

## Examining silences in an English teacher inquiry group focused on critical conversations: A facilitator's reflexive analysis

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### **Abstract:**

Facilitating critical conversations includes helping students unpack dominant ideologies, interrupting stereotypes, creating a context for marginalized voices, and strategizing ways for taking action. Oftentimes, that means that teachers must recognize what silences are occurring, interpret why those silences are happening, and figure out the best moves to make to either interrupt or protect that silence. As facilitators of critical conversations with teachers, we explored the silences that occurred in a teacher inquiry group focused on improving the facilitation of such dialogue in high school English classrooms. Critical discourse analysis and reflexive analysis were used to examine transcripts from those inquiry discussions. Findings suggest that privileged and veiled silences circulated, and indirect silences disrupted, race-evasive discourses with a diverse group of teachers. Implications discuss how teachers and teacher educators can engage in reflexivity, specifically in relation to how they may inadvertently support white-centered discourse, to improve their facilitation of critical conversations by using an expanded notion of silence as a tool for critical discourse analysis.

**Keywords:** silence | critical discourse analysis | critical conversations | teacher inquiry groups

### **Article:**

There is a significant need for educators to foster critical conversations or classroom dialogue about power, privilege, and agency with students (Johnson, 2018; Schieble, Vetter, & Martin, 2020; Wargo, 2019). For example, scholars in English education argue that teachers must tackle critical topics such as white supremacy and anti-Black racism in order to “move the pedagogical practices around the intersections of anti-Blackness and literacy from the margins to the center of discussion and praxis in ELA contexts” (Johnson, 2018, p. 102) (e.g. CREE). White teachers, however, are often unprepared to support students in taking critical stances with literature in ELA classrooms (Chisholm & Whitmore, 2017). To be successful facilitators, teachers must have knowledge and

practice with fostering dialogic and student-centered discussions (Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Caughlan, & Heintz, 2013; Nystrand, 2006). White teachers must also be comfortable with talking about power and privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013; Skerrett, 2011), and must be prepared to gain support from parents and administrators in this work (Thein, 2013). To add to that complexity is the need for white teachers to be aware about how to have critical conversations within various contexts and with participants who have different cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds than their own and each other (Haddix, 2012). As teacher educators, then, it is our job to prepare and support both pre and inservice teachers to foster such critical conversations in their classrooms.

Research on teacher education and professional learning related to critical work in classrooms argues that teachers need support putting critical theories into practice and navigating the constraints they face in public schools as critical teachers (Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Fasching-Varner & Dodo Seriki, 2012; Young, 2010). This need for support extends to the specific work of fostering critical conversations in classrooms. Research in the area of classroom dialogue has focused on the benefits of analyzing video and/or audio transcripts of classroom discussions with teachers in inquiry groups (Schieble et al., 2020; Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Caughlan & Heintz, 2013; Rex & Schiller, 2009). Such work has been shown to increase teachers' interactional awareness, or the ability to reflect in the moment about language use (Rex & Schiller, 2009). Less research, however, has examined how such work with teachers could support how they facilitate critical conversations in their classrooms with students.

This paper does just that by focusing on the ways in which one facilitator, with the support of two other teacher educators as thought partners, engaged in critical self-reflection by using a widened conception of silence (Mazzei, 2003; Morgan, 2010) as a unit of analysis to examine discussions about critical conversations in a teacher inquiry group. This analysis stems from a larger study focused on how teachers, in an inquiry group, examined critical conversations they fostered in middle and high school ELA classrooms. During analysis of the transcribed discussions of the inquiry group meetings, which occurred after the group meetings ended, we noticed silences (i.e., instances of race-evasive language) and wanted to know more about how they shaped the critical dialogue of a racially diverse group.

By silence, we do not mean an absence of sound. Instead, we expand traditional notions of silence to include the intentional and/or unintentional absence of a topic and/or uptake of a topic during critical conversations. We view silence as active (e.g., a person is intentionally silent for fear of being rude; a topic is silenced because it makes an individual uncomfortable) and related to issues of power and privilege. For example, a facilitator of a teacher inquiry group might steer discussions about racism in a different direction for fear of interrupting a sense of community and trust built amongst a group of teachers. As a result, teachers miss opportunities to address relevant concerns and questions about learning and instruction.

In an effort to improve her work as a facilitator, Amy engaged in reflexive analysis using critical discourse analysis of the inquiry group discussions and a widened conception of silence as a unit of analysis. Melissa and Kahdeidra served as thought partners in Amy's analysis. For this study, we asked the following questions: What silences occurred in an inquiry group focused on fostering critical conversations in high school English classrooms? How did these silences function? The findings to these research questions have implications for specific analytic tools that educators could use to examine and reflect on the critical conversations they are fostering and engaging in.

## 1. Literature review

### 1.1. Critical conversations in classrooms

We define critical conversations as a pedagogical practice to facilitate discussions about power and privilege that help students to think critically about the world and their place in it. This definition draws on critical theory by focusing on disrupting issues of power and privilege related to oppression (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011) and also widens the scope to focus on power for liberation, solidarity and agency (Rogers, 2018). In an English classroom, these conversations are often in connection with literature. For example, students might examine the relationship between race and identity in *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas and also disrupt the ways in which society uses the stereotypes of Black people to justify violence and racism against them.

Thus, critical conversations about literature are important because they help students question why certain groups are positioned as “others” and open space for students to explore how individuals can take action on social issues (Harste et al., 2000). Such collaborative and generative dialogue helps students learn to talk productively and can mitigate misconceptions and fear that people have about individuals who are culturally and linguistically different from them (deKoven, 2011). Critical conversations, however, are complicated and require knowledge about power, practice with critical pedagogy, positions of vulnerability, stances of a critical learner, and experience navigating critical talk moves (Schieble et al., 2020).

One of the jobs of a teacher during critical conversations, then, is to utilize critical talk moves that help students unpack dominant ideologies, interrupt stereotypes, create a context for marginalized voices, and strategize ways for taking action (Schieble et al., 2020). Oftentimes, that means that teachers must recognize what silences are occurring, interpret why those silences are happening, and figure out the best moves to make to either interrupt or protect that silence (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Schultz, 2010; Singleton & Linton, 2006).

### 1.2. Conceptualizing critical conversations

To conceptualize critical conversations, we draw from critical literacy (Janks, Dixon, Ferreira, Granville, & Newfield, 2013) and racial literacy (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013; Twine, 2010). The overall goal of critical literacy is social transformation, in which reading is a “form of creative dialogue with the world” that promotes systematic change (Garcia, Mirra, Morrell, Martinez, & Scorza, 2015). Critical literacy reframes the interpretive goal of reading from finding the main idea in a text to questioning the ways characters, places, and interactions are a social construction that sustains or disrupts dominant narratives about race, gender, dis/ability, class and other social systems (Janks et al., 2013; Morrell, 2015; Vasquez, 2014). Critical conversations, then, promote active dialogue with students in which they consider multiple viewpoints, focus on sociopolitical issues, disrupt commonplace notions, and explore ways to take action that promotes social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). Such dialogue also supports students through critical readings of texts to better understand how texts are constructed, who benefits from texts, and how texts shape identities (Janks et al., 2013).

We also draw from racial literacy to define how participants in critical conversations examine the ways racism pervades our social, cultural, material, and political worlds (Guinier, 2004; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013; Skerrett, 2011). Racial literacy practices

include viewing racism as structural rather than individual, seeing everyday forms of racism, and challenging undemocratic practices (Bolgatz, 2005). Overall, the goal of racial literacy is to notice, respond to, counter, and cope with everyday forms of racism (Twine, 2010). Racial literacy scholars (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013; Skerrett, 2011; Stevenson, 2014) note that this framework holds true for examining other systemic forms of oppression, such as sexism, heterosexism, and classism. We tie racial literacy to critical literacy because the framework provides an explicit and well-theorized set of discursive practices to build racial knowledge and skills that are essential to interpreting text from a critical literacy stance. Maintaining silence about racism, for example, is not a racial literacy practice. Understanding the functions of silence can move teachers and students to interrupt racism and thus learn to enact racial literacy practices.

### 1.3. Silences in critical conversations

In research on critical conversations, silence is often discussed as an act of resistance or protection. Silence as a form of resistance often occurs when participants are uncomfortable talking about a specific topic. This discomfort might come from beliefs that discussions about race are rude, inappropriate, and/or racist (Diangelo, 2018; Michael, 2015; Schaffer & Skinner, 2009). Other times, participants are silent because they take on a color-evasive (Annamma, Jackson & Morrison, 2017) or colorblind approach (Bonilla-Silva, 2013), believing that they do not see race, just people. This perspective is problematic because it denies the significance of privilege and systems of oppression (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). Other reasons for silence include beliefs that racial discrimination is a thing of the past (Copenhaver, 2000) and inexperience with explicitly discussing racism with others (Picower, 2009; Pixley & VanDerPloeg, 2000; Pollock, 2004). Such silence exacerbates racism that structures everyday life in the U.S. (Bonilla-Silva, 2013).

In research with white inservice teachers, Mazzei (2003) identified the following five different types of silence related to resistance that she encountered during race-based conversations: polite silences, privileged silences, veiled silences, intentional silences, and unintelligible silences. It is important to note that Mazzei did not narrow her understanding of silence to the absence of sound. She did, however, view silence as moments when questions were avoided or topics were not addressed, which we will describe in relation to the veiled and privileged silences that we use in this paper. Polite silences are those which happen when one remains silent for fear of offending another. Privileged silences are the silences which happen when one ignores something by virtue of his or her sense of importance and social standing. In Mazzei's study with teachers, she described a moment when white teachers read McIntosh's *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*. In the discussion, the group of teachers were not quiet. Instead, they engaged in discussion that questioned the validity of the statements of privilege that McIntosh asserted. One participant said, "I'm wondering how valid some of these are and whether I'm getting it." Thus, this privileged silence was not an absence of sound, but instead a questioning of the topic at hand that functioned to silence the issue of white privilege.

Veiled silences occur when "participants speak, but their speaking serves as 'noise' that 'veils', or masks, their inability or unwillingness to talk about a (potentially sensitive) topic" (Morrison & Macleod, 2014, p. 694). For example, veiled silences occur when one does not know how to respond to a question and instead comments with "avoidance, denial, deflection, reframing, and intellectualizing" (Mazzei, 2003, p. 363). For example, Mazzei stated that when posing questions meant to foster dialogue about whiteness, participants answered in silence that was "not literally silent" but metaphorically silent. They did speak, but their speaking was an attentiveness

to a different question, not the specific one offered by me to generate discussion” (p. 365). Intentional silences happen when one intentionally chooses not to speak because they do not wish to reveal something about themselves or because they are unsure about the reactions it may create. Unintelligible silences are those that are purposeful but remain incomprehensible.

Silence as resistance can also be moments when individuals use silence to push against oppressive power structures. For example, Morgan et al. (1996) and Morgan (2010) suggest that indirectness, defined as conveying intention by means of hinting, circumlocution, or insinuations (e.g., silence, laughter) has historically been used in African American English to communicate meaning, agency, support, and resistance to normative practices and/or policies. For Black women, in particular, indirectness has been used to subvert power structures and assert or validate experiences (McGee, 2019).

Silence as a form of protection often allows participants to hold onto practices and beliefs that might make them vulnerable to negative judgments from their peers and teachers. For example, one explanation of silence in the classroom could be that a student feels oppressed by the dialogue (Ladson-Billings, 1996). This is often the case for racially minoritized students who are placed in a vulnerable position of revealing their psychological and emotional experiences with racism in order to “educate” white people about racism (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). For example, in Carter's (2007) study about the classroom interactions of two Black females in a high school British Literature classroom, she makes a distinction among silence, silencing, and silenced. Data illustrated how the two students constantly negotiated whiteness within the curriculum. As a result, they were often positioned negatively by the white teacher and white students when they shared their perspectives. For them, silence was one way to deal with a white space that was not ready to engage in critical conversations. Specifically, Carter describes silence, rather than simply not talking, as a way of responding to silencing. Being silenced can be a submission to hegemonic process, a response to silencing, and/or an absence of talk. Similarly, Haddix (2012) found that Black preservice teachers in her study often remained silent to safeguard personal beliefs and ideologies, which unjustly can be misinterpreted by white teachers as disengagement (Carter, 2007). Naming, conceptualizing, and/or theorizing these silences is helpful in unpacking the complicated reasons why individuals might stay silent in critical conversations and how that silence functions.

Silences also function at a macro-level in oppressive ways. For example, Huckin (2002) argued that manipulative silences are those that deliberately conceal relevant information from the reader/listener. Through a case study on the ways in which homelessness is portrayed in the news, Huckin illustrated how information, when out of sight of the reader, is silenced. Thus, a reader must take a critical stance in order to question what is left out. Rogers (2011) also illustrated how silence functions at a macro-level through a 10-year study of one individual's experience (Vicky) in K-12 special education courses. For example, one area of silencing was related to informed consent as stated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Although Vicky and her family gave consent to several modifications, such as remaining in a self-contained classroom, it was clear they did not fully understand what these modifications meant for her present and future educational experience (e.g., receiving an Individualized Education Program (IEP) certificate rather than a high school diploma). Thus, Rogers shows how school and societal policies (informed consent rather than informed understanding) can act as macro-level silences that support local educational decisions that were left unspoken to this student and her family.

It is important to note that the function of silence is contingent on sociopolitical context and the identities and positionalities of those involved in the discussion. Silence can be “a

constructive move in racial discussions,” especially when white participation “reinscribes the White dominance and centrality embedded in the larger society” (DiAngelo, 2012, p. 5). This is also true for individuals in conversations about gender and sexual orientation. Listening can be the best option when individuals are working to deepen their critical knowledge about power and oppression and learning how to interrupt traditional power relations. For example, an individual might choose silence when other dominant groups have already spoken first and/or when individuals are discussing sensitive issues of internalized oppression. Silence as a choice can be related to Tuck and Yang's (2014) concept of refusal in which researchers refuse to capitalize on the painful stories of oppression from people who have traditionally been marginalized as a way to produce knowledge in academia. Thus, silence, or leaving out a topic, story, or detail, can be a way to refuse to objectify individuals, groups of people, and the objects that represent those people. Silence, then, could be seen as taking on a “refusal stance” which means observing “instead the objectifying space and its sexual, racial, and biopolitical architecture” (p. 816).

Teachers play a significant role in interpreting and disrupting silences for the sake of facilitating critical conversations. As Glazier (2003) argued, teacher educators often expect preservice teachers to immediately dig into critical conversations, but much research illustrates that educators need to be “more patient and more vigilant” (p. 88). Researchers argue for the importance of exploring the meanings of silence in classrooms by engaging in careful listening and inquiry (Schultz, 2010). Paying attention to silence in a classroom means questioning students in ways that clarifies assumptions that participants might make about what is not being said (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Singleton & Linton, 2006). In the end, silence can deny participants the opportunity to try out and share new ideas, positions, or ways of working together.

#### 1.4. Silence and race-evasive white teacher identity studies

For this paper, we intersect the theoretical underpinnings of critical conversations and silence with scholarship on race-evasive white teacher identity studies. This subset of scholarship has explored the enactment of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2013) to examine white teachers’ race-evasion, whiteness, and privilege. White race-evasion “refers to tacit and explicit identity strategies and speech acts taken up by White-skinned individuals who diminish, deny, and evade the saliency of race and, therefore, defend and buttress White privilege and hegemonic whiteness” (Jupp, Leckie, Cabrera, & Utt, 2019, p. 5). Privileged silences, for example, are similar to the concept of race-evasive practices. This line of inquiry has built on the traditions of African American intellectual thought (Baldwin, 1963; Beale, 1970; DuBois, 1903; hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984) and coalesced with first and second wave critical whiteness studies (Frankenberg, 1993; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1992; King, 1991; Leonardo, 2002; Roediger, 1994). This subset of scholarship evolved from an initial focus on white preservice and inservice teachers’ resistance to and lack of knowledge about racialized knowledges (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Jupp et al., 2019) to highlight white teachers’ racial identities as nuanced, contextual, and harnessing both race-evasive and race-visible knowledges (Berchini, 2019; Borsheim-Black, 2015; Lensmire, 2017; Lowenstein, 2009; Mazzei, 2003; Trainor, 2002).

Amy engaged in continuous critical self-reflection about her identity as a white, female, teacher educator throughout the longitudinal project the authors had been working on together for several years. The first phase of data analysis revealed silences during the inquiry group conversations that occurred around race-evasive practices. Amy reflectively questioned her own facilitation practices as a white woman in the teacher inquiry group who felt responsible for

disrupting those race evasive discourses while also making sure that participants of color were not silenced by those discourses. Thus, Amy undertook a reflexive analysis (Anderson, 2017; Bucholtz, 2001) of the inquiry group's transcripts using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 2004; Rogers, 2018) and sought support from Melissa (a white teacher educator) and Kahdeidra (a Black teacher educator) as thought partners to support data analysis (we share more about our author identities and the work of thought partners in the methods section). By thought partners, we mean that Melissa and Kahdeidra engaged in critical dialogue with Amy about her analyses of the group discussions and her own role as a facilitator in shaping the dialogue. Ravitch and Carl (2020) support the idea of collaboration in qualitative research as necessary for research reflexivity: “for an individual, collaboration is vital to creating the conditions necessary to challenge your assumptions and blind spots” (p 36).

Analyzing such silences in inquiry group discussions using a broadened notion of silence (Mazzei, 2003; Morgan et al., 1996; Morgan, 2010) helped us learn more about how silences occur around race-evasive practices. The goal of this paper, then, is to open conversation about the role that teacher educators and curriculum facilitators/coaches (this role is hereafter referred to as facilitator) play in race-evasive dialogue, particularly in racially diverse groups of teachers, which for us meant a group of white, Black, and Brown teachers. In particular, this paper shows how silence as an analytic tool helped a white facilitator engage in critical self-reflection of her own race-evasive practices with the goal of better supporting teacher learning in future inquiry group meetings. While this subset of scholarship is nearly saturated with empirical evidence to support how and why white teachers engage in race-evasive practices, there is a dearth of research that demonstrates how white facilitators navigate those practices and discourses in discussions with groups of racially diverse teachers focused on critical teacher learning.

## **2. Methods**

For this paper, Amy used critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 2004; Rogers, 2017, Rogers, 2018) and reflexive analysis (Anderson, 2017; Bucholtz, 2001) to examine the following questions: What silences occurred in an inquiry group focused on fostering critical conversations in high school English classrooms? How did those silences function? This analysis helped us acknowledge the power dynamics involved in such moment-to-moment interactions and highlighted the benefits of engaging in critical discourse analysis and reflexive analysis as a facilitator of inquiry groups with teachers.

### **2.1. Context and participants**

Participants were part of a larger study focused on the ways in which teachers, in an inquiry group, examined critical conversations they fostered in middle and high school ELA classrooms in the Southeastern United States. This group consisted of Amy and three high school teachers, one African American male in his twenties (Carson), one Latino male in his twenties (Jose), and one white male in his fifties (Roger). Two of the teacher participants (Carson and Jose) were former students of Amy and one (Roger) was introduced to Amy by a former student.

Carson taught at an early college (a school in which high school students can receive a high school diploma and up to two years of college credit) with a majority of rural white students (63%) and was in his fourth year of teaching. Carson defined a critical conversation as, “A dialogue between people that truly helps them define and discuss their own perceptions of the world and

how that works, and how that functions in their own life.” He joined the teacher inquiry group to become better at fostering what he called important skills for the 21st century.

Jose taught in an urban high school with students from a variety of cultural backgrounds (63% students of color) and was in his fourth year of teaching. He appreciated that diverse student body and believed that the “critical conversation piece is so important for them, especially since they have that opportunity to talk across lines of difference.” Jose joined because he wanted to become better at helping students make connections about power and privilege in their lives and in the texts they read/viewed together as a class.

Roger taught at a high school in a small city with a majority of African American (38%) and Latinx (49%) students, many of whom spoke Spanish as their first language. He was in his first year of teaching at his current school but had taught for five years in urban schools in other states. He came to the school where he taught because he wanted to work in a “high needs” school. Roger described himself as a teacher who believed in developing curriculum that was relevant to the lives of his students. He said that he fostered critical conversations to help students understand that their world “is a worthy topic of observation and analysis.”

In the inquiry group, the three participating teachers and Amy met three times for one-hour meetings over one year to discuss how to foster critical conversations in high school English classrooms (See Tables 1 and 2 for a description of the group meetings). The first meeting focused on sharing what was meant by critical conversations and developing conversational guidelines linked to the tenets of courageous and brave conversations (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Singleton, 2014). For example, the inquiry group discussed the importance of taking risks, being vulnerable, and leaning into (rather than resisting) feelings of discomfort. During the next three meetings, the inquiry group talked about articles related to critical conversations, such as “Walking the Talk: Examining Race and Privilege in a Ninth-Grade Classroom” by Sassi & Thomas (2008). These readings served as shared anchors for discussion about power and privilege in ELA classrooms, which in turn provided opportunities for building shared understandings about critical theories and pedagogies.

**Table 1.** Scope of data

<b># of inquiry group sessions</b>	3
<b>Length of inquiry group sessions</b>	60–70 min
<b># of interviews</b>	2
<b>Length of interviews</b>	45–60 min
<b># of critical conversations per teacher</b>	3
<b>Length of critical conversations</b>	15–45 min

Next, each teacher in the group shared and discussed transcribed classroom conversations. To do that, each teacher recorded three discussions (approximately 15–45 min in length), over the course of one year, using an audio recorder. One week before each meeting, Amy had the discussions transcribed and emailed them to the group. To prepare for the inquiry group meeting, Amy asked the teachers to take note of three things in each teacher's transcript, including their own. First, the teachers were asked the following: What worked? What are the areas of improvement? Second, to analyze the content of the talk, the teachers used an initial version of a chart on characteristics of critical conversations (Fig. 1) to take note of when these characteristics did or did not occur in the classroom. For example, teachers were asked to reflect on the following question: In what ways are multiple perspectives being shared? Do students discuss the ways in



**Table 2.** Inquiry group analysis snapshot.

	<b>Group Discussion One</b>	<b>Group Discussion Two</b>	<b>Group Discussion Three</b>
<b>Length of meeting</b>	1:10	1:02	1:09
<b>Number of participants</b>	4	4	4
<b>Number of turns</b>	133	187	149
<b>Kinds of silences</b>	Privileged: 3 Veiled: 2 Indirect: 4	Privileged 7 Veiled 3 Indirect: 6	Privileged 3 Veiled 2 Indirect: 2
<b>How those silences functioned</b>	<p><i>Privileged</i> Circulated race evasive dialogue that functioned to “diminish, deny, and evade the saliency of race” and “defend and buttress white privilege and hegemonic whiteness” (Jupp et al., 2019, p. 5).</p> <p><i>Veiled</i> (1) did not directly address Roger for his race-evasive discourses; (2) subversively shut down Roger taking up too much space in the meeting as a white male; and (3) subversively put the labor of disrupting Roger on the teachers of color.</p> <p><i>Indirect</i> Disrupted race-evasive discourses and highlighted race-visible teaching and learning.</p>	<p><i>Privileged</i> Circulated race evasive dialogue that functioned to “diminish, deny, and evade the saliency of race” and “defend and buttress white privilege and hegemonic whiteness” (Jupp et al., 2019, p. 5).</p> <p><i>Veiled</i> (1) did not directly address Roger for his race-evasive discourses; (2) subversively shut down Roger taking up too much space in the meeting as a white male; and (3) subversively put the labor of disrupting Roger on the teachers of color.</p> <p><i>Indirect</i> Disrupted race-evasive discourses and highlighted race-visible teaching and learning.</p>	<p><i>Privileged</i> Circulated race evasive dialogue that functioned to “diminish, deny, and evade the saliency of race” and “defend and buttress white privilege and hegemonic whiteness” (Jupp et al., 2019, p. 5).</p> <p><i>Veiled</i> (1) did not directly address Roger for his race-evasive discourses; (2) subversively shut down Roger taking up too much space in the meeting as a white male; and (3) subversively put the labor of disrupting Roger on the teachers of color.</p> <p><i>Indirect</i> Disrupted race-evasive discourses and highlighted race-visible teaching and learning.</p>

which oppression and prejudice are systemic, rather than individual, problems? If not, what can we do to help them? Third, the teachers were asked to examine how interactional patterns occurred in the transcript. For example, they were instructed to take note of who did the most talking (evidence of perceived privilege or lack thereof), the kinds of questions being asked, and/or if uptake occurred. During each inquiry group meeting, 15–20 min were spent discussing one transcript per teacher. The group followed the feedback protocol described earlier in the paper and Amy played the role of facilitator during each group meeting.

*Characteristics of Critical Conversations*

<b>Characteristics of racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism</b>	<b>Characteristics of critical conversations</b>
Essentializing race, class, gender, or sexual orientation	Challenging undemocratic practices
Denying that race, class, gender, or sexual orientation matters (e.g., colorblindness)	Hearing and appreciating diverse or unfamiliar experiences and multiple perspectives
Viewing racism, feminism, classism, or heterosexism outdated	Recognizing how to ask questions related to identity markers
Treating racism, feminism, classism, or heterosexism as extreme actions or words	Understanding that identities are learned
Considering racism, feminism, classism, or heterosexism as personal	Engaging in difficult and awkward talk
Regarding racism, feminism, classism, and heterosexism, within the myth of individualism	Recognizing identities as a structural rather than individual problem
	Disrupting commonplace notions

**Fig. 1.** Characteristics of critical conversations

Modified from Bolgatz, J. (2005). *Talking race in the classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

2.2. Researchers’ positionality

Vetter and Schieble (2019); Schieble et al. (2020) are teacher educators at two different research institutions. Amy and Melissa have backgrounds as high school English teachers. Amy is a white female who is a professor in English education at a university in the Southeast. Melissa is a white female who is a professor in English education at a university in the Northeast at the time of this study. Kahdeidra is a Black female who was a doctoral student in Urban Education at a university in the Northeast. Kahdeidra joined the project as a research assistant in year two, after the inquiry group in the Southeast concluded.

When Amy and Melissa designed the research project and inquiry group structure, they engaged in critical self-reflection about their positions as white, female teacher educators and researchers. They became interested in research on critical conversations because they wanted to become better at facilitating dialogue in their respective teacher education courses. They also wanted to better prepare preservice teachers to become confident facilitators of critical conversations when they enter the classroom. With that in mind, Amy led this group of Southeastern teachers. She situated herself as a teacher, learner, and participating member of the teacher inquiry group by recording, transcribing, and analyzing her own conversations that were shared with the group. In these discussions, she talked explicitly about how her social identities shaped the interactions and how she might make improvements in the future. In particular, she pointed out moments in those conversations when she did not, for example, challenge

undemocratic practices, such as not following up on conversations about how to respond to racialized jokes and name-calling in informal spaces of school (Vetter & Schieble, 2019). It is with this intention (learning more about how to teach teachers how to foster critical conversations) that she engaged in this study. Melissa served as a thought partner during analysis of this data set.

Kahdeidra came to the research study with a background in African and African American Studies, pedagogy in teaching adolescents with disabilities, critical sociolinguistics, and English Composition and an interest in learning more about critical conversations. For this study (the Southeastern inquiry group), she served as a thought partner during data analysis. For the larger study, she collected and analyzed data with our Northeastern inquiry group.

For Amy, engaging in explicit inquiry of her own discourse meant that she had to make herself vulnerable with her two colleagues. This was uncomfortable and exposing, but Amy understood that this was the kind of work that she needed to do in order to become better at fostering critical conversations with her pre and inservice teachers. In fact, she was the one that brought these silences to the attention of her colleagues and requested that they engage in this analysis together. All three authors had been working together on writing projects and analysis related to critical conversations for several years, so they had developed trusting relationships with each other. Despite that trust, power relations shaped the experiences. For example, Melissa tried to balance being a critical friend and yet also align with DiAngelo's (2018) recommendation that white people provide honest feedback that holds other white people accountable. Kahdeidra approached the process from her dual positionalities as a graduate student apprentice and a priestess in an African diasporic religion; because she primarily enters academic spaces from this latter perspective as a faith leader, she was most invested in listening with compassion for the internal tensions that presented and finding ways to address ambivalence towards racism that allowed a pathway for both accountability and empowerment.

### 2.3. Data collection

Data sources for this study included (a) three audio-recorded inquiry group conversations (60 min each), (b) six audio-recorded interviews with the three teachers (two per teacher) (60 min), (c) nine audio recorded and transcribed critical conversations from teachers' classrooms (three per teacher), and (d) field notes taken by the Amy (Table 1). Most analysis for this study focused on the three transcribed inquiry group conversations. After the inquiry group meetings, Amy had the recordings transcribed, reviewed them, and took notes about message units that she noticed in relation to the content (what were the teachers saying about critical conversations) and to the process (how were the teachers talking about critical conversations). Specifically, Amy took notes related to the content and process of the conversation as described earlier. The interviews, transcribed classroom conversations, and field notes were used to confirm or disconfirm that analysis.

### 2.4. Data analysis

Data analysis occurred in three phases. See Table 2 for a snapshot of analysis. In phase one, Amy explored the following question: What silences occurred in an inquiry group focused on fostering critical conversations in high school English classrooms? To do so, she read and re-read transcripts from her inquiry group meetings and coded for moments of silence. For coding, she drew from the definition of silence as the intentional and/or unintentional absence of a topic and/or uptake of a topic during critical conversations. Silence, then, was not recognized as a pause of a certain time.

Instead, silence was recognized as a moment when, for example, Amy did not take up the opportunity to engage in aspects of critical conversations. In line with a definition of silence as active, Amy also asked: What is silenced? Who is silenced? For example, several times in the inquiry group meeting Roger wondered if his race, gender and age impacted classroom discussions, which Amy noted was an opportunity for critical self-reflection. Amy, however, did not address that re-occurring question. Thus, she made a note of silence and examined that silence as an action that maintained race-evasiveness. Amy looked across interviews, classroom transcripts, and group transcripts to confirm or disconfirm interpretations.

In phase two, Amy explored the following additional research question: How did these silences function? For analysis, she drew on tools of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 2004). CDA approaches emphasize the links between everyday language-in-use (micro) with macro-level ideas about power and inequality to deconstruct and reconstruct the social world. Thus, critical discourse analysts describe, interpret, and explain how meaning, social identities, and larger societal narratives are distributed across modes such as language. Discourse practices operate on the following three 'levels' simultaneously: textual, ideational, and interpersonal (Halliday, 2014). The textual level links complex ideas together into cohesive waves of information. The ideational focuses on talk about people and places, their actions and relationships, and the times or circumstances in which they occur. The interpersonal focuses on how language enables individuals to cooperate, form bonds, negotiate, ask for things, and instruct. By looking at and across the different levels individuals use and how they use them, analysts can better understand how language helps individuals function in a particular context and moment. By examining language, educators can understand, uncover, and transform conditions of inequality. CDA also opens up thinking and dialogue about what is possible and reconstructive (Luke, 2004; Rogers, 2018; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Thus, CDA was used to make sense of the kinds of silences that occurred and how those silences functioned within these inquiry group discussions (Fairclough, 1995).

Specifically, Amy drew from a coding chart that brings together literature about race and forms and functions of talk, created by Rogers and Mosley (2006), and added to those codes as she engaged in analysis, specifically related to other identity markers (Appendix A). She slightly modified this chart by adding more research to the sections. For example, in the column focused on style, she added Borsheim-Black's (2015) research that illustrated how white teachers using "we" pronouns can subtly function to exclude children of color who do not share in the same experience. In the same column, she added directness/indirectness as described by Morgan et al. (1996) and Morgan (2010). Then, she charted the patterns of genre, discourse and style for each participant in the inquiry group and classroom transcripts (Fairclough, 1995). Genre refers to ways of interacting, which includes ways that talk hangs together through aspects of language, such as re-voicing, turn-taking structures, and/or veiledness conventions. Discourse, or ways of representing, include clusters of themes, ideas, and/or ideologies. In other words, language-in-use (discourse) represents how individuals enact and recognize socially and historically significant identities. For example, comments about how a person's race does not impact teaching illustrates discourses of individualism that reinforce the belief that we are all unique individuals that are not shaped by our identity markers (e.g., race, gender, etc.). Finally, style or ways of being, represent interpersonal choices, such as veiledness conventions, passive or active construction, absence of talk, cognitive or affective statements, use of pronoun (e.g., favor third over first), and marked/unmarked categories. Style oftentimes tells us about how a person positions themselves

(e.g., as a facilitator) during the interaction. Next, she used this information and Mazzei's five categories of silences to answer how those silences functioned. See Table 3 for an example.

**Table 3.** Example of critical discourse analysis.

<b>Transcript</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>Discourse</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Silence</b>
It's not like I'm just some old white guy. I have a strong history in progressivism and liberalism. This isn't Freedom Writers	Resistance to the idea that his whiteness impacts classroom interactions.	Myths of individualism, hard work, and meritocracy AND white liberalism	Active construction of sentences and affective responses that includes defensiveness and authority.	Privileged silence that functioned to circulate race-evasive discourses related to white liberalism.

After these two phases of data analysis, Amy noted that she wanted support with the reflexive analysis and invited Melissa and Kahdeidra as thought partners. For example, Amy shared data excerpts and her coding chart with Melissa and Kahdeidra for feedback. Melissa and Kahdeidra posed critical questions and helped sharpen or provide different perspectives on Amy's analyses of the inquiry group interactions. For readability, we hereafter use the pronoun "we" to refer to our author team and reference the collaborative work that we did to analyze the data together.

### 3. Findings

Critical discourse analysis and reflexive analysis of the inquiry group discussions illuminated the following kinds of silences in conjunction with moments of race-evasive discourse: (a) privileged, (b) veiled, and (c) indirectness. Findings show that patterns of privileged and veiled silence functioned to sustain, and indirect silence functioned to disrupt, race-evasive discourses during the inquiry group meetings. We examine those silences and illustrate how they functioned through analysis of moments from two inquiry group meeting transcripts. First, we begin with a description of the meeting to provide context. Next we share the portion of the transcript that we discuss in this article. We follow with our analysis of the patterns of silences that occurred and how those silences functioned in the transcripts.

#### 3.1. Meeting 1: circulating and disrupting race-evasive discourses related to white Liberalism

In the first inquiry group meeting about critical conversations, each of the teachers briefly described the critical conversation that they recorded in their classrooms to provide a summary. Jose described how he used *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* by Peggy McIntosh to foster a dialogue focused on white privilege. Carson recounted how students drew from research and short stories to engage in a discussion about systemic oppression. Both Jose and Carson wanted to do a better job of supporting students to draw on specific evidence from texts and opening opportunities for multiple perspectives without putting anyone "on the spot." Roger described how he attempted to use pop culture to disrupt stereotypes about gender and race with his students. Despite his attempt to do so, Roger found that students did not respond in ways he had hoped. He wondered if students' resistance was tied to their mistrust of his older, white male identity, as stated below:

Roger: When I show them a [music] video, I try to get them to deconstruct the images at work. But they aren't taking the bait. It might be me. Maybe it's because

I'm old. I do not know. It's not like I'm just some old white guy. I have a strong history in progressivism and liberalism. This isn't Freedom Writers. I'll come down to your school and show you what it's all about. I never allowed them to pigeonhole me into that teacher icon.

Amy: What kinds of things do you do in your classroom, Carson and Jose?

Carson: I'm thinking... the way I do it is different. I do chalk talk and gallery walks and I ask them what they think these things mean. What do you think race means? I do less of watch these videos and more like, where are you now and what do you see when you see these images. Then we talk about definitions and then we look at videos and articles.

Amy: [Jose] do you feel like you do something similar?

Jose: Kind of. I really try to gauge where they're at first before we even do anything. At first, we have a conversation and I find out from some surface questions like what is race? What is gender? Sometimes I put them in scenarios - it's interactive.

Below, we describe, analyze, and explain how members engaged in privileged, veiled and indirect silences and how those silences functioned to circulate and disrupt race-evasive discourses.

### 3.1.1. Privileged silence

We noted that Roger engaged in a privileged silence (silences that occur when one ignores something by virtue of his or her sense of importance and social standing), because Roger questioned the validity of the idea that his whiteness shaped classroom interactions. Just like Mazzei's teachers, Roger disregarded the idea that his whiteness shaped classroom interactions because he perceived that he understood oppression ("I have a strong history in progressivism and liberalism"). Specifically, we noted several linguistic features that highlighted how Roger ignored the ways his identities (race, age, and gender) shaped his teaching practices. Throughout his response, Roger used the pronoun "I" and definitive statements ("I have a strong history") to situate himself as an authority in his classroom and also construct his identity as a white liberal rather than a white savior or "bad white" (DiAngelo, 2018). Following up his initial hunch that "it might be me," Roger re-positioned himself as a white liberal through his defensive comment about his "strong history in progressivism and liberalism." This privileged silence functioned to sustain his view of himself as a "good white" and prevented any further critical self-reflection that students were not "taking the bait" because of the actions of their white, male teacher. As Matias and DiAngelo (2013) support, discourses of white liberalism served to defend Roger's moral stance on race and racism and to distance himself from stereotypes he associates with being an older, white man. White people who position themselves as liberals often engage with race to defend their morality rather than challenge their own positions in a racist system (Zamudio & Rios, 2006). Roger then used a definitive statement and repetition of "I never" or "I'm not" to resist and ignore the idea that his race and age shaped the interaction. He also contrasted his classroom to Freedom Writers (a book and movie about a white teacher who works with "at-risk" teens in an L.A. school),

implying that he is different from the white female character in the book who is often criticized for playing the role of a savior to students of color and in poverty.

From our critical discourse analysis, we noted that Roger's privileged silence functioned as a way of circulating race-evasive discourses related to white liberalism that deny the significance of race and gender and the advantages of being white and male. Matias and DiAngelo (2013) note discourses of white liberalism pervasively function to protect white superiority rather than challenge and acknowledge complicity in a racist system. The authors note that white liberals evade explicit talk about race and racism through codes of “the rhetoric of diversity, cultural competency/relevancy, or urban understanding” (p. 10). In framing the discourse to preserve their moral reputations, liberal whites thus maintain control over how much to engage with or challenge racism, such as using language of self-defense (Van Dijk, 1992). Matias and DiAngelo argue the function of language of self-defense “enables defenders to protect their moral character against what they perceive as accusations and attacks while deflecting any recognition of culpability or need of accountability” (p. 10).

### 3.1.2. Veiled silence

In response to Roger's commentary, Amy (the facilitator) pivoted the discussion away from Roger and posed a question to Carson and Jose (“What kinds of things do you do in your classroom, Carson and Jose?”). Amy's reflexive analysis determined Roger's wonderings were an important start to adopting a critical self-reflective stance about his identities and how they shaped classroom discourse. Roger sought feedback from the group, despite some hedging he displayed that functioned to soften his commitment (“It might be me...I do not know”). Amy reflexively saw this, then, as an opportunity in which she could have supported Roger to be more critically self-reflective about owning the way he is afforded privileges as a white, middle-class male, rather than defending his moral character against the dominant narrative of white male privilege and white savior—a point we will return to in the discussion. Thus, we marked this silence as veiled (when an individual ‘veils’ their inability or unwillingness to talk about a topic through moves like deflection), because Amy did not directly take up Roger's question about his whiteness shaping classroom interactions. Instead, she redirected the conversation to ask about Carson and Jose's teaching practices to facilitate critical conversations in their classrooms. Like Mazzei's teachers, Amy was metaphorically silent by being attentive to a slightly different topic, not the specific one offered up by Roger.

Critical discourse analysis, then, revealed how her move also served as a veiled silence that functioned to sustain Roger's understanding of himself as a white liberal rather than challenge and acknowledge his complicity in a racist system. In the moment, unpacking his desire for further feedback on how “it might be me” would have been an important opportunity to learn how to engage more in critical self-reflection and explicitly address why he was struggling with facilitating critical conversations. As we will discuss later, it is important for white people to do this disruptive work with other white people (DiAngelo, 2018).

In her field notes, Amy noted that she made this move for two reasons. First, she wanted to invite multiple perspectives in a conversation in which Roger, the only white male, dominated. Second, she did not want the discussion to be focused on helping Roger unpack his white privilege, so she asked a question that focused on Carson and Jose's teaching practices. With this reflexive analysis, we also see that Amy's veiled silence, in part, functioned to disrupt Roger by taking the spotlight away from Roger and focusing on the teaching practices of Jose and Carson. With that

said, this veiled silence also functioned to put Carson and Jose in the position to educate Roger. Amy also realized that her choice to focus her reflexive analysis on Roger, specifically on how to help Roger become more racially aware while also opening space for Jose and Carson to share their perspectives, recentered whiteness. In other words, in Amy's attempt to become more knowledgeable and practiced in fostering critical conversations with Black, Brown and white participants, she was most attuned with how to navigate race-evasive comments from Roger which could have overshadowed the experiences of Jose and Carson. Thus, Amy's veiled silences functioned in the following ways: (1) did not directly address Roger for his race-evasive discourses; (2) subversively shut down Roger taking up too much space in the meeting as a white male; and (3) subversively put the labor of disrupting Roger on the teachers of color.

### 3.1.3. Indirect silence

In response to Amy's question to help Roger, both Carson and Jose described some teaching practices they used to foster critical conversations related to pop culture. Amy noted their responses as a form of silence called indirectness, which Morgan et al. (1996), defined as conveying intention by means of hinting, circumlocution, or insinuations (e.g., silence, laughter) that can be used to communicate meaning, agency, support, and resistance to normative practices and/or policies and subvert power structures and assert or validate experiences (McGee, 2019). In other words, Carson and Jose also did not directly call out Roger for his race-evasive discourse, which they were not expected or asked to do. Instead, they took up Amy's question about their own teaching practices and indirectly pushed back against the way Roger positioned himself as an authority on racism and sexism with his students. In their responses, both Carson and Jose shared examples ("chalk talk", "show things like videos", "scenarios", "interactive") and questions ("what is race?"; "what is gender?") to illustrate how they used various ways of interaction to first gather an understanding of what students understood about power and privilege and then collectively define what specific words, such as race, mean. In addition, Carson used opposing statements ("the way I do it is different"; "I do less of") to separate his practices from Roger's and illustrate his more student-centered, interactive approach and the humility with which he approaches this work.

Unlike the veiled and privileged silences of Amy and Roger, indirectness functioned to disrupt Roger's talk and instead introduce discourses about the fluidity and social construction of race and gender, cultural humility, and dialogue teaching that emphasized dialogue ("chalk talk", "gallery walks", and "what do you really think these terms mean") and consciousness raising ("what do you think race means?"; "what is gender?"). Such discourses are powerful. Roger certainly learned from the examples that both Carson and Jose shared, as he stated in our last interview, and listed some specific community building strategies (e.g., creative therapy) that he planned to use in the future.

## 3.2. Meeting 2: circulating and disrupting race-evasive discourses related to epistemic oppression

In the second inquiry group meeting, each teacher shared an excerpt from a transcribed critical conversation in their classroom. Everyone had read the transcripts before the meeting, so they were familiar with the content. At this point in the meeting, each person summarized their transcript and provided context for the conversation. Roger went first and described a transcript from his classroom in which he attempted to foster a critical conversation with his students about race and gender in pop music, specifically Rhianna's (2016) song, *Needed Me* (chosen by his students).



Before sharing the inquiry group transcript, we give a brief background about the classroom transcript that he shared since this is what he referred to in the inquiry group conversation and what the group had read before we came to the discussion.

In Roger's classroom conversation, he and his students talked through *Needed Me*, line by line, in an attempt to unpack its meaning. A few times, Roger repeated exact lines from the lyrics, which included n\*\*\*\* and bad b\*\*\*\*. Sam, a student, commented that those words sounded 'weird' coming from his mouth. In response, Roger said, "I know it does because I'm an old white guy, but what does it mean, though?" and "It just sounds funny because we are in school. If you lived next door to me and we were talking then it wouldn't sound funny. We are in a school room. We are just having the same kind of conversation that we would have if you were my neighbor."

In our inquiry group meeting, Roger explained that he wanted to help his students understand how the speaker in the song is dismissive of "the entire princess narrative" and instead situated herself as "a woman in control of her own agency concerning her sexuality and its expression." Below, Roger discussed the classroom conversation by noting that students seemed uncomfortable with him reading the lyrics aloud. The group responded to his comments with similar patterns of silence, both veiled and indirect.

Roger: It's interesting and I think that they aren't used to talking about this kind of stuff in the classroom. Because in the Rhianna song, I would say, well, what do you mean about a bad b\*\*\*\* and they would all start laughing and I would say, well that's the lyrics of the song, you know.

Amy: Okay. Interesting. Carson, what about you?

Carson: We were talking about his [Shakespeare's] ideas of deception in the play [Much Ado about Nothing], about gender roles, and then ended up with how people grow from conflict. In a lot of the conversation, we just talked about how in reality Shakespeare did not push that many gender role expectations ... Then we got into some personal stuff [related to gender roles]. I think they connected with the conversation more because I opened up about my own life story. Then they were able to do the same and they were all tearing up. They were more comfortable with opening up and being vulnerable about their experiences with deception and gender roles... I was not expecting a response or anything. I was just saying my truth and that definitely was one of the positive things that helped drive the conversation because they all got serious and was like, "Okay."

During analysis of this excerpt from the second inquiry group transcript, we noted three different kinds of silences (privileged, veiled, and indirectness) that occurred and how those silences functioned. We discuss those below.

### 3.2.1. Privileged silence

We noted that Roger again engaged in a privileged silence because he did not talk about how and why his identity markers shaped the classroom conversation, something that could have helped him think more critically about his classroom discussion. Instead, like Mazzei's teachers, he questioned the idea that his identities did shape the classroom interaction. By using qualifying

language, “I would say, well that's the lyrics of the song, you know” he illustrated his confusion about Sam's statement. He understood that he sounded funny, but he did not realize how reading aloud those words might offend students of color or females in his classroom. By doing this he defended the appropriateness of him, a white, male teacher, repeating the lyrics with two derogatory terms that have been historically used to oppress African Americans and women. Thus, he situated himself as the authority in the conversation and devalued the interpretations of his student that this was “weird.” Lester (2014), a professor of English at Arizona State University who has taught a course on the history of the n-word, describes how there are conflicting views on the use of this word, but that it will “always be tainted with social negativity, no matter the spelling or nuanced pronunciation or the illusion of those who believe that this work can be appropriated as ‘a term of endearment’ to take away its negative sting” (p. 19). As a white, male teacher, unpacking the n-word with youth of color may be met with “political and critical suspicion from some students” (Lester, 2014, p. 10).

Thus, Roger ignored or dismissed the feedback he was receiving from students in the moment about his language use and the broader notion that it is inappropriate to repeat these words as a white male, thus engaging in privileged silence that circulated race-evasive discourses. In other words, he diminished students racialized and gendered identities by dismissing the offensiveness of him, a white, male teacher, repeating the lyrics. By explaining to our group why the “weirdness” is not really weird, Roger privileged his own perspective without acknowledging how the students might feel. This is what philosopher Kristie Dotson (2014) would say is a concrete example of “epistemic oppression” (suggesting that Sam is not adequately knowledgeable about what is weird). In other words, Roger silenced the possibility that his repeating of this language might upset students in the classroom and also ignored the need to engage in further critical self-reflection. He inaccurately perceives the “weirdness” as a result of the context of schooling rather than the context of his uttering these words as a white male in a racist system.

### 3.2.2. Veiled Silence

In response to Roger, Amy (the facilitator) said “interesting” and then asked Carson to describe his transcript. During analysis, we noted Amy's evaluative comment (interesting) and redirection to Carson's transcript as a veiled silence, because she did not directly disrupt the race-evasive discourses in Roger's comment and classroom transcript. Here, Roger attempted to justify the way his race and gender were unduly shaping the classroom conversation which could have been an opportunity to help him question his privileged silence at this time. Like Mazzei's teachers, Amy was metaphorically silent by being attentive to a different topic and moving on to Carson's summary of his transcript, instead of addressing the topic offered up by Roger. Thus, critical discourse analysis revealed how her move served as a veiled silence that functioned to maintain Roger's interpretation of the classroom event through race-evasive discourses. In this moment, Roger shows evidence of needing support with how to reframe a focus from students to himself and a disruptive facilitation move may have provided that support.

In her field notes, Amy noted that she made this move to ensure that Jose and Carson did not feel responsible for helping Roger unpack his privilege and making sure that Jose and Carson had a chance to speak (Roger talked the most during the inquiry group). Amy also noted that she did not have the same background of trust with Roger (he was not her former student) and that she was monitoring time to talk for each transcript (20 min per person). With that reflexive analysis, we see how this veiled silence also functioned to help Roger talk less and listen more (Authors)–

a point we will return to in the discussion. We also see how Amy's veiled silence subversively functioned to put Carson in the position to educate Roger. As stated earlier, Amy realized that by focusing this reflective analysis on how to navigate race-evasive comments from Roger, she recentered whiteness. That focus inevitably took attention away from the experiences of Jose and Carson, the Black and Brown participants in the group. Again, Amy's veiled silences functioned in the following ways: (1) did not directly address Roger for his race-evasive discourses; (2) subversively shut down Roger taking up too much space in the meeting as a white male; and (3) subversively put the labor of disrupting Roger on the teachers of color.

### 3.2.3. Indirect silence

In response to Amy, Carson described the critical conversation that he fostered with his students related to deception and gender roles in *Much Ado about Nothing*. We noted his response as a silence called indirectness, because while Carson did not directly discuss Roger's transcript (which he was not expected or asked to do), he did push back against race-evasive discourses. In his response, he used examples from his classroom (focus on gender roles in Shakespeare, personal story) to illustrate how his personal story fostered stories from his students that helped them build community, practice vulnerability, and better unpack gender roles in society. He situated himself as a teacher who listened to the stories of his students. This description is in opposition to Roger's description that highlights miscommunication and difficulty building relationships in his classroom. Indirectness functioned to circulate discourses related to critical humility (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013), critical pedagogy, and dialogic teaching that emphasized dialogue (personal stories; vulnerability) and consciousness raising (gender roles). Again, these discourses are powerful, and Roger listened and learned from these examples.

## 4. Discussion

In this study, we explored questions about what silences occurred in a teacher inquiry group focused on improving facilitation of critical conversations and how those silences functioned. Such work confirms scholarship on silence by further illustrating how silence is oftentimes used as a form of resistance (DiAngelo, 2018; Michael, 2015) and protection (Carter, 2007; Leonardo & Porter, 2010), and adds to scholarship by illustrating how silence was used as a form of disruption, in some instances. For example, findings show privileged silences, a form of resistance, occurred as Roger attempted to reflect on and analyze power dynamics between himself and his students during critical conversations, for example when his Black and Brown students responded to his talk about race and gender as "weird." Working from an initial critically self-reflective hunch that "it might be me," Roger swiftly moved to blaming his students and ignoring their feedback. Ultimately, he was unable in the moment to think beyond deficit terms about his students and turn a critical gaze onto himself. Thus, his talk supports findings from decades of white teacher identity studies that support that white teachers engage in race evasive dialogue that functions to "diminish, deny, and evade the saliency of race and, therefore, defend and buttress white privilege and hegemonic whiteness" (Jupp et al., 2019, p. 5).

Veiled silences occurred in Amy's uptake in the turns following Roger's privileged silences, which can be viewed as both resistant and disruptive. These veiled silences took the form of deflective questions addressed to Carson and Jose about teaching practice. While reflexive analysis revealed that Amy's intention was to decenter Roger's tendency to dominate the teacher inquiry

group conversations as a white male in a multiracial inquiry group, CDA illustrates how these veiled silences functioned in several ways. Amy's veiled silences occurred as questions ("Okay. Interesting. Carson, what about you?") that pivoted the focus of the discussion from Roger to include Carson and Jose's perspectives. Thus, in one respect veiled silence functioned to open up an interactional context to challenge Rogers' deficit talk about his students, a disruptive move. Yet, Amy's veiled silences also functioned to maintain race-evasive discourse among the white participants as these questions did not explicitly call out Roger for his problematic talk about race and gender, a resistant move. Instead, Amy's veiled silences positioned the work of educating Roger onto the teachers of color in the inquiry group. While Roger did learn from this multiracial dialogue about critical conversations, nevertheless, Amy reflected it should not have been Carson and Jose's responsibility to educate their white colleagues about race (Oluo, 2018).

Amy's veiled silences also functioned as missed opportunities to directly support Roger to engage in critical self-reflection and learn to adopt more humility as a white male when engaged in conversations about racism and sexism. While calling out Roger for his racist and sexist language may have continued to problematically re-center whiteness (making the dialogue about Roger and his whiteness—an issue Amy was trying to negotiate in the moment), this might have been noted by Amy as an area where Roger needed support through individual follow up or work in a white racial affinity group to unpack this issue without placing the emotional labor on people of color (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Carson and Jose both engaged in indirectness as a protective and disruptive form of silence in response to occurrences of veiled and privileged silence. In a sense, indirectness allowed Carson and Jose to share counter perspectives without directly addressing the race-evasive discourse. Indirectness also functioned subversively to disrupt rather than maintain race-evasive dialogue. For example, rather than calling out Roger, Carson indirectly drew attention to his student-centered teaching practices and explicitly named how he facilitated dialogue about race by emphasizing race as a social construct that takes on nuanced meaning amongst his students ("I do chalk talk and gallery walks and I ask them what they think these things mean. What do you think race means?"). Thus, indirect silences functioned differently than privileged and veiled silences by disrupting particular perspectives and protecting Jose and Carson from direct confrontation. Through these indirect silences, Carson and Jose brought race-evasive dialogue into contact with race-visible teaching and learning, which Jupp et al. (2019) define as "teachers' critical deployment of identity in their routine teaching practices that recognizes and uses the potentials of race, class, culture, language, ethnicity" (p. 5) and other identity markers with students in classrooms.

One limitation of the study is that this reflexive analysis was carried out a year after data collection and we were unable to member check our interpretations with Roger, Carson, and Jose. Yet, we see value in advancing these findings as they are supported by related research (Jupp et al., 2019; Mazzei, 2003; 2007), and this analysis has supported us as facilitators of teacher inquiry groups, teacher educators, and researchers to be more cognizant of the dynamics of multiracial teacher dialogue about classroom discourse and power. Engaging in this research has helped us be more metacognitive and interactionally aware (Rex & Schiller, 2009) of silences as they occur in classroom dialogue and how they function. In particular, Amy and Melissa have learned extensively about the insidious ways white facilitators of teacher inquiry groups maintain race-evasive dialogue.

With that said, Amy is aware that she chose to focus this reflexive analysis on aspects of the transcript that inevitably re-centered whiteness. Scholarship on white emotionality and transformation have taken up a disproportionate amount of space in racial justice work (DiAngelo,

2018; Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, and Galindo, 2014; Matisa, 2016). In other words, anti-racism oftentimes focuses on white transformation and focuses less on the experiences of BIPOC educators (hooks, 1995). We recognize, then, that Amy would have benefitted from a closer examination of the experiences of Jose and Carson within the inquiry group. Matias et al. (2014) argues, however, for the importance of teaching about whiteness in order to support pre and inservice teachers who are dedicated to anti-racism and disrupting the complicity in hegemonic whiteness. They argue that such education has the power to transform existing inequities.

In this study, we examined the dialogue of all participants in the group. Still, the focus remained on Roger and how a white facilitator used such reflexive analysis to learn more about how to navigate his race-evasive discourse. We remained focused on this topic because we wanted to offer other educators a tool - analyzing for silences in transcribed critical conversations - as a way to support critical self-reflection and sustain racial awareness. Such a tool helped Amy uncover how she engaged in veiled silences that sustained race evasive discourse and to think through better ways to disrupt those discourses in the future. We believe a tool like this could help other educators, particularly white educators, continue to do the work of racial awareness, including dismantling whiteness, when fostering critical conversations.

We argue that using silence as an analytic tool is useful. We wonder, however, if the term silence loses its meaning when given such a broad definition by scholars. As mentioned in our literature review, the term silence has been used to describe literal silence, being silenced, silencing another, being ignored, and/or an active evasion of a topic (Carter, 2007; Mazzei, 2007). One of the benefits of using the term silence, is that it asked us to think about what was missing in the conversation. The term also pushed us to think about what individuals do in order to remain silent about a topic (e.g., redirect, hedge, etc.). With that said, we see the need for more differentiation between these silences. Critical work often pushes individuals to name specific ideologies, such as white privilege, in order to deconstruct and reconstruct those perspectives. In the future, critical work on silence would benefit from being more specific about the naming of what is occurring in the silencing and silenced. For example, the term evasion, a more active term, specifically illustrates moments when white participants make a statement that avoids directly dealing with topics of race in a discussion.

## **5. Implications**

In our work on critical conversations, we learned about the importance of taking on a critical learner stance (Schieble et al., 2020). Our intention with this stance is to become more knowledgeable about histories of oppression and to use that knowledge during critical conversations to illuminate systemic oppression from an interactional viewpoint. This work entails vulnerability, courage, compassion, forgiveness, transparency, and solidarity. As facilitators of these inquiry groups we practiced taking on a critical learner stance. Having critical friends as thought partners to ask challenging questions and provide multiple perspectives played an imperative role in this work. In particular, this analysis helped us think more about how we, as facilitators of critical dialogue, can handle such race-evasive discourses in groups with racially diverse members in humanizing ways, as discussed below.

First, we learned that the discursive moves we make are dependent on the individuals and context of the dialogue. As stated, when race-evasive discourses occurred, Amy wanted to directly address the comments and also wanted to make sure the conversation was not monopolized by topics of whiteness. As a result, she asked herself: When an individual makes sexist and race-

evasive comments, do I take them up within that moment? If so, do I risk dominating the discussion with white perspectives and feelings? If I do not, am I continuing to circulate race-evasive discourses? These are complex questions that are hard to negotiate in the moment of face-to-face dialogue. In addition, Amy also recognizes that her race and gender inevitably shaped these interactions and the community they built. For example, as a white facilitator, she recognized that Jose and Carson may not be comfortable sharing how they felt about the group conversations for fear that she may not understand. Thus, we note that individual follow ups or racial affinity group work could support the individual needs of group members. For example, a racial affinity group focused on unpacking white privilege could have supported Roger and also avoided placing the burden of educating Roger about his whiteness on the people of color in the group. Other strategies might include opportunities for asynchronous dialogue, such as a discussion forum, or dialogue journals that could help individuals to be more critically self-reflective without re-centering whiteness in group discussions. Certainly, more research is needed to examine how multiracial groups engage in critical conversations and how facilitators foster such discussions.

Second, we recognized that this inquiry group would have benefitted from a more structured approach to discourse analysis. The open-ended feedback structure that the group used provided choice and allowed the teachers to provide initial direction based on a deep knowledge of their own classroom. It did not, however, support teachers to explicitly name the ways that discourses about race and racism (DiAngelo, 2018) for example, were present in the transcript of talk and how they functioned. A more structured approach to transcript analysis could provide guidance to help participants dig deep with critical issues and disrupt the hegemonic order preserved by privileged and veiled silences. More research is needed to unpack how inquiry group facilitators or university-based teacher educators might use CDA with teachers to help them make sense of critical dialogue in their classrooms (Wetzel & Rogers, 2013).

One recommendation we have for facilitators, coaches, school leaders or teacher educators doing this work is to engage in transcript analysis after each inquiry group meeting to analyze silences and their function and to strategize ways to intervene in inequitable practices. For example, as facilitators reviewing our inquiry group transcripts, we strategized ways to engage in more interventionist practices to disrupt rather than perpetuate inequities in doing this work (Schieble et al., 2020). We asked ourselves: What could we have said to disrupt these veiled and privileged silences in our inquiry group? By doing this, we named and noticed specific questions and/or connections that we could have contributed to “unsilence” the critical topics that Roger brought up to the group. In relation to the section about circulating discourses of white liberalism, we could have asked the group to return to Roger's concern about his race and class shaping engagement in the classroom discussions by asking: Talk more about what you mean by “It's not like I'm just some old white guy. I got a strong history and tradition of progressivism and liberalism and I do not try to lay it on them in that.” Or maybe we could have asked him what he meant by not allowing students to pigeonhole him into that Freedom Writers persona. These talk moves would have disrupted the idea that we are each unique individuals who are not subject to issues of power and privilege. We also could have made a connection by telling a personal story about our own struggles to build trust and make connections with students and/or how past educators have dealt with those experiences, as well. This talk move could have helped Roger see another perspective and imagine new ways of building relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Overall, facilitators and educators would benefit from asking the following questions as they examine a transcript: (a) where do silences exist?; (b) what is being silenced?; (c) who is silencing others?; (d) who is silenced?; and (e) how is the silence functioning? As a

reflexive exercise, educators can also ask: (a) why did these silences occur?; (b) should these silences have been disrupted? Why or why not; and (c) what could I (the facilitator) do next time?

Finally, we discussed how, for future groups, we would more explicitly discuss the role of silence in critical conversations. That discussion would include silence as a form of resistance, protection, and respect (Carter, 2007), which could help members of an inquiry group think more critically about why they are choosing not to talk. This means inviting everyone to discuss during a critical conversation and inviting participants to practice strategic silence (DiAngelo, 2012) so that the focus is not only on white perspectives and feelings.

Silence is complicated. This study raised questions about how we as researchers come to know the reasons why silences exist in critical conversations. Researchers would benefit from learning more about silences that occur within educational spaces, both with teachers and with students. Such work would help educators answer questions such as: How can we carefully break through silences during critical conversations? How do we remain brave in a discussion about race and prejudice in order to foster the transformations needed for social justice and equity in the classroom? When are silences needed?

**Appendix A.** Noticing and naming talk about identity markers: forms and functions

<b>Genres (“ways of interacting” verbal resources)</b> (McIntyre, 1997; Smitherman & van Dijk, 1998)	<b>Discourses (“ways of representing” verbal resources)</b> (Chubbuck, 2004; Howard, 1999; McIntyre, 1997)	<b>Styles (“ways of being” verbal resources)</b> (Fairclough, 1992)
Interruptions	Exception to the rules	Lack of using I voice - favor 3rd versus 1st
Humor	“We” versus “them”	Distancing language
Resistance	Reverse discrimination	Politeness conventions
Metaphors	Difference from the “other”	Directness/indirectness (*Morgan, 1996; 2002; Tannen, 1990; Coates & Cameron, 1988)
Overlapping talk	Privileging White feelings about racism over people of color's feelings about racism	Use of research studies to back positions - intellectual or academic talk
Changing the topic	Locating racism as personal deviance rather than institutionally sanctioned and reproduced	passive/active construction of sentences
Rhetorical questions	Myths of individualism, hard work, and meritocracy	Nominalizations - turn verbs into nouns
Open-ended questions	The rush to complicity - the issue is class, not race	Not naming race, Whiteness, antiracism or Whiteness
Evading questions	Philosophy of education - high expectations, equal treatment	Absence of talk
Avoiding words	Colorblindness	Marked and unmarked terms
*False starts ( <a href="#">Haviland, 2008</a> )	Blaming or not taking responsibility	Qualifying language
Dismissing counter arguments	Maintaining status quo	cognitive/affective statements
Staying on topic	Equating ageism with racism	Affective responses - feeling guilty
Drawing on intertextual resources to support arguments	Activism as martyrdom	Modalities
Repetition	Myth that separate can be equal	*Using pronouns that subtly function to exclude children of color who not share in the same experience ( <a href="#">Borsheim-Black, 2015</a> )
Truncated speech	Group identification	
Consensus	Establishing a White viewpoint	
Statements moving into questions in a single turn	Resolving issues of race by minimizing race to a discussion of color	
Questioning for clarification	Positioning color before the person	
Co-construction	Naming racism as institutional and pervasive rather than as personal deviation	
Making a counter point	*Viewing racism, feminism, classism, or heterosexism outdated	
*Questioning language use to make familiar language choices strange	*Treating racism, feminism, classism, or heterosexism as extreme actions or words	
	*White liberalism ( <a href="#">Matias &amp; DiAngelo, 2013</a> )	

Modified from: Rogers, R., & Mosley, M. (2006). Racial literacy in a second-grade classroom: Critical race theory, Whiteness studies, and literacy research. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41(4), 462–495.

NOTE: An asterik indicates the modifications we made to the chart.



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