

**Working for Racial Equity at the Margins: Teacher-Leaders Facilitate a Book Study on
Race in a Predominantly White Suburban High School**

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Abstract

This case examines a book study focused on racial equity work at Oak Meadows – a suburban high school with shifting student racial demographics. Two teacher-leaders organize a year-long book study, initially with the tacit support of school administrators. Book study participants approached their work with great enthusiasm. As the content of the book study shifted to heavier topics such as racialized tracking, teacher colleagues started to withdraw their support, question teacher-leaders' intentions, and undermine their work. This case explores how teacher-leaders work at the margins for social justice with a well-meaning school leader who lacks the necessary subjectivities and skillsets to adequately address these issues of racial equity at Oak Meadows.

Context

Located in a suburb in the Midwest, Oak Meadows High School (OMHS) has experienced an increase in residents of color over the past 15 years. According to the 2010 census, Oak Meadows' population was under 50,000; over 80% of the residents identify as white and the remaining populations is approximately 6% African American and 4% Latinx. The average household income is between \$60,000 - \$70,000 per year. For the 2015-2016 school year, the student racial demographics of OMHS are as follows: 69% white, 11.1% Black, 5.4% Asian, and 7.4% Hispanic/Latinx. Students with disabilities accounted for 11.1% of the remaining population, while approximately 20% are economically disadvantaged. OMHS teaching staff consists of primarily white, female teachers with the exception of one Black teacher, one Asian American teacher, and several Latinx Spanish teachers.

Oak Meadows offers a wide selection of Advanced Placement courses across multiple subject areas, extracurricular activities—including 20 different sports teams—and many other clubs that complement the school's academic offerings. The state report card indicates that OMHS students outperform their peers statewide in both English language arts and math by 10-15% margins in each subject. Consistently, over a three-year period from 2013-2016, the aggregated state testing data indicates that over 50-60% of students at OMHS score at an advanced or proficient level in the math and English portions of the state test. However, when the data is disaggregated, a stark contrast surfaces between the scores of white students and Black students. For the 2015-2016 school year, 64.7% of white students compared to 12.2% of Black students scored at either advanced or proficient in English; the numbers for math are even more disparate: 57.8% of white students, compared to 9.3% of Black students, scored advanced

or proficient. The four-year cohort graduation rate for whites is 97.3%, compared to 89.2% of Hispanic/Latinx and 80.4% of Black students.

Jen and Elaine are both teachers at Oak Meadows. In her fifth year of teaching as a literacy coach at OMHS, Jen is passionate about issues of racial equity. Growing up in a rural farming town north of Oak Meadows, Jen's own racial consciousness as a white woman did not develop until much later in life once she started teaching. She regularly participates in regional and national organizations working to reduce the opportunity gap in schools. She read the book *Despite the Best Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools (DTBI)* (Lewis & Diamond, 2015) and met one of the authors of the book, Dr. John B. Diamond, who is also the second author of this piece, at a regional conference in the spring of 2015. Immediately, Jen recognized that the racial disparities confronting the suburban high school in this sociological study mirrored her own observations at OMHS. Enthusiastically, Jen emailed administrators encouraging them to read the book. Several administrators replied thanking her for the recommendation but nothing more. This level of response did not blunt her enthusiasm for the book or her equity work. Jen shared DBTI with her colleague Elaine, an English language arts teacher. Elaine, a first-generation immigrant of Asian descent and one of a few teachers of color at OMHS, felt compelled to help Jen organize a book study. Unlike the Black students at her previous job in a large, inner-city school district nearby, Elaine's Black students at OMHS expressed feelings of alienation. Furthermore, at OMHS, Elaine observed a welcoming, Midwestern hospitality coupled with adamant avoidance regarding conversations focused on issues of race at OMHS.

The sociological text used for the book study focuses on a suburban high school called Riverview High School (RHS), which serves a racially diverse student body with primarily

middle and upper-middle class families. The book details how even a resource-rich school exhibits racialized practices such as tracking, relegating students of color to basic and remedial classes, whereas most Advanced Placement courses enrolled primarily white students. The authors' findings detail how the enforcement of established disciplinary policies diverged depending on the racial identity of students. The book also focuses on the phenomenon of *opportunity hoarding*, where affluent white parents wield their social and cultural capital to secure resources for their children at the expense of other students (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). The parallels between RHS and OMHS compelled Jen and Elaine to pursue a book study of this text for the teachers and staff at their school.

During the summer of 2016, the teacher-leaders (Jen and Elaine) and district administrators, along with Dr. Diamond, held a conference call to determine the nature and scope of the book study. Dr. Diamond connected Jen and Elaine to other book study facilitators who were using the book in their area. Jen and Elaine eventually developed an approach they thought would be well-suited for OMHS: a year-long book study organized around the book's six chapters starting in the fall of 2016. Neither Jen nor Elaine was sure what the level of interest would be, so they secured a small grant to purchase 20 books, assuming they would get about 15 participants. Participation was voluntary, but teachers could earn 14 professional development hours. The teachers' responses were greater than they anticipated and they ordered an additional 20 books based on the response: roughly 40 people ultimately agreed to participate. The eight meetings were scheduled on a monthly basis, from 3:30 – 5:00pm after school on early release days typically landing on a Monday.

Case Narrative

Shortly after dismissal on a crisp, autumn afternoon at OMHS, a palpable energy swirls in room 808, which is packed with roughly 40 teachers eagerly seated for the first book study session. Jen and Elaine welcome teachers into the room and assist them with the sign-up sheet. Mr. Mark McGee, the principal of OMHS, a tall white male in his late 40s, sits in the back of the room with his laptop open.

As a second-year principal, Mark has struggled after taking the helm as an assistant principal at OMHS. He inherited a vocal staff that was rigid in their ways and a sub-population of affluent white parents who wield power in the school and outside in the community. Mark has lived and existed in homogeneous white communities. However, neither his lived experiences nor his coursework in a principal certification program prepared him to discuss issues related to racial inequities, let alone be a leader in disrupting these disparate patterns at his school. From Mark's perspective, he treats all his students the same regardless of race, employing a colorblind ideology. He believes the key to addressing the achievement gap, for *any* student, just requires more attention to fixing the roadblocks to student success: offering more intervention courses in math and reading; tutoring before and after school; and connecting students with role models in the community. In fact, he just had a conversation with the superintendent earlier this morning. The superintendent informed Mark that he must place some effort in decreasing the racial disparities at his school because it makes the district look bad. Mark feels the pressure to show immediate improvements in academic outcomes and standardized tests. Furthermore, there is a \$90 million referendum on the November ballot asking taxpayers to foot the bill for two new elementary schools in Oak Meadows to accommodate a ballooning student population. The superintendent told Mark that the district must appease their affluent tax base of white homeowners who send their children to Oak Meadows.

The teacher-leaders open the book study by welcoming everyone and offering Mark the floor to say a few words. Standing next to his desk in his olive-green pressed shirt and gray tie, Mr. McGee, holding onto his copy of the book, makes the following remarks:

Thank you, Jen and Elaine, for organizing this book study. We are doing very important work here. If you signed up to commit to this book study, then I urge you to follow through with this commitment. We need teachers like you to be invested and committed to this important work.

Teachers sitting around the room nod their heads and smile with enthusiasm. Jen and Elaine lead the group in a norm-building activity before diving into questions posed for the group related to the first chapter of the book.

In a whole-group conversation, all participants are seated in a circle around the room. A white teacher focuses on her own ignorance at times regarding cultural difference. At one point, a teacher shares her struggles about how to broach conversations with students about their cultures. She wonders, “Where does curiosity cross the line and become offensive?”

Another teacher replies, “Well, it depends. Are you asking the Asian kid where he is from but not the white kid?”

The principal responds, looking directly at Elaine, “Well, I love learning about different cultures. Elaine, for example, I want to learn more about your culture and where you come from. I don’t know if that is offensive. Does that show my ignorance?” An awkward pause punctuates the room as teachers look to Elaine then back at the principal. Elaine, mortified and stunned, is at a loss for words that her principal would isolate her, the only person of color in the room, and direct this question toward her.

Another teacher chimes in to respond to the principal, “I think it depends on your relationship with that person.”

The conversation shifts to why Black and Latinx students continually struggle at Oak Meadows. An older white teacher directs everyone’s attention to a small population of minoritized students at OMHS who achieve academically, “Don’t you think in Asian cultures they value education? That’s why their kids are so successful in this country. What would you say?” as she looks directly at Elaine sitting next to her.

With her arms spread out, Elaine retorts with sarcasm and laughter, “Let me speak on behalf of all Asian people!” Everyone in the room laughs; however, a white teacher from the side insists, “See, this is exactly the problem: white people suck at talking about race.” Only a few teachers around her hear this comment.

The clock strikes five and facilitators stop the session. Jen and Elaine, as they are cleaning up the room afterwards, reflect on this first session. Elaine shares with Jen her discomfort at different points in the discussion, being the only person of color in the room and bearing the brunt of racial micro-aggressions. Although she is not surprised at these ignorant but seemingly well-intentioned comments made by her colleagues and principal, it still wears on Elaine. However, she recognizes that this is the toll people of color often bear when engaging whites in these conversations about race. Even with these challenges, Jen and Elaine were pleasantly surprised that the white teachers in the room appeared, for the most part, open to talking about these issues during the first session.

By the third meeting, however, Jen and Elaine noticed a dramatic change with the book study attendance. There were roughly 15 less attendees than the previous two meetings. Noticeably, not a single administrator was in attendance either. Regardless, with the 25 teachers

present, the teacher-leaders started the book session by reviewing the norms and then transitioning into small groups focused on key quotations from chapter three. Participants spent roughly 40 minutes analyzing the quotes and then drawing parallels with OHMS. Then, Jen and Elaine reorganized the group into a circle and facilitated a larger discussion. Silence punctuated the room initially and then the conversations bubbled up about the racialized practices of tracking at OMHS:

A science teacher shares with the group, “Students in remedial classes share with me how their classes are boring and too easy. Even our electives are racialized, look at the roster for British Literature; it is just like in the book.” Another teacher chimes in, “We have to have rigor across the curriculum, not just in AP.”

“We also have to be mindful of the assumptions we make about our Black students, like they are not capable of doing the work. I know I have mapped on these assumptions about my Black students, even though they are simply not true,” reveals an English teacher.

The science teacher also adds, “I’ve also realized that I need to educate our white families who hold stereotypes about our students of color.” The discussion concludes with more questions than answers; however, Elaine and Jen walk away from that book study session pleased that teacher-participants did not shy away from these tough conversations.

Later that night, Elaine sees a text message from a trusted colleague and book study participant. The text message includes Jen, as well. It reads as follow: *rumors are swirling about today’s book study session. The AP coordinator and administrators feel attacked.* Elaine’s heart skips a beat reading the text. She did not see this coming; however, she is not entirely surprised. Elaine begins to replay the discussion in her mind and wonders at what point anything could have been said that might cause any single person to feel attacked. Also, how did

misinformation leak to individuals outside of the book study, breaking a crucial norm from the book study regarding confidentiality?

The next day, after student dismissal, a cluster of teachers from the book study huddle in the literacy intervention room to talk to Jen and Elaine. One teacher reveals, “Look, I’m hearing this from people in the building. The AP coordinator thinks this book study is trying to sabotage her work with the AP program because we were talking about racialized tracking last night. Which is *so* not true!” Another teacher chimes in, “This makes me nervous. She has been at this school for 20 plus years; she’s got a lot of sway with staff. Not to mention, her family is well connected in Oak Meadows.” These comments leave Jen and Elaine unsettled and disturbed.

Meanwhile, across campus, the principal just left a meeting with the AP coordinator. She appeared distraught and in tears about the book study meeting the day before. She thinks this book study is attacking her work and questioning the AP structure at Oak Meadows. She believes the book promotes divisiveness amongst staff, and it blames white teachers for all the problems with the racial achievement gap—an example of reverse racism. Admittedly, Mark skimmed the first few pages of the book but never read it: he just never got around to it. He just didn’t have time. He also stopped attending the book study sessions because there is simply too much on his plate, from putting out fires on a daily basis to addressing his various administrative duties; there is only so much he can do as the principal. Walking back to his office, Mark recalls that he has a meeting scheduled with Jen and Elaine on Friday afternoon along with his three assistant principals to discuss how the teacher-leaders plan to use the behavior data from last year in their next book study session focused on discipline. Mark intends to use this meeting on Friday to check in with Jen and Elaine about the nature of the book study.

Friday afternoon rolls around: Jen and Elaine head over to the principal's office for their scheduled meeting. Both facilitators feel emotionally drained from a full week of teaching while growing weary of the subtle hostilities from colleagues. Elaine replays some of these moments in her head: *Her peers' halting silence and stares when she walked into the English department meeting yesterday. Comments made during that same meeting about "those kids" from "that family." The glares from the AP coordinator and her circle of friends when they cross paths in the hallways. Not to mention the deafening silence and inaction of her principal and the whole administrative team while all this has erupted this week. Everyone is talking about it behind closed doors and yet no one is talking about it. She has lost sleep over all of this.*

Across campus, assistant principals trickle into the Mark's office and chitchat about the upcoming school dance while the principal wraps up a phone call at his desk. Everyone hears Mr. McGee repeating over and over again, "Yes, sir. I got it. Ok. Got it." When Mr. McGee finishes the conversation, he greets everyone with a forced smile, fidgeting around his desk to gather some notes. Everyone collectively picks up on this tension. Mr. McGee takes a deep breath, walks over to his door, and closes it momentarily, so he can address his administrative team in private:

"Okay, I just got off the phone with the superintendent. He's somehow got wind of this AP coordinator's complaints about the book study. The superintendent wants me to do something about this before it gets out of hand. He says we don't need bad publicity especially with this referendum coming up, and I don't want any trouble from this AP coordinator."

One of his assistant principals asks, "So, what are you going to do about this?" Just then, someone knocks at the door. Mark's administrative assistant peaks in, "Mr. McGee, Jen and Elaine are here for your 3:30pm meeting."

Epilogue

The meeting in the principal's office confirmed for Jen and Elaine the nature of their racial equity work at OMHS: it would be met with formidable resistance in a context that often caters to white fragility. Noting a lack of confidence in their principal and his incapacity to even adequately talk about issues related to race, Jen and Elaine knew, regardless of Mark's actions to address this crisis, students of color would land on the losing side of this battle. Behind closed doors shortly after that meeting, Jen and Elaine started looking for employment elsewhere. Particularly, for Elaine, as a person of color engaged in this work, she reflected in an email at the start of summer to Dr. Diamond as to why she decided to leave OMHS:

Increasingly, my own isolation and feeling unsupported led to a job search. It's not as if there were not teacher allies, but without other teachers of color to share the burden, I needed my leadership to assume some of the burden and risk the criticism especially as they are white. White administrators in power have to assume the burden; they must not only rise to the occasion, but they must defend the values of social justice in all actions, including hiring, discipline, academic expectations and professional development. I knew I was not just another face in this community, but suddenly, I was the face that everyone noticed, and again while I did have wonderful white colleagues and allies, their faces can and will meld with the norm of this community, and honestly, they might have more persuasive powers with faculty. For me, as the face of equity, there's no back seat, no recovery time; there's that brown girl talking about race again without leadership backup. This perhaps, along with a set of values that exists in my own department about power has led me to seek out new employment in a place that has more people of color and leadership courage.

Teaching Notes

The purpose of this case is to highlight the tensions of working for equity in racially diverse schools, particularly for teacher-leaders. As the population demographics of U.S. schools are changing, teachers and administrators are forced to grapple with a complex mix of challenges and opportunities. Just as the teachers in the book study were dealing with race, class, and inequality, these issues were playing out in the very processes in which they were engaged.

Racial Disparities in US Schools

With regards to race, it is clear that while OMHS is changing demographically, it is still a white space. Over 80% of the students and teachers are white and the school has only one Black administrator and one Black teacher. This lack of racial diversity among the population shapes the context in ways that make pursuing and leading for equity challenging. White racial isolation in such communities and school contexts makes substantive conversations about race rare and difficult. This is in part because whiteness has become so normalized as a default, “raceless” category, that white people have difficulty conceptualizing its significance outside of comparisons to other racial identities or categories (McDermott & Samson, 2005). Such contexts are also a breeding ground for various manifestations of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018) – the process through which emotions of anger, guilt, and frustration, and behaviors of avoidance and argumentation undermine racial discourse and maintain white comfort. For instance, white people often avoid talking about race (Pollock, 2004; Lewis, 2003) and remove themselves from racial conversations when they begin to feel uncomfortable. This might help explain why some teachers apparently complained to administrators about group discussions and

why administrators felt the need to “protect” or perhaps support the teachers who were made uneasy.

Schools do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, they are embedded in a broader context with which they must contend. In OMHS, administrators faced social pressure to signal an investment in racial equity. In fact, the school’s website emphasizes that it “celebrates and values diversity,” “supports and values people of all races and religions,” and “respects diversity regarding gender identities and sexual orientation.” Work on impression management (Goffman, 1959), colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), and institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 2006) might help explain why this public “presentation of self” was important for maintaining the legitimacy of the school within the larger community. Recent work in similar contexts demonstrates that school leaders purposefully market diversity (and their receptiveness to it) to maintain district stability in the context of changing demographics (Turner, 2017).

Distributed Leadership & Teacher-Leadership

Recent research on school leadership has focused on distributed leadership (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001; 2004). Distributed leadership is a conceptual tool for understanding how leadership practice in schools is co-constructed and distributed across leaders, followers, and the context in which they are embedded. This case highlights some of the tensions that can arise when people who are not in formal positions of power within organizations push for changes in the status quo. While teacher-leaders sought to address issues of race and equity in their schools through the book study process, the context in which they were doing their work – potentially shaped by white fragility, colorblind discourses, and opportunity hoarding – made this work more difficult. Previous work on distributed leadership has been criticized for not paying enough attention to issues of power differences among those

who seek to play leadership roles (Flessa, 2009). This case might help us think more deeply about power and conflict within the distributed perspective (Diamond, 2013; Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Harris (2003) asserts succinctly that teacher-leaders are instrumental in school improvement efforts:

Quite simply, we cannot continue to ignore, dismiss or devalue the notion of teacher leadership as a form of distributed leadership—to do so is to knowingly invest in forms of leadership theory and practice that make little, if any difference, to the achievement of young people (p. 322).

The research on teacher leadership remains clear: teachers as leaders within their schools play a crucial role in classroom pedagogy, student achievement, and also school improvement (Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2003; Lambert, 2002). Rather than undermining or dismissing their work, school administrators should offer the necessary supports to buoy teacher-leaders' efforts. This case highlights leadership within schools that moves beyond the building principal to include those often existing at the margins as educational leaders, mainly teachers, parents, students and community organizers (Bertrand & Rodela, 2017; Lac & Cumings Mansfield, 2017; Welton & Freelon, 2018).

The Toll of Doing Racial Equity Work

Leading and participating in racial equity work can be stressful. If talking about race is difficult work, leading others through those conversations is even more fraught (Singleton, 2014). In the case reported here, conversations were happening in a mostly white context where participants were dealing with relatively new demographic shifts and a lack of experience talking about race. As leaders of similar discussions, facilitators (particularly facilitators of color) may experience resistance and anger on the part of participants as well as racial microaggressions

(Sue, 2010) and ultimately racial battle fatigue (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2000). Black feminist scholars and activists have emphasized the need for self-care among those working for racial justice (Collins, 2002; hooks, 1989). Sometimes that self-care may require finding spaces that are better prepared for meaningful changes and leaving those that are not.

Critical Professional Development & Book Studies

This case offers a lucid example of a form of *critical professional development* (CPD). Kohli and colleagues (2015) offer CPD as an approach that prioritizes the learning of teachers in response to salient social justice issues plaguing their schools. Speaking against often top-down, traditional PD that positions teachers as inert receivers of expert knowledge from outside sources, these authors assert that teachers should be active learners focused on issues impacting their students and the communities they serve through CPD (Kohli, Picower, Martinez, & Ortiz, 2015). CPD grounds the practice of critical reflection coupled with actionable steps, so teachers can work actively to reflect on their work in a manner that will guide them toward social change in and beyond their schools. These authors note that CPD often happens as a response to oppressive structures, pushing social justice-oriented teachers to the metaphorical margins to conduct this work (Kohli et al., 2015).

Additionally, we offer that book studies could be an instrumental approach within a CPD context to encourage and promote critical conversations focused on race and racism given the proper support from administrators and teaching staff. Traditionally, book studies have been used among literacy instructors to promote literature circles among K12 students (Kong & Fitch, 2002; Raphael & McMahon, 1994); however, a scant body of research illustrates the potential of book studies as a tool for professional development to promote the growth of teachers as learners. Teachers who participate in book studies learn from heterogeneous groups mixing

experienced teachers with novice ones (Amador, Wallin, & Amador, 2015; Burbank, Kauchak, & Bates, 2010), shift their beliefs regarding marginalized students (Andrei, Ellerbe, & Cherner, 2015; Gardiner, Cumming-Potvin, & Hesterman, 2013), and exercise critical reflection regarding issues related to equity and serving all students (Burbank et al., 2010; Mensah, 2009).

Talking About Race and Racism

For teacher-leaders to engage in challenging conversations regarding issues related to race and racism, this requires a distinct skillset not necessarily nurtured while in a teacher education or certification program. We offer here a series of resources to develop and strengthen the racial literacy of teacher-leaders interested in engaging in racial equity work. In particular, we highlight readings and resources that may guide teachers on having conversations about race and racism with white peers and colleagues who may be resistant or resentful of racial equity work in schools:

- (a) *Despite the Best Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools*: Lewis and Diamond's (2015) book might be a good place to start for those interested in learning more about how race and racism informs and shapes racial inequality in schools. This sociological study begins with a chapter focused on debunking the myths often employed to explain the educational failures of minoritized students.
- (b) *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*: In her book, Tatum (1997) offers an accessible read making a clear distinction between racism versus racial prejudice. She also elaborates on the white racial identity development of white people in the United States.
- (c) *Courageous Conversations About Race*: Singleton (2014) offers a practical guide for educators interested in having conversations about race. He details how teachers

interested in facilitating these types of discussions can lay the ground work, such as developing norms amongst participants from different backgrounds.

(d) *Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School*: Pollack's (2008) book has a compilation of short readings from leading educational researchers and practitioners in the field focused on racial equity. Topics range from problematizing racism in schools to offering solutions to address and redress these issues.

(e) *The National Equity Project* provides professional learning opportunities for educators and other leaders and equips them with tools for transforming cultural practices and building competencies to enhance racial justice.

<http://nationalequityproject.org/about/staff>

(f) *White Fragility. Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*. DiAngelo (2018) helps practitioners better understand the forms of resistance they are likely to experience engaging white educators (who make up the vast majority of teachers and administrators) in conversations about race.

Questions

(1) Consider the scene at the meeting with the administrative team after Mr. McGee's phone call with the superintendent. What would you say or do as the principal in this situation?

(2) Furthermore, as the principal at Oak Meadows High, if you truly believe in teacher leadership of professional learning, how would you have approached the work of the teacher-leaders with the book study while also addressing the pressures from the superintendent and constituents in the community?

- (3) For the most part, the book study thrived with a core group of dedicated teachers interested in social justice. What recommendations do you have for teacher-leaders, such as Jen and Elaine, that could make this work more sustainable, given the OMHS context?
- (4) Jen and Elaine never explicitly address that individuals within the group violated the norms established for the book study. Should they have addressed this issue? Why or why not?
- (5) Please reflect on your professional development experiences as an educator. Would you characterize it more as traditional professional development or critical professional development?
- (6) What practices does your school have in place to address issues of racial equity? If there is nothing currently in place, what steps would you recommend for beginning this racial equity work?
- (7) Unfortunately, OMHS does not represent an anomaly among schools in the US in terms of exhibiting racial and educational inequities. What recommendations do you have for teacher-leaders interested in engaging in racial equity work at their schools?
- (8) In what ways could educational leadership preparation programs better prepare their students to lead for racial justice or to address resistance to this work among faculty and staff?
- (9) For Jen and Elaine, they found themselves in a situation where their principal lacked the skillset, knowledge, and capacity to engage in conversations about race and racism. What do you do as a teacher-leader when you know more than your principal regarding matters of racial equity?
- (10) Do you think Elaine should have left Oak Meadows at the end of that school year? Why or why not?

Role Play Scenario

(A) Imagine you were sitting at the first book study session where your principal makes the exact same comment as Mr. McGee. How would you handle this situation if you were Elaine, the only teacher of color in the room and the receiver of his comment? How would you handle his remark as a white teacher sitting in that circle? What would your response be witnessing a superior enact a racial micro-aggression against a colleague?

(B) Imagine you are Elaine and you are sitting at an English department meeting. A senior colleague and chair of your department asserts that Black and Latinx students' underachievement in standardized test scores and grades are a result of a lack of effort on the part of the student. The chair also alludes to the idea that minoritized students at your school lack support from their parents and families. How would you respond? What would you say?

Start Your Own Book Club

We hope this case may also inspire you to start your own book club at your school or amongst peers in your educational leadership program. Here are some suggestions to facilitate this process:

- (a) Identify a text focused on issues of race and racism.
- (b) Find colleagues who may be interested in reading this text with you.
- (c) Determine a time/place to meet on a weekly or monthly basis.
- (d) Establish norms as a group.
- (e) Commit to meeting and having open/honest conversations about these issues.

ERIC Descriptors

Racial Equity
Book Study
Teacher-Leadership
Critical Professional Development

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