and practices.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data for this study were drawn from a two-year, multi-sited critical ethnography of diversifying schools in New York City. I conducted observations at M.S. 917 two or three times each week, for a total of 58 days of observation (typically three to five hours per day) throughout the 2016–2017 academic year. There were four sixth-grade cohorts at the school, ranging from 23 to 27 students each. Based primarily on scheduling constraints, I selected one focal cohort of 25 students to follow throughout the day, accompanying them from class to class, on field trips, and during fire drills. While I did not observe non-academic spaces such as recess or lunch every time I visited the school, I periodically sat in on them as well. I also occasionally sat in on other sixth- and seventh-grade classes to ensure that what I observed in my focal cohort was representative of what was happening with other groups of students. In addition, I frequently observed other, more adult spaces, including the teachers’ lounge, staff meetings, collaborative teacher planning sessions, and PTA events. In each setting, my observations focused on how instructional practices, student-teacher interactions, and student-student interactions represented and reinforced notions of difference within the classroom. I paid particular attention to both the content of classroom curricula and labeling and sorting practices (such as remediation or how students described each other). I jotted down bits of class dialogue, nonverbal interactions, and details from daily lessons as I observed, then transformed these jottings into formal field notes no more than 24 hours after each observation (Emerson et al., 2011).

In addition to multiple informal conversations with students and teachers throughout the school day, I conducted semistructured interviews with 9 of the 11 staff who worked regularly with the focal sixth-grade cohort (including elective teachers and paraprofessionals) and two of the school’s four administrators. Two of the staff members I interviewed were also parents of students in my focal cohort. I also interviewed 14 of the 25 students in the focal cohort and conducted one focus-group discussion with nine of the students I interviewed.⁴ The demographics of both staff and student interview participants were racially diverse (see Appendix A for detailed participant demographics). In interviews, I asked kids to describe their perceptions of the school, their social interactions with other students, and themselves as students. I asked teachers to explain how they planned and adapted lessons, to share their perceptions of individual students, and to reflect on changes they had seen in the school over the academic year. (For sample interview protocols, see Appendices B and C.)

Like many ethnographers, I approached data analysis as an iterative process (Saldaña, 2015; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). I incorporated analysis into the close of each day of fieldwork by transforming observational jottings into formal field notes (Emerson et al., 2011). The decision to detail certain interactions was in itself an analytic act. During interviews, I frequently asked

participants about my observations. In doing so, I both checked my own interpretation of events and grounded our conversations in specifics, creating a generative space for participants to share their own analyses. Throughout the process of collecting data, I also wrote memos that captured my reflections on the significance of events and initial interpretations of emerging patterns.

I began more formal data analysis with an effort to describe and defamiliarize the data. Using Dedoose qualitative software, I created an initial codebook that categorized the types of data collected (e.g., classroom settings or roles of interview participants), as well as describing recurrent themes and topics. In a few cases, these recurrent themes were inductive, based purely on phrases I heard repeated within the data (such as “election”). More frequently, my codes were informed by existing literature on teaching and learning in racially diverse schools. After coding the entire dataset, I extensively revised my codebook, organizing codes according to broader themes; recoded much of the data; and wrote a new series of analytic memos. (A list of codes and samples of coded data I used in writing this paper can be found in Appendix D.) This process allowed me to engage in what Tavory and Timmermans (2014) called “abductive analysis,” a “creative inferential process aimed at producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence” (p. 5). It was this abductive process that allowed me to group my codes, identifying three ways in which individual teachers and the school as a whole responded to the presidential election: relationally, politically, and instructionally. In the findings below, I first describe the school staff’s shared values, key practices, and constraints related to these three domains. Then, I explore gaps between teachers’ relational, political, and instructional responses to the political events of the 2016–2017 academic year.

SCHOOL NORMS, VALUES, AND PRACTICES

As the M.S. 917 student body became increasingly White, school staff carefully considered the implications for students of color. Principal Myers saw integration as a means to the end of racial justice and he knew that, historically, integrating schools had frequently failed to serve students of color well. When some White families asked him to create a gifted-and-talented program for the sixth grade, he refused. He prioritized racial, linguistic, and religious diversity in his hiring practices; the teaching staff at M.S. 917 was unusually racially diverse, and Black and Latinx administrators and counselors outnumbered their White counterparts. When he interviewed candidates for open positions, Principal Myers asked teachers to discuss their commitment to racially integrated learning environments and their approaches to heterogeneous instruction. In an orientation for new teachers, Principal Myers repeatedly emphasized the importance of creating a “level playing ground” in every aspect of the school community “regardless of race or ethnicity or economic status.” Faculty and staff participated in professional development that focused on the roots of racism through discussions of texts such as Stephen Jay Gould’s *The Mismeasure of Man*, which traced the origins of racialized theories of intelligence. Although almost one in three M.S. 917 students were White and fewer than half of the kids at M.S. 917 were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, faculty and staff discussions frequently focused on how to best serve their low-income students of color.

However, these conversations frequently focused on supporting individual students through field-trip subsidies, behavioral interventions, or counseling services. Although most M.S. 917 staff were sincere in their efforts to create an anti-racist school community, they did not have many opportunities to develop a collaborative vision of anti-racist classrooms that centered the

prior knowledge, lived experiences, and critical questions of their students. When I asked staff how school leadership supported teachers in teaching their heterogeneous classes, neither teachers nor administrators gave me a clear answer. Faculty reported that they regularly talked about race in professional-development sessions, but they could not remember very many conversations about instruction. In interviews, several teachers complained that they did not get many opportunities to collaborate on curricula or examine assessment practices. In the absence of ongoing coaching or support, teachers drew from other resources to plan their instruction, including materials from their preservice training, conversations with trusted colleagues, or packaged materials that the school had purchased but not mandated; the quality of these materials varied widely.

School staff were acutely aware of differences in the resources and access that were readily available to M.S. 917 students. Teachers and administrators considered it important to consider the complex social contexts surrounding student behavior and they avoided deficit-based frames when discussing children. This relational stance was made explicit in schoolwide meetings and individual conversations with Principal Myers, who frequently reminded her staff that students “want to meet your expectations,” so that it was teachers’ responsibility to consider what might be “getting in the way” of a kid’s success. Teachers deliberately built relationships with students in order to realize this goal. They drew on a broad repertoire of relational strategies to address challenging classroom dynamics, such as inviting small groups of kids up to their classrooms for lunchtime pizza, chatting with students before and after class about shared experiences and interests, and using individual counseling rather than punitive discipline measures. They not only refused to see their low-income students of color through subtractive lenses; they actively demonstrated to students that they cared for them as people and that they knew students cared about school (Valenzuela, 1999).

At times, the care that M.S. 917 staff felt for low-income children of color led them to actively push back against the privilege of students from advantaged families. This is not generally the case in racially and socioeconomically diverse schools (Cucchiara, 2013; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Oakes et al., 1997). In fact, Lewis and Diamond (2015) found that staff often responded to intervention from White parents by accommodating both actual and anticipated demands, treating Whiteness as a symbolic resource from which all White children reaped academic and disciplinary benefits, whether or not their parents ever picked up the phone. In contrast, M.S. 917 staff at times spoke dismissively about advantaged families’ concerns about their children’s academic or social progress. Teachers attempted to push back against both anticipated and actual requests to center these students’ needs.

While they could not altogether ignore students’ or families’ actual and anticipated demands, educators frequently framed requests from White students or their parents as missed learning opportunities; they saw these symbolic resources as drawbacks, rather than assets. For example, Ms. Apple saw that some kids at M.S. 917 were missing opportunities to develop cultural competence because, as she hesitatingly explained, they were “coming from a place of privilege, who feel that they deserve—maybe they don’t feel that they deserve it, but they don’t know what—they’re just 11.” Trying to show me the ways in which entitlement created obstacles to learning, Ms. Apple told a story about a series of minor conflicts between Gavin, a White boy, and Mia, a Latina girl. Other children often found conversation with Mia uncomfortable; she told dark jokes, and she alternately withdrew from and acted verbally aggressive during social

interactions. Gavin had several conflicts with Mia when he was seated near her, in part because he saw her as disrupting his focus on academics. His parents came in for a meeting with the sixth-grade teachers in which they requested that the two children no longer be seated together.

The teachers suggested alternative ways to resolve the problem. As Ms. Apple told me later, she wanted students to learn how to interact with people unlike themselves, and simply avoiding those interactions defeated that goal. However, Gavin and his parents insisted. What struck Ms. Apple most was the sense of privilege that the family brought to the conversation. She summarized the teachers' response:

Gavin told Mr. Tello, "I appreciate your feedback, but I think this is more serious than you think." So we kind of were like [*in a skeptical voice*], "All right." ... I think that with other students, it would've been—if I had explained the situation, and explained, "You know, sometimes people are different, and we have different experiences and different interests." It would've been, I don't know, I'm just speculating right now. But it could've been perceived as something different than just, "Well no, that's making me feel uncomfortable, so I don't want to be around it anymore. End of discussion."

Ms. Apple worked consciously to navigate the tensions between the goal of decentering Whiteness and her desire for all students to feel safe within the classroom. She argued that while the parental intervention may have paid off in the desired change to the seating chart, the outcome actually prevented Gavin from learning—or at least from learning to be culturally competent. Instead, Gavin learned that with enough insistence, he could avoid some of the discomfort surrounding contact zones.

By arguing that Gavin's interactions with Mia could have been seen as a learning opportunity, Ms. Apple was making a case for the importance of teaching all students—including White, middle-class students—to broaden their "cultural repertoires so that they can operate more easily in a world that is globally interconnected" (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 145). Indeed, the majority of the staff at M.S. 917 saw the chance for students to learn across difference as central to the school's work. Mr. Tello told me that "one of the best things about the school" was that it provided opportunities for "kids [to] talk to kids that are different from them." He explained that this was

something they will not get a chance to do in their lives outside of these classrooms, so to me it's just a priority for that reason, just, like, for their social development. It trumps everything else. I can work with a kid to have longer independent work stamina. And they will get better over time at all of those things. They're only 11. But I can't guarantee in the future that they'll have an opportunity to talk to a kid from a completely different background and experience, so I just prioritize it for that reason.

However, that potential could not be achieved without the "conflict, tension, and diversity" that are "intrinsic to learning spaces" (Gutiérrez et al., 1999). M.S. 917 teachers walked a fine line in their efforts to address the tensions that often accompanied these interactions. Even as they worked to decenter Whiteness in classroom interactions, teachers often inadvertently centered it in their classroom instruction. These processes were particularly evident in educators' relational, political, and instructional responses to the political events of the 2016–2017 academic year.

RELATIONAL AND POLITICAL RESPONSES TO THE ELECTION

In Pratt's (1991) description of her efforts to create a course that "functioned not like a homogeneous community or a horizontal alliance but like a contact zone," she reflected:

Every single text we read stood in specific historical relationships to the students in the class, but the range and variety of historical relationships in play were enormous. Everybody had a stake in nearly everything we read, but the range and kind of stakes varied widely. (p. 39)

The 2016 presidential election and the early months of the Trump administration foregrounded the range of stakes that M.S. 917 students, teachers, and families held in the project of anti-racism, as well as the gaps in how M.S. 917 teachers responded to their students relationally, politically, and instructionally. In deep-blue New York City, many students had never heard public support for Donald Trump or his policy positions. Throughout the fall, students had been using phrases such as, "You're like Donald Trump!" as insults; some of the most notable sources of interstudent conflict had been conversations in which kids accused their peers of being willing to vote for the Republican candidate. Nobody thought he might actually win. When he did, the school's sense of rupture (Abu El-Haj, 2017) was palpable. The election results were, for some students, abstractly disturbing; for others, the outcome of the election was first and foremost a threat to their families and communities. A substantial number of M.S. 917 students had family members who were undocumented and/or were immigrants from countries targeted by the incoming administration's Muslim ban.

As part of the school's activist stance, M.S. 917 faculty and staff made sincere, sustained efforts to support these students, their families, and their communities. However, teachers seemed to see this work as relational or political, rather than instructional; they carefully kept these conversations outside of academic classes, considering them more appropriate for arenas such as advisory periods, after school, or extracurricular spaces. These decisions illustrated the ways in which, even as M.S. 917 worked to decenter Whiteness in extracurricular spaces, teachers continued to center Whiteness in the classroom.

On the day after the presidential election, teachers were unsure how to proceed. Several students sat crying in sixth-grade hallways and classrooms before first period began, sharing their fears for their own futures or those of undocumented family members. As a group, teachers' first impulses were to support and center the needs of students from immigrant families. They talked one-on-one with kids who raised concerns before and after school, and they focused that week's advisory discussions on responses to the election. However, they carefully balanced their desire to address their concern for their students' well-being with concerns about remaining politically neutral. Ms. Apple described a moment in which Ariel, an "incredibly insightful" kid, shared his fears in her advisory group:

I didn't electioneer, and I didn't talk about my political position at all, but I definitely was like, "There are kids who are terrified about being deported." You can't just let that go. . . . He was just talking about how deportation is awful, and he's terrified for his family, and all this other stuff, and the other kids were like, "Ariel, it's OK." That was the best advisory period I've ever had, was the day after the election. Because they were just all

there to support each other, and it was really, really great to see. . . . And again, I wasn't saying anything about my political beliefs. All I had to do was say, "If you ever need help or support, if you're worried about something, then come to your teachers and talk to us about it, because I can't even imagine that level of stress that you're going through."

Immediately after the election and throughout the year, Ms. Apple and her classmates provided a compassionate, supportive response to her students' anxieties and questions.

Later in the year, M.S. 917 staff responded to the aftermath of the election through more explicitly political activities. In March 2017, M.S. 917 hosted a free, public "Know Your Rights" session with an immigration attorney for families and community members. Fliers advertising the event were also posted throughout the hallways, and teachers encouraged students to attend in announcements at the beginning of class. In keeping with the school's dedication to centering the needs of marginalized families, M.S. 917 staff not only proactively organized a response to political events; they also used their relationships with students to increase the impact of the school's community organizing. During writing workshop one day, Ms. Apple knelt by Ariel's desk, gave him an event flier, and said, "Remember how we were talking about this in advisory? I think you and your family should come on Thursday." When Ariel looked up at her wordlessly, she kept the topic of immigration status general, saying carefully, "Because you've been concerned and had lots of strong things to say about it." Ms. Gonzalez, a Special Education teacher who was herself the daughter of Mexican immigrants, called several Spanish-speaking families to personally invite them to the meeting as well. Through these public and private "signaling practices," M.S. 917 teachers positioned "undocumented students, families, and communities as legitimate participants in school spaces," cultivating a sense of safety and belonging that was simultaneously relational and political (Dabach et al., 2018, p. 27).

The school's most public response to the election came in the week following the announcement of the executive order banning refugees from seven Muslim countries. That week, staff members sat down with the student council to discuss how they could ensure that students from affected communities knew the school supported them. Together, the group planned a "No Ban! No Wall!" rally after school. Teachers announced to sixth-graders that the protest would be after school and encouraged them to participate. In doing so, they demonstrated the possibility of what Lee and Walsh (2017) called "socially just, culturally sustaining pedagogy" for immigrant youth and provided students with models of "justice-oriented citizenship that encourages youth to be active agents in the political process" (p. 197). Ms. Apple told her class that the purpose of the rally was to "show that we as a community welcome all people to our school, city, and country," because "so many of our students are affected by the Muslim ban and the proposed wall." Later that day, in advisory period, students were invited (but not required) to make posters for the rally. Kids pushed desks together, singing, chatting, and coloring in signs based on mottos that Ms. Apple had written on the board, such as "*¡Ningun ser humano es ilegal!* No human being is illegal!" Several Latinx students who were frequently disengaged in other classes eagerly participated in this activity, actively discussing slogan options with their neighbors, translating Spanish words for Anglophones, and debating with their classmates which symbols would best illustrate their message. As I watched, I wondered what it would look like to similarly engage these kids in "academic" classes.

INSTRUCTIONAL RESPONSES TO THE ELECTION

As early as the day after the election, sixth-grade teachers had a range of ideas about how to respond to political events instructionally. While their instructional responses differed—trying to give students something else to think about, reserving discussions of politics for advisory periods, or adhering to curricular plans made weeks before—the sixth-grade teachers at M.S. 917 shared a reluctance to center the emerging problems and questions that could develop students’ critical consciousness and contribute to a culturally sustaining curriculum. On the morning of November 9, Principal Myers emailed the staff several essays that he encouraged them to discuss with students, including Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” However, none of the sixth-grade teachers took him up on that suggestion, apparently unwilling to deviate from their previously planned instruction. Mr. Seif, the math teacher, told me that his goal was to get students focused on math “as quickly as possible to keep them from distraction.” Ms. Apple, on the other hand, was preoccupied with thinking about how she would talk about the election in her advisory period three days later. When I asked if she had thought about addressing the election in that day’s English Language Arts class, she was puzzled by the question. She didn’t see where the topic fit within the sixth-grade ELA curriculum. When I mentioned that since she was in the middle of a unit on persuasive writing, Ms. Apple could use “Letter From a Birmingham Jail” as an exemplar text, she was intrigued. However, she ultimately could not imagine changing her lesson plans for the week.³ She decided to wait until Friday’s advisory. While she thought it was important to emotionally support students who felt threatened by political events, she did not seem to see these concerns as central to her classroom practice.

In contrast, Mr. Tello began social studies class on the day after the election with an excerpt from the poem, “Let America Be America Again” (Hughes, 1935): “O, yes, I say it plain / America never was America to me, / And yet I swear this oath— / America will be!” After class, he told me that he’d made the decision to teach the poem right before class began:

Obviously, yesterday I had no plan to do that, but immediately when I got in, one of my students said she was going to be deported, her parents are illegal. I was very concerned. . . . A lot of them were having these really unfortunately, mostly misinformed, but really scary ideas and feeling some fear, so I was trying to think of something that would let them reframe it, instead of just feeling really sad and scared and powerless. . . . I didn't have a lesson, I just wanted to read it to them and tell them what I thought about it, so they'd hear something that maybe wasn't so scary.

I asked Mr. Tello how he felt about the activity. Had he achieved his goal? He shrugged: “I don't know. I could plan a whole lesson around it and maybe get to some catharsis with them or, like, have them produce something by the end, but that wasn’t my lesson for the day.” Mr. Tello’s approach during this moment was to expose students to new ideas and possible frames for their experiences, to acknowledge students’ experiences but also stick to his “lesson for the day.” By understanding their instructional choices as a series of “bounded lessons,” rather than a broader anti-racist project (Alim et al., 2017, p. 21), M.S. 917 made arbitrary distinctions among the relational, political, and instructional aspects of their work.

Perhaps inevitably, however, presidential politics leaked beyond the school’s extracurricular holding containers. Students’ responses to political events intermittently disrupted classroom activities in the form of tears, outbursts, and side conversations. During the academic-support period before first period, students shared news about recent ICE raids. In quiet classroom

moments, students would look up and make comments about the President-elect being “a bum” or ask questions about the proposal to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border. In social studies, on the day after the election, Mr. Tello followed the class discussion of “Let America Be America Again” with an introduction to a new unit about ancient Mesopotamia. After previewing unit vocabulary, images of Mesopotamian art, diagrams of social class structures, and maps of the Fertile Crescent, Mr. Tello handed out an “anticipation guide” with statements that echoed unit themes.⁴ The anticipation guide asked students to agree or disagree with statements that included, “Walls are built to keep people safe.” Mr. Tello asked the class to mark the statements true or false, then explain their thinking in writing before discussing it in small groups and sharing with the class. Students appeared to read the anticipation guide with contemporary political debates in mind. During the following conversation, kids described walls as both “racist” and “useful.” A student spoke out against the idea that walls are built to keep people safe because “leaders build walls to keep people in and out.” Another student agreed, saying, “Walls mark territory.” Others said that walls can be bad, because they keep out people who are not in the country and want a better future, but they can also do good things like protect people from things like bombs. Mr. Tello called on a series of students, encouraging them to share their thoughts, but did not provide additional context about contemporary politics or ask any follow-up questions.

This instructional pattern continued throughout the school year in social studies discussions. In January, kicking off a discussion of Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt, Mr. Tello asked students if people would respect the Pharaoh equally if the position were held by a woman, rather than a man. In the discussion that followed, Mr. Tello repeatedly scaffolded and extended his students’ analysis in the discussion that followed, which clearly echoed themes of the 2016 presidential election. Derek, a Black boy, started the conversation off by stating that if a leader was great, she would earn respect based on her actions, and gender would not matter. Daisy, a White girl, disagreed, saying gender “doesn’t impact how they lead, but it does impact how people think of them.” She made an explicit connection to contemporary political debates, saying that people had not respected Hillary Clinton because she lives in a sexist world, and the world of ancient Egypt was even more sexist. Gavin, a White boy, jumped in, saying, “I disagree with Daisy.” He argued that gender does affect “how someone leads because they’re treated differently.” and here Mr. Tello clarified on his behalf: “by society.” Gavin nodded, adding, “And friends.” Gavin explained that women have the potential to be great leaders but are not always seen that way. Ariel raised his hand to note, “Men have more power than women.”

A White girl, Debra, redirected the conversation to the question of how women lead, saying that society treats male leaders differently from female leaders. Mr. Tello noted that it is not just female leaders who are treated differently, it is “women in general.” Debra nodded in agreement but argued that some people “care more about what other people think than other people,” so if a woman doesn’t care how others see her, she might not lead differently at all. Michelle, a Black girl, tried to reframe the conversation; she argued, “Everybody leads differently.” For example, she said, Obama and Trump led differently even though they are both powerful people. Mr. Tello acknowledged Michelle’s point, then argued that all the same, “Gender shapes our experiences of the world.”

Several things are noteworthy about this exchange, beyond the active role that Mr. Tello played in shaping students’ analysis of gender as a social construct—a role which he did not take on in

other discussions of social power, such as race, politics, or walls. One was the extent to which girls, who were outnumbered two to one in the class, were active in driving the discussion of gendered leadership roles and expectations. Another is the way in which White students, who made up less than one third of the class, dominated the conversation. Throughout the year, I had observed that students from politically progressive families—those White families who were most likely to send their children to an activist school like M.S. 917—were at a particular advantage in this kind of class discussion. In class, in the hallways, and during interviews, privileged kids were more likely to refer to conversations they had about politics with their parents. By not directly teaching his classes about political events, but occasionally referring to them in the curriculum, Mr. Tello counted on students' prior knowledge to fill in the gaps. As a result, rather than creating a "third space" that bridged the practices of home and school, he centered the learning of the children who encountered the fewest gaps between what they learned at home and what they learned in class (Gutiérrez et al., 1999). Like Ms. Apple, he failed to recognize the ways in which these lessons about social power were "received systematically in radically heterogeneous ways" (Pratt, 1991, p. 39).

In one M.S. 917 class, I saw an example of how things might be otherwise. Youth chorus was taught by a Black Special Education teacher and professional singer who credited much of her own academic success to attending desegregated schools. One of several rotating arts "elective" (yet mandatory) courses, it was also the only class I saw at M.S. 917 in which all the sixth-graders were engaged and consistently focused on a shared task throughout the class. Youth chorus was the final period of the day, and the sixth-graders I observed that fall were in the midst of a transition to a new school. When students got distracted or expressed exhaustion, she responded compassionately but firmly, calling them by name and asking, "Are you with me?" While students brought a range of musical interests and vocal skills to class, Ms. Jackson made clear from the outset that each of them could and would be successful in chorus.

Ms. Jackson made few presumptions about students' interests and prior knowledge, other than that they would be diverse. Each semester, Ms. Jackson began sixth-grade youth chorus with a unit on anthems: "The Star-Spangled Banner"; the Black national anthem, "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing"; and the South African anthem, "*Nkosi Sikelel' Afrika*." The class in which Ms. Jackson introduced the national anthem was typical of her approach to new songs. First, she distributed the lyrics to the students, explaining that the song was initially written as a poem and that most people only knew the first verse. She explained that when students became singers, they might be asked to sing the anthem, so she wanted to make sure they had it in their repertoires. Then Ms. Jackson asked her students to read the lyrics out loud and clap out the rhythm, over and over again, until the group was on beat and unified. Reflecting in my field notes that evening, I noted how the exercise was "challenging for everyone in the room, no matter how much they already knew. Even students who were already familiar with the song clearly benefitted from her close review of the words and the rhythm." Only after the group was unified did she allow them to sing. (I commented in my field notes that the outcome sounded "surprisingly good.")

During the month in which Ms. Jackson introduced the class to "The Star-Spangled Banner," there was a growing national debate over Colin Kaepernick's silent protest during the national anthem. I asked Ms. Jackson later that year if she had considered this context when she taught students the song, since I had not seen her lead any class discussions of the topic. She assured me she had. While she was very careful not to "inflict my opinion on them," she provided space for

students to discuss what they knew about the protests and to make their own decisions about whether or not to sing the song. At the end of the class discussion, she told me, she reminded students:

As a vocalist, it's in your singer's toolbox. I'm not telling you you're ever gonna use it, but just in the idea that we do live in this country, ["The Star-Spangled Banner"] is something for you to know. So, as I'm teaching you anthems, it's just one of the many.

Ms. Jackson was equally thoughtful about her choices in including other anthems in the curriculum. She taught the Black national anthem because "it celebrates unity and rising up from tragedy and tragic history. More than anything, as a singer, you'll be met with this at some point, so it's imperative for you to know." She began teaching the South African national anthem during a year when M.S. 917 had begun a schoolwide conversation about segregation, and she wanted to speak with students about apartheid. Following that experience, she decided to begin each semester with all three anthems, refusing to teach these cultural artifacts through the "prism of Whiteness" (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 142).

These efforts were not perfect. For example, in failing to unpack the references to slavery in "The Star-Spangled Banner," Ms. Jackson also missed an opportunity to engage students in critical examination of the racism embedded in U.S. history and society. However, by placing equal importance on each anthem, expecting each student to master all three songs, and situating each in the contemporary social context, Ms. Jackson illustrated the interconnected nature of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

The moments in which M.S. 917 teachers missed opportunities to foster students' critical consciousness were not always directly linked to national politics, and their format varied depending on the classroom subject. In sixth-grade science, for example, Ms. Bright rarely demonstrated awareness of opportunities to make connections between classroom curriculum, contemporary social issues, and culturally relevant teaching strategies. In fact, at times she explicitly dismissed the knowledge and experiences that students brought to class. One day, science class began with a warm-up brain-teaser that asked students to match animals with their Portuguese, Chinese, and Russian names. When Ms. Bright asked Miguel, a Latino student who was generally quiet in class, to find the word for dog, he pronounced the Portuguese word *cão* as if it were in Spanish. I wrote in my field notes that afternoon:

She laughs and says, "Why do you say it like that, though?" He's silent and the class moves on. I'm stung on his behalf. I don't know if Miguel heard it this way, but I definitely hear her comment as mocking his accent—or at least oblivious to the fact that he's using his Spanish as an asset in this moment. And the linguistic marginalization continues. When Ms. Bright is talking about the word in Chinese characters, she says, "the snake is the word in the Chinese or Japanese or whatever symbol that is." She goes on to say that this exercise was difficult for kids "because the words are in different languages and you all speak a specific one—English." Ariel [another Latino boy] pipes up with his broad, bright smile, "And Spanish!" Ms. Bright brushes Ariel's response off

with an “eh,” and moves on to explaining that scientists needed a universal language, so they chose Latin.

In this moment, Ms. Bright missed an opportunity to scaffold critical consciousness by asking the class to consider how it is that languages such as Latin or English become “official.” Perhaps more important, she dismissed—or even mocked—students’ bilingualism. Opportunities to demonstrate caring for students and center their knowledge were lost.

While Mr. Tello regularly incorporated discussions of social power into his instruction, these conversations focused almost exclusively on gender. Several White girls in the class engaged eagerly in discussions about gender and feminism. However, some students found other questions more pressing. One day, during a lesson about Egyptian social hierarchy, Michelle, a Black girl, raised her hand to ask, “Has there ever been an African American pharaoh?” Mr. Tello paused, then explained that the Pharaoh couldn’t be African American, since America didn’t exist yet, but “the Pharaohs were African. Egypt is in Africa.” Jayden, a Black boy, asked why Egyptians were so “pale,” then. Mr. Tello said, “They weren’t, but that’s a really interesting question. Why do we represent them that way?” Across the room students looked up, appearing eager to hear more, but Mr. Tello returned to the front of the room and urged students to finish their worksheets. His apparent concern about deviating from his lesson plan prevented him from reimagining his teaching.

It is testimony to M.S. 917 teachers’ ongoing relational work that students felt comfortable interrupting the progression of classroom curriculum with their own urgent questions and connections. However, despite these educators’ evident, consistent concern for their students’ growth and well-being, they repeatedly missed opportunities to treat “points of disruption as the building blocks for potential learning” (Gutiérrez et al., 1999). Perhaps because these points of disruption felt risky, teachers seemed to bracket students’ questions and concerns, relegating them to extracurricular spaces and, in so doing, marginalizing them.

Ms. Jackson’s comfort with designing a unit on anthems, in contrast to other teachers’ concerns about deviating from their lesson plans, may in some ways have been a function of the differences between teaching chorus and teaching social studies or English. Mr. Tello, Ms. Bright, and Ms. Apple, like many other teachers of core academic subjects, may have felt reluctant to deviate from what they were “supposed” to teach according to state standards. However, teachers of core content areas at M.S. 917 had considerable latitude in designing their curriculum and instruction; they were not expected to strictly adhere to state-adopted curricular standards or to prepare their students for standardized tests. In many schools, standardized testing and curricular standards severely constrain teachers’ instructional options (Anderson et al., 2017; Lipman, 2004; Pierce, 2016; Royal & Gibson, 2017). Principal Myers told me that the goal at M.S. 917 was “teaching for understanding” rather than “compliance”—and that this goal distinguished M.S. 917 from most American public schools. This message was delivered clearly and consistently. Principal Myers repeatedly reminded staff of his belief that student test scores reflect demographic advantages, not academic learning. Teachers were told that they were “professionals” who could make decisions about curriculum and instruction. In an orientation for new teachers, the Assistant Principal underscored this message, saying, “We’ve not found it helpful to have everyone do the same thing.”

In this and many other ways, M.S. 917 was a best-case scenario for teachers who wished—as most M.S. 917 teachers clearly did—to engage with the diversity in their classrooms. Their principal had built a school culture explicitly focused on anti-racism and actively encouraged staff to engage students in discussion of issues central to their lives. The 2016–2017 academic year presented all too many missed opportunities to do exactly that. Some sixth-grade teachers may have been constrained by their relative inexperience. Nobody on the team had taught for more than six years, and it can be quite challenging for teachers to develop the skills necessary to address controversy in the classroom, to rapidly plan lessons in response to current events, and to effectively capitalize on questions and concerns that students raise in classroom discussion (Hess, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Rubin, 2007b). Another constraint may have been teachers’ perceptions that sixth grade was too young to address these topics; when I asked teachers why they did not address political events in the classroom, I frequently heard, “They’re only 11.”

M.S. 917 teachers would certainly have benefited from more structured opportunities for collaboration and professional development, exploring how they could “promote the kind of student success that engages larger social structural issues in a critical way” (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 469). However, the school’s leadership faced constraints of its own that led to missed opportunities for teacher learning: Administrators expended intense labor as they attempted to integrate a school in the absence of any official policy, they faced lack of support or outright opposition from their local superintendent’s office and the New York City Department of Education, and they invested significant time and effort in developing authentic relationships with an extremely diverse group of families and communities, including students in crisis. M.S. 917 was full of people working very hard to serve students very well. Instructional planning and support were not always the most pressing priorities.

The extent to which the classroom practice at M.S. 917 did not differ from that of many other schools was particularly notable in the context of the school’s political and relational norms and values. The fact that M.S. 917 teachers struggled with how to decenter Whiteness points to the enormity of this task; the persistence with which students asked questions that destabilized their curricula points to the exigency of this task. As a result of pedagogical tensions, silences, and missed opportunities, a school that was intended to be culturally sustaining could not be fully so.

IMPLICATIONS

At M.S. 917, teachers taught sixth-graders to identify racism as a social problem. At the same time, as in so many other schools, their classroom curricula and instruction did not treat racism as “a legitimate topic of discussion” (Epstein et al., 2011, p. 6). Through moments of “curricular exclusion and pedagogical malpractice” (Gutiérrez & Johnson, 2017, p. 249), these teachers—frequently unwittingly—created color-blind classrooms that marginalized students of color “softly” (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 3). The end result was curricula that reinforced racial storylines by centering Whiteness.

This analysis is not intended as a criticism of the educators at M.S. 917. It is a criticism of an oppressive system that renders other outcomes nearly impossible (Alim et al., 2017). The difficulty of decentering Whiteness even in circumstances that may appear favorable—an anti-racist school in a political context that provides multiple opportunities for discussions of race,

rights, and difference—raises important questions about the possibilities of culturally sustaining pedagogy in racially diverse classrooms. Of course, one study of one grade in one school is not a sufficient foundation for a theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy in the contact zone. However, my findings have important implications for practitioners, theorists, and researchers who seek a better understanding of what such a body of work might explore: the interconnected aspects of teachers' relational, political, and instructional work, the ways that silences and missed opportunities impact pedagogical goals and practices, and the urgent need to support teachers in grappling with the challenging work of sustaining culturally diverse students.

M.S. 917 teachers brought important assets to their classroom pedagogy: Their investment in the success of students who are frequently pushed to the margins of schools and their understanding that their work was, by nature, political. What they did not consistently recognize was how to leverage these strengths in planning, delivering, and adapting classroom curricula and instruction. Even as they cared urgently for students of color and immigrant students, these teachers also marginalized these students' questions and interests as personal, rather than academic; they relegated students' experiences and concerns extracurricular spaces, rather than bringing them into the center of curriculum and instruction. This finding illustrates the importance of situating any and all research on classroom practice within analyses of student-teacher relationships and local social and political contexts.

In the contact zones of racially diverse schools, as in all classrooms, students learn from silences as well as what is said. Tensions among teachers' political, relational, and academic goals and practices may lead to missed opportunities. Instructional moves that center Whiteness—however unwittingly or unwillingly, whatever the demographics of the classroom—have consequences for students' relational, political, and academic learning. Refusal or inability to incorporate “necessary disruptions” (Kinloch, 2018) into classroom curricula affects student learning in the domains of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Without “engaged discourse that productively lifts up difference, discord, power differentials and conflicts” (Patel, 2012, p. 334), these contact zones may be rendered miseducative.

As Ladson-Billings (1995b) has always reminded us, the theoretical framework for culturally relevant pedagogy must address the implications of classroom-based findings for teacher preparation. Currently, most teacher education programs emphasize the importance of in-depth instructional planning based on state-mandated curricular standards; few preservice teachers are ready to facilitate engaged (often dangerous) discourse, to deviate from lesson plans when faced with necessary disruptions, or to center, rather than simply acknowledging, students' questions when designing units of study. Without being prepared for this work, it seems unlikely that teachers will take the risks it demands, no matter how necessary they might be.

Proponents of culturally sustaining pedagogy, like many advocates of school integration, see the purpose of school as “positive social transformation” (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1). Unlike many advocates of racially diverse educational settings, however, advocates of culturally sustaining pedagogy reject visions of success rooted in “a unidirectional assimilation into Whiteness” (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 3). Clearly, we need further research that probes the relationships between pedagogical goals, classroom practice, and the constraints within which many integrated or diversifying schools operate. While such research is being conducted, however, teachers and those who support them cannot rest. Teacher educators and educational leaders might well ask

themselves how they can help teachers like those at M.S. 917 navigate the multiple tensions underlying their work. Given the current policy context of high-stakes accountability and top-down reform, teachers have few models upon which to lean (Anderson et al., 2017; Royal & Gibson, 2017). Ultimately, what constraints could be lifted, and what policies would need to be changed? In the short term, how can we help teachers leverage their strengths, examine the instructional implications of their silences, and address the learning that falls outside their lesson plans? One possibility might be to incorporate ethnographic data such as those I have shared here into teacher education and professional development programs. We can hope that findings such as these will encourage teachers to consider and prepare a range of relational, political, and instructional responses to opportunities that might otherwise be missed.

Notes

1. All names used in this paper are pseudonyms. In addition, I have slightly altered some identifying details for the purpose of protecting the school and individuals.
2. The New York City Department of Education does not collect these data.
3. These shifts in student demographics were due to a combination of evolving perceptions of the school on the part of affluent, mostly White parents; changes in local school-choice policy; and Principal Myers's longstanding advocacy for integrated schools.
4. I invited all students in the focal cohort to interview multiple times, both through general announcements and individual conversations. A few students explicitly declined; others expressed interest in participating but did not return parental-consent forms.
5. It's important to also note that teachers were, in general, quite exhausted on the day after the election. Many of them had stayed up until 1:00 or 2:00 AM (Eastern Standard Time) watching election returns, then woke up several hours later to begin lengthy commutes to school before the school day began.
6. For more on anticipation guides as an instructional strategy to activate students' prior knowledge, see Beers (2003).

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APPENDIX A

Data Collection

School and Classroom Observations

School space	Days observed
Classes*	58
Advisory periods and extracurricular events	15
Staff meetings (e.g., schoolwide professional development or grade level)	9
After-school events for the community or parents	5

Note: I typically observed 3 class periods each day I visited, as well as any other events happening at school that day. Classes included both “academic” courses (English language arts, math, social studies, and science) as well as electives (youth chorus, art, and physical education).

Student participant demographics

Participant type	Black	Latinx	White	Asian American	Male	Female	Total
Focal cohort members	9	7	8	1	16	9	25
Students interviewed	5	2	6	1	8	6	14
Students in focus group	3	1	4	1	5	4	9
School demographics	27%	29%	36%	N/A*	59%	41%	100%

Note: NYCDOE redacts the exact percentage of small student subgroups to protect student privacy. As previously noted, there were also students at M.S. 917 who identified as biracial, multiracial, Arab American, or “other.”

Staff participant demographics

Participant type	Black	Latinx	White	Asian American	Male	Female	Total
Teachers interviewed	3	1	4	1	2	7	9
Administrators interviewed	0	1	1	0	1	1	2

APPENDIX B

Student Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your school.
 - What is your favorite thing about this school so far?
 - What has surprised you the most?
 - How is this school like or unlike your elementary school? Where did you go? How did you get there? How do you get to school now?
2. Tell me about your class(es).
 - What has been the most fun? What have you enjoyed the least?
 - What has been easy and what has been difficult?
3. Talk to me about lunchtime.
 - Explain the cafeteria to me. How does it work? Where do different kids sit?
 - Who do you like to hang out with/play with? What do you do?
 - What would you say are the unwritten rules of this school? If a new student came to school tomorrow, what should they know?
4. Tell me about the other students in your class. What are they like?
 - Did you know any of the kids in the class before you got to school? How?
 - Have you become friends with anyone new this year?
 - If you were working on a group project, which three other students would you want to work with? Why?
 - If you needed help with homework, which three other students would you ask? Why?
5. Tell me about yourself as a student.
 - How do you think your classmates/teachers would describe you?
 - What does your teacher do to make you think you are doing or not doing well?
6. I had a question about something I saw in class the other day . . .
 - [Probe about incident from field notes]

Now it's your turn. Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX C

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. I often think that one of the hardest things about teaching is that there are just so many things to think about all the time. How do you prioritize or decide where to focus your attention?
2. Tell me about how this group of kids compares to other groups you've taught.
 - What strengths and challenges have you noticed?
 - What do you know about their lives outside of school, like their neighborhoods or their families? How do you learn these things?
3. Talk to me about how you group students.
 - How do you decide who should sit where? What factors do you consider when you make groups?
 - Tell me about a time when you thought a group assignment worked well.
 - Tell me about a time when a group assignment worked poorly.
 - I've noticed that sometimes you allow a kid to work without a group. What's your thinking about that situation?
4. I had a question about something I saw/heard in class the other day . . .
 - [Probe about incident from field notes]
5. There's been a lot of talk recently about how integrated/segregated this school is. Do you agree? What kinds of differences do you most notice among students? Do they affect your teaching?
6. Tell me about some individual kids [someone who has really surprised you this year, someone who's easy to work with, someone you find frustrating, someone who's not getting the grades they should be getting].
 - How would you describe this student to another teacher?
 - What is particularly rewarding about working with him/her?
 - What is particularly challenging about working with him/her?
 - What has surprised you about working with him/her?
7. Have there been any changes you've particularly noticed in the school over the past year?
 - In programming or structure?
 - In students or families?
 - In what the staff seems to talk about during PD or over lunch?
 - Have these changes affected your classroom? How? (or why not?)
8. Do you think the kids pay attention to race or class differences within the group?
9. Do you think the election has impacted the kids? Or your teaching?
10. Do you have any questions for me—about my research or anything at all?

APPENDIX D

Codebook and Sample Data

Category	Code	Description	Example(s)
School norms and practices	School identity	References to or observations of how members of the school community describe the school	The PTA president got up to introduce the panel and either she or the person introducing her, really not quite sure, said that the “activism committee” is the “largest and most active committee at the MS 000 PTA.” (Field notes, 3/30/17)
School norms and practices	PD	References to or observations of professional development, inside and outside of school	"We always, in PD, read about race. ... I always go to the retreat and every year at the retreat Mr. Myers does the same seminar on racism in schools, we read the same quotes. I don't mind it. I always learn something new and it's always useful to recenter on the mission, but at some point, ‘We've had this conversation.’ We know what the problems are but as long as we keep trying to solve the problem with the same tools." (Mr. Tello, 4/6/17)
School norms and practices	Leadership	References or observations of the principal, other administrators, or leadership committees	“The people here are different, and this school focuses a lot on racism and color. They just want it to be as equal as possible. In our old school, there were some teachers who would separate us, White and Black. This school, they try to put you together instead of separating you.... The principal focuses a lot on racism and how we can stop it.” (Student Interview, 3/10/17)
School norms and practices	School change	References to how and why the school has changed over time	“I was so excited when they were bringing kids in and I was like, ‘That's great. That's wonderful. Light up your resource, let it change things.’ It brought in a lot of stuff. It brought in more money. It brought in more people in the PTA. It brought in more things. It brought in other teachers. It's just like it did come with benefits. The White middle class people came with benefits.” (Ms. Levin, 5/25/17)
Relational	Student-teacher relationship	References to or observations of how students and teachers perceive their relationships with each other	“I'm not saying, like, they don't care about the kid's education [at my former elementary school], I just feel like they help but they - when you would raise your hand, they'll just ignore you like you were a naughty kid. Here they notice everyone and they're not like you know all over the place. They know who to go too, they help keep you on track.”

(Student Interview, 3/1/17)

Relational	Extra-curricular spaces	References to or observations of teacher-student interactions outside of regular class time (e.g., advisory, clubs, or assemblies)	The Black History Month assembly theme is “using multiracial unity to fight racism and inequality.” Teachers have made presentations about historical moments in time that illustrate the theme... At the beginning kids are silent and respectful as the sixth graders open with the anthems, cheering at the end, but by the protest songs they’re not listening as carefully. (Field notes, 2/28/10)
Relational	Student-student relationship	References to or observations of relationships between kids	“In my experience in this school, there's kids that are like gap-bridgers, that are just more at-ease talking to people that we would think of as different from them, and those kids, there's not a lot of them, but when they're in a group, it really helps the whole group. ... So just kids with really strong speaking and listening skills, basically, are really good in a group like this because they’re more patient, they’re open to new ideas, they’re comfortable expressing, they're comfortable with themselves, so they're less judgmental of others, I've noticed.” (Mr. Tello, 11/9/16)
Political	Election	References to the 2016 presidential campaign, the election, or the new administration	They are going to read short essays written by a high school student who supports Trump and a student who supports Clinton, since they haven’t had a minute to do current events this week and the election is next week. There are murmurs and Axel says loudly, “Yay Trump!” and gives a thumbs-down sign when Clinton’s name is mentioned. He’s in the minority and I can’t tell how sincere he’s being. But then he says quite sincerely, and I’m sad that I can’t hear all he said, “I want to go back to my own country. Nobody here . . . No offense to all of you!” (Field notes, 11/4/16)
Political	Organizing	References to community organizing and activism related to the election or other news headlines	“She comes back with a mini-flyer about the immigration ‘know your rights’ meeting at school this evening. She says to Ariel, ‘Remember how we were talking about this in circles? I think you and your family should come on Thursday.’ He looks up at her, seeming a bit surprised, and she says, ‘Because you’ve been concerned and had lots of strong things to say about it.’ He nods and takes the flier but doesn’t say anything.” (Field notes, 3/9/18)

Instructional	Small groups and seating	References to or observations of how small groups are formed or operate	My group still doesn't have their materials ready. Wendy is visibly stressing about not having her paragraph. Mia is asking someone to deliver her paper so she can draw the last picture. Jayden is bitter: "This is horrible. Yo, Mia is lazy. No one wants you on their team." He gets up, brings her paper, and passes it to her saying, "Take your paper and don't ruin it like you do all the time." Jabari is more focused on the paragraph. He says to Debra, "Can you do it because she's not?" Debra looks outraged and says, "I'm not going to write her paragraph." (Field notes, 3/10/17)
Instructional	Science	References to or observations of science curriculum	Ms. Bright moves on to talking about dominant and recessive traits, an intro to the Punnett squares to come. There's a list of physical characteristics, from eye color to fused fingers to tongue rolling. Nikole looks up and asks a question about light spots, I don't quite catch it. Ms. Bright looks at her and says, gesturing to first her own face and then Nikole's, "Just like I have light spots, you have light spots on your face." Nikole, covering her cheeks with her hands, says, "Don't look!" Ms. Bright is, as always, matter of fact: "It's nothing to be ashamed of." (Field notes, 1/23/17)
Instructional	Social studies	References to or observations of social studies curriculum	Mr. Tello asks if people know who the slaves in Ancient Greece are and someone—maybe Jayden, I'm not sure—says something about the slave trade, but Mr. Tello clarifies that that's the US slave trade and they're talking about thousands of years earlier, in Greece. Jonah says the slaves came from being in debt or in war, and Mr. Tello verifies that. Matteo asks a question about whether they'd be slaves or indentured servants, if they could work off their debt, and Mr. Tello agrees that's a good distinction, but then Jayden asks if people were slaves because their families were slaves and Mr. Tello says yes, sometimes, and that's a good connection to their conversations about caste systems. (Field notes, 3/23/17)
Instructional	Math	References to or observations of math curriculum	Mr. Seif has started a mini-lesson about tips. He asks what people think a tip is, and various people call out definitions until he calls on Daisy, who says "it's the money you leave the waiter or waitress, like a 20% tip." Elijah affirms 20% but Mr. Seif says yes, it can be anywhere from 10-20%. Michelle asks what happens "if you're not satisfied at all with the

Instructional	ELA	References to or observations of English Language Arts curriculum	service.” Mr. Seif says you don’t have to leave a tip, but that is how the servers make their money and often problems aren’t their fault. (Field notes, 1/31/17)
Instructional	Youth chorus	References to or observations of Youth Chorus curriculum	Kids are quietly copying down a list of “qualities of activists”: inspiring, fight for the oppressed, persevere when things are difficult, follow their dreams, take risks to help those in need, gather support, persistent and keep pushing forward, and work to make the world a better place. They wrap up right as I arrive and Ms. Apple tells the class they will work on free writes about activism for the rest of the period, just keeping their pens moving and writing what they learned from their research, what they already know, and from our culture. She refers to what they’ve learned about Malala as an example. (Field notes, 1/31/17)
Axes of difference	"Diversity"	Use of the terms "diverse" or "diversity" to describe school, students, classrooms, and/or neighborhoods	They begin their warm-ups, then start to sing the Stevie Wonder songs. Debra raises her hand between stanzas to ask what “the sandman” is, since it’s in the song... They go back to singing, with Ms. Jackson giving them many reminders about tempo and syncopation and keeping to their parts. (Field notes, 11/01/16) “It was diverse as in that, it had many minorities, the first school I worked at. Very diverse when it comes to minorities, but not many Caucasian children, and I thought it was imperative at that school to start to get more of the kids in the neighborhood, that lived on a certain side, to start to come to that school.... And I think, here, or with any school, it should look—it should look like the city that we live in, you know. New York is charted to be one of the most segregated states when it comes to public schooling. So I think that we can do a better job of making sure our classrooms look diverse.” (Ms. Jackson, 06/06/17)
Axes of difference	Heritage languages	References to or observations of people speaking languages other than English inside or outside the home	Mr. Tello pulls the class back together to listen to Debra’s presentation about Roman food. She’s animated, well-rehearsed, and the topic is engaging for many of the students. At one point she states that the Roman word for dinner was “ <i>cena</i> .” She pronounces it “see-nah.” I look at the slide and note that it’s the same as the Spanish. Ariel does the same. He calls out, “It’s <i>cena</i> !” with Spanish pronunciation (SAY-nah). Nobody responds again.

Axes of difference	Naming class	References to or observations of people explicitly marking differences in class or access to class-based resources	He repeats, with some authority, "It's cena!" Gavin and Jonah argue with him over pronunciation, but Jabari takes his side. Mr. Tello lets it all go, clearly confident that the moment will pass, and it does. But before he goes back to silence, Ariel says, frustrated, "You do not know nothing!" (Field notes, 06/06/17) "Like they'll come and Bobby will say, 'I went to Aruba.' And Derek will be like, 'Oh I'm just home, playing video games.' So things like that makes them very different, and then it makes what they bring into the classroom very different as well." (Ms. Gonzalez, 5/10/17)
Axes of difference	Naming race and racism	References to or observations of people explicitly using racialized language to explain phenomena and/or talking directly about racism	Matteo asks why there's only one line razored into Jayden's haircut, not two. Jayden shrugs that "that's what Black people do." Mia immediately calls that racist. Jayden is confident in his rejection of her claim: "That's not racist. That's nowhere near racism." Mia insists that it is, since he said "That's what Black people do." But Jayden still isn't having it. He surprises and impresses me by not just rejecting Mia's claim outright, instead using an idea from the previous class: "It's not racist. It's.... What's that word we were using in ELA?" Mia wonders, "Stereotyping?" He nods, relieved to have the word back on his tongue, "Yeah, stereotyping." (Fieldnotes, 4/19/17)
Axes of difference	Educational resources	References to students' experiences in other schools or academic resources at home	"Sometimes I think maybe it's because their parents are doing, like, they're doing a job that takes up more time, then they might not have as - as much time to like pay attention to their kids and help them with homework. So then, when they're at school, they're, like, they want attention and they don't - they have a hard time." (Student focus group, 6/15/17)