The Radicals Shift Because It Matters:
Teaching for Equity and Justice in PDS Partnerships

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Abstract: In these tumultuous and divisive times in our country, educators at all levels (k12 and university) have a tremendous responsibility to make intentional shifts in their actions to promote equity and justice for all students. This article details six shifts that members in one school-university partnership made to ensure that they continuously dismantle the racist practices and policies that are deeply rooted in all aspects of schooling to better educate their students.

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:
Essential One: A Comprehensive Mission. A professional development school (PDS) is a learning community guided by a comprehensive, articulated mission that is broader than the goals of any single partner, and that aims to advance equity, antiracism, and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities, and their respective community and professional partners.

Essential Two: Clinical Preparation. A PDS embraces the preparation of educators through clinical practice.

Essential Three: Professional Learning and Leading. A PDS is a context for continuous professional learning and leading for all participants, guided by need and a spirit and practice of inquiry.

Essential Four: Reflection and Innovation. A PDS makes a shared commitment to reflective practice, responsive innovation, and generative knowledge.

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These are tumultuous and divisive times in our country. One can turn on the evening news only to watch an insurrection targeted against elected officials under the guise of *Making America Great* again. One can log on to a social media account only to read the most recent demeaning Tweets by the former president of the United States targeted against people of Color. One can flip to the front pages of the *New York Times* to read the latest headlines, *8 Dead in Atlanta Spa Shooting, With Fears of Anti-Asian Bias.* One can chat with colleagues only to find out that a new name that has been added to the list of innocent people of Color who have died at the hands of white supremacist, right winged groups or from the gun fire of police officers who took an oath to protect and serve. What is deeply disheartening about all of these examples is the fact that they all happened. Racism is behind many of the issues that we experience on a daily basis and is embedded in every institution and in every system that shapes our lives. Yes, these are dangerous and frightening times. Despite the distance between the 8 minutes and 46 seconds of the summer of 2020 as we watched George Floyd take his last breath to the insurrection of January 6, 2021, and now the Atlanta shooting on March 16, 2021, it becomes clearer that our commitment to addressing issues of injustice, hatred, racism, and countering anti-blackness is ever more urgent today than it has been in the past.

We, as educators, have a significant role in addressing racism, intolerance, and hate as we educate children for a better world. We, as educators, must hold firm to our commitment to love, equity, justice, and democracy and take intentional and concerted actions to dismantle racism, intolerance, and hate for a more just world. As educators, we are the embodiment of the citizens Margaret Mead described when she espoused, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." I call these thoughtful citizens radicals, meaning those who advocate vigorously for complete political and social reforms in all systems of which they are a part. Over the last seven years, I served as the university liaison in a Professional Development School (PDS) partnership with an elementary school filled with radicals who are committed to this work. I have worked with radicals who have taken up this mission and are doing the work with fidelity. In this article, I will detail aspects of our combined actions. I will describe the context in which this work occurs, explain six key principles that guide our work, and share implications and ways others may do similar work in their own contexts.

The School and University Partnership

Long term and continuous collaboration among partners, mutually trusting relationships, as well as committed involvement in research and funding form critical elements of effective and lasting partnerships (Tseng et al., 2017). The University of South Carolina (UofSC) Professional Development School (PDS) network is one of the largest and longest standing PDS networks in the nation, with 30 years of collaboration, and over 21 schools from five local districts. The PK-12 schools in this network offer spaces for our undergraduate and graduate preservice teacher candidates to collaboratively work with exceptional in-service teachers as they hone their skills, grow their competence, and satisfy university course requirements. In-service teachers support and guide our preservice teachers as they align important theoretical concepts learned in their university courses with opportunities to practice them in embedded experiences in PK-12 sites

while receiving supportive, real-time feedback. The University of South Carolina and Meadowfield Elementary School (MES) have one such partnership. UofSC and MES have been PDS partners for thirty years. I have served as the university liaison for MES for the past five years. Even with changes in personnel within this partnership, a high level of mutual trust and commitment to the work remains constant.

Meadowfield Elementary is an urban prekindergarten through grade five school serving approximately 750 students. Sixty-five percent of the students are Black; twenty-one percent are White; eight percent are Latinx; and six percent identify with two or more racial groups. Approximately fifty-four percent of the students identify as males, and forty-six percent identify as females. The school has a seventy-eight percent poverty index; seventeen percent of the students identify as students with special needs; and ten percent of the students require ESOL services. The faculty composition is slightly different, consisting of an eighty-nine percent females and eleven percent males teaching force. Of those, sixty-seven percent are White; twenty-five percent are Black, two percent are Latinx and four percent identify with two or more racial groups.

I serve as the university liaison for Meadowfield and as a faculty member in the elementary education undergraduate and graduate degree programs at UofSC. My research focuses on culturally sustaining pedagogy, anti-racist education, and familial networks of support in children's literacy development. The goal of my work is to help educators understand the importance of immersing themselves in the lives of children and their families as they shift their stance from learning *about* families to a stance in which they learn *from* and *with* families, children, and community members to uncover the rich resources and support structures that exist in homes and communities. In addition, my work seeks to create teaching and learning spaces in which participants actively dismantle racist practices and center the lives, stories, histories, and joys of communities of Color. Members of this partnership (preservice teachers, in-service teachers, administrators, liaison, and students) have made an intentional decision to grow our collective knowledge regarding anti-racist teaching and learning and to take actions to dismantle practices that only privilege some students but not all. I narrow the scope of this article to highlight six radical shifts that the teachers with whom I work make as they create spaces to center the lives of their students.

Synthesis of the Literature

Transformative teaching for equity and justice requires three essential ways of knowing: knowledge of self, knowledge of students, and knowledge of curriculum. Researchers espouse that children of poverty, children of Color, and children who are multilingual are disproportionately taught by teachers who are underqualified and underprepared to adequately and effectively teach them (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Barton, 2004). Milner (2014) reminds us that White teachers may not feel efficacious in their abilities to teach about race and often shift the attention away from it to focus on socioeconomics. Milner avers that White teachers feel uncomfortable reflecting on their own racial identities and the identities of their children of Color. In order for teachers to be qualified and prepared to teach children in culturally responsive, anti-racist ways, it is essential to have a high level of personal and professional knowledge about self, their students, and their curriculum (Howard, 2016; Gay, 2018). Howard (2016) espouses that teachers must transform themselves and the social conditions of injustices that stifle the potentials of children from different racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. He charges both White teachers and teachers of Color to do the work of raising

their personal consciousness as a way of demonstrating their commitment to racial healing for positive change. The teachers or radicals, my term of endearment, with whom I work most closely at Meadowfield are Sara Suber and Alexandra (Ali) Jenkins. Ali is a multi-racial kindergarten teacher, and Sara is a White third grade teacher. I host my embedded culturally sustaining pedagogy undergraduate and graduate courses in Sara's and Ali's rooms to provide my UofSC students opportunities to witness the seamless alignment of theory and practice. Over the years, I have witnessed these two radicals as they continuously make intentional shifts within themselves and their curriculum to transform their classroom practices for their students. What follows is a brief description of the six shifts that are evident in their practice.

Radical Shift #1: Create classrooms on the foundations of equity and justice.

Equity and justice are the guiding principles which serve as the foundation and govern all action and interactions in Ali's and Sara's rooms. Equity and justice are not mere add-ons to an already sanctioned curriculum but permeates every aspect of every system. One notices these principles in the curriculum as these teachers make shifts in what is taught to give voice and choice to their students. Equity and justice also show up in the ways these teachers spend their funding for classroom resources as well as in the policies they develop and sanction with their students. They are always evaluating who is being privileged or marginalized and whose voices and opinions are being heard or whose voices and opinions are absent from the conversation or curriculum. This is an ongoing process that these two teachers engage in on a daily basis as a means of providing the kind of schooling that Love (2019) reminds us is possible. Love avers that we must build new schools based on "justice, anti-racism, love, healing, and joy" (p. 11).

Radical Shift #2: See color

Many White people subscribe to colorblindness because they are unaware of how race affects Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) in society on a daily basis. They believe it is helpful to assert that race does not matter (Tarca, 2005). This is not true. Race does matter. For people of Color, race permeates every aspect of one's life. A stance of being colorblind is very counterproductive when it comes to dismantling racism. Equity conscious teachers, like Sara and Ali, see color and make it a priority to enact initiatives that are designed to support their Black and Brown students in their classrooms. When they make decisions, those decisions are always filtered through the lens of the positive or negative impact the decision may have on their students of Color. If the decisions will have positive ramifications for their students of Color, they implement those decisions. However, if those decisions are not supportive or could have potentially damaging or negative consequences on students of Color, these teachers tweak those decisions or abandon them all together.

Radical Shift #3: Become an antiracist

Racism is behind many of the storylines that we read about or view on a daily basis. One cannot turn on the television or scroll through an online platform without coming across an incident that was racially motivated. Racist practices and racism are real, but many people shy away from such conversations or take a position of neutrality. Many espouse, "I have Black friends." Others share, "I am not a racist." Kendi (2019) reminds us that it is not enough to be non-racist. He avers, "One endorses either the idea of a racial hierarchy as a racist, or racial equality as an antiracist" (2019, p. 9). Kendi goes on to explain that there is no safe space as "not racist." I have found that talking about race and racism can be frightening, overwhelming, and

dangerous. But these conversations are very necessary, if we are really serious and committed to dismantling racist practices and policies within our classrooms and school systems.

Ali and Sara are racial justice-oriented educators who are not afraid to have conversations in their classrooms that center on race. Once on the playground, Ali overheard two White kindergarteners tell one Black kindergartener that he was not allowed to play with them because he was Black. Ali immediately shifted her curriculum to create a unit title, "*It Doesn't Matter if You Are Black or White*" (Myers & Jenkins, 2020). Ali and Sara collaborated to plan and implement the unit. They created spaces for their learners to explore concepts of race and racism through Socratic seminars. These racial-justice oriented teachers confronted racism in their work with young learners. This is important because there is a dearth of literature that addresses ways to counter anti-racism with early childhood learners.

Radical Shift #4: Commit to Pro-Blackness

The disdain for Black people is deeply embedded in all institutions and systems. When one is not victimized by it, it becomes difficult to notice. One can navigate all spaces with little or no concern because everything appears normal or the way that it should be. The opposite is also true. When one is oppressed by anti-Blackness, one notices it everywhere and has to carefully navigate all spaces at all times. Pro-Blackness is the opposite of anti-Blackness. Pro-Blackness does not mean anti-White or *anti* anything. It simply means that the humanity of Black people should be respected just as the humanity of others are respected and held in high regard (Boutte, et al., 2021). Take for instance the insurrection that occurred on January 6, 2021. Many Black Americans compared that event to the #BlackLivesMatter protest of summer 2020. During the #BlackLivesMatter protest, protestors were met at the state capital by thousands of armed guards, and many protestors were arrested for peacefully demonstrating. During the Insurrection of 2021, there were lives lost, and the few arrests that were made were done in the days and weeks to follow. The resounding pro-Black sentiment from many Black Americans was that Black people should receive the same treatment that the right-wing White demonstrators received.

Those who are committed to promoting a just and equitable world are pro-Black. As pro-Black educators, Ali and Sara take concerted, intentional actions to ensure that Black children are loved, are safe, and that their souls are healed from the damage of White supremacy (Boutte, et al., 2021). Their commitment manifests itself in their curriculum, their attitudes, and the way they manage their classrooms. They are very cognizant of their role in breaking the Cradle-to-prison-pipeline (CTPP) for many students of Color, children with disabilities, and children with limited English proficiencies.

Radical Shift #5: Institute restorative discipline

The Cradle-to-prison pipeline (CTPP) is a term that describes the structural, systemic, institutional, and societal barriers that produce inequities, racism, and other forms of discrimination that affect children of Color, children with disabilities, and children with limited English proficiencies (Milner, et al., 2019). Milner and colleagues (2019) aver that some of the root causes of the CTPP are: zero tolerance policies, subjective teacher and administration practices, a lack of teacher preparation in understanding race and class, and the criminalization of school facilities. Sara and Ali are cognizant of the need to move away from approaches to classroom management that are punitive by design. They understand that the over-policing, suspension, and expulsion of students are not beneficial and can be detrimental and traumatic to

a child's overall wellbeing. Punitive approaches to discipline often position offenders on the outskirts of a classroom community. Instituting a restorative discipline approach to behavior management is essential in supporting all children, but children of Color, children with disabilities, and children with limited English proficiencies in particular. Restorative discipline is a relationship-oriented, conflict resolution approach to managing student behavior (Morrison, 2007; Amstutz & Mullet, 2005; Milner, et. al., 2019). Restorative discipline provides students opportunities to take responsibility for the harm they may have caused others, make amends, and then to return to the classroom community in good standing (Wachtel, 2016). There are three elements to support restorative discipline: affective language, circle processes, conferences. Affective language is language that genuinely expresses feelings and emotions. It is usually done through statements and/or questions that get to the core of the problem. The circle process is designed to promote a sense of community and is built on mutually respectful relationships. The conferences are held so that involved parties may address the conflict, take responsibility, and find a mutually agreed upon solution. In Ali's and Sara's classrooms, the circle process sometimes includes the children's family members. This is because Sara and Ali understand the importance of treating families with dignity and respect. They also understand their roles as a part of the children's familial networks that support the children.

Radical Shift #6: Build effective familial networks of support
    The final shift that the radicals make is in their treatment of families. There are racial inequities in our schools and communities. This is problematic when some students end up at the bottom of all the good lists and the top of all of the bad lists. More often than not, we blame the kids and their families as opposed to looking at the system to determine the root causes. Radicals understand the significance of getting to know families by becoming a part of the family's networks of support (Myers, 2013). These radicals reject the limited, deficit views of familial involvement and build on the rich resources and support structures available to the families as they learn from and with families on how to best educate the children they share (Myers, 2013). In doing so, they begin to see families in new ways and begin to understand the many ways that families help their children navigate schooling, ways that are not situated in White, middle class norms.

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Implications

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    I am going to briefly address what the response and responsibility of school-university partnerships should be during this time of crisis. I will address what we should be doing now if we are committed to dismantling racism, countering anti-Blackness, promoting pro-Blackness, and challenging all forms of hate to promote a more just and equitable world for all. Our commitment is even more important today than it was just six months ago. Bearing this in mind. I offer the following implications.

1. We must understand how racism works. We must remain mindful that no strategy can help us cultivate equitable schools if we're unwilling to understand how racism operates. Racism is prevalent in every aspect of schooling, from the curriculum that is sanctioned to the testing that is required, to the ways that students are identified for placement in gifted and talented or special education and even to the ways that punitive classroom discipline is exercised and against whom.

2. We have to take actions to grow our collective knowledge to better understand the intersections of the social identities of the students in our care. The more we know about

the children in our care, and the more we know about best practices for educating children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the better equipped we are at educating them in ways that truly matter. This means that it is essential to take actions to grow the knowledge of individuals in the organization as well as the collective knowledge of all in the organization. We must all muster the courage to act, to act in ways that support the collective humanity of us all.

3. Remain cognizant of whose voices are missing from the decisions. If everyone at the table looks and thinks like you, go to another table. In this way you foster an environment wherein diverse perspectives are not only welcomed but invited.

4. Knowledge is never stagnant. Continue to learn and grow and apply new knowledge and learn from that. I always tell folks that my job is to plant the seed. Their job is to nurture the seed, and time will yield the fruits of those seeds. Some of you are going to be radical enough to go right out and apply the ideas shared here, others will take some time to internalize it, and yet for others, these ideas may fall on dry, rocky soil and soon wither away. My hope is that the seeds that I am planting will propagate and yield thriving plants in different spaces so that the legacy continues.

5. It is critically important to honestly examine your own prejudices and biases. What you believe and value guide your every decision and action. Your beliefs will show up in your work and practice.

6. Stop trying to fix students of Color but instead fix the inequitable policies, practices, and conditions that are operational in the institutions and systems you engage in daily. In this way, you are getting at the root causes of the problem and not the individuals who are affected by the problem.

Conclusions

In conclusion, ordinary people can resist systems of oppression through our collective powers with others who have teamed up to do this work on an everyday basis. Our verbal and written commitment to promoting equity and justice is not enough; it must also show up in our daily actions. We as educators are moving forward and must engage in forward thinking. Poet and activist Amanda Gorman (2021) at the Presidential Inauguration for President Joseph R. Biden said, "There's always light, if only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it." My challenge to you is to act, and act now in radical and brave ways. Be the light. Our children are depending on you. Our world, the better, more just world, is at stake.

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