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A WHITE PALETTE GATHERING
A LITERATURE SYNTHESIS IN ONE ACT

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See table of contents

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Article abstract

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ART | RESEARCH international
A Transdisciplinary Journal

A WHITE PALETTE GATHERING: A LITERATURE SYNTHESIS IN ONE ACT

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Abstract: Storytelling, a tenet of Critical Race Theory, offers a distinct approach for researchers engaging in narrative inquiry. This article models a fiction as research approach for creating a literature synthesis as a pedagogical strategy for teacher educators and pre-service teachers. The white palette refers to a painting palette, a blank slate or canvas, often considered neutral ground. Whiteness, however, is not neutral and this one-act conversation centers on examining whiteness as it impacts my role as a white teacher educator. The production, players, and script developed out of salient literature inclusive of Critical Race Theory, Art Education, and Critical Whiteness Studies. I am both author and a participant in this story. In this capacity, I disclose the impacts of the literature on my white teacher educator identity and reveal how I created arts-based data artifacts to evidence the overall story.

Keywords: storytelling; Critical Race Theory; whiteness; arts-based research; fiction as research

Storytelling can be inquiry as a reflexive act. When I tell stories, I am the writer within the narrative process, uncovered and complicit in the act of storying. Narrative inquiry has the potential to contain pertinent research information, veiled in story (Tanner, 2018a; Tierney, 1993), where the story holds the research data. Narrative arts-based inquiry instills "the potential that insight may emerge as a reflexive action" (Tierney, 1993, p. 242), revealing the self within the research action through artmaking.

The purpose of this article is to model an arts-based research act through the craft of storying a literature synthesis as a play for pre-service teachers and teacher educators. The literature synthesis as play is woven from the scholarship within Critical Race Theory (CRT), Art Education, Critical Whiteness Studies, along with published interviews featuring certain players in the play. The play also reveals my creative process of gathering data, reflecting on, and assembling that data, and ultimately presenting it as an arts-based fictional composition. The script, composed as a hosted conversation, centers on whiteness and white spaces impacting teaching and learning systems. The players are scholars and artists, and all are people of color. I am the only white participant cast as the Listener. As a white, cisgender woman I represent a prevailing demographic (Acuff, 2019; Buffington, 2019; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Zumwalt & Craig, 2003) within educational systems as a teacher educator. In a system "intoxicated by whiteness" (Matias, 2016, p. 181), I feel compelled to critique my own whiteness and in turn model that critique process for students, peers, and for myself. In doing so, I must be willing to enter the uncomfortable spaces (A. Boards, personal communication, October 30, 2020) – those with the potential to provoke discomfort or unease for white teacher educators when discussions about race or racism arise (Buffington, 2019). This narrative is designed to show me in that space of confronting my discomfort while providing arts-based evidence of the listening process (DiAngelo, 2018; Tanner, 2018b).

Writing a literature review is a complex, skill-based task (Machi & McEvoy, 2009) that many students and researchers find dry or formulaic even when they understand its necessity. What I present in this model is a culmination of the tasks within a literature review: the defining, locating, and critiquing of literature for relevance and intention. As an artist/researcher/teacher, my purpose in modeling an arts-based, fiction as research (FaR) approach is to understand 1) how a FaR approach to creating a literature synthesis might support teacher educator pedagogy, and 2) how the literature within this fictional play impacts me as a white teacher educator. Before articulating my framework and describing the play in more detail, I provide context on FaR as a device to support my narrative.

My early introduction into FaR began while reading *Method Meets Art* (Leavy, 2015), notably in chapters where Leavy discusses the use of narratives to "breathe humanity" (p. 41) into the research process. Eisner pioneered the concept of writing a dissertation as a novel, suggesting that such writing may bring generative understandings to research findings and help illicit "images that are…larger than life" (Saks, 1996, p. 407). A fictional

account of research processes, imagined through an arts-based medium composed by the researcher (Barone & Eisner, 2012), can carry the weight of experiential findings gleaned in a qualitative process. Choosing to write in a narrative literature synthesis, for example, may be unorthodox but choosing to take a risk and investigate an alternative genre is what this model explores (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2018, 2019).

In this FaR, I compose a setting called, "A White Palette Gathering," as a hosted conversation between scholars and artists. The impetus for this composition germinated during a CRT course. I was interested in utilizing the storytelling tenet of CRT as a form of research inquiry (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2008). My pedagogical modeling approach to FaR allowed me to realize my engagement with relevant CRT literature. In my narrative, I examine the canonical, dominant white ideologies revealed in CRT while wrestling with my own epistemological preconceptions. Prior to raising the curtain, however, I want to take you behind the scenes and reveal my understanding of CRT as vital in shaping facets of my arts-based educational research (ABER) identity and practices.

Critical Race Theory as a Framework

Learning about CRT helped me, as a teacher educator, to appreciate the impacts of whiteness and white spaces as dominant, oppressive forces in educational systems. These theories were never a part of my pre-service curriculum. I recall discussion of equity and multiculturalism but without any overt links to race and racism. Such practices may be a normative standard throughout methods courses depending on how histories are taught (Aronson et al., 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2003). However, as a white educator, I feel CRT has the potential to inform my teacher educator practice to benefit the profession and to support pre-service teacher learning. What follows is not a concise history or exhaustive literature review of CRT, but a framing of how I, as a student of CRT, come to understand its theories toward supporting and defining my FaR inquiry process. The CRT voices outlined here are ones I found pivotal in building a foundational understanding of this approach as applicable to influencing my awareness as a teacher educator.

CRT developed from law scholarship challenging anti-discrimination laws and critiquing the passive rate of societal change following the civil rights initiatives of the 1960s (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2006; Harris, 1993; Williams, 1991). Professors of law sought ways to highlight the racial underpinnings embedded into U.S. laws, revealing how these laws perpetuated racial discrimination, injustice, and inequity for people of color. Education scholars brought CRT into educational research as a tool for addressing school inequities and access to learning with an emphasis on race, revealing how racism is institutionalized into educational practices and policy decisions, often subverting justice for all learners (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2013). The voices I found most resonant were Derrick Bell, Cheryl Harris, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Gloria Ladson-Billings.

The following series of tenets define CRT as a theoretical framework. These tenets, or core beliefs, hold that race and racism:

- are an expected, ordinary part of our culture (Bell, 1992; Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Solórzano, 2013);
- are social constructs/socially constructed (Crenshaw, 1991; Kendi, 2016; Leonardo, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994);
- have interest convergence (Bell, 1980; Harris, 1993; Milner, 2008) united around supporting the interests of white dominance and supremacy;
- happen at/within/because of the intersections of race, class, and gender and often propagate essentializing (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Hancock, 2016; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Omi & Winant, 1994);
- and can be informed through narratives, storying, voice, and chronicles (Bell, 1992; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2006; Farmer-Hinton et al., 2013; Harris, 1993; Harris, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2013; Milner, 2020; Solórzano, 2013).

The tenet most impactful for this narrative inquiry is the use of storying or chronicling (Solórzano, 2013): the use of narratives and counternarratives (Bell, 1992; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) to address experiences as a retelling process through alternative, non-hegemonic methods. Whiteness orchestrates “racial discourse” (Leonardo, 2000, p. 31) around notions of socially constructed racial categories. As a racial signifier, whiteness denotes a skin color, but its effects run deeper than a surface hue. One cannot leave the skin they are in and the notion of skin color permeates CRT. White spaces include those established for learning like textbooks, visual aids, classroom environments, etc. (Buffington, 2019), that reinforce a white supremist ideology. Such an ideology, if left in place and unchecked, proliferates white-centric narratives dismissive of or failing to recognize different accounts other than white hegemonic storying (Acuff, 2019; Acuff et al., 2012) – the ones that have always been there. My play examines whiteness and white spaces supported by a CRT lens, focusing on the CRT tenets of property and its valuation, the intersections of race/class/gender, images and stereotypes, and the visibility/invisibility of color. These components have the potential to inform teacher education practice and assist pre-service teachers in understanding issues of race and racism in educational systems. The script’s dialogue reveals these components through engaged critical reflection (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2007; Zeichner, 2008) by me as a white teacher educator.

Establishing the Setting

For a play centered on examining whiteness and white spaces through a CRT lens, why have I chosen the title of “a white palette” as a setting? For some artists, a white palette represents a place to start mixing colors. Like a blank canvas, which is often white, or a

blank piece of paper, the absence of color or markings represents a clean slate, a place to start, and a place for possibility and potentiality. Though a white palette is assumed to be a neutral ground for mixing colors, a white surface is far from neutral. White surfaces reflect light, and that reflection tends to skew the colors placed on the palette for mixing. For example, white pigment blends into the palette below making it difficult to see. As well, the light being reflected from a white palette creates shadows, thus altering the appearance of actual paint color. Many painters prefer to utilize a gray palette to avoid the challenges described above. So, why choose a white palette title if such an artistic tool represents a technical impediment? Even though a neutral gray palette may be a better choice, my own anecdotal experiences as a consumer and seller of artists' materials has informed me that white palettes are the ones predominantly advertised and sold. Whiteness dominates the painting palette market as an uncontested neutral ground, so whiteness persists.

The title, "A White Palette Gathering*,"* underscores the persistence of whiteness dominating oppressive educational systems (Acuff, 2019; Aronson et al., 2020; Buffington, 2019; Ohito, 2017, 2020; Sleeter, 2016; Spillane, 2015). My whiteness, as author and participant, carries the weight of oppression and of privilege (Harris, 1993). Though I am striving to examine issues of whiteness as property and white privilege as author, I cannot divorce myself from my own privilege – from the skin I am in (Flake, 1998; Leonardo, 2000; Solórzano, 1997) – and the "veil" within the "color-line" (Du Bois, 1999, p. 5). I am calling attention to a veiled whiteness standard or a site of neutrality in my play. In this setting, I conjure a situation where non-white voices dominate and inform – or color – the palette while my own white voice is an aside, listening, learning, witnessing.

The play's setting centers on two circles of engagement. An inner circle locates the narrative dialogue of the script. The dialogue takes place as a conversation between scholars and artists invested in one or more of the following practices: CRT, Art Education, and artistic methods, accentuated by social justice theories and Critical Whiteness Studies practices. The conversation is hosted by a tenured teacher educator and person of color. The outer circle is where I sit, along with white cut-out forms representing other white teacher educators. The cut-outs are stand-ins for the idea of a dominant teacher educator demographic: white and female. The stand-in's function as a practical staging choice and as a collective "we" to represent whiteness in teacher education. "We" have been invited by the host, to listen and learn from the conversation. My role as the only physical inhabitant of the outer circle, is to understand the impact of this literature on my white teacher educator identity. (Further discussion of my role is defined in *The Players* section below.)

Using an Arts-Based Format

Setting this FaR into a play format allowed me to access an arts-based approach reflecting my experiences as an artist/researcher/teacher. This section reveals how the players, the script, and the production came into being. Here, I explain my purpose for using

an arts-based format for building the narrative and the culminating evidence or artifacts of this arts-based research process.

One part of this FaR is the play itself, the written dialogue and conversation taking place among the players, evidenced as a script. Another part is the arts-based evidence that remains after the play is over. As the listener, I am hearing and recording the conversation as it unfolds. My notes are represented in color lines (see Figure 1) with each player visualized through a different color (see Playbill below). These two elements, the script and the color lines, evidence the overall conversation as a "data event" (Rousell, 2018, p. 204): the scripted data combined with the color data illustrate a dynamic, dialogic event. The script then functions as a device for holding data and, in the imagined performance, the written dialogue becomes spoken data.

The arts-based color lines, or color-coded data, provides a template for a woven artifact culminating my experience as the listener (see Figures 1 and 2). The woven artifact (Figure 2) is my arts-based reflection as data event evidence. Weaving represents both a physical artifact and a metaphorical one. The two components of a weaving process, the warp and the weft, translate the color-coded data into a woven artifact where I, as the listener am the warp – the fixed white thread that holds and records the color-coded spoken text – like a white palette. The player's voices then become the weft – the active voices shuttling through the warp. These actions represent the data event as an embodiment of a performative encounter (Belliveau, 2006). (A more detailed reflection of the culminating artifact is included in the Epilogue below.)

The Players

As outlined above, the players in this FaR narrative form two circles. The scholars and host form the inner circle, while I sit among white cut-out forms in the outer circle. All the dialogue is between the host and the inner-circle players. The players are: two CRT scholars, a scholar in art education, an essayist/playwright, author/scholar, a distinguished visual artist and educator, and a teacher educator/scholar as host. The CRT scholars highlight vital tenets such as storytelling, whiteness as property, and controlling images. The artists and art education voices highlight arts-based practices and related teacher education interests for addressing whiteness standards.

My role as author is to use a FaR approach to model an arts-based method for synthesizing literature and to appreciate the impacts of the literature on my role as a teacher educator. Inside the play, I am the listener as invited participant, learner, and witness to the conversation. As an aside (Literary Devices, n.d.), I reveal my own questions, doubts, reflections, and discomfort while situated in the outer circle, as a form of "self-disclosure" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 107; Iser, 1997) within the script. I am using the

dramatic aside device to show my thinking and address the audience during the play's action – only the audience can hear these words.

The Script

The written dialogue is collected from talks, articles, books and book chapters, interviews, and other literature authored by the play's participants. By constructing the dialogue in this manner, I am "valuing the already-said" and the "already written" (St. Pierre, 2014, p. 377) and synthesizing it into a conversation as a method of inquiry as a researcher (Belliveau, 2006). I felt it necessary to utilize the words and ideas coined and published by each player. Put differently, I did not want to put words into mouths. Rather, I located meaningful passages from texts where the players spoke their authentic truths. Some creative license, however, is included especially if one participant asks another to explicate an idea further or to "say more." Other creative liberties were taken with style formatting in writing this article in a FaR format.[1] One exception to this format is the material written for the host. Those lines are words I imagined the host player might use during this conversation. The fictionalized lines are an amalgam of prior encounters and race-based discussions with mentors in my discipline.

This script represents what Bruce (2018) refers to a "factionalisation" (p. 1) or a reflexive process of "mapping the effects of dominant discourses and generating counter-narratives" (p. 9). Incorporating the words and excerpts of the writings and comments made by the players directly, I blend fact with fiction – or "faction" (Bruce, 2018, p. 2) – to re-present the literature in an alternative format. This script represents a "reflexive, participatory, and aesthetic process" (Leavy, 2015, p. 46) of narrative inquiry where I am in play with the literature as data (Bruce & Fitzpatrick, 2017). I am constructing a site to engage with data – "the theatricalization of data" (Lea et al., 2011, p. 2) – in an emotive and empathic manner (Leavy, 2018) where I see myself hearing a conversation and bringing the literature to life (Saks, 1996).

The Production

My research practices as an ABER teacher educator linked with CRT and Critical Whiteness Studies are unified this article. According to Sullivan and Gu (2017), ABER can be defined as "a localized or context-rich example of human science inquiry that expands the scope of research" (p. 52) by artistically examining inquiry questions. Synthesizing literature in the format of a play represents ABER in a postmodern sense by embracing new methods of inquiry such as post-qualitative inquiry (St. Pierre, 2019) and of the self-referential nature of transdisciplinarity in action (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008) in the service of meaning-making. Through ABER I make meaning by utilizing an alternative form of writing, both academic and creative (Stake, 2007; Tierney, 1993), embracing the plurality of artmaking techniques (Bresler, 2006; Eaves, 2014; Irwin et al., 2006).

Also significant are the ways that CRT tenets (described above) inform and impact Critical Whiteness Studies from a white perspective such as privilege, pedagogy, and racism (Applebaum, 2019). My intent is to combine CRT and Critical Whiteness Studies as strategies for recognizing my complicity as a white educator in systems that proliferate racist structures: educational settings, schooling, and curriculum content. A whiteness norm – as a standard measurement device – reinforces the dominance of whiteness without the signifier of race: the notion that white people are not a racial category (Leonardo, 2002). What Leonardo proposes is a concept of "neo-race theory" that focuses on "the lives and consciousness of the white imaginary" (p. 45), to both appreciate and confront the impact of whiteness on property, privilege, and white racial identity (Spillane, 2015).

These combined methodologies helped to develop this play like a collage or a combination of elements (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Iser, 1978, 1997; Leavy, 2015). I collected, arranged, and assigned fragments of text as scripted dialogue into a collaged literature synthesis. This assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; St. Pierre, 2014) process mirrors my own collage artmaking process but, instead of achieving a distinctly visual/textual outcome, this process culminated in a word-based, verbal play: fiction as arts-based research (Tanner, 2018b). However, this play is not intended for an actual performance. I am a visual artist and not a theatre artist, so my play is what Saldaña (2010) would call a collage of "verbatim interview transcript excerpts interspersed with dramatically incompatible devices such as footnotes or citations of the related research literature" (p. 62). The dialogue within the script is a reconstruction of words and ideas contained in the gathered literature (Saldaña, 2010) synthesized into a fictional conversation.

The production I present is also modeled on the epistolary format used by Solórzano (2013) in a book chapter where he dialogues with law professor Derrick Bell.[2] Solórzano's use of epistolary emulates both a tenet of CRT and the storytelling format Bell (1992) utilized and advocated. My white palette gathering casts me, as author, in Solórzano's role as an "educational archaeologist," or "a person who discovers, collects, and analyzes the written and visual materials" (2013, p. 48), of an educational, dialogic discovery. My discovery is formatted as a play, whereas Solórzano's (2013) was an epistolary or correspondence through letters to tell a story. Here, the correspondence is a scripted conversation captured in the player's voices.

What follows next is the playbill, then an excerpt of the play,[3] and finally, an epilogue containing my summarizing thoughts on the significance of this FaR process. Because the purpose of this article is to model an approach to developing a literature synthesis in an alternative, arts-based format, I include a portion of the play as an illustrative example. The excerpt begins at a point where the inner circle players are discussing the value associated to skin color centered on notions of images, stereotypes or controlling images (Acuff, 2018; Collins, 1990) to reveal how "whiteness is more than a skin's surface," as stated by the

HOST. I chose this excerpt because it includes every voice actively participating and contributing to the dialogue or data. As well, this excerpt incorporates the end or fade out of the play's action and concludes the narrative.

And now, as the curtain rises on the action already in progress, I reveal a one-act play/literature synthesis titled, "A White Palette Gathering."

PLAYBILL

A White Palette Gathering

The setting: A circular dining table in the home of the HOST. Players sit around the table with the remnants of a meal still in view. The Listeners (white teacher educators) sit in chairs around the outside of the center table. These listeners were invited by the HOST to attend the conversational portion of the gathering.

The players: Joni Boyd Acuff, Associate Professor of Arts Administration, Education and Policy at Ohio State University, Critical multicultural art education, Critical Race Theory in Art Education, research and scholarship include culturally responsive teaching and curriculum development – yellow

Cheryl I. Harris, Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Professor in Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, UCLA Law School, poetry as irene, Whiteness as Property (1993) – green

Gloria Ladson-Billings, pedagogical theorist and teacher educator University of Wisconsin–Madison School of Education, researcher at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, author of The *Dream-keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (1994) – orange

Kerry James Marshall, American artist born in Birmingham, Alabama, uses visual arts to comment on black identity and black history in the US and in Western art – purple

Claudia Rankine, poet, essayist, playwright, editor of several anthologies. Author of five volumes of poetry, two plays, and various essays, author of *The White Card: A Play* (2019) – blue

HOST, Distinguished Research Professor of Art Education and teacher education, arts-based researcher methodologist – red

Listener, (*speaking to audience*) Karen McGarry, PhD Candidate, University of Cincinnati, teacher educator

SCRIPT NOTE: All players have agreed to use first names when speaking to each other. Spoken lines will be introduced with full names for the first entry, first names thereafter. The colors indicated above identify the color coding assigned each player for data generated and evidenced in culminating artifacts by the author/listener.

(Excerpt) As we enter, a post-dinner conversation is already in progress.

HOST

So, as a valued social identity, whiteness is more than a skin's surface. The saying, skin deep, is meant to connote the superficiality of skin, but intersections of experience are more than superficial. Whiteness, as described by DiAngelo (2011) is a "constellation of processes and practices" inclusive of "basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white people" (p. 56). So, as Cheryl pointed out, it's a power identity as a social construct that also impacts our individual and collective storied existence.

GLORIA

The primary reason that stories, or narratives, are deemed important among CRT scholars is that they add necessary contextual contours to the seeming objectivity of positivist perspectives. Thus, the experience of oppressions such as racism or sexism has important aspects for developing a CRT analytical standpoint (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11) —

HOST

—And context provides your idea of storying as system of knowing that is linked to worldviews based on the conditions under which people live and learn (Ladson-Billings, 2000), which as Dolores Delgado Bernal (2002) writes, is more than a way of knowing – that knowing is inclusive of contexts, experiences, and languages. She calls them, "race-gendered epistemologies" (p. 107). Like epistemology at the intersectional sites of knowing (*intertwines her fingers*).

GLORIA

Indeed. And people of color (*points to self*) speak with experiential knowledge about the fact that our society is deeply structured by racism, and such a structure gives their

stories a common framework warranting the term voice (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13) —

HOST

—Having to recognize the voices that our structured society may not want to hear or see because they fall outside the dominant vocal dynamic—

KERRY

—(*sits forward, crossing arms on table*) It's to try to figure out how to do something that the mainstream refuses to address, but to do it in a way that causes them to have to come to terms with it (Art21, 2008).

Listener: *as I need reckoning personally but also professionally to do something to address it, regardless of feeling comfortable?*

HOST

Like presenting an alternative narrative and forcing a conventional audience toward grappling with different or multiple sides of a narrative?

CLAUDIA

I'm often listening (*points to her ears*) not for what is being told to me but for what resides behind the narrative. It's like one of those mirrored rooms where the spectator sees the same thing repeated in different variations and from different angles. It's about creating the feeling of knowing the story through the accumulation of the recurring moment (Rankine, 2019) —

HOST

—Like when Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) writes about multiple grounds of identity all impacting intersectionality (p. 1245), and within those intersections are identities comprised of accumulated voices, all culturally connected, all building knowledge—

JONI

Yes (*she stands, leans into table, makes a gesture of leveled platforms*). Adopting culturally responsive pedagogy establishes a platform for multiple voices to be used in the construction of knowledge at all times (Acuff et al., 2012, p. 7). And Black feminist scholars explain that theory is developed from experiential knowledge and daily lived experiences (Acuff, 2018, p. 203)—

HOST

—Which seems to relate to the scholarship of Patricia Hill Collins (1990) when she writes about levels of knowledge where the "commonplace, taken-for-granted

knowledge shared by African-American women" (p. 30) stems from the daily thoughts and actions that constitute experiential knowing.

JONI

Exactly (*hits her hand to the table*), and Collins' work emphasized key actionable goals for Black women (*counts over fingers*): to define themselves; establish positive, multiple representations of themselves; use their cultural heritage as energy to resist daily discrimination; and confront interlocking structures of domination, such as race, gender, and class oppression (Acuff, 2018, p. 205).

Listener: *Have I ever recognized this in my actions with my students? In living my life?*

HOST

So, discriminating against these types of knowing and silencing certain voices potentially restricts how and what is seen, heard, known, etc. Such restrictions may even build language barriers intended to silence or censure language.

CLAUDIA

And, as people of color, we can hear, we can feel, when the language is weaponized against us (Rankine, 2019).

HOST

And language may take many forms. It may be words that inflict harm, or it may be images. And the use of imagery becomes critically important and acutely relevant for arts education, a system "intoxicated by whiteness" (Matias, 2016, p. 181)—

JONI

—Just what Buffington (2019) writes of – a need to unmask the pervasiveness of whiteness so that efforts can be made to disrupt the structural racism that lives within art education (p. 8).

Listener: *The system supports me as part of the inebriation, the status quo.*

HOST

That's right (*pointing and acknowledging Joni*). The demographic model in education is predominantly white and female. And, in art education anyway, the demographic of the canon of artists and artworks normally used as representational images for K-16 classroom is not only white, but it is also white and male, adding gender-based intersectionality to the mix (*Kerry exhales*).

KERRY

(*raises arms to ceiling*) All my life I've been expected to acknowledge the power and beauty of pictures made by white artists that have only white people in them (Medium, 2018)—

HOST

Is that a part of the reason you choose to paint black people exclusively?

KERRY

I think it's only reasonable to ask other people to do the same vis-à-vis paintings that have only black figures in them. Yes (*nods to HOST*). That is part of the counter-archive that I'm seeking to establish in my work, that it's not an argument against anything; it is an argument for something else (Medium, 2018). (*Cheryl asks Kerry to pass the water pitcher*)

HOST

(*passing pitcher around table*) And that notion of an archive, like the canon, was critiqued in an article you wrote, right, Joni?

JONI

It was. In referencing Ann Holt (2017) in my article on Black Feminist Theory (Acuff, 2018) she critically commented on the way archives are (*making segment gestures with hands*) appraised, collected, arranged, processed, organized, and preserved. She argued that archival practices can be exclusionary, as processes of selection are always subjective and value laden (p. 208).

HOST

The power to exclude. And returning to you, Kerry (*extends her hand on the table toward Kerry*), you said before that your black images were non-negotiable, that blackness was non-negotiable, which speaks to valuation, I think. Do you feel your artwork is included in the canon, present alongside the predominance of white artists represented there? And do your counter-archive works reveal you within the archive?

Listener: *I see Kerry's artwork as valuable, but do I work it into my teaching archives with meaningful intent?*

KERRY

(*smiles and gestures with shoulders*) When you talk about the absence of black figure representation in the history of art, you can talk about it as an exclusion, in which case there's a kind of indictment of history for failing to be responsible for something it should have been. (*placing hand on chest*) I don't have that kind of mission. I don't

have that indictment. My interest in being a part of it is being an expansion of it, not a critique of it (Mason, 2016). (*places hand back on tabletop*)

HOST

So, rather than critique history for its perceived failings, for things history should have done as you say, you prefer to look forward and make your presence through your work.

KERRY

(*leans in, taps tabletop with index finger*) I also have another mission, which is to find some kind of mechanism for African American artists to gain greater status in the historical narratives of important contributors (Bomb Magazine, 2005).

GLORIA

(*motions to HOST for pen and pad of paper, HOST passes to Gloria*) And your efforts at helping African American artists to gain greater status (*draws a connecting web of circles for each idea*) connects well to what culturally relevant teaching aims to accomplish by empowering students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p, 20).

Listener: *All things I need to do.*

HOST

And by creating such mechanisms for cultural relevance (*points to the connecting web*), students and artists, as Kerry spoke of, may more directly see themselves as potentially represented in archives or in canons where they were once absent.

JONI

(*speaking with urgency*) Which is vitally important. A lack of foundational understanding about systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality, art teachers might continue to produce curriculum that fails to interrogate power and privilege (Acuff, 2014, p. 75).

HOST

Indeed. And earlier we questioned the role of power and privilege in relation to people and property, but value in artmaking, in art history is often set by players outside the field – those with the money to control imagery and ideas. And when imagery is controlled by those with power, influence, and control, images often turn into stereotypes or caricatures (*grimaces*).

CHERYL

Historically we see this in minstrel culture (*players react with head shaking and scowls*). Through minstrel shows in which white actors masquerading in blackface played out racist stereotypes, the popular culture put (*gestures air quotes*) the Black at solo spot centerstage, providing a relational model in contrast to which masses of Americans could establish a positive and superior sense of identity, an identity established by an infinitely manipulable negation comparing whites with a construct of a socially defenseless group (Harris, 1993, p. 1743).

GLORIA

Members of minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed in order to maintain their power. Historically, storytelling has been a kind of medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14). (*players respond affirmatively*)

HOST

And…the power of a controlling image is "designed to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life" (Collins, 1990, p. 68). It seems that the stories you create in your paintings, Kerry, attempt to heal wounds caused by decades of oppression by not showing African American men as—

KERRY

—(*counting across fingers*) somehow threatening, somehow violent, somehow irresponsible, somehow nihilistic and alienated. I want to show that representations of African Americans can be incredibly mundane, that they can be ordinary, and they don't have to be event-filled or anxiety-laden or about political activism. They can just be a picture. Period (Medium, 2018). (*stabs the tabletop with index finger*)

Listener: *Where do I recognize the ordinary as a norm and see its experiential value?*

HOST

The ordinary needn't be a property right only for white identity and white value.

CHERYL

It is important to note the effect of this (*raises voice in emphasis*) hyper-valuation of whiteness. Owning white identity as property affirmed the self-identity and liberty of whites and, conversely, denied the self-identity and liberty of Blacks (Harris, 1993, p. 1743).

HOST

Exactly. But what I often seen in educational settings are attempts at a so-called multicultural curriculum, where non-whiteness is a focus, "but whiteness still remains at the center of many national curricula or culture. It is racialization which remains at the center, with de-racialization staying at the margins" (Leonardo, 2002, p. 35). (*gestures for the pad of paper with Gloria's connecting web illustrated, Gloria passes it around*) Our art educational system often misses the mark (*pointing to the connecting web*) on creating culturally relevant, authentic sites of learning about race and oppression that warrant investigation.

JONI

Investigative, reflective dialogue about systemic oppression is required before art teachers are able to see themselves as capable of creating art curriculum that is truly critical and attentive to difference, and that challenges systems of dominance (Acuff, 2014, p. 75).

Listener: *and this is why I am here, to reflect, to do the work.*

HOST

(*stands, looks directly at Joni*) You say, Joni, that art educators need to see themselves as capable, I agree – capable as critical pedagogues, attentive to difference, and ready to critique the whiteness status quo. (*looks around the table*) So, (*shrugs with open hands*) how do we shift away from the discomfort of challenging dominance?

CHERYL

Our efforts to shift racial frames have to be grounded in a broader orientation than raw empiricism; what is required is attention to social organization and social movements that open up the space for refraining (Harris, 2006, p. 943). (*pushes back chair, stands*)

CLAUDIA

Well, how to have a conversation so that the space can hold discomfort, so that the thing isn't a thing that you have to put over there, so that we can get over ourselves, in a sense (*shifts in chair, stands, moves to back of chair, hands resting on chair back, Joni stands too*), and I mean all of us, people of color, white people, that we have, suddenly, a moment where we have an investment in a kind of possibility that is beyond our negotiation of each other. I think the messiness of just saying what it is, when it is (Rankine, 2019).

KERRY

(*stretches in chair, shifts to stand*) The problematic is not in the artists themselves or what you call them, but it's in the perception of somebody who you believe needs to

change their perception in order for you to be seen correctly, or (*points two fingers at eyes*) seen the way you would like to be seen (Art21, 2008).

GLORIA

If we are serious about solving these problems in schools and classrooms, we have to be serious about intense study and careful rethinking of race and education. Adopting and adapting CRT as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education and propose radical solutions for addressing it (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 22). (*pushes chair back, stands, leans over picking up pad of paper and pen*)

JONI

We have the task of identifying whiteness as the lynchpin of systems of racial meaning, and moreover, of racial oppression within art education. This task brings together conscious voices that (*taps finger on tabletop for each idea*) ask new questions, make critical considerations, and promote anti-racist teaching strategies that decenter and destabilize whiteness within the art education field (Acuff, 2019, p. 8).

HOST

And here we are at the "what next" wondering, will a critical focus on whiteness shift the color line and lift the veil (DuBois, 1999)? (*HOST looks over to the Listener*) What have you been up to?

FADE OUT

Epilogue

The script ends with two questions, one asking about whiteness and lifting the veil and the other directed at the listener by the host. I address the first question in the significance section below. Before then, however, I want to attend to the host's question put to me, the Listener, and discuss the data event artifacts created during and after the play.

Throughout the play, the listener hears and reacts to the conversation, revealed as asides, gaps in the conversational flow as suspended action. The listener created a color line template to code the dialogue and note dramatic asides (see Figure 1). As already indicated, this action is a reflexive act of mapping the conversation and creating a different, visual story of the play (Bruce, 2018). As the listener, I was both present and active during the conversation, using an arts-based method to connect my reflective thoughts to the dialogue. Figure 1 illustrates points in the script where I mentally wrestle with the dialogue in a process of self-reflective revelation.

Figure 2 shows a woven artifact made after the play as an arts-based data event (Rousell, 2018). The weaving is an alternative narrative to accompany the script. I am the white warp as listener and the weft is created from the color line template made during the play's action (Figure 1). Gaps in the weaving are my aside reckonings with the literature, revealing my complicity, my doubts, my uncertainties in negotiating the literature as a self-critique. As well, I am modeling this arts-based practice for synthesizing literature, revealing my reflections as a form of "self-disclosure" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 107), and answering the host's final question.

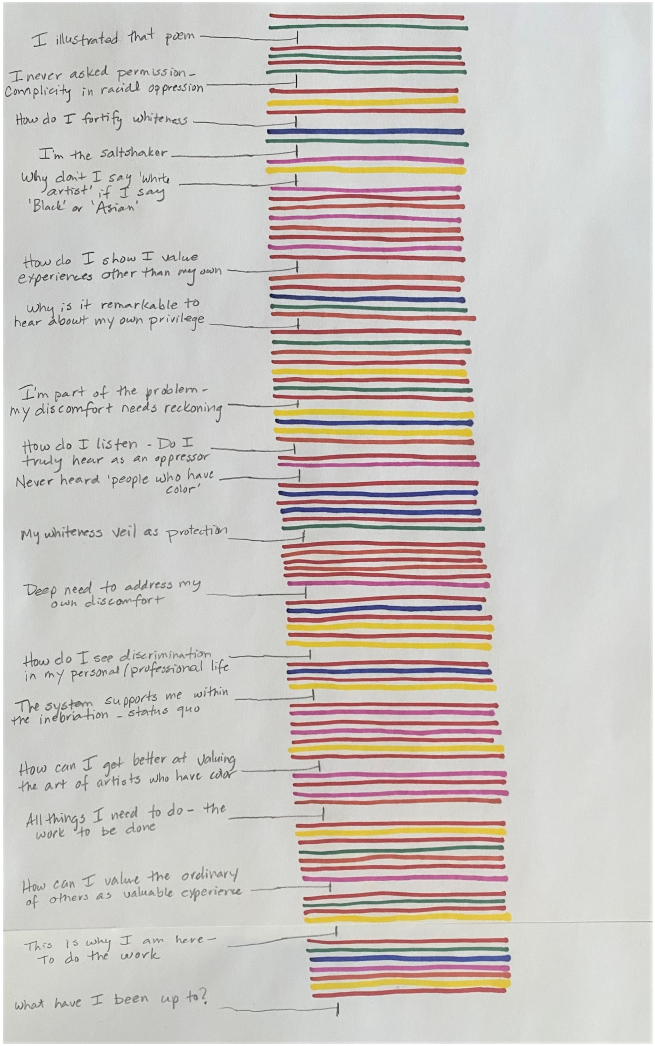

Figure 1: Color Line Code Data of Conversation with Aside Notes (©KMcGarry)

The So What

The significance of modeling this arts-based inquiry process as a teacher educator rests in how it translates as generative scholarship for other teacher educators interested in arts-based pedagogical instructional methods. Or, put simply, for other ways to write or

perform a literature review and synthesis. I feel this act of modeling addresses my first purpose question (noted above) regarding teacher educator pedagogy – this article has the potential to inform other teacher educator's practice by highlighting alternative, arts-based methods when assigning traditional course projects. As well, this scholarship may highlight the use of storytelling as a critical approach in academic research, embracing alternative methods that recognize cultural relevance. Situating this literature synthesis in CRT, Art Education, and Critical Whiteness Studies supports a transdisciplinary approach to research practice. My intent is to bring awareness into what I do as a white teacher educator in art education while recognizing the impacts my whiteness brings to the table – to the palette – with the belief that such awareness will positively impact future pre-service teachers (Aronson et al., 2020; Tanner, 2018a). Such impacts may open doors to action in recognizing where the work needs to happen toward enhanced awareness about whiteness as a racial signifier – what it means, its racial implications, and how to "re-rupt" the conversation about white supremacist systems in educational practice (Tanner, 2018a).

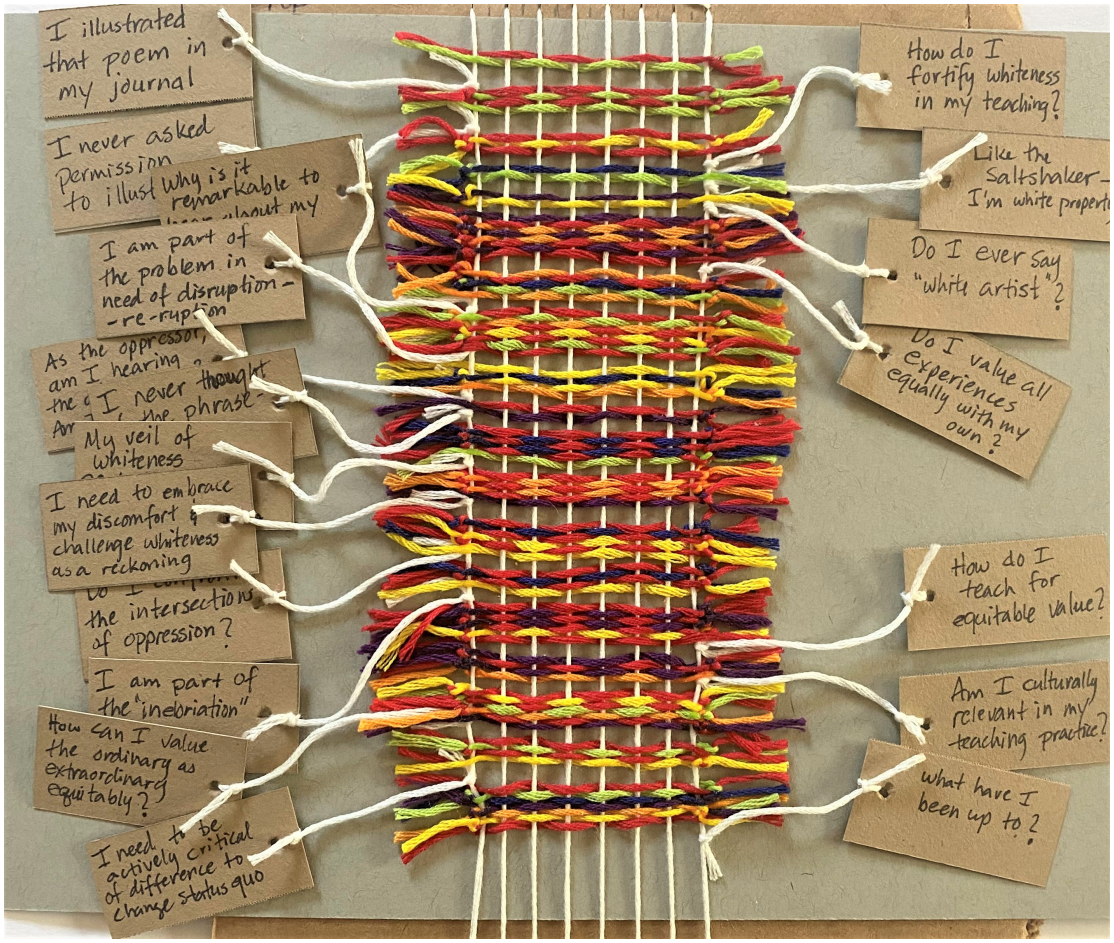

Figure 2: Woven Artifact Data Created Post-Conversation (©KMcGarry)

By collaging and synthesizing the literature, I constructed an epistemology of whiteness (Martínez, 2012) with the intent to understand my own practices. My second purpose question asked above was how this play might impact my white teacher educator practice. For me, revealing my inner thoughts as the listener highlighted direct, located impact. My reflections underscore where further work needs to happen toward thoughtful, directed awareness (Tanner, 2018b); an awareness that shuns empty platitudes for concerted actions producing responses, not unremarkable, but memorable and enduring.

This writing was never intended to present conclusive findings, but to reveal an arts-based process as a pedagogical model. As a reflection, this writing activates a self-reflexive embodied practice of recognizing what lies beneath my own veil and, to shift the paradigm of the color line; to move beyond notions of colorblind racism that negate color and race through "white race-evasion, white privilege, and whiteness" (Jupp et al., 2019, p. 6), perpetuating the dominant status quo. My aim was to expose the whitewashing in my held knowledge (Aronson, 2020), "to challenge constructed beliefs" (Grushka & Young, 2014, p. 275), and visualize color as something to be seen, appreciated, and valued.

I view "A White Palette Gathering" as a collection of data events to spark potential agency – hopeful places endeavoring to move the color line toward equity and engaged dialogue. The player's voices resonate in supporting inclusivity, where the I/We does the work. In a recent interview, Kimberlé Crenshaw said, "If you see inequality as a "them" problem, that is a problem" (Steinmetz, 2020, p. 82). "Self-interrogation," (p. 82) she said, is a place to start. In ending this article, I have my start, already in progress.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The textual dialogue included maintains ethical APA Style guidelines (7th ed.), and in-text citations are indicated throughout the script where possible. However, since each entry has an attributed name (as in traditional script writing), I decided to eliminate quotation marks (unless a passage attributed to the HOST includes words by another author).

[2] Derrick Bell, PhD (1930-2011) was a distinguished law professor, political activist and founder of legal scholarship centered on Critical Race Theory. One of his best known books, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (1992) uses storytelling and allegory to reveal the impacts of racism in American politics and institutions. For more information, consult this or other websites for details of his life and legacy: https://today.law.harvard.edu/derrick-bell-1930-2011/

[3] The full play can be read/downloaded as a PDF from: https://www.kmcgarted.com/publications Listed under the "Publications" tab: A White Palette Gathering: A Literature Synthesis in One Act – Full Play PDF