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Exploring Community College Practitioners' Cultivation and Praxis of Antiracist and Asset-Based Approaches to Education: A Phenomenological Study

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EXPLORING COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRACTITIONERS’ CULTIVATION AND PRAXIS OF ANTIRACIST AND ASSET-BASED APPROACHES TO EDUCATION:
A PHENOMENOLICAL STUDY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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BY

ESTER U. SIHTE

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For my family, and for the students who have inspired me.
PREFACE

In my experience as a student of higher education, I have always been interested in finding the bridges between research and practice. Research comes most alive to me when I can utilize it to understand phenomena or dynamics that I have experienced or witnessed prior in my personal and professional experience. This dissertation is a deeply meaningful culmination of (a) what I have learned in my coursework, (b) what I have reflected upon in my practitioner-based work with students, and (c) my family and my story.

When I was young, my family and I immigrated to the U.S. after my father obtained a scholarship through the Indonesian government to advance his studies in economics. A number of years after my family and I immigrated, my parents applied for “green cards” through a lottery system, and my family and I were the recipients of these. My parents decided to keep our family here in the U.S. to give what they considered the best opportunities for my brother and me.

Shortly thereafter—unable to use his highly specialized graduate education and carrying a heavy accent—my father was turned away from basic, entry-level positions and subsequently returned to school to pursue new vocational avenues. He attended two different community colleges to pursue a nursing degree, which could lead to a high likelihood of well-paying jobs in Washington State. Throughout his schooling experience, I witnessed my father struggle emotionally; though he did not share all the details of his experiences, I was able to surmise that the community college settings in which he pursued his occupational training were neither friendly nor validating, even with all of the intellect and academic capital he possessed.
Fast forward to six years later: I worked in TRiO Student Support Services at a community college near my hometown of Seattle, and students shared with me dynamics of their experiences at the college (and the world at large) similar to those that my father shared with me years earlier. However, it was not until a position I held as an academic advisor a few years later that I began to wonder if there were some disturbing and similar dynamics that many low-income students of color experienced at the community college that seemed at times dehumanizing and oppressive. I observed cultures, practices, and structures that seemed to not only make it difficult for many students to accomplish their goals but also did not acknowledge their having assets—as being fully human.

In reflecting upon my work as an academic affairs practitioner at a community college, I have come to believe that my engagement with praxis (though I did not fully know it at the time) shifted how I worked with many of the students with whom I came into contact. In the past, I had unknowingly held a somewhat deficit-based framework in my work with students from marginalized backgrounds, based on my own appropriation of oppression throughout probably most of my lifetime. However, through exposure to theories like Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) and reflection upon my professional and life experiences, I was prompted to adopt a more asset-based and multicultural framework in my educational practice. Consequently, I believe this transformation allowed me to serve as a practitioner who validated students of color and other marginalized student groups.

Upon being in the Ph.D. program at Loyola, I have continued to engage in a praxis of reflection and action: reflection in the sense that I want to make meaning and sense of what I have experienced and seen in my past—through exploring other educators’ stories and experiences—and action in the sense that I want to be a part of cultivating organizational and
meaningful change. I see myself working in or with community colleges someday, and so what I hope to learn now directly relates to the communities and people to whom I still feel very connected.
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ABSTRACT

Community colleges comprise a robust and complex sector of U.S. higher education, serving large numbers of students of color and other historically underrepresented groups. There is a dearth of literature on how antiracist and asset-based approaches to education can be utilized to promote student success and racial justice. Using an inductive, phenomenological approach, this study utilized data from interviews with a purposive sample of community college practitioner-educators (faculty, staff, and administrators) who invested in racial justice praxis—reflection and action—to explore (a) how their cognitive frames, abilities, and interest in racial justice were cultivated, and (b) what this praxis looks like. This study uncovers the number of ways in which the personal, educational, and organizational realms of practitioner-educators’ lives interacted to influence their praxis. Findings also reveal how practitioner-educators’ praxes are contextualized within institutional contexts and dynamics. Finally, this dissertation discusses implications for research, teaching, practice, and policy in higher education and community colleges in particular.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Community colleges comprise a large sector of higher education, spanning 1,108 total institutions and enrolling 45% of all U.S. undergraduates (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016). They have been called “the people’s college” (Stern, 2010) in large part because of their open-access structure and affordability and serve as important sites of education and means of upward social and economic mobility among historically marginalized students, who might not otherwise be granted seats in other segments of higher education. Different than most four-year public or non-profit institutions, roughly half of students at community colleges are people of color, 36% are first-generation college students, and the average age is 28 years. Additionally, 17% are single parents and 62% are part-time students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016). In terms of racial makeup, a larger percentage of Latinx\textsuperscript{1} undergraduates (56%) and Black undergraduates (44%) were enrolled in community colleges than White undergraduates (39%) (figures were not available for American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students; Ma & Baum, 2016). It is also noteworthy that since the mid-1990s, 82% of new White enrollments have been at the 468 most selective institutions in the U.S., while 72% of new Latinx enrollment and 68% of new

\textsuperscript{1} The term Latinx is utilized in this dissertation as a gender-neutral way of referring to people of Latin American descent.
African-American enrollment have been at two-year and four-year open-access schools (Carnevale & Stohl, 2013).

While functioning as open-access and highly diverse institutions, barometers of student success in terms of retention, completion, and/or transfer to four-year baccalaureate granting institutions have nonetheless suggested limited success (Dougherty, 1998; Long, 2016a; Munsch, Velazquez, & Kowpak, 2014). For example, the American Association of Community Colleges (2012) documented that within six years, less than half (46%) of students who entered community colleges with the goal of earning a degree or certificate had attained that goal, had transferred to a baccalaureate institution, or were still enrolled. They further found that these rates were lower among Black, Latinx, Native American and low-income students. Recent data specify that among students who started at two-year public institutions, White students were far more likely to graduate with a degree or certificate (45% completion rate) after six years than Black or Latinx students (25.8 and 33.0 percent, respectively) (Shapiro et al., 2017). Notably, one out of three students of color who enroll in community colleges drop out within a few months of having initially matriculated (Long, 2016a). The aforementioned evidence suggests that, while serving critical roles, community colleges may be places in which “access is a necessary but not sufficient condition for achieving a robust and democratic system of higher education” and in which “what [students] encounter is not always hospitable, and doesn’t help [them] find [their] ways and settle in” (Rose, 2012, p. 143).

Much of the literature has attributed students’ likelihood of educational success to categorical or quantifiable background characteristics of individual students, such as race, class, and academic preparedness. For example, some quantitative research on race being a factor of post-secondary academic success at these institutions has attributed lower levels of academic
preparation to unequal primary and secondary schooling conditions (e.g., Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Wang, 2012). Certainly, there is importance in examining structural inequalities that exist in the lives of students before and while they attend college, such as the ramifications of having unequally resourced K-12 systems, and impeding external factors (e.g., experiencing economic poverty) that impact students and their educational experiences and trajectories, or through using such frameworks as a social capital theory lens (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Well-meaning scholars and practitioners may recognize these and other inequitable circumstances that students of color and other marginalized groups may well have faced prior to college. Although such considerations seem benign or even beneficent, such a model on its own is problematic, insomuch as practitioners can assume stagnancy in students’ capacities and also minimize the impact that institutions can have (White, 2016). In other words, mainstream research has offered important, yet limited, perspectives that may nullify the responsibilities of institutions to promoting student learning and success as well as the capacities of students of students of color and other marginalized groups to succeed given adequate support and resources.

Solely taking on an individual-level approach to understanding student success can also be problematic inasmuch as they can disguise deficit-oriented and culturally-biased assumptions suggesting that most educational failures stem from cultural deficits and deviations from historically White, upper-middle class norms as pointed out by several scholars (Bensimon, 2005; Harper, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Museus, 2014; Yosso, 2005). With a lens undergirded by White hegemony, an educator might believe that the students, or the communities (namely those of color) from which they come, need to assimilate to White, upper-
middle class norms in order for students to be able to succeed and for educators to be able to educate them.

Indeed, there has been scholarship that illuminates the notion that institutional dynamics (that is, what happens once students get to community colleges) play equally as important, if not more important, of a role in students’ experiences and likelihood of succeeding as do pre-college characteristics (e.g., Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2009; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen & Person, 2006). In previous decades, well-cited scholars across surmised that the educational stratification that took place in higher education was a manifestation of institutional agents’ perceptions of the “natural order” and inferior abilities of poor students (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Clark, 1960). This research also posed that community colleges have historically exhibited a “cooling out” function, whereby informal educational practices employed by institutional agents have lowered the educational aspirations of students who come disproportionately from lower-income backgrounds and who are deemed as having educational deficiencies. From the early years of community colleges, which saw the growing need and demand for higher education that four-year private institutions could not (or would not) absorb (Thelin, 2011), the student population —those who had less social and economic capital than students at four-year institutions—were seen as less capable than their more affluent counterparts of achieving academic success. Scholars have argued that this dynamic still exists in educational spaces in community colleges in the present era (e.g., Rose, 2012). White hegemony and culturally biased lenses continue to have a powerful—even if not blatantly oppressive— influence on multiple facets of present-day educational settings, particularly at community colleges (Jain, 2010; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996).
Building on the paradigm that institutions have an influence on student success, recent empirical literature (e.g., Calcagno, Bailey, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Nitecki, 2011; Price & Tovar, 2014) has illuminated institutional dynamics at community colleges that promote student success (as described in Chapter 2). One important strand of research, for example, explores how underrepresented student populations can succeed with academic and interpersonal validation by key individuals at the institution (Rendón, 1994). The construct of validation refers to the intentional and proactive affirmation of students by institutional agents in addressing their identities as capable learners and valuable members of the college learning community, as well as demonstrated interest in students’ social adjustment and personal development (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). In Rendón's (1994) original study and in years since, validation has been positively attributed to academic self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and ultimately student persistence (Acevedo-Gil, Santos, Alonso, & Solórzano, 2015; Barnett, 2011; Hurtado, Cuellar & Guillermo-Wann, 2011; Schuetz, 2008; Suarez, 2003).

Similarly, research that names the potential for staff and faculty to be effective institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) or empowerment agents (Pendakur, 2010) also highlight more critical paradigms being used to understand how students with marginalized identities can succeed within higher education. Pendakur (2010) and Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011), for example, emphasized the influence of those who help students of color navigate and succeed in the midst of oftentimes oppressive dynamics in education, and thus broker and counter the established and hierarchical social structures. Further, Bensimon (2007) highlighted higher education staff and faculty’s ability to craft and harness their funds of knowledge—their beliefs, attitudes, understanding, and practices—to play integral roles in students’ navigation of and experiences in higher education, and to engage in equity-minded practices. In this light, she
asserted that scholars cannot think of student success and the factors that contribute to it apart from students’ interactions and relationships with practitioners at colleges and universities.

Bensimon (2005) also stressed the importance of examining institutional actors’ cognitive frames, which inform their educational practice in pivotal ways:

Individuals—the ways in which they teach, think students learn, and connect with students, and the assumptions they make about students based on their race or ethnicity—can create the problem of unequal outcomes. Such individuals, if placed in situations where they learn the ways in which their own thinking creates or accentuates inequities, can also learn new ways of thinking that are more equity-minded. Individually and collectively, campus members can be the creators of the conditions that result in unequal or equitable outcomes. (p. 101)

The engagement of cultural and demographic diversity in higher education by scholars and practitioners has been given a number of names, including: inclusive excellence (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2005), multicultural competence (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004), the educational benefits of diversity (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002), among others. However, above and beyond naming diversity as a positive asset that needs to be cultivated and nurtured, a number of authors have also explicitly pointed out the history of social injustice, inequitable policy and power structures and exclusion in education and, thus, the necessity to shift paradigms, policies and practices in education to actually foster equity and social justice for all groups. These bodies of literature have centered on the conceptualizations of multiculturalism and multicultural education (Banks, 1998, 2009; Jackson & Solis, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996), culturally engaging campus environments (Museus, 2014), and more. With albeit different points of emphasis in these frameworks, they
share the position that the marginalization and oppression of socially minoritized peoples continue to unfold in society at large and in educational institutions specifically—and that in order to foster equal outcomes across different groups, individuals and institutions need to foster culturally responsive conditions for them to thrive.

Positing that the ability to foster culturally responsive education relies on humanizing and critical understandings of marginalized student populations, a growing body of literature also identifies and explores the under-recognized assets of students of color (with regard specifically to race, e.g., the abilities, potentials, and knowledges that they bring with them to college), as well as the role that educators should play in understanding their students through asset-based lenses. For example, one conceptual framework that names the assets of students of color is Yosso’s (2005) model of community cultural wealth (CCW). This model centers Critical Race Theory (CRT) to explicate under-recognized yet valuable forms of cultural wealth (e.g., aspirational, familial, resistant capital) that students of color bring with them from their homes and communities into their educational experiences.

CRT-centered and -related research of the last 15 years has named both the explicit and subtler forms of racism (i.e., the biases that the CCW works to dismantle) that have pervaded U.S. educational structures. In addressing U.S. educational structures at large, Kailin (2002) articulated the need for “antiracist education,” a concerted acknowledgement and dismantling of racism in education (as discussed further in Chapter 2). Beyond simply publicly endorsing diversity (Long, 2016b) or engaging in non-critical attempts at multiculturalism (Rhoads & Valedez, 1996), authors have increasingly posited the need for educators to individually and collectively critically self-assess their biases and practices, as well intentionally and actively engage in racial justice efforts in order to foster educational equity. In order to achieve such a
goal, Hartlep (2013) noted that we (scholars and practitioners) need to be “viewing education from the perspective of the oppressed” and critical analyses of “the roots of inequality” (p. 69). In other words, the acknowledgement of racism’s existence and consequences in educational structures needs to be centered in the discourse and efforts at promoting racial and educational equity. However, describing the current dynamics and challenges facing educators in confronting their promulgating educational racism, Long (2016b), editor of *Overcoming Educational Racism in the Community College*, articulated that educators at the postsecondary level take offense at the slightest suggestion that they are biased in any way against people of differing races and cultures, and rightfully so. Most see themselves as ardent supporters of the social idea called egalitarianism, having devoted their professional lives to helping students of all backgrounds become successful. Such efforts are to be applauded and not summarily dismissed. Even so, the American system of education contains sundry systemic biases that have become inherent and embedded into the very fabric of higher education. This systemic bias (i.e., educational racism) shows itself within the community college as a systemic network of rules, expectations, and cultural norms based on a model of education that caters to a middle- and upper-class White mind-set in America. Educators who function within this domain often are unaware that they are practicing bias in the classroom because of their own cultural norms and expectations. (p. 238)

Looking at multiple levels of education, Museus, Ledesma, and Parker (2015) noted that even when espoused goals at multiple levels of higher education (i.e., institutional, state, and federal) entail increasing persistence and graduation rates, as well as vaguely fostering “diversity, multiculturalism, or equality” (p. 83), there is a dearth of acknowledgement of
dynamics of racism and how these impact multiple aspects of students’ (as well as educators’) experiences within an institution. The prerogative for institutions that are committed to the “idealistic role of promoting social progress and mobility for all students” (Museus et al., 2015, p. 82), therefore, is “to do the difficult work of pursuing systemic transformation to create more inclusive environments so that racially diverse populations can thrive” (p. 83).

This study seeks to incorporate components of the aforementioned theoretical constructs and center practitioners’ efforts to engage in antiracism and equity at community colleges—a line of research that remains fairly sparse and seldom disseminated amongst practitioner-educators on the ground. Findings from this study will contribute to the areas in the literature that are ripe for expansion, which include how practitioner-educators can individually and collectively support the educational goals of marginalized student populations—particularly students of color—and pursue espoused goals of equity and social justice.

I use the term practitioner-educators to describe the range of faculty, practitioners, and administrative staff who engage in a variety of educational capacities with students. My experience researching, interacting with, and working within both teaching and practitioner roles in higher education highlight the distinct and overlapping functions and opportunities within and across these groups. For starters, teaching and educating, functions formally thought of as occurring within the faculty role, take place both inside and outside of the classroom. Similarly, student development work, which is arguably thought of as largely the responsibility of student affairs staff, can occur both inside and outside of the classroom, and in the interactions between students and faculty and/or staff. Chapter 2 further highlights the distinct roles of these practitioner-educator groups.
By virtue of the largely diverse student populations enrolled in the community college sector, scholars and educators do not often consider these institutions as sites that lack multiculturalism, because it is assumed that structural diversity is evidence of institutional inclusivity (Jain, 2010; Watson & Brand, 2014). And yet, community colleges have often upheld values in their curriculums, policies, and practices that are reflective of White, middle-class norms, while continuing to stratify low-status and “low-achieving” students to the bottom rung of the higher education ladder (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). Critical scholars have posited that these cultures, policies, and practices have typically failed to support students of color, low-income students, and other marginalized groups that make up large parts of this institutional sector (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1998; Watson & Brand, 2014). In fact, it is because of community colleges’ history (which will be further discussed in Chapter 2) and these aforementioned dynamics that research on antiracism, practitioner-educators’ use of asset-based cognitive frames, and what results from this praxis may be particularly fruitful.

This study looks at the personal and educational journeys, and professional and organizational contexts of practitioner-educators who have stated an individual and collective commitment to antiracist work at a community college site. I utilize the tenants of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Yosso, 2005), some of the extant higher education literature, as well as my cultural intuition¹ (Delgado Bernal, 1998), to ascertain that experiences of oppression and racism are still salient among people of color in higher education and the society at large. Although this study focuses on race, I necessarily recognize the multiple, intertwined identities

¹ The notion of cultural intuition was defined by Delgado Bernal (1998) as “experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective, and dynamic” (p. 568) ways of knowing based on personal experience, professional experience, participatory analytical research processes, and existing literature.
of students (e.g. class, gender, age, religious identity, disability, sexual orientation, immigrant status) and the intersections of these social identities that contribute to their experiences in higher education and in the world at large (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). For example, to be a student of color attending a community college also means that one is more likely to be non-traditional aged (age 23 or above), be a part-time student, come from a working-class background, and be the first in one’s family to attend college (Rose, 2012). While acknowledging the intersections of individuals’ social identities, as well as the interlocking dynamics of power and oppression that marginalized peoples experience (Crenshaw, 1991)—this study centers race and racism, because I believe these elements remain salient to understanding dynamics of equity and social justice, particularly in the community college.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to uncover key elements of community college practitioner-educators’ life experiences, education, and professional/organizational settings that cultivate an antiracist and asset-based educational praxis, as well as examine what actions and approaches to fostering student success manifest from this praxis. This study builds upon the theory of antiracist education (Kailin, 2002) and the idea of the inter-connectedness between reflection and action, or *praxis* (Freire, 1993).

The two main research questions of this study are, therefore, the following: What key elements of community college practitioner-educators’ life experiences, education, and professional/organizational settings cultivate an antiracist and asset-based educational praxis? What actions and approaches to fostering student success manifest from this praxis? To address these research questions, I utilize phenomenological approaches via the collection and analysis
of one-on-one and group interview data from a purposive sample of practitioner-educators within a “Racial Justice Team” at a community college site in the Midwest.

**Significance of the Study**

There are several anticipated contributions that I seek for this dissertation to make. First, this dissertation offers findings and discussion on what major influences within practitioner-educators’ personal, educational, and professional and organizational experiences and contexts cultivate an antiracist and asset-based educational praxis. Second, the study explores what the praxis looks like for these practitioner-educators (i.e., *how* do they do what they do?). In effect, this study expands the literature on the role of practitioner-educators and institutions in fostering the success of students of color and other marginalized student populations at community colleges. It will also push the literature to continue moving beyond a simplified and “nice” rhetoric regarding diversity in higher education (as pointed out by Kailin, 2002) and engage in a discussion on what helps to cultivate and sustain antiracist and asset-based educational practices in an understudied and highly diverse sector of higher education: the community college. The insights garnered from this study may bear implications for coursework in graduate preparation programs, hiring practices at community colleges, continuing education opportunities for practitioner-educators, and dynamics of organizational change.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not “marginals,” are not people living “outside” society. They have always been “inside”—inside the structure which made them “beings for others.” The solution is not to “integrate” them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become “beings for themselves.” (Freire, 1993, p. 74)

Overview

This chapter synthesizes, critiques, and draws connections between the relevant theoretical and empirical bodies of literature. In exploring how community college practitioner-educators cultivate antiracist and asset-based approaches to educational praxis, and what actions and approaches to fostering student success manifest from this praxis, this study seeks to build upon understandings of student success at community colleges, opportunities and challenges in the roles of practitioner-educators in community colleges, and various approaches to diversity and racial justice work in higher education. After discussing the literature, I will present the conceptual framework I utilize for this study, centering on antiracist education (Kailin, 2002) and praxis (Freire, 1993).

Review of the Literature

Historical Context and Function

Community colleges comprise a unique sector of higher education largely due to their
open-access structure, range of purposes and educational missions, and enrollment of students who are widely diverse in both their backgrounds and educational goals (Dougherty, 1998; Munsch et al., 2014). The first two-year colleges date back to the early 20th century and were founded to meet the rising need for general liberal arts education that universities could not fulfill (Cohen & Brawer, 2014). Designed to offer the first two years of a liberal arts education, these institutions were initially and fittingly called “junior colleges” (Kelsay & Oudenhoven, 2014). Their functions expanded by the 1930s and 1940s; in order to address workforce needs, which arose particularly during the Great Depression and after World Wars I and II, community colleges began to provide vocational and job training in conjunction with area businesses (Phillipe & Patton, 1999), a prevalence that continued and grew in later decades (Kelsay & Oudenhoven, 2014).

By the middle of the 20th century, community colleges were characterized largely by their accessibility and affordability, with the Truman Commission’s report of 1947, for instance, articulating the importance of these institutions in democratizing education (Vaughan, 2000). With funding policies such as the G.I. Bill, the creation Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (Pell Grants), and allocations of funding at each of the federal, state and district levels, the community college network expanded. Relatedly, large groups of people who had been traditionally excluded from higher education, namely lower-income communities and people of color, gained increased access to postsecondary schooling (Shaw, Rhoads, & Valadez, 1999), with the 1960s seeing the most significant expansion (Kelsay & Oudenhoven, 2014). Today, community colleges serve 45% of the students enrolled in a higher education institution, and serve a multitude of functions spanning general/transfer education, occupational studies and
certification, remedial education, and non-credit continued education (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016).

Though viewed over their history and today as a “democratizing” segment of higher education, a number of scholars have pointed out the complex (Beach, 2012; Munsch et al., 2014) and “contradictory” nature of community colleges (Dougherty, 1994; Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2006). For example, Cohen and Brawer (2014) noted that, from the start, these institutions met the rising need for basic liberal arts education that universities were unwilling to fulfill, playing a role within a hierarchical system of higher education within which community colleges found themselves at the bottom rung. Similarly, Beach (2012) posited that access has seldom equated to success in the community college sector; that these institutions were designed to be underfunded and marginalized in the higher education system, existing in an “environment of sociopolitical inequality, educational elitism, and restricted educational and financial resources” (p. xxxiv). Further, Beach surmised:

The institution of community colleges offered an “egalitarian promise,” but at the same time it also reflected the constraints of the capitalist economic system it was embedded in. Part of the reality of that system is an optimistic society that generates more ambition than it can structurally satisfy, which creates a need for an elaborate and often hidden tracking system to channel students into occupationally appropriate avenues largely based on their socioeconomic origins. (p. xxxiii)

Beach and other authors (e.g. Brint & Karabel, 1989; Clark, 1960) spoke of the gaps between the egalitarian function community colleges purportedly served and the realities of their limitations going back to their early years.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) these background characteristics and dynamics, and the fact that community colleges today enroll such as large proportion of students in higher education, increased attention has been paid to the reform of, and educational success rates
within, community colleges. For example, at the federal level, the Obama administration pointed to the importance of two-year colleges as points of entry into higher education for many students and for economic recovery (Kelsay & Oudenhoven, 2014). Community college researchers and policy makers have similarly asserted the

A concern among policy-makers and educators is the lower rate of success in terms of persistence, degree and certificate completion, and upward transfer seen at two-year colleges as compared to their four-year public and non-profit institutions. What is thought to contribute to success generally varies across the literature. Much of the research posits that success is attributable largely to students’ background characteristics (e.g., Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Mertes & Hoover, 2014). When the bulk of the attribution is given to the background characteristics of students, analysis is conducted at the level of the student and examine factors typically comprising of socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity, age, enrollment status, and indicators of academic preparation. Other research attributes considerable weight to institutional characteristics as well; that is, more attention is paid to institution-level dynamics having to do with practices, policies, available resources, and environmental dynamics thought to influence student success (e.g., Bailey et al., 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Price & Tovar, 2014).

**Understandings of Student Success at Community Colleges**

**Student-level factors.** The most commonly explored student-level factors of success can be categorized as socio-demographic characteristics, including race, SES, age, and gender. With regard to race, a number of studies have found that White students hold advantage over students of color (namely Black and Latinx students) in terms of rates of retention (Mertes & Hoover, 2014; Schuetz, 2008), degree completion (Alfonso, Bailey & Scott, 2005), and upward transfer
(Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Roksa & Calcagno, 2010; Wang, 2012). A small portion of these studies explicated that race is related to other characteristics; for example, the effects of being Black were attributed significantly to lower academic preparation (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Wang, 2012). Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Native American student groups were excluded from analyses in the majority of the studies reviewed, serving as a major limitation of the current understandings of community college student success.

Several studies have examined socioeconomic status (SES), measured in terms of income levels and/or educational attainment of parents, and find that students whose parents have attended college and had higher incomes are more likely to complete their degrees and/or to transfer. Like race and ethnicity, evidence suggests that students’ levels of academic preparation mediate the SES effect (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Jenkins & Weiss, 2011; Wang, 2012). Further, two studies found that the effect of SES is attributed in part to students’ disrupted enrollment (Alfonso et al., 2005; Jenkins & Weiss, 2011) and assumed lower educational aspirations (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006). Jenkins and Weiss (2011) also found that students with low SES were more likely to start in programs that lead to lower success rates, such as adult basic education and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL), and to also concentrate in areas that had lower completion rates, such as career-technical education.

With regard to age, the consensus across studies is that older age predicts less success. That is, students who started college when they were older than 18—and, in particular, students who started above the age of 25—have lower chances of retention, completion and transfer (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Jenkins & Weiss, 2011; Mertes & Hoover, 2014; Roksa & Calcagno, 2010; Schuetz, 2014). Importantly, the effect of age has been shown to be mediated
by outside demands (including higher work intensity and having children), educational aspirations (which are lower for older students), enrollment status (which is more likely than not to be part-time), and program track (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006). Jenkins and Weiss (2011) further noted that older students are more likely to start in ESL or in college-level vocational coursework, or to fail to enter a concentration, which exacerbates their chances of completion or upward transfer.

The majority of articles examining student-level factors have also found that part-time enrollment status predicts lower levels of success. Similar to age, the literature largely links enrollment status to the presence of external demands on students, such as having dependents and high work demands. Wang (2012) found, in addition, that part-time status may be associated with the degree to which students experience academic and social integration and feel more strongly committed to the institution, which may then affect educational outcomes. In spite of having external demands, a qualitative study of community college graduates surmised that students are able to persist and graduate largely by their ability to manage their multiple demands and having a “support system to face challenges related to employment, schooling, and family responsibilities” (Martin, Galentino & Townsend, 2014, p. 232). The authors further posited that financial aid make it possible for students with multiple responsibilities to persist and succeed in school. Notably, receipt of financial aid positively predicted success in two other studies (Mertes & Hoover, 2014; Schuetz, 2014).

Unsurprisingly, the majority of sources regarding student-level factors discuss academic preparation as being substantially predictive of students’ chances of success. Academic preparedness is mainly defined in terms of standardized test scores (i.e. from the SAT/ACT or college placement tests), high school GPA, and number of years or highest levels of math taken
in high school. As noted above, academic preparedness also significantly mediates the observed effects of other variables, such as race and SES (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Jenkins & Weiss, 2011; Wang, 2012).

Some research has begun to investigate other types of characteristics such as motivation, self-efficacy, and educational aspirations. Based on a combination of survey data and transcript data, several studies show that measures of educational aspirations positively predict persistence and transfer outcomes (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Roksa & Calcagno; 2010; Schuetz; 2014). That is, educational aspirations have a strong, significant effect on transfer outcomes even when social background and academic preparation are controlled. The most interesting finding from this set of research is that educational aspirations are significant to success, independent of background characteristics, and that they may have an even more important role for underrepresented students of color than their White counterparts (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006). In this study, Black students were found to have significantly higher measures of aspirations, and this factor was surmised to serve as a suppressor effect on the negative effects that Black students otherwise experienced.

Another psychological element, self-efficacy predicts success according to several studies (Liao, Edlin, & Ferdenzi, 2014; Martin et al., 2014; Wang, 2012). Based on survey data at an urban community college, Liao et al. (2014) found that self-efficacy for self-regulated learning, which entails the belief in one’s ability to engage in productive behaviors for learning, significantly predicts students’ intent to persist. The broader construct of “self-concept” (similar in notion to self-efficacy) is also found to positively predict vertical transfer (Wang, 2012). In addition, motivation—as a related but distinct construct—positively predicts success; specifically, the “tendency to keep trying even when a task is frustrating” (Schuetz, 2014, p. 619)
and exhibiting extrinsic motivation (e.g. a desire to obtain a well-paying job, making others and oneself feel proud) explains significant portions of the likelihood of persisting (Liao et al., 2014).

Another theme that emerges from the literature is the importance attributed to curricular trajectories that students encountered in college. One of the biggest measurable factors of success, according to Jenkins and Weiss (2011), is whether or not students entered a concentration (i.e. got started on a path to a credential by completing multiple classes in a single area). Relatedly, in studies examining upward transfer, factors positively associated with this outcome include continuous enrollment (Wang, 2012) and intermediate outcomes, such as credits earned and completion of college-level math and English classes (Roksa & Calcagno, 2010). These findings may seem intuitive, given that intermediate outcomes and continued enrollment are inherent elements of completion; however, what is valuable about these findings is that they shed light on observable, behavioral elements that may differentiate the trajectories of students who succeed versus those who do not.

Similarly, three separate quantitative studies indicated that enrollment in an academic program—as opposed to an occupational program or no program at all—is significant in positively predicting retention (Mertes & Hoover, 2014), completion (Alfonso et al., 2005) and transfer (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006). Students enrolled in occupational/technical majors have lower probabilities of achieving their educational goals even after demographic, educational, socioeconomic and pathway variables are controlled for (Alfonso et al., 2005; Brint & Karabel, 1989). Of note, low-income and older students enter occupational trajectories at disproportionately higher rates (Jenkins & Weiss, 2011). It is also worth stating that curricular trajectories could be equally considered institutional dynamics as they are individual factors.
In summary, the sample of literature regarding individual-level factors suggests that a wide range of elements impact student success at community colleges. The majority of factors that have been explored in terms of their ability to predict student success are pre-college and/or individual-level factors. The research on these factors suggests that of the students who are enrolled at community colleges, those who are Black, Latinx, low-SES, older, part-time, have dependents, and who are less academically prepared are less likely to succeed academically than students who are White, mid- to upper-SES, younger, full-time, do not have dependents, and are more academically prepared. Notably, there has been some research on effects that are not strictly structural, such as psychological factors and curricular trajectories. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of research that investigates how other individual-level influences—such as how underrepresented students’ culturally-derived assets and attributes (i.e., CCW)—contribute to their abilities to succeed, in spite of structural inequalities. Finally, while institutional-level dynamics are discussed in some of the research (see next section), most of the student-level data are extracted from national datasets and do not nest the data or account for concurrent contextual effects on success.

**Institutional-level factors.** The extant research renders a wide array of findings regarding the institutional factors that influence student success and the degree to which these factors matter. Several studies that have investigated the impact of select institutional characteristics suggest that institutional characteristics contribute very little to student success. For example, in one study using data on over 10,000 students across 56 community colleges in North Carolina, results indicated that institutional characteristics (e.g. size, expenditures, staff training, and cooperation with industry) were not significant in predicting student success after accounting for significant background characteristics of students (Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin &
Vigdor, 2013). In another study utilizing a national sample and hierarchical linear modeling, Crisp and Nuñez (2014) found that no institutional-level variables spanning academic and social environmental measures—including total institutional enrollment, percentage of Latino and African American faculty, percentage of full-time instructional staff, and total dollar amount spent per student on academic support— influenced African American and Latino students’ chances of successful transfer. Notably, this study had a sample of 1,360 students across 260 institutions, the ratio of which may have limited an ability to make internally valid claims. Nonetheless, even in studies in which the variance in student success is attributed in part to institutional characteristics, the effects are relatively small in comparison to student-level factors (e.g., Bailey et al., 2008; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Schuetz, 2014). It is possible that institutional characteristics simply do not bear substantial impacts on student success. However, it is likely that the institutional factors examined are not representative of all of the dynamics that meaningfully influence student success and that more work is needed to identify these factors (Calcagno et al., 2008; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014).

In a study that simply looked at whether differences occurred among community college students’ outcomes based on the institution they attended, Schuetz (2014) found, using hierarchical regressions and data on roughly 5,000 students across nine community colleges in Los Angeles, that students at different institutions demonstrated small but statistically significant differences in unit completion rates after controlling for individual characteristics. While this study did not investigate what institutional characteristics caused varying levels of success, it surmised only that those differences existed. Other studies have explored and attributed student success to particular institutional dynamics.
Among the factors considered influential on success are those that have to do with an institution’s structure, including characteristics of students and faculty. Two studies (Bailey et al., 2006; Calcagno et al., 2008) utilized institutional-level data and found that students complete their degrees at higher rates at institutions that are smaller, invest more in instruction, and have higher proportions of full-time faculty. Bailey et al. (2006) also found that colleges with relatively larger proportions of part-time students and larger proportions of students of color have lower completion rates. The negative effect of composition on success, while controlling for individual-level factors such as race-ethnicity, test scores, and SES, was discussed by the authors as being worthy of further study.

While the aforementioned studies have examined institutional-level factors, there are a small number of studies that have examined how program-level dynamics (i.e., educational programs or units within which students pursue their educational goals) within institutions have influenced student success rates. For example, based on a large-scale study of community colleges across Washington State, career-technical programs on the whole were shown to have lower completion rates than academic (i.e., transfer-oriented) programs (Jenkins & Weiss, 2011). However, breaking down the unit of analysis further and taking a case study analysis approach, Nitecki (2011) uncovered success-fostering characteristics of two vocational programs—a paralegal program and an early childhood education program—that fared better than other programs within a large, urban community college. The programs’ higher success levels were attributed to the ability of faculty within the programs to actively engage and retain students through advising, setting high expectations, providing holistic care, and facilitating connections between academic work to professional settings. Though specific to one particular site, the findings of this case study convincingly explicated the role that programs within community colleges play in student success.
colleges have, and suggested the importance of examining smaller units of community colleges in future research, in order to understand dynamics that affect student success.

Similarly, findings regarding the importance of structures and people to support and engage students academically have emerged across a number of studies. For example, success was partially attributed to the ability of institutions to support learners engage students in active and collaborative learning and to support learners (Price & Tovar, 2014). In their quantitative study of roughly 160,000 students across over 250 institutions nationwide, Price and Tovar (2014) found that these two indicators of student support and engagement, as measured through the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, significantly and positively correlated with graduation rates after controlling for individual characteristics. These findings led to the recommendation of instructional practices, such as requiring students to work together on projects during class, creating opportunities for students to tutor each other, and committing faculty time for students to discuss ideas and course material with instructors outside of class.

Intentional and formal support systems have also been explored through qualitative research. Based on field research at multiple community colleges, Jenkins (2006) stressed that success occurs at higher rates when there are not only services in place—including in-depth orientations, proactive advising, early warning systems, and well-organized academic support services—but also when these services are well aligned and coordinated across a community college campus.

Well-cited literature has noted that community colleges have allowed for the systematic failure of many of their students. One notable example is Clark’s (1960) article entitled *The Cooling-Out Function in Higher Education*, which argued that two-year colleges have systematically and passively allowed for, yet concealed, the discrepancies that most of their students encounter between “aspiration and avenue” (p. 576) through sets of informal practices.
In a similar vein, Brint and Karabel (1989) questioned whether community colleges have lived up to their democratizing mission, namely by examining dynamics of stratification and vocationalization. Offering evidence to suggest that community colleges negatively affect students’ chances of attaining a bachelor’s degree and fail to foster positive returns even for their vocational students, Brint and Karabel argued that community colleges have exacerbated social inequalities rather than alleviate them.

In a study that empirically tested for the cooling out effect, Bahr (2008) utilized hierarchical logistic regression techniques and data on a large sample of students across 112 California community colleges, and found that receiving advising is beneficial to all students’ chances of remediation and transfer and—to an even greater degree—for academically underprepared students. Notably, Asian remedial math students do not benefit from advising in terms of remediation as much as their White, Black, and Latino counterparts do, and Black transfer-seeking students benefit significantly less from advising than do White students in terms of the hazard of transfer. However, Bahr found that there was no cooling-out effect observed. He surmised “it is possible that some aspects or expressions of advising actually are detrimental to the attainment of certain groups of students, but this effect may be masked by a strongly positive effect of other aspects or expressions of advising” (p. 727). There are limitations to the generalizability of Bahr’s findings, insomuch as it included only California community college sites, while Clark (1960) and Brint and Karabel’s (1989) work was suggested to reflect national trends. While Bahr’s research is important, further research is needed to unpack the dynamics of advising and other student support services, and how their impacts may differ among different student groups.
One key study (Jenkins, 2006) used case study methods to investigate a comprehensive set of indicators regarding policies, practices and cultural characteristics of institutions, and renders valuable findings on high-impact strategies that occur at community colleges that effectively foster the success of underrepresented minorities (identified as Black students and Latinx students in this study). Based on data on six community colleges in Florida, Jenkins (2006) found that high-impact institutions are distinct in terms of having exceptional levels of inclusivity in their campus environments and specialized retention services for students of color. Indicators of inclusive environments consisted of campus climate surveys and the availability of and active participation in minority cultural activities and clubs, while specialized retention services included formal programs such as TRiO Student Support Services.

While the literature, such as that which is synthesized above, suggests the importance of high-impact educational practices—some of which are thought to particularly benefit students of color—there is rare explicit discussion of the covert and overt issues of racism impacting community college students’ experiences. One study that did so looked at women student leaders of color at a community college, interactions with their professors and peers, and the students’ perceptions of transfer. Jain (2009) found that the women of color in this study encountered microaggressions from their faculty and peers regarding their presumed inferior academic abilities based on race, which manifested in feelings of fear, inadequacy, and self-doubt when they considered transfer. In her analysis, Jain (2009) surmised that the racial battle fatigue (Parker & Villalpando, 2007) that students suffered impacted their academic aspirations.

Overall, empirical research on institutional-level factors impacting community college student success leads to a wide array of findings. Some quantitative studies suggest that institutional factors contribute very little to student success; others find significant differences,
specifically in terms of the size of the institution and investment made on faculty (Bailey et al., 2006; Calcagno et al., 2008). More in-depth, qualitative studies suggest the positive impact of intentional academic engagement and support of students (Jenkins, 2006; Price & Tovar, 2014). Some (albeit limited) empirical research (e.g., Jain, 2009) on the role of racism in influencing students’ experiences suggest that students of color encounter issues of racism that can negatively influence their academic aspirations and self-efficacy.

There exists a need for more critical research on community colleges practices and factors that meaningfully influence student success (Calcagno et al., 2008; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014). As can be seen in the review of literature, there is an abundance of research that looks at the community college students’ individual-level characteristics (particularly socio-demographic characteristics) shown to correlate with their chances for success; however, there has been an insufficient—or, in some studies, an uncritical—look at how colleges can foster the abilities of students of color and other marginalized student populations once they walk through the college’s doors. As Bensimon (2007) put it:

While there is no question that minority students’ chances for success are severely constrained by their K-12 educational experiences, socio-economic background, and the extent to which they and their families possess “college knowledge,” the reality, frustrating as it may be, is that there conditions, once students are admitted, are beyond the control of college practitioners…[The aforementioned studies] are informative and can stimulate reform efforts at the K-12 level. However, they are of little use to the basic skills math instructor who has to find the most effective ways of teaching beginning algebra to students who, in spite of their outward bravado, are filled with fears. Instead, we need a social science that assists practitioners in becoming equity-minded. (p. 456)

We can interpret what Bensimon (2007) articulated to mean that institutions and institutional actors (i.e., individual practitioner-educators) need to see themselves as active participants—responsible for and having the potential to shape students’ educational experiences and trajectories.
Roles of Practitioner-Educators

In the vein of Bensimon's (2007) call to have “a social science that can indeed assist practitioners in becoming equity-minded” (p. 456), there is growing acknowledgement that practitioners—and the educational practices in which they engage—themselves need to be studied in order to flesh out how to better serve students of color on the grounds of college campuses. Specifically, we need to study “how the practitioner’s own knowledge bases, belief and value systems, experiences, and abilities directly impact how students experience the educational environment” (Pendakur, 2010, p. 29).

On a simplistic level, research has explicated the importance of the personal connections that community college students have with significant others in general (e.g. Rendón & Muñoz, 2011; Stebleton & Schmidt, 2010; Williams, 2002). Based on national survey data and focus groups, for example, the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2009) stated that most students considered dropping out at some point in their college careers, but that their explanations for why they stayed “almost always include the name of a particular person—an instructor, a staff member, another student—who gave the encouragement, guidance, or support they needed to keep going” (p. 3). In a dissertation study that conceptualized the idea of “empowerment” agents (Pendakur, 2010), both faculty and staff were studied; like Pendakur (2010), my decision to investigate the roles of both faculty and student affairs practitioners/administrators centers on the rationale that each of these groups plays unique and important roles in the experiences of students of color.

Faculty are often the main point people with whom part-time adult students at community colleges interact (Chang, 2005). Further, data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE, 2009) indicate that students are more engaged in the classroom than
anywhere else. At the same time, we also know that student affairs practitioners/administrators play a unique and often intimately and holistically oriented role in students’ journeys (St. Clair, 2007) and are often on the front lines of social justice efforts on college campuses (Rhoads & Black, 1995). Taking into account the centrality of all of these roles to the educational experiences of students, this study is interested in those who work as either faculty or student affairs practitioners/administrators (again, covered by the all-encompassing term of practitioner-educators), and how they come to be engaged in antiracist, multicultural, and equity-oriented practices. I also note that these groups also seem to have many responsibilities and opportunities in common. This section provides a review of the literature regarding the unique and overlapping opportunities (or promising practices) of each group of practitioner-educators, as well as barriers that get in the way of effective student engagement.

**Opportunities and challenges in the role of faculty at community colleges.** Much of what we know about the role of faculty comes from research on four-year institutions; very little attention has been paid to the role of faculty at two-year colleges. Nonetheless, we can glean from the research that does exist—including that which has looked at students of color populations and commuter student populations—to begin to understand some of the opportunities and challenges that exist within faculty’s role at community colleges.

An overarching theme across a number of the publications reviewed is that students’ perceptions of the quality of relationship with faculty members and/or the perceived support of the faculty members are positively associated with a measure of academic success, retention, or learning. In one study, the retention of students at a community college was positively predicted by their perception that (a) they found it easy to get answers to their questions regarding their education at the institution (the strongest predictor), (b) they got to know the faculty, (c) the
institution had a well-educated faculty, and (d) they had adequate opportunity to interact with faculty (Johnson, 1997). Bearing some similar findings, Arrendodo (1995) found that higher degree aspirations are predicted by the following factors: time spent with faculty, working on a professor’s research project, becoming a guest in a professor’s home, and being satisfied with the opportunity to talk with professors. A similar group of factors was shown to be important to all students, and particularly to students of color, in a study by Lundberg and Schreiner (2004).

Further, in disaggregating the data by students’ racial/ethnic groupings, they found that overall learning at the college is positively predicted by the frequency and quality of faculty-student interactions, and that this association is stronger for students of color than for White students. Focusing specifically on Latinx students, Anaya and Cole (2001) found that the perception of faculty as accessible and supportive, and the occurrences of faculty-student discussions regarding coursework and career plans positively relate to students’ college GPA. Thompson (2001) found through pathway analysis of survey data gathered from a sample of community college students that informal student-faculty interaction (time that students spent communicating with faculty members apart from the general classroom interaction) positively predicts the effort that students exerted in science courses, as well as their educational gains in science and mathematics. Lastly, the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2009) highlighted best practices employed by faculty, including engaging students in mentoring opportunities, community engagement, and networking in their areas of study, as well as relating to students on a personal level. The findings across these studies generally corroborate one another and suggest that the quality of relationship and even the perceived opportunity for a relationship between faculty and student are positive predictors of college success.
At the same time, some authors have noted the importance of taking into account nuanced elements of faculty contexts, roles and potential challenges to engaging in practices that support students of color. These elements have largely centered on institutional context and priorities (which have, at least in part, been influenced by neoliberal forces (Beach, 2012; Levin et al., 2006), departmental policies and cultures, status as a full-time or part-time faculty member (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Eagan, 2007; Twombly & Townsend, 2008), and their own challenges experiencing racism and lack of support (Museus et al., 2015).

For starters, community colleges, like predominantly White four-year institutions, struggle to maintain a diverse faculty (Levin, Walker, Jackson-Boothby, & Haberler, 2013), which is related to several manifestations of racism that may be experienced by faculty at the community college. In particular, Museus et al. (2015) highlighted evidence from the literature of the following dynamics: faculty of color in higher education reporting challenges to their authority and expertise via covert and overt racial discrimination in the classroom; experiencing racial taxation from excess service, where they might be “consistently bombarded with requests to serve the institution through participation on committees, organization of events, and so on” (p. 66); and racial marginalization and isolation from being one of a small number of faculty of color in their unit or across the institution. These and other documented dynamics are seen as potential challenges to the retention of faculty of color who may otherwise seek to engage in antiracist and equity-oriented work.

The Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014) also discussed how the growing reliance on part-time faculty has implications on the educational experiences of students of color, particularly at community colleges, where part-time faculty teach 58% of the courses
and 53% of the students enrolled (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). These authors discussed both institutions’ under-engagement of part-time faculty, as well as part-time faculty’s under-utilization of high impact practices (such as building learning communities and referring students to academic and support services). Further, national survey and focus group data indicated that large portions of part-time community college faculty members feel insufficiently invested in by their institutional employers in terms of money and energy; are often given fewer expectations and less communication and training; and/or are often less integrated into the fabric of the institution than their full-time counterparts (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). Unsurprisingly, the literature highlighted the need for community colleges to greater invest in and involve part-time faculty (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2009, 2014; Eagan, 2007), as well as further researched in general (Twombly & Townsend, 2008).

**Opportunities and challenges in the role of student affairs practitioners and administrators.** Outside of the classroom, student affairs practitioners play an important and unique role in addressing issues of diversity and multiculturalism, insomuch as they are “in an ideal position to provide support to “engage students and help them persist toward their goals (including but not necessarily limited to graduation from the community college)” (Stebleton & Schmidt, 2010, p. 80). Historically, the student affairs profession grew out of a shift in the roles of academic faculty to primarily be producers of research and bearers of knowledge (American Council on Education Studies, 1937), which had led to a neglect of the student as an individual in the mid-1800s, and subsequent student demand for colleges and universities to better support their learning and multi-layered needs (Thelin, 2011). A unique mechanism through which such work occurs lies in the individualized and highly personal nature of the interactions student
affairs practitioners engage in with students, which have the potential to greatly influence students’ educational experiences and trajectories. While the student affairs profession is often viewed within higher education as auxiliary and whose work is secondary to faculty and academic affairs (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2014), there has also been growing acknowledgement that student affairs practitioners in fact have the opportunity and the desire to transform higher education institutions to be more multicultural and socially just places (Rhoads & Black, 1995). Similar to that which pertains to the role of faculty in community colleges, the research on student affairs practitioners and administrators is sparse. Nonetheless, there are key takeaways regarding the opportunities and challenges for student affairs practitioners and administrators to engage in antiracist and asset-based approaches to fostering student success.

First, based on focus groups with a purposive sample of 22 academically successful African American and Latinx students at an urban community college, Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, and Klingsmith (2014) found that students attribute their success partly to campus engagement and support. Specifically, they identified “having helpful staff members assist in their academic processes” and noted that the school “felt like a friendly and helpful campus” and “a lot like family” (p. 530). Authors noted their surprise that 75% of the students in the community college setting were part-time students, including many of their participants; yet, the level of engagement of students was high. In a case study of a learning community at a community college, Stebleton and Schmidt (2010) discussed the capacity-building of counselors who, through the acknowledgement of both the assets of and barriers experienced by students with whom they worked (who were predominantly from underserved populations), capitalized on the opportunity to develop and implement a high-impact practice for students at their institution. The authors spoke of practitioners’ multifaceted work (i.e., supporting students both in and out of the
classroom), and their building bridges and buy-in across the college among staff and faculty, such that they were able to cultivate a team of “champions” for retention efforts and student success. Across these two articles resonate several facets of practitioners’ behaviors that contributed to students’ integration: assuming students’ capacities to learn, succeed, and seek engagement with others in the campus community; demonstrating an inclusivity that is palpable to students; and participating on collaborative teams of “champions” for student success across the college, thus cultivating multiple points of connection with students.

Taking a historical approach, Kelsay and Oudenhoven (2014) posited that student services have largely been “a loose collection of individual functions,” (p. 10), notably different from many four-year institutions with regard to their absences of residential components and having more of a commuter student focus. In a literature review and commentary piece, Williams (2002) iterated that most faculty and even staff have not always had a clear understanding of the primary purposes of the student services division. Yet, there has been an importance attributed to these resources and services, with authors Munsch et al. (2014) noting that “when structured in a committed, well-organized, and well-funded program, result in a significant increase in student success” (p. 37).

The literature has indicated the presence of positive impacts that student affairs practitioners and administrators can have on student engagement and success; however, some evidence suggests that these personnel and services are underutilized. For example, Miller et al. (2005) found that community college students consult with family members regarding school matters more so than with peers or community college personnel. Further, according to the 2009 CCSSE Cohort data, between upwards of 51% of students nationally have never used such services as academic advising/planning, career counseling, tutoring, financial aid advising, and
student organizations (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2009). This publication also illuminated, for example, the fact that 90% of students say that academic advising/planning is important; however, only 56% of students use the service sometimes or often. This and other evidence suggests that there are differences between the availability and potential usefulness of student affairs practitioners and administrators, and the rate and frequency of connections that students are actually making with them (Williams, 2002). Further research on these dynamics is needed.

**Academic and interpersonal validation.** Across both faculty and student affairs staff roles, a substantial number of sources have named the need for institutions to validate the academic capacities and various cultures that students bring with them (e.g. Hurtado et al., 2011; Laden, 1999; Nora, Urick, & Cerecer, 2011; Rendón, 2002). The first study that explicitly named academic and interpersonal validation—based on qualitative analysis of interview data from four different higher education institutions (n=132)—indicated that many nontraditional students—particularly community college students, first generation students, Black and Latinx students, and students who have been out of school for a while—spoke of their desire to shed their doubts about being capable of learning (Rendón, 1994). In turn, when faculty, college staff, other students, and family members validated them academically and/or interpersonally, students demonstrated greater self-efficacy and likelihood to be involved in the academic and social fabric of their institutions.

Validation has become more commonly used in the literature to reference the intentional and proactive affirmation that significant others (i.e. faculty, student/academic affairs staff, peers and family members) give students, validating their innate capacity to learn and contribute to the college community, while fostering personal development and social adjustment to the college
Examples include faculty taking time to learn and call students by their names; faculty expressing both their belief in students and their willingness to support; parents, spouses, and children supporting students in their quest to earn their degrees; faculty encouraging students to help one another; the curriculum reflecting student backgrounds; and staff mentoring students outside of class. Further, as explained by Rendón and Muñoz (2011):

Validation theory provides a framework that faculty and staff can employ to work with students in a way that gives them agency, affirmation, self-worth, and liberation from past invalidation…for many low-income, first-generation students, external validation is initially needed to move students toward acknowledgement of their own internal self-capableness and potentiality. (p. 17)

Indeed, in subsequent qualitative and quantitative studies, validation has been linked to persistence among community college students (Barnett, 2011); engagement, sense of belonging, and self-worth/self-concept (Nora et al. 2011), and seen as a prerequisite for development and involvement for students learning to navigate their higher education environments (Hurtado et al., 2011).

Notably, validation does not only consist of affirmation in the academic sense; for example, Rendón (2002) and Laden (1999) found several examples of interpersonal and cultural validation with the Puente Project, a highly successful program started at a California community college in 1981. The program bridges together components of coursework, counseling, and mentoring, whereby students take a yearlong writing course based on Latinx and other multiculturally diverse literature and their own cultural and community experiences, and also benefit from regular support from an academic counselor and individual relationships with Latino professional mentors. The program’s success in terms of retention, completion, and transfer has been attributed to the interconnections between the program elements and the affirmation of Puente students “as academic achievers who can make it through higher education
and as ethnically identified and ethnically affirmed individuals who are accepted for who they are” (Laden, 1999, p. 67). This and other examples highlight the ways in which the concept of validation continues to be utilized in a multitude of studies that attempt to understand the college transition and experience, particularly for low-income, first-generation students, students of color, developmental education students, immigrants, and community college students (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011).

**Diversity, Multiculturalism, and Social Justice Frameworks in Education**

There have been a number of different ways in which education scholars have conceptualized the work of educating or serving diverse student populations. This body of literature has largely been a response to the notion that many education practitioners lack the frameworks and the skills to engage in critically-minded and culturally responsive practices in ever-diversifying educational settings. Thought to contribute to these limitations is the lack of racial diversity currently present in the education profession (Hughes, 2015). For instance, it was reported in 2013 that only 18% of full-time and part-time community college faculty in the U.S. were people of color (California Community College Collaborative, 2013). At the turn of 21st century, only about 20% of higher education administrators were people of color (Mueller & Pope, 2003). As is documented in the K-12 education literature, White, middle-/upper-middle class educators who have not unpacked their own privilege likely experience “cultural mismatch” (Villegas, 1988) in the majority-minority educational settings in which many of them serve.

**Multicultural competence.** As a somewhat “catch-all” term that describes what educators believe can help to address the aforementioned cultural mismatch, “multicultural competence” has been considered by a number of scholars and educators as an important skill set
to have in working with increasingly diverse student populations (Mueller & Pope, 2013). Two of the earliest scholars to bridge the skills of multicultural competence from the field of counseling psychology to student affairs were Embers and Henry (1990). One of their main points centered on the notion that it is not enough for colleges and universities to hire diverse staff members; leaders and practitioners need to continually evaluate the current knowledge, values, and program purposes existing at their institutions, in order to inform services for students of color and cultivate greater cultural competency among their personnel. Embers and Henry (1990) also advised student affairs programs to go beyond promoting “cultural awareness and acceptance” but also to address the “deeper understanding involved in cultural competence” (p. 321).

Some years later, Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller’s (2004) book entitled *Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs* further conceptualized multicultural competence in terms of what the authors deemed were its three components: multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, and multicultural skills. They posited that multicultural competence should be integrated into each of the other student affairs competencies (e.g. administrative and management, helping and interpersonal, assessment and evaluation), as opposed to being thought of as a stand-alone competency. In addition, they asserted that multicultural competence ought not to be the responsibility of a particular office or group of people on campuses but rather a common competency among all student affairs staff.

There have been several responses and follow-ups to the book by Pope et al. (2004). For example, Moore (2005) argued in a book review that the multicultural competence framework inadequately considers the need for a “degree of cognitive complexity” (p. 236). That is, multicultural competency can only develop to the degree that a practitioner can be open to
changing and shifting their worldview to one that is inclusive of others. In a somewhat similar
vein and also adding another layer of complexity to the understanding of multicultural
competency, an empirical study by King and Howard-Hamilton’s (2003) found that respondents
(i.e., student affairs practitioners, diversity educators, and graduate students) rated themselves
highest for multicultural awareness and lowest on multicultural knowledge. These results
suggested that while people may be aware of the need to address issues of diversity, oppression,
privilege, and one’s responsibility to address such issues, they may have less actual knowledge
about diverse cultures and oppressed groups, the ways in which cultural differences affect verbal
and non-verbal communication, and information about the nature of institutional injustices.

While effective in suggesting tangible changes that can be employed throughout student
affairs practice, as well as the demographic changes in higher education that implicate such
changes, there are ample limitations to how multicultural competence has been construed in the
aforementioned literature. For starters, the pervasive dynamics of oppression, power, and
privilege—as they exist in higher education and the society at large—have been insufficiently
named and discussed as invoking the very need for multicultural competence. Relatedly,
suggestions presented by these works seem to address the “tip of the iceberg” in terms of
solutions to make higher education settings more welcoming and supportive of students of color
and other marginalized groups. However, the larger and more complex issues have often been
under-examined in this literature, precluding engagement in the “historical and structural context
and causes of inequalities” (Kailin, 2002, p. 50) in higher education.

(Critical) multiculturalism & multicultural education. What can be seen as more
historically-oriented, critical and comprehensive approaches to organizational change in
education are the broader constructs of multiculturalism and multicultural education. According
to Banks (2004), documented publications and events in the development of multicultural education and ethnic studies in the U.S. date back to the late 1800s, for example with the publication of the *History of the Negro Race in America* by George Washington Williams. Over time and by the late 1900s, multicultural education theorists developed a high degree of consensus regarding the aims, nature, and scope of this field. Banks (2004) noted, too, that a major goal of multicultural education is “to reform the schools and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality” (p. 3). Based on his research, observations, and professional practice, he conceptualized a model of the five dimensions that he believed comprises multicultural education: content integration, the knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, an empowering school culture and social structure, and an equity pedagogy. Banks’ work (e.g. 1998, 2004, 2009) has continued on to be cited by thousands of scholars.

In synthesizing the wide range of interpretations and approaches K-12 and higher education scholars and practitioners have taken to multiculturalism and multicultural education, Jackson and Solis (1995) stated that these constructs have been largely used to “address diversity, difference, representation, voice, and issues of power in teaching and learning, inclusive of curriculum, organization and structure of institutions, classroom settings, and the imperative to redress social ills in the pursuit of social justice” (p. 2). At the same time, these and other authors have agreed that the depictions of multiculturalism have not always served to truly include marginalized communities but have been widely characterized and, at times, coopted into being essentialist, accommodationist, and can so much as mean “having a ‘taco day’ at school” (Kailin, 2002, p. 49). Pushing educators to move *Beyond Comfort Zones in Multiculturalism*, Jackson and Solis (1995) posited that “anything less than self-determination in
multicultural development is evasive and empty of any real meaningful content and pedagogy” (p. 2). Self-determination for all members of an educational community, they stated, characterizes a multiculturalism that is truly humanizing.

Focusing on higher education, in a recent book entitled *Creating Multicultural Change on Campus*, Pope et al. (2014) shifted their prior emphasis on multicultural competence of student affairs practitioner—and its framework around awareness, knowledge and skills—to a more explicit statement of multiculturalism being a social justice imperative, as well as discussion of the requirements for long-term multicultural change, such as the interrelationships between individual-, group-, and institutional-level dynamics. Similarly, Barr and Strong (1988) wrote one of the earlier documents challenging the higher education community to take necessary steps toward multiculturalism within organizations. Noting that “resistance to multiculturalism is well-entrenched in higher education” (p. 87), Barr and Strong (1988) advocated for interpersonally-oriented and structural strategies for helping to build multicultural organizations, including developing training programs in which those who hold power at institutions are required to participate.

As Ladson-Billings (2004) stated, however, “multicultural education is less a thing than a process. It is organic and dynamic, and although it has a history rooted in our traditional notions of curriculum and schooling, its aims and purposes transcend all conventional perceptions of education” (p. 51). She further suggested that multiculturalists can engage in methodologies that move beyond those of mainstream scholarship, with its use of surveys, content analysis, and other “apparently positivist approaches to research,” identifying the access of multicultural research and education to more expanded methodologies, such as narrative inquiry, counterstories, historical ethnographies, and a “full range of indigenous projects: claiming,
testimonies, celebrating survival, remembering...envisioning, reframing...[and] restoring” (p. 61).

Specifically regarding community colleges, Rhoads and Valadez (1996) spoke to a lack of critical multiculturalism, which they defined as conscious and intentional organizational dynamics that transform “monolithic centers of power to democratic constellations in which...structures reflect diverse cultures and perspectives” (p. 9). Rhoads and Valadez (1996) demonstrated the ways in which institutions have historically upheld values in their curriculums, policies, and practices that are reflective of White, middle-class norms, thus precluding students of color and low-income students from full participation in what are purportedly democratizing institutions. Jain (2009) reiterated this notion, stating that “we see that community colleges are not politically neutral, color-blind institutions that benignly serve their underrepresented students of color” (p. 81). Indeed, in order to advance agendas of equity and social justice, there is a need to examine issues of race and racism through the framework of multiculturalism.

**Asset-based models.** Frameworks, such as that of CCW, offer a critical lens through which the cultural wealth of communities of color (and students of color in the context of education) are identified and legitimized, and problematize how schools have applied understandings of social capital. The CCW model (Yosso, 2005) deconstructs and reconstructs understandings of social capital by, first, problematizing applications of mainstream and Bourdieuan understandings of capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), which focus on the social reproduction of access to education, language, social networks, and knowledges that are deemed valuable. According to Yosso (2005), an assumption of an unchanging system of mobility—articulated by such a framework as Bourdieu’s—has “often been interpreted to explain why the academic and social outcomes of People of Color are significantly lower than the outcomes of
Whites” (p. 70). Yosso then articulated that “the assumption follows that People of Color ‘lack’ the social and cultural capital required for social mobility”—with such a deficit perspective often resulting in schools “structuring ways to help ‘disadvantaged’ students whose race and class background has left them lacking necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities, and cultural capital” (p. 70) that are overwhelmingly oriented to White, middle-class culture.

The model of CCW reveals and validates the cultural wealth and assets of communities of color, with an aim of schools and educators acknowledging these historically un-acknowledged cultural assets as part of efforts to attain social and racial justice. Instead of considering students as empty vessels to be filled, the community cultural wealth model asserts that students have educational agency and capacities that are strengthened by one’s family and culture. This model uses concepts and language that centers students’ assets, talents, and contributions, and include how these characteristics and skills can aid them in their educational journeys. More specifically, Yosso (2005) conceptualized the various forms of cultural wealth that students of color bring with them from their homes and communities and into the classroom, in terms of (1) aspirational capital, or one’s ability to sustain hope and aspirations for a better future, even in the midst of real and perceived barriers; (2) familial capital, which comprises the “emotional, moral, educational, and occupational consciousness…developed through lessons first learned at home” (Yeung, 2011, p. 41) that informs a commitment to community well-being and a conceptualization of family extending beyond biological kin; (3) social capital, encompassing being a part of a network of people and community resources that provide tangible and intangible (i.e. emotional) supports; (4) linguistic capital, which refers to the cognitive and social skills attained through the ability and practice in communicating in more than one language and/or style; (5) navigational capital, which translates into the ability to maneuver
through, survive and thrive in places and spaces not created for communities of color; and (6) resistant capital entails the resolve, skills, and “grit” fostered through experiences resisting and challenging inequality and oppressive structures.

A number of other pieces of literature have similarly highlighted the cultural wealth of students. For example, Campa (2010) utilized interviews with Mexican American community college persisters and found that students’ motivations cluster around themes of “cultivating a larger purpose” beyond just “getting a good job” (p. 435) but also entail “changing history” for their families (familial and aspirational capital). Similarly, through interviews, Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2014) found that the most common motivation for academic success among African American and Latinx students is the desire to be a role model to their children or other family members. Overall, the motivations of students of color often supersede just their own welfare; they are also fueled by what their education could do for the social mobility and wellbeing of others around them. In Yeung’s (2011) study of immigrant college students of color, a number of participants reported that their parents—many of whom did not attend college themselves—engaged with their educational experiences in non-traditional ways, including making and offering their students food and asking questions about their schoolwork. In fact, it was these “non-traditional” ways in which parents engaged with immigrant students’ academic journeys that led Yeung (2011) to identify the need for researchers and institutions to redefine what parental involvement may look like to many students and how these stories highlighted forms of familial capital.

Prominent scholarship has noted that higher education systems have been built and sustained with students/communities of color—and those with other historically targeted identities—at the margins structurally, pedagogically, and culturally (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 2004;
Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Yosso, 2005), yet critical scholarship also emphasizes students’ ability to navigate and balance multiple cultures or have navigational capital in terms of CCW. In Campa’s (2010) study, Mexican American students who persisted at a community college were able to learn and employ the unspoken rules and language of academia (linguistic capital), and engaged in overt classroom behaviors that would give them access to social capital via their professors. Further, they were also able to “code-switch,” “not internalize these codes as part of their culture…recognize [when] the game [was] over” (Campa (2010, p. 445), and maintain cultural integrity when they were outside of the formal educational settings. Campa (2010) highlighted students’ abilities to scan their environments, to problem-solve, and to utilize their “sixth sense for survival, cultivated by [their] multiple identities” (p. 443).

The research that explores the cultural capital that students possess and utilize during their college experiences has increasingly been utilized to understand students of color holistically and with critical multicultural awareness. This can be evidenced by the fact that since its publication in 2005, Yosso’s conceptual article has been cited in over 3,000 publications, suggesting that scholars have both utilized and critiqued this model in order to understand the educational experiences and under-recognized assets of students of color. What needs to be further explored is how these forms of capital interact with educational environments within which students operate. Is CCW able to compensate for otherwise oppressive structures and cultures that exist in many higher education settings? How might educators validate the cultural capital of students of color?

**Culturally Engaging Campus Environments**

The model of culturally engaging campus environments (CECE; Museus, 2014) was substantiated by the notion that traditional college success theories are limited in garnering
comprehensive understanding of how “racial and cultural contexts” (p. 192) within a college or university serve as critical factors in explaining student success. The model posits that there are four main sets of interrelated influences upon college success outcomes: external influences (such as the availability of finances or financial aid), pre-college inputs (i.e., demographics, initial academic dispositions, and academic preparation), individual influences (i.e., academic and psychosocial factors), and the presence of culturally engaging campus environments, such as cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, culturally validating environments, and humanized educational environments. The focal point of the model and what makes it different from other models is that it denotes and explicates the ways in which culturally engaging campus environments can positively influence individual influences on student success (e.g., sense of belonging, academic self-efficacy, academic motivation, intent to persist, and academic performance) (Museus, 2014). In other words, the model incorporates into the discourse on student success how institutions “engage the cultural identities of racially diverse student populations and reflect the needs of these students” (Museus, 2014, p. 209), thus offering an understanding of colleges as not simply academically neutral sites but as multi-dynamic cultural sites.

**Antiracism & Racial Equity**

Inherent to the goals of multiculturalism, culturally engaging campus environments, and other diversity-related outcomes discussed above, is the transformation of structural arrangements of educational settings, and the elimination of barriers to student success regardless of racial background (Banks, 1998, 2004, 2009; Barr & Strong, 1988; Jackson & Solis, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). However, notably the explicit acknowledgement of *racism* and *racial inequity*—and the discussion, then, of antiracism and
racial equity measures—are often absent in the education literature. That is, much of the conversation and efforts have been depoliticized and divorced from difficult yet needed discourse that brings to light historical and present-day dynamics permeating U.S. higher education.

Kailin’s (2002) book, Antiracist Education: From Theory to Practice, namely focused on teachers and teacher education at the K-12 level; however, this explicit orientation toward antiracism and anti-racist education can be applied conceptually to all levels of education. Kailin (2002) articulated the need to bring to light the “racist underpinnings of [U.S.] history and culture” and the insufficiency of “the typical ‘liberal’ multicultural approach [that] has led not to emancipation, but to containment, giving some people the illusion of challenging the status quo, while never seriously challenging the relations of domination” (p. 208). She further described that antiracism is a social process in which:

…teachers are not simply mechanical devices through which knowledge is imparted rather, they are also change agents who creatively interact with their students, learning from them as well as instructing them… [and in which] leaders of antiracism movements… engage not only in theorizing, but also in developing a praxis that seeks to confront and transform unequal power relations. (pp. 56-57)

Put another way, antiracism centers on a dimension of activism, whereby those involved take a stance of being proactively antiracist and not just nonracist. For its active orientation and explicit focus on dismantling racial oppression, antiracist education has been considered necessary in democratizing and multiculturalizing education (e.g., Hartlep, 2013).

Racism remains an undertheorized topic specifically in the higher education literature as well, despite evidence of continued racial disparities and overt, regular racial hostility experienced by people of color. Museus et al. (2015) argued that in order to make sense of these phenomena, researchers and educators need to foreground the concept of racism. They further
noted that an explicit focus on “racial equity can help inform efforts to combat racism and cultivate more equitable postsecondary systems… [inasmuch as] racially diverse perspectives [become] equally embedded in power structures, policy-making processes, and the cultural fabric of the organizations” (Museus et al., 2015, p. 13).

Literature on antiracism (e.g., Kailin, 2002) and racial equity (e.g., Museus et al., 2015) provides a more explicit orientation toward dismantling racism such that higher education can “live up to its idealistic role of promoting social progress and mobility for all students regardless of their racial backgrounds” (Museus et al., 2015, p. 82). However, despite rich articulations of this and related constructs (i.e., multicultural competence, multiculturalism, and culturally engaging campus environments), there remains a dearth of literature (particularly within the higher education field) on what contributes to practitioner-educators having antiracist and asset-based frameworks and capacities. In other words, what makes practitioner-educators who exhibit these capacities different from others? What life experiences and organizational contexts allow them to engage in such work? Research that addresses these questions will add to the literature on antiracism and anti-deficit work in higher education by uncovering what compels, influences, and equips institutional actors to critically support the success of students of color and engage in organizational transformation.

**Praxis**

In illustrating the process of engaging in social justice and liberation, Freire (1993) conceptualized *praxis* as the symbiotic relationship between reflection and action. He posited that “reflection—true reflection—leads to action” and that “action [constituting] authentic praxis” occurs when the consequences of such action “become the object of critical reflection” (Freire, 1993, p. 66). This can be interpreted to mean—in the context of this study—that what
practitioner-educators reflect upon and choose to make important in their lives will translate into their practice. Freire (1993) further suggested that, in order for true praxis to occur, it is necessary to “trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason,” as well as to note that “the liberation of the oppressed is a liberation of women and men, not things” (p. 66). This latter notion can be taken to mean that liberatory praxis entails practitioner-educators seeing their students as fully human and entrusting in them the capacity to jointly recreate their settings and to “become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (Freire, 1993, p. 80). Insomuch as educators are educating, they are also constantly learning and putting into practice what they are learning.

**Conceptual Framework**

Along with various components of the literature, the two undergirding concepts I use to interpret findings in this study are that of antiracist education (Kailin, 2002) and praxis (Freire, 1993). I believe these two core concepts work in tangent to help make sense of (a) what elements of community college practitioner-educators’ life experiences, education, and professional and organizational settings cultivate an antiracist and asset-based educational praxis, and (b) what actions and approaches to fostering student success manifest from this praxis.

The model of antiracist education posits that racism and racial inequity pervade throughout the history and culture of U.S. education systems (and the society at large), and translate oftentimes in teachers that are “unconscious or ignorant of the multidimensional ways in which white supremacy percolates and spreads throughout American culture” (Kailin, 2002, p. 13). While these dynamics are pervasive, there are interventions—such as teacher education that takes on structural approaches to understanding race and racism, and “critical multicultural perspectives” (p. 23)—that can interrupt the status quo and help educators arrive at “antiracist
conscientization” (p. 207). Kailin (2002) effectively centers the human agency that exists in “constructing histories and therefore in deconstructing and reconstructing them” (p. 173). Similarly, in higher education contexts, all practitioner-educators (staff, faculty and administrators) can engage in learning and reflection that shifts dominant perspectives and orientations toward students of color and other historically marginalized populations.

If the model of antiracist education centers on the imperative for educators to critically reflect upon their orientations toward their students and their arriving at “antiracist conscientization,” then the concept of praxis can be seen as illuminating what happens with that reflection. That is, once educator-practitioners engage in critical reflection, the conceptualization of “authentic praxis” suggests that their actions or practice would be necessarily transformed by such reflection (Freire, 1993). Inasmuch as practitioner-educators also trust their students, see them as fully human, and also hold them jointly responsible for instigating mutual learning—practitioner-educators’ relationships with their students may also be transformed. This study utilizes these more generally-used concepts of antiracist education and praxis to examine what key life elements influence practitioner-educators’ praxis, and what actions within their respective roles at a community college site this praxis entailed.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Overview

The previous chapter revealed the theories and research that relate to this central inquiry; the current chapter details the methodological approaches I employed in the study. To review, the study explored the following question: What key elements of community college practitioner-educators’ life experiences, education, and professional/organizational settings cultivate an antiracist and asset-based educational praxis? What actions and approaches to fostering student success manifest from this praxis? This study utilized a qualitative approach and an empirical phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994). I interviewed a purposive sample of practitioner-educators at a community college site who belong to a “Racial Justice Team,” plus one adjunct faculty member outside of the team, who was identified through reputational sampling. With each of these participants, I engaged in a one-on-one interview inquiring about the life experiences, education, and professional/organizational settings that they believed shaped their practice, followed by one of two focus groups that further explored their professional/organizational settings.

Qualitative Inquiry

Due to the complex, nuanced, and previously understudied nature of the research questions I sought to explore, I employed a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is defined as
an overarching “array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning…of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (van Maanen, 1979, p. 520). The phenomena I investigated centers on how practitioners cultivate the ability to take multicultural and asset-based approaches to their educational practices and effectively validate students of color. The main purposes and components of qualitative inquiry are to bear a focus on meaning and understanding of phenomena through a humanistic and constructivist lens through utility of an inductive process and production of rich description (Merriam, 2009). Given the inductive nature and complexity of the constructs I sought to unveil, along with the lack of a validated quantitative instrument that could measure relevant constructs, qualitative inquiry was the optimal approach to this study.

**Paradigm and Epistemology**

This study was conducted through a constructivist paradigm, which encompasses an aim to understand and “reconstruct” phenomena, obtain trustworthiness and authenticity by getting recognition and input from participants in addition to the researcher, and has a “process tilt toward revelation” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 166). More specifically, I took an epistemological stance toward social constructivism, which holds that truth (with lower-case t) is a function of social interactions and background assumptions best understood through the presence and expression of alternative points of view (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). This approach is also aligned with Delgado Bernal’s (1998) Chicana feminist epistemological framework, which validates and centers the dynamic roles of both the researcher and the study participants in the analytical research process. That is, the *truth* is a shared discovery grounded in the lived experiences of both the researcher and participants, which is shaped by personal experiences, professional experiences, existing literature, and the interactive analytical research process itself (Delgado
I utilized these sources of cultural intuition while engaging in an intentional and systematic process of data collection and inductive analysis, as is described in the following section.

**Empirical Phenomenological Approach**

At its core, phenomenology is a human science that studies persons and lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997). The empirical phenomenological approach involves looking retrospectively at people’s lived experiences in order to obtain rich description that provides “the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 15) that may otherwise be hidden or veiled. Simply put, human science “wishes to meet human beings…there where they are naturally engaged in their worlds” (van Manen, 2016, p. 19). Van Manen (2016) also posited that

> In contrast to the more positivistic and behavioral empirical sciences, human science does not see theory as something that stands before practice in order to “inform” it. Rather theory enlightens practice. Practice (or life) always comes first and theory comes later as a result of reflection. (p. 14)

This approach, therefore, notes that the *practice* of a group of individuals has already occurred, and that the process of reflection thereafter will be able to illuminate the theory that had already existed in some form, though may not have been consciously grasped. In the case of this project, the phenomena that I wished to explicate upon is practitioner-educators’ ability to engage in an asset-based, antiracist and multicultural approach to education (extending into the dispositions of validating and activating the CCW of students of color), drawing upon the lived experiences of practitioner-educators. Phenomenology allowed for the rich explication of the former by delving into the latter.
Population and Sample

This study explored what cultivates antiracist and asset-based approaches to education among community college practitioners who work with students of color. Thus, the primary population of interest were staff, faculty, and administrators who currently worked at a community college site who possessed the aforementioned characteristics, as identified by their engagement in the “Racial Justice Team” at the college (the description of which is included further in this section) and through additional reputational sampling.

Research Site

The community college at which the study took place is a two-year public institution in a suburban area of the Midwest. Middle Community College, or MCC (pseudonym) is located within 10 miles of a major metropolitan city. This college grants two-year Associate’s degrees as well as certificates in vocational or technical areas. In Fall 2016, MCC enrolled about 9,000 students, with roughly 70% of those students attending part-time and 30% attending full-time (12 or more credit hours per semester). Just over half of students indicated a transfer-oriented program of study, 30% of students declared a career program of study, and just under 20% were undecided (Office of Research and Planning, 2017).

In terms of demographic characteristics, the racial/ethnic background was as follows: 0% American Indian or Alaskan Native, about 20% Asian, just over 5% Black or African American, just under 20% Latino, 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, just under 50% White, 2% multiracial, and 5% race/ethnicity unknown. Of full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking students, about 55% of students received financial aid, with about 40% of these students receiving federal Pell grants and just over 20% receiving state or local grants and scholarships.
The average age of students was 26, with 60% of students age 24 and under, and 40% of students age 25 and over (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

With regard to barometers of retention and completion, the fall-to-fall persistence rate for all students from 2015 to 2016 was just below 50% (Office of Research and Planning, 2017). Across all full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking students, 17% graduated within 150% time to program completion (i.e., three years for a two-year program). These rates varied across racial groups, with Black/African American and Latino students graduating at a rate of 14%, Asian students graduating at 17%, and White students graduating at 21% (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). It is important to note that these graduation rates may not be fully indicative of all students’ educational outcomes, as these statistics do not capture the numbers of students who transfer horizontally to another community college, or vertically to a four-year institution before graduating with a degree or certificate at MCC. At the same time, the racial differences in graduation rates are noteworthy for the purposes of this study, because they illuminate differences in students’ educational experiences and outcomes at the institution.

Other relevant characteristics of MCC include the distribution of human resources and institutional workers. In the fall of 2015 (the most recent data available), there were just over 600 instructional staff members (faculty), with roughly 150 (25%) who were full-time and 450 (75%) who were part-time. Among the approximately 1,000 employees, about 40 (or 4%) had positions in student and academic affairs and other education services. The breakdown of core expenses at the institution were as follows: just over 50% instruction, just over 10% academic support, over 10% institutional support, 10% student services, 8% other core expenses, and 1% public service (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).
This site was chosen partly due to the access that I, as the researcher, had to the institution, having previously formed collegial relationships with a number of the staff and faculty. This element was beneficial to the project, insomuch as my already having developed rapport with a number of participants allowed for increased comfort, credibility, disclosure of information, and mutual investment in the research project (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007). This site was also chosen because of the unique existence of a formal “Racial Justice Team,” whose characteristics and efforts align well with those in which this project is interested, which are discussed in the section below.

**Sampling Method**

This study utilized purposeful sampling in identifying a group of practitioner-educators who demonstrated an interest and presumed ability to engage in asset-based, antiracist and multicultural approaches to education. Although a range of strategies could have been employed to generate a purposive sample of practitioners (e.g., administering surveys, obtaining recommendations by students or college employees), it was seen as most feasible and fruitful to purposively sample an already established group of people at a community college who exhibited the characteristics and life experiences in which I was interested. According to the college’s website, the Racial Justice Team promotes a mission and initiatives described by the following statements:

- We are an inclusive, anti-racist, multicultural educational institution that recognizes the destructive effects of racism on all members of our community.
- We commit to restoring full participation and shared power of the entire community and being accountable to the people and communities we serve.
- We reject all forms of bias.
• We are dedicated to teaching an anti-racist, anti-bias curriculum.

• We implement anti-racist, anti-bias structures, policies, and practices that maximize the potential of our constituents.

• We imagine a future without systemic racism that empowers all members of our community to use their creativity in an inclusive, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive environment.

To the degree that these mission statements reflect the epitome of antiracist, asset-based and equity-oriented approaches to higher education, this group served as an ideal purposive sample for this study. Within the Racial Justice Team, seven were faculty members, four were staff members, and three were administrators.

It was also important to further conduct reputational sampling that facilitated the representation of part-time faculty members, a sub-group that was not represented on the Racial Justice Team. Part-time faculty were important to include in the study due to their prevalence in serving as educator-practitioners at MCC (in fact, making up 75% of the instructor population), as well as community colleges across the country (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014). At the conclusion of my interviews with individual members of the Racial Justice Team, I asked for the names of part-time faculty members whom they saw as exhibiting an ability to engage in asset-based, antiracist and multicultural approaches to education. This multi-tiered approach constituted theory-based sampling (Patton, 2002), or “select[ing] people on the basis of their potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs” (p. 238).
Participant Selection

I located the names of members of the Racial Justice Team through the college-sponsored webpage on the team and emailed each of the members with information about the study and an invitation to participate (see Appendix A). I sought to have an even distribution of faculty, staff and administrator roles represented in the sample group; as it so happened, out of the first six (out of a total of seven) participants who responded, each of these roles was represented by at least one participant (this and demographic information regarding each participant is included in the table below). At the conclusion of each one-on-one interview, I then asked each of the original six participants to identify—if they could—part-time faculty members who demonstrated antiracist and asset-based approaches to their work at the college. Only one of the participants was able to provide recommendation of someone who fit these criteria. (This finding—in and of itself—will be further discussed in Chapter 5.) I then directly invited the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Title/Position</th>
<th>Indicated Race</th>
<th>Indicated Gender</th>
<th>Years in Functional Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>Full-time Faculty Member</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bambi</td>
<td>Full-time Faculty Member</td>
<td>African American</td>
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<td>Kevin</td>
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<td>Tommy</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
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<td>Molly</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Table of study participants’ demographic and background information.
identified part-time faculty member to participate in the study. As both an incentive and token of appreciation for their time, I offered gift cards of up to $25 for participation ($15 for the one-on-one interview, an additional $5 for the member check, and $5 and lunch for the focus group). The table above contains relevant information regarding the participants in the study.

**Data Collection**

As introduced earlier, this study involved two phases of data collection. First, I conducted an in-person, one-on-one interview with each of the seven practitioner-educator participants. Secondly, I engaged in two focus groups, one with four of the participants, and the other with two of the participants (based on availabilities in scheduling). Merriam (2009) stated that interviews serve as optimal means of data collection when researchers are interested in past events. One-on-one interviews are used to intently listen to and from people and can render rich and valid information that “encompass the hows of people’s lives” (i.e. how practitioners have engaged in praxis to get to where they are today) “…as well as the traditional what” (i.e., what specific dynamics and experiences shaped their educational practices of today) (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 646).

I interviewed a total of seven practitioner-educators, four of whom were faculty, two of whom were administrators, and one of whom was a full-time staff member. I interviewed each participant in-person, individually, with each interview ranging in length from approximately one hour long to approximately three hours long. All but one of the interviews took place on the campus of the institutional site either in the participants’ offices or in a low-traffic area of the campus; one interview took place at a Starbucks near the campus. As mentioned, in each of the interviews, I followed a semi-structured protocol that explored the central research question, while allowing for clarifying and/or probing questions. Each interview was audio-recorded and
partially transcribed shortly thereafter. During the course of the interviews I handwrote field notes, or memos, of the participants’ responses.

I utilized a semi-structured interview protocol comprising a total of 14 key questions, with designed opportunities to ask probing questions (see Appendix C). The set of prepared questions I used in this protocol were influenced by those that were used in a recent dissertation (see: Pendakur, 2010), a study that bore some similarities in topic and methodology. The one-on-one interview protocol was divided into three sections: (1) life experiences, (2) education, and (3) professional and organizational context, and any interconnections between these realms. These sections corresponded to the anticipated components of the key elements of practitioner-educators’ lives that had cultivated an antiracist and asset-based educational praxis (the central research topic). More specifically, the interview questions in the section on life experiences included questions on participants’ family dynamics growing up in terms of culture, how they came to learn about their social identities, and the people who influenced who they were as people the most. The second section focused on education—namely: participants’ educational experiences, relationships with teachers and mentors, and transformational learnings in undergraduate and graduate school. The third section focused on the professional and organizational context of participants—asking them about what brought them into their roles, what it took for them to do their jobs well, their approaches to working with students, and more. (For the full interview protocol, see Appendix C.)

As mentioned, I also conducted focus groups with six of the seven participants to engage in the remaining the interview questions and sub-topics (one of the participants was unable to participate in either of the focus groups due to scheduling conflicts). Madriz (2000) described focus groups as encompassing a “collectivistic rather than individualistic research method that
focuses on the multivocality of participants’ attitudes, experiences, and beliefs” (p. 836) among people who share a commonality (in this case, the phenomena of interest). Having focus groups decreases the amount of interaction between the facilitator and individual participants, thus giving more weight to the participants’ opinions and decreasing the influence the researcher has over the interview process. Relatedly, focus groups can allow for an abundant amount of information to be collected in one time. Lastly, a clear advantage of conducting focus groups is that they can elicit authentic, spontaneous responses from group members that may not always occur in one-on-one interviews (Madriz, 2000).

After the completion of all of the one-on-one interviews, I invited each of the participants to participate in a roughly 60-minute focus group over the course of a provided lunch on or near campus. One focus group (of four participants) took place in a conference room on campus; the other (of two participants) took place at a restaurant close to the campus. I followed a semi-structured protocol that explored the participants’ professional and organizational contexts. Similar to the individual interviews, the focus group conversations were audio-recorded and partially transcribed shortly thereafter; I also took field notes during the focus groups.

From both the individual interviews and focus groups, the data thus comprised a combination of the memos, audio recordings, and subsequent transcriptions. For the focus group, I developed a similar protocol (see Appendix F) with a series of five key questions focusing on additional aspects of participants’ professional and organizational contexts, including their perspectives on how they saw their unit and/or institution as a whole participating in the work of antiracism and racial equity.
Data Analysis

I utilized the well-cited (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994) analytical process that follows an empirical phenomenological research method. This method comprises the following stages: *Epoche*, phenomenological reduction (horizontalizing, clustering, and organizing), imaginative variation, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994)—each of which are detailed below.

**Epoche**

The process of Epoche is described as simply seeing and listening to the data, and bracketing one’s presuppositions (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). Creswell (2013) described this first part of the analytic process as suspending understanding and simply being curious. Moustakas (1994) further noted that the Epoche process

inclines [one] toward receptiveness…and [being] more readily able to meet something or someone and to listen and hear whatever is being presented, without coloring the other’s communication with my own habits of thinking, feeling, and seeing, removing the usual ways of labeling or judging, or comparing…[and] to perceive and know a phenomenon from its appearance and presence. (p. 89)

To facilitate this process, I wrote memos of participants’ responses to each question during the time of each of the interviews and the focus groups; I also listened to the audio recordings after, and subsequently filled in the rest of them memos by writing additional notes of how participants responded to questions. Afterward, I reached out to each participant, shared the completed memo from the interview and invited them to engage member-checking (discussed below). This process was repeated after each of the two focus groups.
**Phenomenological Reduction**

Second in the analytic process was phenomenological reduction, in which I engaged in (a) horizonalizing, or highlighting significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomena; (b) clustering the horizons into themes; and (c) organizing the horizons and themes into a coherent textural description (Moustakas, 1994). This substantive stage of the analysis entailed capturing themes of common experiences shared by participants, finding emergent themes, creating an initial coding schema, and beginning of make sense of the data. A description of this stage posits that engaging in this stage effectively

depends on competent and clear reflectiveness, on an ability to attend, recognize, and describe with clarity. Reflection becomes more exact and fuller with continuing attention and perception, with continued looking, with the adding of new perspectives…Things become clearer as they are considered again and again. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 93)

Through this iterative process, I developed an initial coding schema across four overarching “realms” (personal/life, education, professional, and praxis). After going through all of the data, each code was revisited; if a theme was true for at least three out of the seven participants, the code was kept for analysis (suffice to say that oftentimes themes/codes spanned the experiences of all or almost all participants). When themes were true of participants that shared a social identity (e.g., being a person of color or being a faculty member) and were not true for participants with a different social identity (e.g., being a white person or being an administrator), that information was noted as well. Altogether, there were a total of 51 codes and 16 sub-codes (the full “code tree” can be seen in Appendix H). Data, codes, and memos were
organized in the NVivo software program, which allowed for retrieval of data by designated codes.

As a final part of the phenomenological reduction process—organizing the horizons and themes into a coherent textural description—I began to uncover the patterns and relationships that occurred between and among themes/codes. For example, it became clear that some themes emerged in multiple realms (e.g., attaining knowledge of social injustices emerged as a theme in participants’ personal lives, education, and their professional realm) and that some themes (phenomena) tended to occur in tangent with one another across participants’ stories. I noted this and other patterns and observations in running memos linked to the data, which then led to imaginative variation, detailed next.

**Imaginative Variation**

Third in the process of analysis was what is referred to as imaginative variation (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994), whereby I sought “possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97) and also analyzed what factors, structures, and contexts account for the emergence of the phenomenon, in other words: “how the experience of the phenomenon [came] to be what it is” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). To facilitate this part of the process, I engaged in a process of drawing and visualizing themes, relationships between themes, and their overall relationship to the central construct of interest—participants’ cultivation of antiracist and asset-based approaches to education (see Appendix I). Engaging in this process allowed me to best harness my dominant learning styles, visual and kinesthetic (Fleming, 1995), in exploring and answering the central research questions. Creating different iterations of findings visually helped me to quite literally construct
imaginative variations of answers to the research question. Within this stage, I also engaged in a peer debriefing process with each of two colleagues (discussed in the following section) to further make sense of the preliminary findings.

Synthesis

The final step of data analysis entailed forming a synthesis of the findings, which Creswell (2013) described as a “composite description that presents the ‘essence’ of the phenomenon, called the essential, invariant structure (or essence)” (p. 82), focusing on the common experiences of the participants and noting an underlying structure. This stage consisted of crafting the underlying meaning and essence of all of the data, and synthesizing answers to the research questions. Suffice to say that while this was the culminating stage of analysis preceded by the above-mentioned stages of analysis and validity procedures (described below), this stage remained an iterative one, as I received and integrated feedback from my dissertation committee chair to expand upon, revise, and strengthen my synthesis of findings.

Validity and Credibility Procedures

Member Checking

The phenomena this study explored are complex, have been previously under-explored in the literature, are contextually grounded, and have also jointly been constructed by the researcher (me) and the participants (Schwandt, 1997). To optimize qualitative validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000), therefore, it was imperative that I facilitate member checking, the act of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study, “so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account” (p. 127). Within this study, I reached out to each participant after interviewing, via email, and asked each participant to review the memo (see Appendix H) I had written during and after the interview. The measure of member checking can
be seen as optimizing validity insomuch as they maximized the likelihood that the preliminary analysis in which I engaged accurately reflected the narrative accounts and responses that participants shared.

**Peer Debriefing**

In an additional effort to optimize validity and trustworthiness, I engaged in a process of peer debriefing, whereby I solicited and engaged the review of the data, analyses, and preliminary findings with two external reviewers who were familiar with the area of study. Peer reviewers are utilized in qualitative research as those who can probe the researcher’s thinking around one or more parts of the research process, provide support, interrogate the researcher’s assumptions and analyses (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; ThêNguyêñ, 2008), and help the researcher define and consider what is relevant to the study, why it is relevant, and suggest possible alternative explanations that might render new insights (ThêNguyêñ, 2008).

For my study, I debriefed with two peers and colleagues who possessed research- and practice-based experience and knowledge in the area of racial diversity and equity in higher education, including in the community college setting. While removed from the research site, each peer debriefer possessed a degree of knowledge about the institutional site. I engaged in peer debriefing during the *imaginative variation* phase, as I worked to reconsider and assess my analytical findings. Specifically, I presented to each of the peer debriefers (1) a summary of preliminary findings as captured in the epoche stage, followed by (2) a synopsis of themes and interpretations of what factors, structures, and contexts accounted for the emergence of the phenomenon (i.e., my meaning-making of the data). I then utilized the peer debriefers’ feedback to engage in a final step of synthesis.
Researcher Reflexivity

A final validity procedure I utilized in this study is that of researcher reflexivity, which is defined as the self-disclosure and bracketing of the researcher’s positionality, interests, experiences, and biases that may shape their inquiry (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I acknowledge that my previous life experiences, including being a daughter of working-class immigrants and hearing about the experiences my father had attending two community colleges, have influenced the selection of the current research topic. I also note that my experiences having worked as a practitioner at a community college, and the educational contexts (which have notably centered social justice) shape my scholarly lens.

As such, it was pertinent to be cognizant of my positionality and role as a researcher. I sought to mitigate my personal biases over the course of this study through reflective journaling, as well as engaging in the complementing validity measures of member checking and peer debriefing to ensure that findings and conclusions are optimal in their qualitative validity (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Additionally, I note I was fairly familiar with the research site at which this study took place (having previously held an internship there). I had also interacted with, to various degrees, three of the participants in this study, through my previous role. Of consideration is that my internship experience with the institution was overall positive. I made concerted efforts to bracket any previous assumptions or perceptions I may have had about the institution and participants, engaging fully in the phenomenological research process and seeking truth.

Ethical Considerations

Of primary consideration were the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants’ identities and accounts, as well as the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants
(Creswell, 2013). I sought to honor each of these elements throughout the sampling, data collection, analysis, and reporting processes. Prior to the start of the study, Institutional Review Board approval of the study was obtained via an application of protection of human subjects submitted through Loyola University Chicago, my home institution. Once approved, I engaged in purposive and theoretical sampling by reaching out to members of the Racial Justice Team. Prior to the start of individual interviews during data collection, I reviewed the purpose and overview of the study, their rights and voluntary roles as participants (see Appendix D), as well as address any questions that participants had. I collected a consent form from each participant at the beginning of each of the one-on-one interviews (as well as subsequently the focus groups), asking also for each person to select a pseudonym that would be used for the duration of the study. To ensure anonymity throughout the analysis and reporting of the study, interview memos were coded with the chosen pseudonyms, and the pseudonyms used in the reporting and discussion of the findings (Chapters 4 and 5). A file containing the participants’ names, relevant contact information, and self-reported demographic information was password-encrypted, stored on a secured computer, and deleted after the conclusion of the study. Lastly, to dually optimize validity and credibility in the study, as well as honor participants’ rights and roles, I engaged in voluntary-based member-checking with participants as described earlier in this section.

**Summary**

This chapter described the methods and methodology I employed in addressing the research question of this study. An inductive, qualitative approach utilizing a constructivist paradigm and an empirical phenomenological approach undergirded the methods and methodology to addressing the complex and previously understudied research topics. The population and sample were community college faculty, staff, and administrators who made up
the practitioner-educator group in which I was interested. I interviewed a purposive sample of practitioner-educators at MCC who belonged to a Racial Justice Team, as well one additionally recommended and recruited part-time faculty member. One-on-one interviews and the focus groups allowed for in-depth inquiry about the life experiences, education, and professional and organizational settings that participants believed shaped their current practice. A phenomenological process of analysis was guided by Creswell (2013), Moustakas (1994), and van Manen (1997), whereby I engaged in the steps of Epoche, reduction (horizontalizing, clustering, and organizing), imaginative variation, and synthesis. To optimize validity, member checking, peer debriefing and reflexive journaling were employed throughout the analytic process.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS, PART I: PERSONAL AND EDUCATIONAL REALMS

Overview

This study sought out to explore: What key elements of community college practitioner-educators’ life experiences, education, and professional/organizational settings cultivate an antiracist and asset-based educational praxis? What actions and approaches to fostering student success manifest from this praxis? The unveiling of the various realms of participants’ lives—their personal life experiences, education, and professional and organizational settings—showed that these areas significantly overlapped and combined to influence how participants came to embody and enact antiracist and asset-based approaches within their various professional contexts. That is: for all participants, it was the interaction of personal, educational, and professional/organizational experiences that fostered their reflection and action centering on antiracism, equity, and the success of students. Within this chapter, I first discuss the personal and educational influences of their praxis. The organizational context and praxis are presented in the following chapter.

Personal Life Experiences

In asking participants about the personal realms of their lives (i.e., their family culture, key individuals in their lives who had influenced them the most), it was palpable that these
“personal” experiences guided much of why and how participants engaged in antiracist, asset-based work later in their lives and at present. In large part, these experiences centered on how they came to understand their racial identities and learned of racial injustices. Participants of color shared about early life experiences in which they were confronted with overt and covert racism, their learning of racial injustices as a result of these experiences, and the subsequent salience of their racial and/or ethnic identity. White participants discussed having learned about racism through relationships they had with people of color (namely friends and family members), having reflected upon differences in their experiences in a number of contexts as compared to those of their friends and family members of color (i.e., their White privilege), and subsequently having their White racial identity become increasingly salient to them.

For both the participants of color and White participants, these personal encounters with and learnings about racism largely influenced their desire to invest in racial justice efforts in their current professional roles. Participants also talked about the influence of their families, from the
importance of helping others in one’s community, of education, and of resilience; to the positive reinforcement and celebration of their racial and/or ethnic identity among participants of color. These family influences additionally contributed to participants’ calling to and ability to engage in racial justice efforts in their current roles as practitioner-educators.

**Participants of Color: Salience of Racial/Ethnic Identity and Experiences of Racism**

I asked each participant: *Can you share at least one life event from earlier in your life that shaped your understanding of your social identities, including but not limited to race, gender, and/or socioeconomic status? Where were you at the time? How did it shape you?*

Among participants of color, their racial and/or ethnic identities were salient from a young age. These were largely connected to experiences of racism early on in life, which took place primarily within experiences with White friends and peers, in participants’ educational settings, and neighborhoods.

Kevin, a Black male faculty member, vividly recalled specific incidents from his childhood involving White peers. He described one of these incidents as “the biggest thing that really just made [him] recognize that you could grow up with somebody” [and have dynamics of race and racism could crop up]:

> I was in the sixth or seventh grade, and my neighborhood at this time was predominantly Black. But I remember on the corner to the left was this White family... I remember one time, my friends—my Black friends—and I were riding around the block on our bikes, and the son of this family, he’s with his friends...and I just remember him coming to the corner, and he shouted “nigger!” And it was funny to us at the time, not laughable funny—we were mad, but we were also...we couldn’t believe it...he hadn’t used that word before, but now that he was with these White kids...

Kevin talked about how many of the kids in the neighborhood, including his White peer, had grown up play sports together and spent time with each other’s families. He shared that this incident influenced his understanding of his racial identity at a young age, highlighted in the
following reflection: “I used to be Kevin down the street, but now I’m Kevin that you can call
‘nigger.’” Kevin spoke of the lesson he had taken away as a child from these two incidents, that
dynamics of race and racism could (and indeed had in his life) forge(d) wedges in the friendships
and interactions with White persons.

Bambi, a Black female faculty member, and Donovan, a Black male staff member, also
described incidents of having been called the N-word by White peers in their childhoods or
adolescence, and they spoke of how these events stuck with them and influenced their
understanding of their racial identity and how they would interact with the world. Bambi, for
example, noted the following event when she was in junior high school:

The school I went to was predominantly White and working class. There is a story that
has stayed with me all these years…I had a White male classmate, and for some odd
reason, we got into this discussion, and he called me a nigger. And it is amazing to me
that it was civil enough for me to say, “Why do you think you need to call me that?” or
“What did you get that from?” And what was amazing about his response is he didn’t
know why he was calling me that, but he could say that that’s what his parents had said…
and it has stayed with me in terms of understanding, again, that there was something
about the way I looked that was perceived by others as negative.

Reflecting on how this and other later incidences shaped her understanding of her social
identities, Bambi noted that these events simultaneously informed her “interest in countering
those [racist] messages.”

Tommy, a Latino administrator, talked about how the salience of his Mexican identity
and his learning of racial injustices emerged from first-hand experiences of race and racism in
his geographical contexts. He shared, for example, about the area in which he grew up: “While it
was a really diverse community…it was also a very segregated. All the White families lived
above the hill, and all the Black, Mexican, and Vietnamese families lived below the hill and on

the other side of the tracks.” The differentiation of students in terms of educational tracking, largely by race, at his school was also palpable (as is discussed in the following section).

For practitioner-educators of color, dynamics of race and racism influenced the salience of their racial and/or ethnic identities, while simultaneously motivating them to better understand racial injustices. They learned from young age that they were people of color and had minoritized identities within their personal and educational contexts; notably, the salience of their racial and ethnic identities and cognizance of racial injustices fueled their later trajectories in education and their professional lives, and influenced their desire and sustained efforts at pursuing equity and antiracism work at present.

**White Participants: Salience of Racial Identity and Privilege, and Learning about Racism**

Each of the three White participants in this study—Leslie, Molly, and Sharon—spoke about how they encountered consciousness of their identity as being White (and increasingly of their dominant identities) largely through personal experiences and, more specifically, their relationships with people of color. Through these relationships, they increasingly learned of the roles of race and racism in the worlds of the people of color in their lives, which in turn also shaped the cognizance of their identities as White.

Sharon, a White female faculty member, grew up on a farm in what she described as a “culturally homogenous,” predominantly White part of Illinois, and described her family’s culture as “predominantly centered around the Protestant church” and, lacking “awareness of [their] ancestry…it was purely a White American heritage.” When asked who most helped her develop her current understanding of herself, Sharon talked about how different people had helped with “bits and pieces”; however, one person who stood out was her husband’s late grandmother, an African American woman. Emotionally, she credited “Gran” (as she called her)
for having influenced how she saw the world, how Gran countered Sharon’s presumptions about race and poverty and illuminated her understanding of how institutional racism in the United States played out:

She provides me context that I lacked. I had known her [teared up in stating that Gran had recently passed] for over 20 years—and we visited her all the time, quite often. And a lot of things that I had been taught or presumptions that I had about race and poverty and equity were not true, because I didn’t have examples of alternatives. And so, speaking with Gran, and getting to know Gran and getting to know her life—what her family was like and is like—has helped shaped how I see the world. And that then kind of reflects on how I understand myself and how I interact with the world.

The story of Gran, who was poor, was contrary to what Sharon stated she was taught as a child, which was that if one was poor, it was because “one didn’t work hard.” She noted that getting to know her husband and Gran’s stories, and (contextually) the history of African Americans in the U.S. reshaped her understanding of meritocracy and the relationship between hard work and success.

Sharon later talked about how she came to join the Racial Justice Team largely because of her interest in learning about race during the aging of her multiracial Black children and her “increased awareness that [they] were being perceived differently than [she] imagined they would be perceived.” For example, she talked about having issues with and being troubled by the consistent concerns that her son’s preschool teacher voiced about her son’s “behavior” (despite evidence to the contrary) and that Sharon “started to have an inkling that this had to do with his race.” This personal set of incidences prompted Sharon to note that she needed to educate herself on more. Sharon knew she had “deficits” in her understanding of racism and that she “had skin in the game” or, in other words, a personal stake in addressing racial injustice being a parent of multiracial children, adding:
You shouldn’t have to have skin in the game to want to get in the game. But I did…and I didn’t want to be part of the problem. I wanted to understand what the problem was, try to start to fix it here, and maybe try to help my children understand what was going on around them that they might not be able to fix or affect, but that they need to understand—and I didn’t understand it. Because I have the privilege of not suffering from it, so I could be blind to it—and I didn’t want that anymore.

These realizations that Sharon had of no longer wanting to be “ignorant” or complicit because of the relationships and personal investment she had in the outcome of racial dynamics, were poignant and prompted her to initially get involved on the Racial Justice Team.

Demonstrating some parallels in terms of personal relationships facilitating awareness of racial and other social inequities, Molly—a part-time White faculty member—discussed her reflections upon some differences in the life experiences that she had compared to those of a childhood friend, with whom she had recently reunited. She and her friend, Antoinette (who was Black) had gone to school together and both lived in New York City. “I remember being friends with Antoinette—I came to understand that we lived in very different worlds in a lot of ways…I realized this somewhat in my childhood, but I became painfully aware of it last year” [when they had reunited]. Molly spoke of learning how both of Antoinette’s younger siblings had since passed away, one due to cancer and the other due to a drug overdose, and Molly’s summation that it had to do with them having “live[d] a much harder life.” Molly further reflected upon the socioeconomic differences that she and her friend Antoinette experienced growing up, including that Molly’s parents bought both of them clothes for debate events, as well as her realization that she had never been to Antoinette’s house, as she lived in what she and others generally deemed an “unsafe” part of New York City. Molly reflected upon how she had been “completely oblivious” to these dynamics in her childhood and that the recent awareness was both “painful” and illuminative in terms of her understanding her own social (including racial) identity.
Experiences that facilitated White participants’ consciousness of their race and racial privilege, often intersecting with class privilege, coincided with their learning of the social injustices that people of color who were in their lives experienced. More critical understandings of dynamics of race and racism became increasingly salient in adulthood, through seeing the effects of racial prejudice in her children’s lives (Sharon), a recent conversation with a childhood friend (Molly), and processes of critical and sometimes painful reflection among each of them. The centrality of their racial identities, relationships with people of color, along with educational and professional experiences (discussed more later) and processes of reflection shaped White participants’ interest and efforts in racial justice work in their professional roles.

**Influence of Family**

*Cultural validation within participants’ families.* If dominant cultural norms were communicated to participants of color growing up that their racial and/or ethnic identities made them inferior, their families acted as buffers and as teachers about the positive value of their racial and/or ethnic identities. Participants of color spoke of how their families fostered an affirmative and positive sense of their cultural and, in particular, racial and/or ethnic identity. They expressed how this occurred through having been part of bigger, family-oriented communities that helped them learn about aspects of their family’s racial and/or ethnic identity and history. For example, Bambi talked about the influence that her mother had on her learning the history of African Americans, recalling a particular event:

> One time, my mother had asked my brother and me what we had learned [in school] for Black history month. And we couldn’t tell her anything more than Martin Luther King or something. And so, she then flooded the house with magazines from Jet and something else that was age-appropriate that really helped increase our understanding of contributions of African Americans.
Bambi talked about how this set of affirming learning experiences growing up was part of a longer trajectory of being affirmed of her Black identity (e.g., later on attending a historically Black university).

Tommy—whose parents were Mexican migrant workers—talked about the role that his family played in cultivating his ethnic and cultural identity. He expressed an appreciation for how his mother, in particular, balanced raising him and his siblings and navigating the mainstream “American” culture that was new to her, while retaining saliency of their Mexican ethnic identity in their home:

There…weren’t a lot of [Mexican] families in the community…any big celebrations we would do together as a family…Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Easter, quinceañeras…centered around my immediate family and my cousin’s families and the other Mexican families in our vicinity.

Indeed, Tommy noted that he often shared with people currently in his life, in his professional context, that his “primary identifier” was that of being Mexican and Latino. Family activities and dynamics growing up, such as Bambi and Tommy’s, affirmed their racial and/or ethnic identities, serving as partial counters or buffers to external dominant messages that deemed them inferior for being a person of color. These events and dynamics also connected to later experiences about which they would share in their educational and professional trajectories.

**Influential values.** Both participants of color and White participants discussed values passed down from their families that they believed influenced who they were as professionals and as people in general. These values included their relationship with the greater community around them, work ethic, resilience, and the value of education.

For starters, most of the participants mentioned explicitly the values that their families passed on around being of service to and being responsible to others in one’s community. Kevin,
for example, noted the specific influence that his aunt had on him, with whom he had stayed while an undergraduate student at Jackson State University and during which his aunt not only helped him but also his friends on multiple occasions, from making sure he could get a job to helping ensure his friends had food. He shared:

That experience with [my aunt and her family] those two years really taught me about giving back… and being there for your family, friends, and just people in general… I try to honor her and those lessons not just in my personal life with family and friends, or strangers—but also with co-workers and colleagues, and my students in trying to make sure that I’m available to them. Or if they tell me about something, and if it’s within my power and falls within my ethics—then I try to be there for them.

Most participants emphasized the actions and values exhibited in their families around making sure people were cared for—and that these values later in life became central in their professional contexts as well.

Overwhelmingly, participants also shared how their families taught them the value of hard work and resilience in the context of their educational, personal, and professional endeavors. Resilience was at the heart of the dynamics that Donovan, a Black male staff member, described with regard to his family culture. He spoke, for example, his admiration for his grandmother, who had raised his mother as a single Black woman in the 1940s and 50s while working full-time. Donovan noted:

Whatever those setbacks are, she’s never really let those stop her from being who she is… When I wasn’t going to school anymore, and I was depressed and wondering “what does this mean for my life?”—she went back later on and got an Associate’s degree. This was a woman who was in her 70s. It was one of those kicks to the butt, like “if she can go back for an Associate’s degree, and she’s 70-something, I can find a way to go back and get a degree as a non-traditional student.” I think she’s always shown me that… it doesn’t matter how long it takes you to do something; if you want that thing, it will always be there waiting for you.

This ethic of resilience and embracing “non-traditional” pathways was something that Donovan described as being part of his approach to encouraging and working with students.
Education was also regarded by participants’ families as being a valuable asset and worth pursuing. For example, Bambi, who was the first on her father’s side of her family to attend college, noted the values that her family (especially her mother) passed along regarding the value of higher education: “Education was sort of paramount because it was assumed to be the way in which you equalized race, the way you allowed yourself to be independent.”

While participants spoke of their families influencing them in ways that they felt were positive, there were also complex relationships and sets of values that participants felt like were antithetical to racial justice work that they needed to unpack later in their adult lives. Among two of the White participants, these value sets related to how they understood diversity, systems of social injustice, and their own positionality being White. Sharon, for example, noted:

[My parents] instilled in me a work ethic that has served me well… They also shaped and influenced some negative parts, because the cultural identity that I had and have were also shaped by them, and it took a long time to unlearn some of those things. So, they gave me a strong sense of identity in lots of ways, and some of those ways have not served me well.

Sharon credited the life lessons (i.e., a strong work ethic) that her parents passed along to her to her ability to do her job well at present, including in terms of serving students well. At the same time, she also acknowledged the limitations of her parents’ positionalities and what she had learned partly from them—which were informed by cultures and structures of White dominance—in shaping a set of values and understandings that later on in her life became increasingly and evidently antithetical to the work of antiracism.

Leslie also spoke of the person and professional she is today having been influenced by her parents, and more specifically a “culture of helping others” that they (her father, a minister and her mother, a teacher) instilled. At the same time, she also reflected upon how she came to
be in a different place and that her paradigm around “helping others” had shifted in important ways, saying:

You know that image depicting helping others by pulling them up? I think that was more of the—not charity work, but...[I had] more of that mentality. And as I’ve grown as a professional and had different experiences, I still see myself as helping others but not through that [lens], but more through empowering others. So, it’s that we’re equals, that I’m not better than you or bringing you up. But I think earlier on, I saw it as like charity work...so even, thinking about it in that way, there’s this notion that I’m better, that I can do something to help you. I don’t think it was explicit that I’m better than you, but I think that’s the underlying message that somehow if I’m supposed to be helping you, then I must have something that you need from me... So, I think [this shift] has been a big influence.

Leslie noted that while her parents instilled some early seeds of “being in service to others” that would shape her educational and professional choices, she noted that these initial paradigms were critically shifted by her later experiences (as described further in the forthcoming section) in ways that propelled her toward antiracism work.

**Summary of Personal Life Experiences**

Different elements of participants’ “personal” realms contributed to the asset-based and antiracist praxis they exhibited in their current role. Experiences of racism among participants of color illuminated their understanding of race and racism, motivated them to learn more about these issues, and planted some seeds for their work as practitioner-educators engaged in antiracism. Among White participants, it seemed that meaningful relationships with people of color in their lives and learning about their experiences (often as different from their own) illuminated the existence of racial injustices, along with their own racial privilege. Among these participants, exposure to and reflection upon these matters facilitated increased buy-in to the work of antiracism in their personal lives and professional lives.
Participants were influenced by their families in important ways with regard to the person and practitioner-educator they are today—from the understanding and affirmation of their cultural identities especially among participants of color; to the importance of caring for one’s community, the values of hard work, resilience, and education (nearly all participants); to unlearning dominant narratives (White participants). Suffice to say that these “personal” elements of participants’ lives substantially interacted with and overlapped with elements of their educational and professional realms (as discussed in the following sections), suggesting the interconnected and cumulative ways in which the different realms of participants’ lives cultivated their antiracist and asset-based approaches to education.

**Educational Realm**

Delving into the formal and informal educational contexts of participants gave way to seeing how what they experienced and learned in their own educational journeys played a role in cultivating their interest and investment in antiracist and equity-oriented educational practices in their current practitioner-educator roles. Participants’ educational journeys were multifaceted, as was illuminated by their responses when asked what words they would use to describe their education, e.g., “nurturing, challenging, and continuous” (Kevin); “bumpy, enlightening, and passionate” (Tommy); “linear, reflective, and positive” (Leslie); “privileged” (Sharon); “tedious, navigating politics, and learning” (Molly); and “perpetual, and creative” (Donovan). Participants shared about challenges that spanned personal, social, and academic matters. However, these experiences were typically paired with and/or were buffered by positive experiences, including having teachers and mentors who facilitated opportunities for them to learn and grow, receiving academic and cultural validation; and learning in ways that fostered critical social consciousness and identity development.
Teachers and Mentors Who Facilitated Opportunities

Each of the participants named the positive influence of a number of memorable teachers and mentors across each level of education from elementary school through graduate school—specifically in the ways in which their teachers and mentors helped them learn and grow academically and personally, and brokered opportunities for participants to advance in their education and/or in their careers. Leslie, for example, reflected on the immense role of her teachers and advisors throughout her educational trajectory:

[In high school], it was my teachers who I connected to in many ways more than my peers—they created opportunities for me to excel academically [e.g., a history teacher who encouraged her to study abroad, which ended up changing her worldview]… Then in college, I had wonderful faculty mentors who encouraged me, mentored me, challenged me… and I had a fabulous advisor in graduate school… He worked his butt off, but he expected me to work just as hard. I met with him weekly—he kept his students on track. Leslie and other participants attributed their being able to academically excel in large part to teachers who held high expectations for them, while also providing support for them to develop and grow.

Further, several participants noted the social identities (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity) that they held in common with some of their teachers, which participants attributed to higher levels of comfort, being able to relate, and help them succeed both inside and outside of the classroom. Bambi stated, for example, that when she was in ninth grade, she had a math teacher who was a woman for the first time, and “all of a sudden, math made sense.” For Bambi, having a woman math teacher countered gender stereotypes, and she allowed herself to particularly trust this teacher. Beyond formal class learning, Tommy shared about the impact that a Latino professor had had on him and his ethnic identity when he was in college:

One of my Spanish professors, who was Cuban, was one of my favorite professors because he pushed me to really begin to feel comfortable again with my ethnicity and my identity… in college, you start out wanting just to prove your worth and be just like
everyone else, and you don’t really fight the good fight when it comes to ethnicity… in my sophomore year, the beginning of my junior is also when I first had him, and I started to also be a fighter for the Latino community at the University of Iowa. Our presence wasn’t really felt. Diversity was still a very black and white issue, still very binary, and so me and some of my Latino and Mexican friends were like “What about us?” And we started to get really angry and really proud, and he was a professor who helped reignite that in me and helped support me in being okay raising a voice and raising a hand against the man, in order to help people understand my community’s gripes and where the university wasn’t supporting us. And so, he came at a right time in my educational journey in helping me re-understand and re-commit to being ethnic and loud and strong at a predominantly White institution, where there weren’t a lot of Latino professors.

Tommy identified the unique role that his professor had in sharing some of his social identities, fostering his ethnic identity development, and helping cultivate an area of personal growth—including getting involved in activism—while he was a college student.

Participants also talked about having teachers, advisors and mentors who invested in and brokered opportunities for them. Particularly at the higher levels of education (i.e., undergraduate and graduate levels), participants recognized opportunities that their teachers or mentors engaged in that allowed them to be able to advance educationally and/or professionally. For instance, Sharon talked about a mentor whose lab she worked in before and during graduate school, and commented on how this mentor saw potential in her, encouraged her to apply to graduate school, and offered her knowledge of graduate school. It was this mentor that Sharon attributed her getting into her master’s program and eventually into a PhD program to, saying: “She’s responsible for me being here. And it was important to see that it was a woman who had done it. That was the first strong female influence that directed me, at least academically.” What stood out to Sharon as being a major influence on her educational and professional trajectory was having a mentor—specifically a woman who previously navigated a field dominated by men—who helped to cultivate both her efficacy and brokered some of the knowhow to enter this educational space.
Validation

In spaces that largely had not been built for students of color and other marginalized communities (e.g., women), participants attributed importance to the roles that their teachers and mentors had in making them feel capable and that they belonged as students, by intentionally and proactively communicating to them that they were capable learners and valuable members of their educational communities (what Rendón [1994], again, conceptualized as academic and interpersonal validation). Participants talked about how these validating actions of teachers and mentors were important influencers of their educational—and subsequently, professional—trajectories. Their stories indicated experiences of academic validation and also cultural validation, or positive affirmation of participants’ of color social identities.

**Academic validation.** Within participants’ educational experiences, they identified the importance of being validated by their teachers and mentors that they had what it took to be educationally successful. Revisiting the experiences of Sharon, who was a first-generation college student—she talked about the influence that her sixth-grade science teacher had on her. Having seen potential in Sharon in her early years of schooling, this teacher encouraged her to keep going in her education. Sharon noted: “It was the first time any person had told me ‘if that’s what you want to do, you can do it, so go for it’”—and she identified the significance that this (and subsequently other academically validating messages she received from teachers) on her sense of efficacy and capacity to excel educationally (e.g., go to college) and to go down that path.

Importantly, in addition to being told that they could succeed academically, a number of participants also noted that their most influential teachers fostered a learning environments that were collaborative, dynamic and relational. Participants talked about a number of their
influential teachers treating the learning process as one in which teachers and students bore
shared responsibility for students’ learning. These teaching styles, in turn, seemed to foster in
participants a love for learning and the notion that they had the capacity to continuously learn,
ask questions, and seek help of their teachers in a supportive environment. For instance, Tommy
described a memorable teacher of his, an advanced placement calculus teacher who consistently
made sure that every student in the class understood the content, who adjusted his teaching as
necessary to make sure students learned, and who always welcomed questions:

[He] helped me understand that there wasn’t anything wrong with asking for help or
saying, “I don’t get it.” If someone asks you, and you don’t get it, all they’re going to do
is explain it in a different way, or teach you in a different way until you get it…or at least
that should be the role of an educator.

This teacher helped affirm in Tommy the notion that he (and all other students) were capable of
learning and that the process of learning involved a dynamic teacher-student relationship that
entailed a shared responsibility for students’ learning and success.

**Cultural validation.** Beyond being validated academically (i.e., being affirmed that they
had what it took to succeed academically), participants of color also highlighted the positive
influence that cultural validation had, inasmuch as that the social identities that participants
possessed were deemed as *assets* and integral parts of who they were. For example, Kevin
talked about how early in his formal education, he had experiences that were culturally and
holistically validating—his elementary school’s motto was “Black excellence,” educators
exposed students to African American history, and it was a place in which students felt safe to be
individuals while also recognizing they were part of a community. Exemplifying the benefits of
cultural validation, Bambi described her undergraduate and graduate experience at a historically
Black university:
We had buildings named after prominent Black folks… my chair worked with [the psychologist] Harlow… so I was really clear that there were people who looked like me who made these significant contributions. And I think it does nothing but sort of engender a sense of pride in your membership… I’m convinced that those were really important avenues in terms of my own sense of pride in self, my willingness to be able to combat oppression, to sort of stand up for myself and justice.

Bambi reflected that her educational experience in higher education contained critical elements that her K-12 education did not provide, including having voices of people of color in the curriculum. As they shared about their educational trajectories, it was evident that among participants of color, their educational success, social identity development, and confidence were positively influenced by people and dynamics that validated their cultural (in particular racial or ethnic) identities, when dominant structures (including predominantly White institutions) had otherwise marginalized them. Participants then integrated these experiences of academic and cultural validation into their own praxis.

**Lack of validation.** Participants also acknowledged (through experience and/or observation) that educational environments could have an *invalidating* effect on students of color, which influenced their interest in racial justice in higher education later in their lives. For example, Tommy shared about an experience that he, himself, had had in high school:

In the state of Illinois, in eighth grade, you take these tests to determine how you’re tracked…and I tested into all of the honors courses. And so I had gone to speak to my high school counselor, and she had indicated to me in a meeting: “Oh, well I see that you’re in these honors courses. You know, I’ve had some of your brothers and sisters before. I don’t know that this is the right fit for you, so I’m going to put you into lower levels.” And I had some electives that I had chosen, and she instructed me to take some more kind of shop/vocational-type courses. So I went home that day, and I happened to be talking to my older brother… and [told him about what happened]… and he got really pissed… he was like, “I’m taking work off tomorrow, I’m going to go to school with you”… because my parents don’t speak very good English, and I wouldn’t have been able to explain that situation to them anyway, and my brother knew that… so we went to school the next day, he asked to meet with my counselor, and he was like, “You’re putting my brother back into these honors courses if he placed into them.” And the counselor said, “well, you know I just want him to be successful, I just want to make sure
that he’s fitting in”—and whatever it is that she said, he was really adamant, saying “he’s smart, he placed into them. Just because we [his siblings] didn’t place into them doesn’t mean he’s not capable of doing it… And that was really my first indication—without my brother saying “Why did you this? Did you do it because he’s Mexican, and you don’t think he was smart enough?”—that was really my first indication that because of the color of my skin, because of how my last name sounded… because of perceptions people had about my ethnicity, that I was going to have to fight for some things and that I wasn’t going to be taken at the same level as anybody else… It was in this experience that I realized “I’m different, I’m a person of color that is different from many of the classmates that I’m going to be with, and because of that, there might be an assumption that I’m not as smart, not as worthy, that I don’t belong.

Tommy stated that this event was “probably part of the reason [he is] in education today.”

Among him and other participants of color, there was a cognizance that educational spaces are often not validating environments for people of color, and this keen awareness influenced their desire and sustained efforts at pursuing equity and antiracism work later in their lives and at present.

**Critical Social Consciousness and Social Identity Development**

A substantial part of what participants shared about their educational journeys entailed experiences and people that fostered their critical social consciousness and/or spurred the development of their social identities. These learning experiences occurred namely at the graduate level, through formal academic work (i.e., coursework and research), graduate assistantships, and student organizational involvement. For example, asked what co-curricular experiences changed how she viewed herself or the world around her, Leslie described a graduate assistantship she had within her master’s program, through which she worked for a year and a half in public housing project in Richmond, Virginia working with middle school youth (who were almost entirely African American) through a federal grant program. She described:

> It was me and three other graduate students, and we went every day after school [to the program they helped lead]… kids would get bussed there from their middle schools to this horrible place, it was a school that was boarded up and had chains on it… And we
did groups with girls and groups with boys, and did homework and did all kinds of things and connected with family… [In the area] there was a lot of violence and a lot of drug deals and a lot of gang activity, and here I was—this White grad student, it was a very interesting experience… [the other grad students and I] reflected a lot… it was an eye-opening experience for me on so many levels…being afraid, not wanting to be afraid, going in with certain assumptions and having those assumptions challenged—about not realizing how much community exists in places like…the place that I worked…building trust with parents of kids who at first looked at you like you were definitely not somebody that you trusted—those were really profound experiences for me…It got me interested in more of the antiracist work, honestly…being in Richmond, Virginia exposed me to race and class issues. I kind of had some knowledge of it, but I saw it in a different way…so it caused me to be reflective. And I think it’s part of why I ended up at a place like [MCC].

Leslie noted the longer-term influence that this graduate assistantship and set of learnings had on her; she also talked about subsequent learning experiences that furthered her engagement in antiracism work (discussed in the next section). This graduate assistantship marked for her one of the key sets of transformational learning experiences in the way of dispelling myths, giving her more critical understandings of race and social inequalities, and her own positionality.

Participants also talked about their experiences in having practitioner-educators and educational experiences shape their social identity development in importantly liberating ways. Within his graduate program in higher education and student affairs, for example, Tommy spoke about learning about ethnic identity development models, particularly the Latino identity development model, in addition to the gay identity development model (at a time when he was coming out as “a gay, bisexual man”). Continuing this learning through the writing of his master’s thesis on identity development models for Latino gay men, he spoke of this time period as one in which he reconciled and reflected upon the coexistence and intersections of his identities as both Latino and gay:

That really shaped how I saw myself in my world, specifically because I began to understand that I didn’t need to choose one or the other… I didn’t need to be either Latino or gay, and I didn’t have to be just gay and not Latino… I didn’t call it
intersectionality in 1998 when I wrote my thesis, but it is intersectionality… My thesis research helped me understand that I could still be strongly Latino and still be a part of the gay community, and I didn’t have to be less gay in my Latino community… that I could still strongly identify and hold both those identities at the core of who I am and be a central community member in both of those communities… I think my delving deep into both of those identity development models helped shape my context… and I learned how to come out to myself and to my family. But it was first that sort of educational exploration of it.

Similarly, insomuch as coursework facilitated more critical and empowered understandings of participants’ historically marginalized social identities, Bambi talked about reading the works of African American psychologists in her clinical psychology doctoral program at Howard, as well as equipping her to be a critical and justice-minded scholar and practitioner:

In addition to having the [traditional] psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioral elements, [the program] really was talking about how do we service marginalized groups? … There were a lot of readings that challenged the status quo… my instructors made us challenge the legitimacy of [mainstream literature on intellectual assessment]… We did that kind of stuff with everything we did in our learning.

Bambi went onto share, “It was that sort of history that has informed how I currently work, and I spend a lot of time debunking in my teaching [dominant thought when it comes to race]… I also challenge power and privilege.”

The majority of participants named the influence that critical, key learnings that took place largely in graduate school (both within formal classroom curriculum and in co-curricular learning experiences) had on their critical understandings of the world and themselves, and ultimately, their interest in and ability to engage in antiracist and equity-based work in their current roles. Among White participants (Leslie and Molly), reflection and action came hand in hand in terms of their learning about social injustices and their potential agentic roles in addressing these injustices. Among participants of color (Tommy and Bambi), key sets of
learnings in their respective fields not only validated their (historically marginalized) social identities but also helped them understand ways in which they could navigate social structures in empowered ways.

**Summary of Educational Realm**

An exploration of participants’ educational journeys was intended to unveil how, if at all, their own experiences as students—from what they learned, to relationships and dynamics with their teachers and mentors between primary and graduate school—cultivated their current asset-based and antiracist approaches to education. The most prominent themes that emerged consisted of having teachers and mentors who facilitated opportunities for them to thrive and learn; the recognition of academic and cultural validation in educational settings as being important to their success and holistic wellbeing; and learning experiences that fostered participants’ critical social consciousness and identity development.

It seemed that these various dynamics influenced two keys sets of outcomes amongst the participants: firstly, that they were supported in critical ways by educators and institutions that helped them feel efficacious as students and subsequently have opportunities to persist and thrive within their educational trajectories. This was seen as important particularly for the five out of seven participants who were first in their families to go to college. Secondly, participants’ educational settings and experiences caused them to learn critical aspects about themselves and the world around them in ways that influenced both their personal and vocational journeys. Participants discovered who they were and what was important to them (much of which centered on social change) through experiential and relational learning, and having teachers and mentors help nourish and refine their goals and sense of efficacy. Participants’ reflections pointed to the recognition, based largely on their own educational journeys, that educational structures and the
people within had the capacities to render affirmative and meaningful opportunities and learnings (including for people with marginalized identities such as themselves). These connections to their educational journey, in turn, influenced their roles as educator-practitioners.
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, PART II: PROFESSIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL REALM

Racial Justice Team

To begin this section, suffice it to review that members of the Racial Justice Team at Middle Community College (MCC) comprised six out of the seven participants of this study. Members of the team shared slightly differing but mostly overlapping accounts of the start of the Racial Justice Team. With no written history of its founding, there were nonetheless several facts that I was able to consolidate from these accounts. One participant (a current administrator who had joined the team several years after its founding) noted the team’s history as being a grassroots response of people of color arriving at institution in the early 1990s, alongside racial and ethnic demographic changes in the student, faculty, and staff population. Another participant—a founding member—shared that the team was born out of a grassroots effort by a racially mixed group of faculty who were concerned about the lack of racial inclusion and justice at the college. More specifically, it began as a working group of faculty members at the college that read about, explored, and discussed White privilege. After recognizing a need and opportunity for a formal group of various stakeholders at various levels of the college addressing issues of racism, the team sought out and received institutional (financial) support via approval from the college president at the time (and who remained in the role until 2015) in the 2009-2010 academic year. Notably, one of the founding members was the vice president and a close
colleague of the president’s. The core group of founding members took on an initially different name and iteration (called “Next Step”), decided to take on an approach of incorporating structural and institutional analyses of anti-racism, and partnered with a national non-profit organization called Crossroads Antiracism Organizing &Training, whose central function was to “provide organizing, training, and consulting to institutions striving to dismantle racism” (Crossroads, 2018). In an effort to have a shared analysis of racism and to be intentional about who was on the team, from early on in the Racial Justice Team’s existence, a prerequisite for college faculty, staff, or administrators to join was participation in a 2-hour, then a 2.5-day antiracism training facilitated by the Crossroads organization, and a subsequent personal invitation to join the team.

Notably, the Racial Justice Team existed in addition to a group called the Diversity Council, speaking to the founding members’ recognition for the need for a group that particularly addressed issues of racism and racial justice at the college. Members of the group discussed the tension of wanting and needing institutional support and funding while also wanting to be autonomous from the college (i.e., not be required to answer to people or units at the institution that would have held up the goals and the antiracism work). Bambi, one of the founding members, described the team’s history and role:

That role has morphed and evolved. In some ways, we wanted to be institutionalized—we wanted to be in the fabric of the institution but not of the institution…The team recognizes that to become part of a culture means traditionally that you adopt its values, its beliefs, its practices. And we believe that those practices are what are at the core of institutional racism. So, it’s not our intent to be embedded in that way. We want the college to acknowledge our existence, to provide financial support for our efforts, but we don’t want to report to anybody but the president because it keeps us from challenging the institution and dismantling the racism that’s present.
Tommy further noted that they “wanted to be the counterculture as it related to helping the college understand institutional racism…and the impact that equity had in [their] work.” In one of the focus groups, Sharon described that one of the team’s key approaches had been to “organize behind the scenes to implement policies and get people in positions of power who share[d] antiracist worldviews to move the entire college in that direction.” The self-described role of the Team, therefore, was in influencing who would occupy key positions at the college, as well as to educate all current employees and, altogether, try to change the culture at the college. Participants noted that, since its founding, the Team had influenced work that goes on in college that “sometimes was invisible” (Leslie)—particularly as it pertained to hiring, promotion, and whose voices were or were not at the table. According to one of the team members, the team met about once every two years for a retreat, during which they map out strategies and organize. The team also constantly evaluated what needed work at the college; they had a sub-committee to work toward trying to infuse the president’s council and presidency with antiracist views, another sub-committee to do the same among faculty staff, and yet another sub-committee that focused on the team itself and making sure team was “healthy, happy, and functioning well” (Sharon). The range of time that members had been on the team spanned two years to the whole seven years the team had been in existence. Several former members of the team had left for a variety of reasons, from limitations in capacity and time, to the possibility that the work had become too difficult particularly among White colleagues on the team (as shared by a founding member of color). This chapter details some of the individual-level as well as group-level dynamics that participants reflected upon with regard to what cultivated, contextualized, complicated, and manifested from their antiracist and asset-based praxis.
Overview

Delving into the professional and organizational realms of participants’ lives allowed the exploration of multiple facets of both research questions: (a) What elements of their professional and organizational realms cultivated their antiracist and asset-based praxis, and (b) What actions and approaches to fostering student success manifested from this praxis? This section highlights a number of themes. First, participants all felt a kind of vocational calling into their roles in education, as well as a desire to “pay forward” what had been given to them in their educational and professional journeys thus far. Second, participants expressed common philosophies regarding student success, including seeing success as a shared responsibility between students and educators/institutions, as well as understanding students holistically with an overarching aim for equity in their praxis. Further, participants took on both individual-level and organizational-level actions and approaches to fostering antiracism, racial justice, and student success. In

Figure 2. Key findings part 2.
discussing the institutional-level approaches to fostering racial justice, participants talked about
dynamics of racism and racial hostility at the college, and expressed some fatigue with engaging
in racial justice efforts. At the same time, they shared continued passion and hopes for
institutional transformation.

**Vocational Calling and “Paying it Forward”**

At the heart of participants’ motivation and reasoning for entering and continuing in their
respective roles as practitioner-educators was their sense of vocational calling and an intrinsic
motivation to “pay forward” the opportunities and experiences they had been given in their
educational and personal journeys by teachers, mentors, and key others. That is, what drew
participants to their work and gave them continued sense of fulfillment connected back to their
personal and educational journeys. Thinking of his parents, siblings, professors and supervisors,
for example, Tommy stated that he “owe[d] it to folks behind [him] to return what was given to
[him],” that he “didn’t get here on [his] own… [he] climbed on people’s backs and shoulders”
and had an “obligation to pay it forward.” When Sharon was asked why she does the work that
she does, she teared up and reflected upon her having had strong mentors who got her where she
is and how she would like to be that for someone else. She remarked:

> If one person someday is sitting down in an interview and says, “this professor told me I
could do it, and I hadn’t heard that before, and so then I did it.” …I think that’s powerful.
I’d like to be that example that other people provided for me.

For Sharon and other participants, a sense of vocational calling to their functional areas, their
interest working specifically at a community college, and motivation to give back and “pay it
forward” brought them into and sustained them in their current roles.

In addition to discerning that they wanted to go into their respective functional areas,
several participants also noted being drawn to working at a community college based on its
democratizing mission, as well as their interest in working with diverse student populations. For instance, for Leslie early in her career, one of her past supervisors—who was familiar with the community college system—had suggested that she look into working at a community college based on her interest in social justice and access issues. Upon applying to and getting her first job at a community college (MCC), Leslie spoke of planning to “never go back to the four-year”:

I found that the access mission of community colleges, given who I was and what I believed in and some of the earlier experiences I had—it really matched my values… I loved the college, and I believed in what we did. [Most meaningful to the work is] listening to students and their stories…And I’ve always felt that about working in higher ed… I feel it qualitatively different here than I did in most of the other places that I worked, [where] most of the students who come to those institutions have some privilege being there.

Philosophies Regarding Student Success

Aligned with their vocational calling and motivation to do their jobs, participants highlighted their philosophies around serving, supporting, and helping students succeed. Notably, these philosophies largely centered on improving the educational experience for students and to help the institution improve in fulfilling its social justice mission. Participants viewed student success as a shared responsibility between students and the institution and a holistic understanding of students, with an aim for equity.

Student Success as Shared Responsibility

Each of the participants described a shared responsibility for student success that they (as individual practitioner-educators) and the institution as a whole possessed alongside each student. Several participants discussed the importance of creating a sense of belonging particularly among historically marginalized groups. For example, Kevin postulated:

If we create that situation where you’re not really a student, then why would they value this experience? Or if we’re not making sure that they’re a part of that experience… This goes back to those marginalized communities as well…if we aren’t making them feel that
they are a part of the institution, part of that academic setting, community…where their voice should be heard… It’s important to validate their voices as students and as individuals.

In some similar ways, Molly (a part-time faculty member) shared that her philosophy to promoting student success entailed treating students with kindness and respect. She added: “I communicate to them that I want them to succeed, but you can’t just say ‘I want you to succeed,’ you have to show them.” She explicitly “owned” the role of an instructor in helping students succeed, and “examining where [she] could do a better job.” Indeed, across the board, one of the key components to participants’ philosophies regarding student success was a belief in their (and the institution’s) shared responsibility for fostering student success.

**Holistic Understanding of Students, With an Aim for Equity**

In a similar vein, participants also named the importance of understanding students holistically, with an aim to foster equity. They spoke of the importance of understanding from where students came—their backgrounds, their stories—as a beginning step to understanding how to best serve students. Molly, for example, articulated: “As a teacher, I find myself much more interested in the whole person as opposed to just the person who’s handing in a piece of paper or taking my test.” While the participants exhibited the desire to invest in and try to understand their students on a holistic level, this was not the norm at the college, including among many faculty members. Sharon stated, for instance: “Sometimes faculty’s life experience is so different from students’ that they can’t imagine and can’t or don’t believe what students share with them. They don’t teach faculty how to deal with student issues.” She noted that many faculty worked from a place of assuming all students came from the same backgrounds and should be treated homogenously. However, for her, she noted: “It’s this idea of equity instead of
equality—I’m going to meet the students where they’re at… But that means you have to be willing to put in the time to work with the student.”

Participants acknowledged the complexity of the identities and backgrounds that their students had—naming multiple layers of social identity such as race, socioeconomics, gender, disabilities, sexuality, veteran status, age, and having competing priorities (e.g., working, taking care of family)—and the responsibilities the institution had to understanding their varying needs, experiences, and opportunities. Kevin noted:

> When it comes to our students—especially when we talk about gender, when we talk about race, when we talk about class, when we talk about vet status, or when we talk about sexuality…while we might have something [indicating the presence of diversity] on the website, my question goes to the individual’s experience with the institution… How often are we really questioning what [students from those marginalized populations and communities] experiences are? Because it’s one thing to say, “well, we’ve got this, and we’ve got that,” and we’re telling them—and we’re seeing some students participating in certain activities…But when we talk about climate surveys and so forth, how are we doing it? Are we doing it? Because, of course, we’ve got stats regarding academic performance broken down in terms of gender and racial categories…but we can start going into some other things, like how safe does a student feel here within the context of the classroom or walking down the hallway…or getting a pulse on a male student’s consideration of what a female student or trans student has to contend with.

Participants’ understanding of students’ experiences entailed giving weight to students’ multiple, complex identities, as well as how these identities interacted with the cultures and structures at MCC. Participants were also simultaneously interested in the goal of equity and how the institution functioned to be able to support students across various identities.

Participants also exhibited critically multicultural (Rhoads & Valedez, 1995), asset-based understandings of students. Asked what were some key assets that students at the college possess that allow them to succeed, several participants noted facets of CCW (though they did not specifically use the term), such as aspirational capital, social capital, and resistance capital.

For example, asked to describe the students with whom he worked, Kevin partially noted: “I
think our students are intelligent… students are contending with different things. Some of them have impressed with being able to overcome certain obstacles” (resistance capital). Sharon similarly noted:

I think that students of color have no sense of entitlement. They are very familiar with the reality that if they’re going to get ahead in this world, they’re going to have to do it; the onus is on them to succeed—nothing’s going to be handed to them, probably very little has been handed to them ever. Non-marginalized students sometimes lack that insight. And so, they can then struggle with adversity; they haven’t had to necessarily overcome adversity before and don’t know how to deal with it… and so that may be a benefit to marginalized students.

Tommy spoke of working closely with a group of Latinx students at MCC, who were the first in their families to attend college, lower-income, and many of them undocumented or “DACA-mented” students. Tommy described these students as hard workers because of their family situations… and the importance of having a college education… All of them have strong family connections—and while some of those connections can hinder their success and their progress in education, many of those connections really help those students be successful… even if they don’t have parents who went to college, parents are super supportive of them being here and doing better than they did. So, I think that helps to keep those students driven and passionate to complete their degrees.

In explicating the above attributes as strengths, Tommy demonstrated an asset-based understanding of these students (whose assets can be equated to familial and aspirational forms of community cultural wealth), inasmuch as he understood that these students derived cultural capital from their identities as first-generation, Latinx students from immigrant backgrounds.

**Individual-Level Praxis Fostering Antiracism, Equity, and Student Success**

Within their individual praxis, participants talked about their approaches to fostering student success entailing: fostering validating and supportive relationships with students; continuing to learn, grow, and reflect on their roles at work and in the society at large; and staying connected to and engaging with the institution.
Forming Validating, Supportive Relationships with Students

In alignment with their beliefs regarding what contributes to student success, participants actively found ways to learn about who their students were and what they needed to succeed, and made consistent efforts to form validating and supportive relationships with them. For example, Molly stated that she administers a survey at the beginning of each of her classes, asking several open-ended questions (e.g., “Is there anything going on outside the classroom that could impact your work?” and “Is there anything that affects you as a learner?”), and reviewing and acknowledging each survey. She noted that through this practice, students shared information of situations including having an ill parent, balancing multiple jobs outside of class, having an undocumented learning disability or a health issue, and (among a few students she had had) dealing with homelessness. These surveys also established lines of communication between her students and her throughout the remainder of the course, and helped her be a more understanding and accommodating instructor.

In some similar ways, Kevin spoke of striving to get to know students holistically, and also to validate and support them through a multifaceted role as an educator. Specifically, Kevin shared about a set of events that partially led him to the aforementioned realizations: in his interactions with a student, an African American male student who had a speech stutter that had come up in class, he noted:

The thing that happened that kind of broke me…he was crying [in my office] and said “I don’t feel like I belong”… And I told him “Don’t you say that. I understand why you’re saying it, but don’t you say that. There’s nothing about you that says you don’t belong here. You’re here, you’re in my office because you’re concerned; you’re in my office because you want to do better. You’re here because you want an education. So, don’t you dare say that you don’t belong… I’m telling you, you do belong here.”
Kevin had acknowledged and been emotionally affected by his student’s experiences with structural and cultural barriers. At the same time worked to validate the student, telling him that he belonged, encouraging him to utilize resources at the college (such as requesting accommodations), and subsequently checked in with student even after the semester ended. He reflected:

Maybe in some ways, I’ve got to serve not just as an instructor in terms of facilitating the academic part of it, but also serve as a cheerleader or mentor, trying to lead them to certain resources, letting them know that I believe in them.

**Continuing To Learn, Grow, and Reflect on Their Roles**

Insomuch as participants exhibited the ability to work with their students using critical and equity-based frameworks that positioned the institution as playing a role in fostering student success, many of the participants alluded to the ways in which they continued—and needed to continue—individually learning, growing, and reflecting on their roles. These areas for growth included ways in which they could enhance their educational practices; greater knowledge of social identities and dynamics of power, privilege and oppression at and beyond the institution (i.e., in their personal lives); and owning their own positionalities and areas of agency.

For example, outside of his functional role and being on the Racial Justice Team, Donovan served on the college’s Student Conduct Committee, which he attributed to giving him greater understanding of the institutional dynamics outside of his immediate office, ways in which students were experiencing and desired to be at the college, and what the institution could do better to ensure that students could succeed. He noted:

Both [being on the Racial Justice Team and on the Student Conduct Committee] are rewarding in almost the same way. It allows me to better understand our students and our institution, and what our institution is lacking or needing to improve upon for, again, the purposes of making sure our students are succeeding.
Altogether, participants talked about the recognition that they were continually learning and reflecting, and that these were critical processes of how they were going to be effective in their educational practices and efforts at fostering greater social justice in their work and in their personal lives. Aside from the individual work that they did, each participant was involved in multiple committees and college groups in which they sought to connect with other employees, further understand students’ experiences and the institutional context, continue to build upon their own knowledge of diversity and social justice issues, and seek opportunities to hone their praxis.

**Coalition-Building and Enacting Agency within the Institution**

Participants talked about building coalitions with others on campus, sharing information and opportunities for antiracism work, and engaging in broader organizational transformation. Those who were administrators discussed using their influence and scope of their power to try to get staff, faculty, and other administrators at the college to buy in and invest in the priorities of equity, racial justice, and student success. For example, informed by the understanding of the importance of connection in retaining students, Leslie spoke of an initiative that she launched just prior to the study, wherein they tried to get as many of the students (particularly those who belonged to groups that had had lower persistence rates at the college) connected with at least one staff or faculty member. She noted that the initiative promoted faculty engagement in an intentional, structured way; after seeing the positive results of the initiative, Leslie then saw her task as: “How do we make sure that every student has that experience?” As a leader, she also noted that faculty who engaged in the initiative found their jobs to “be more meaningful as a result.” This example demonstrated the agency that Leslie took through her role as an
administrator at the institution, leveraging her power and influence to foster buy-in and participation from more members of the institution.

In addition to engaging in organizational change for student success, participants also exhibited a desire to have meaningful and supportive relationships with other employees at the college. Participants viewed the work that they did as necessarily involving people and community, and they saw benefit to building relationships with people who were both like-minded and not-like-minded. Bambi, for example, noted:

The work we do is helping White folks understand that their humanity is taken and that you have as much stake in the game as everybody else—you might not recognize it in the same way as folks of color. That’s what keeps me on the team…It’s easier to confront it and have a channel by which to manage my frustrations, celebration of the work we do, and be in fellowship—it’s supportive in a really important way.

A related idea of “the MCC family” was also brought up by several participants in a focus group, whereby it seemed that participants and others on campus sought to have a family-like community, fostered by dialogue-oriented and supportive relationships. In all, participants recognized the need for engaging with the institution and forming relationships with other staff members, faculty members and administrators (as opposed to acting solely on an individual level) to not only help spur organizational change but to also find fellowship and support amongst each other.

**Institutional Dynamics of Racism**

Participants discussed the institutional dynamics of racism that they observed and/or experienced, which had notably also precipitated some of the need for and development of the Racial Justice Team. These dynamics occurred in both overt and covert ways, and impacted students as well as staff, faculty, and administrators. For one, participants alluded to many faculty members’ (namely White faculty members’) failures to recognize their own privileges
and biases, to connect with students, and to utilize culturally validating and effective educational praxis. These dynamics, in turn, they believed impeded opportunities for many students of color to feel welcomed and be supported in succeeding.

Specifically, within the sciences division, Sharon talked about a lack of cultural competency and rigidity in their practice that a number of faculty exhibited:

In the [science] division, there’re a lot of senior faculty—some have been there 30 years! They are intractable in their teaching methodologies. Some hold idea that they’re not racist—if their students of color are not succeeding, “it’s not me, it’s them.” …What I feel from my division a lot is “this is how I did it, this is my experience, and why isn’t everybody just having the experience as me? I feel there’s a real lack of empathy and connection with the students of a community college. I don’t think anybody in my division has gone to a community college as a student. And so, their experience is so different, and they’re not open to the experience of their students. And they blame academic failure on students’ lack of preparedness and them getting “crappy students” and not: “maybe I could try some things to be more engaging or help out.”

Based on what participants shared actions and commentary engaged in by faculty (in particular), there was a sense that the many of the practitioner-educators at the institution failed to engage in a critically multicultural, antiracist (and generally anti-deficit) understandings of diverse students (particularly, students of color, first-generation college students, low-SES students among other groups).

In addition to these above indications of cultural bias and educational racism (Long, 2016a, b), outright racial hostility also was evident on campus, dynamics which were not consistently or sufficiently addressed by institutional agents. For example, in a focus group, participants described a prominent incident that occurred at an annual college breakfast with several hundred staff, faculty and administrators in attendance. During an activity that was intended to facilitate conversation about building structures for supporting student success, a staff member made a noose out of rope (one of the materials available for use in said activity),
and the master of ceremonies, a White faculty member, then took the noose-shaped rope and began to dangle it on stage. Tommy shared:

A number of staff of color got really uncomfortable and wanted the institution, the president to respond and say, “hey, we saw what happened. Here is what we believe” …just kind of reinforcing our work toward being an anti-biased institution, which is the language that the college was comfortable with five years ago. And it literally took us about two and a half or three weeks to convince the senior leadership that they should respond in that way—that we should have a community conversation. And by that point—three weeks without having a conversation with the culture as is tends to create more and intense and deepened feelings—bad feelings—about our inability to respond… And even within the community conversation, senior administration chose to make excuses for the professor, as opposed to simply saying: “Hey, this was inappropriate, we support antiracism, that’s who we are as a culture.” But instead, we chose to make excuses for the professor instead of having a really crucial, critical, courageous conversation about what was going on.

Within the focus group in which this story was shared, members of the team expressed both verbally and non-verbally the sense of shock, disgust, disappointment, and anger that they felt (even years after the incident occurred) at witnessing institutional leaders’ downplaying the incident and failure to commit to a semblance of antiracism work. Participants exhibited exhaustion in dealing with not only this but other instances of racial hostility on campus. For example, having witnessed student complaints, Kevin spoke of learning of faculty members having been passive observers of racial hostility and discrimination among students:

I think part of it is the political, social climate…I’m not just seeing it from my colleagues, we’re seeing it from students in the way [students are] interacting with each other. And I do think as an institution, we try to address that, but…I’m privy to certain things being on certain committees…and hearing about situations where students are feeling discriminated against outright—or, for lack of a better word…being bullied by their peers—and how their instructors are either subtly but of course not so subtly participating in that, or passively allowing that culture to exist. That’s obviously problematic, and [the realization of this has] woken me up…because I really thought that we, as an institution—and not just because we have a Racial Justice Team and not just because of certain people in different positions—but I just thought that we were much better than that… Those things might be reported by a student but then find out nothing much happens. And the irony is that there’s continuity in this…I’ve heard it happening with
our students but also with employees… it’s just been disappointing and in some ways quite ugly.

By and large, and throughout their number of years at the college, participants shared that racism was pervasive, troubling to a number of employees, problematic toward the goals of student success among students of color, and ill-addressed by institutional leaders. Members were tired of “putting out fires” in terms of blatant racism and the lack of accountability on the campus. Taken altogether, there was clear reasoning for why such a group as the Racial Justice Team had come about; at the same time, there was exhaustion in having the same racism-related issues come about, even with the existence of a formalized team. Some unit- and institutional-level strides were made—albeit with challenges; these dynamics are discussed in the following section.

**Unit- and Institutional-Level Strides and Challenges**

**Training and Education**

A number of the participants articulated the important role that the training and education of *educators* plays in advancing cultural competence and racial justice. One of the key opportunities for training and education at the college began at the outset of the Racial Justice Team, wherein they sponsored a 2-hour, followed by a 2.5-day "antiracism training" offered to college employees (serving also a precursor and requirement to joining the Racial Justice Team). This set of trainings was facilitated by a vetted external organization and financially supported by money that the team was able to get regularly allotted by the institution (as part of the Racial Justice Team’s operations). Though participants noted already having been interested in the work of antiracism, several of them talked about the significance, still, of this training in influencing their perspectives, positionality, and their praxis. Molly, for example, described this
training as having been one of the most meaningful professional development opportunities in which she had taken a part, stating that it helped her more deeply understand how much of the historical context is still at play in the world today…the ramifications of American history, of the modern world, weren’t as present in my mind…I sort of understood them, but the more direct connections and links came up.

Sharon also commented that the training illuminated laws, policies, framework that had given rise to effects that she had noticed. She further shared: “That was a paradigm shift for me, and now it’s become the focus of my personal and professional life…I see myself as both a professor and anti-racist, and those things [intersect].”

Participants largely emphasized the importance that education such as the antiracism training had on moving toward a goal of a more inclusive, racially just institution. For example, asked what institutional-level or departmental-level dynamic he would change involving how people at MCC went about engaging in antiracist and inclusive praxis, Kevin responded that part of what he would change is having antiracism training be mandatory for all full-time employees.

In speaking to some strides toward antiracism and cultural competence that the institution had made, Sharon noted that a promising step was the fact that some departments and divisions were starting to require this or related training. She specified, for example, that the new dean of her division had recently made it a requirement for every faculty member to have some multicultural, diversity, inclusion, or equity training at least once every two years.

Thus, the education of the practitioner-educators seemed to be influential in their adopting antiracist and asset-based praxes in working with diverse student populations. They observed the impact of this type of training and education on their own outlooks and praxis, and they wanted a greater proportion of the college’s practitioner-educators to engage in such learning and professional development as well.
Leadership Matters

Participants spoke within their individual interviews and focus groups about the importance of leadership at the institution. For example, as noted above, Sharon noted the larger scale importance of having a new leader for the division who was interested in antiracism and equity work, and who pushed for measures such as diversity training for instructors, paying attention to disparities in academic success between student groups, helping faculty utilize effective and multicultural pedagogical practices (such as active learning, case studies, and a variety of learning techniques), and having faculty share best practices amongst each other. Giving acknowledgement to the leaders in his department and division as well, Kevin noted appreciating being given the freedom and encouragement to incorporate culturally meaningful content in his courses, such as bringing in the show “The Wire” to his English classes, to talking with students about music, and in general engage in topics of interest to him and that he felt fostered the engagement of students in the classroom.

On a larger scale, each participant noted the highly influential role that institutional leaders (e.g., executive-level administrators) had in either fostering or hindering the goals of racial justice. Participants discussed having a former president (among other leaders) who did not consistently invest in matters of racial justice at the college, and that some of the work “sort of seemed like lip-service… and there was really no interest in making any critical change” (Bambi). Asked about what institutional dynamics (structurally or culturally) either fostered or inhibited efforts to address racism and bias at present, one participant in a focus group noted:

One on hand, we have a president now who acknowledges racism. She sends letters to the college where she talks about it. So that’s positive… and she’s clearly hired a lot of people of color…and let go of people who were blocking [antiracism] work…but on the other hand, the president has at times failed to be as strong as she could. You can read that she’s kind of sugar-coating some of these things to make it more palatable for those
who aren’t comfortable with this sort of [antiracism] work or unfamiliar with it… Also, [she] acknowledges the work, but I have yet to see any money put where that mouth is.

Participants indicated a desire for the president to do more than had been done in the past to help dismantle institutional racism in the way of both funding resources and efforts. Notably, within one focus group, participants also noted that the college’s current board members (more than one of whom were “actively racist”) also stood in the way of leadership efforts to engage in campus-wide racial justice and antiracism.

Leslie (a White woman) reflected on ways she felt challenged being in a leadership role and how to adequately lead and engage efforts toward racial justice:

Being on the [Team] has really helped me, forced me to think about my role and the privileges that I have, in ways that I wasn’t always as aware of and didn’t always want to be aware of… Some of the team meetings were very difficult. When you look at who’s on the team, that was a cross-section of staff, faculty and administrators, people of color and White… [In my former role] I recognized that I truly had more power than anybody in that room. And I don’t think I ever have thought of myself as a powerful person. I’m not hierarchical… I’m a younger woman… but I would sit in that room, and believe me, [the Racial Justice Team members] were like “you have the power.” So, there were often these weird dynamics. I was like, “I don’t want that power.” Just even thinking about the role of power that’s ascribed to you because of your role…and having to own it and being like, “Yeah I do have that power.” And recognizing, “Yeah, I really do, whether I want it or not—I have it. So, then what am I going to do about it?”

As exhibited by the above reflection, being a part of the Racial Justice Team entailed her owning her position of power and her White privilege, being accountable to a group of which she was a part that sought out institutional change, and intervening in a culture that had previously underplayed a need for racial justice. In general, it was clear that participants identified the power that institutional leaders had, and sought out and expected them to care about and invest in the work of antiracism—through resources, actions, messaging, and engaging in (and leading engagement of) critical analyses of dynamics on campus.
Problematic Structure and Compensation

What came up as a clear barrier to the work of antiracism at the institution was the lack of an inclusive and effective structure and compensation system that allowed and encouraged all the practitioner-educators “who wanted to do antiracism work, to actually do the work” (Sharon). In a focus group, participants shared that many faculty and staff were well-meaning and sought out student success much of the time. Further, a number of faculty would have liked to learn how to improve their pedagogical practices but that many of them did not have the time or the resources to do so, or feel a sense of support from the college. Sharon and Molly brought up, for example, that encouragement around faculty engaging with their students individually early on in the semesters were good ideas but were not feasible for most adjunct faculty, who had limited time and did not so much as have their own offices. Further, Molly (part-time faculty member) stated that adjunct faculty would love to participate in trainings but believed it was unfair that they were not compensated for their time. As part of the part-time faculty union, she shared that she was working to have additional compensation for professional development be a part of the adjunct faculty new contract negotiation.

By and large, participants posited that there was a lack of exposure, education, and ability to implement changes, particularly among faculty. Sharon articulated:

You can tell people the best pedagogy, and they can know it and believe it, but they still won’t implement it because they don’t have the time or resources to do it… Give faculty [fellowships] or semesters off so they can rework all of their curriculum… Provide training around what it looks like to have antiracist curriculum in different disciplines…You can do it, but probably many physicists [as an example] don’t know how to… even I struggle a lot over how—when I teach biology, how do I teach that in an antiracist way, so that…with the examples that I give, it resonates with everyone. Or, forget that, maybe I’m giving examples that resonate primarily with the students of color and shifting that a little bit. But I need to see examples of that, the other faculty need examples of that.
Overburdening of Staff, Faculty, and Administrators of Color

While participants named some of the progress that had been made at the institutional level with regard to antiracism, equity, and inclusion, they also stated that much of the burden had been on staff, faculty, and administrators of color—and that the institution had failed to retain many employees of color who had experienced racism and/or were overburdened by the work of addressing it. Tommy described, for example, that:

staff, administrators and faculty of color…[would] stay for two years, and then at some point, you get slapped in the face of understanding that this is not a welcoming and supportive environment to work in, when you know no one is being held accountable for their behavior.

Tommy further noted that working at the college was taxing in terms of mental and spiritual health. Bambi stated that she continued to do the work even though it was hard, and she knew that she would be “subject to pressures even without the team.” Speaking also to the history of the Racial Justice Team, Bambi stated that it could be challenging having White colleagues on team, insomuch as “if it gets too hard, they could leave”—and, in fact, White members of the team had left.

Sharon put forth also the overall lack of employees of color at the institution: “How do you get faculty of color to stay when you’re working them to death by asking them to be on every committee, every group? They become the face of [MCC]…And it’s not just faculty, it’s staff, it’s administrators.” Both Sharon and Molly also expressed the pivotal role that White college employees played in combatting racism but that they needed to consider and navigate how to be an ally and not “take over” the work: “That’s a problem with White people—we have a tendency to want to ‘fix the thing’ and have the potential to trample people you’re trying to help” (Sharon).
Expressing similar sentiments regarding employee burnout, Kevin articulated the ongoing dynamics that a number of college employees had faced:

What does it matter to have the diversity if you’re still having those same issues? And people are really very good people…who are willing to put the students first, particularly those students who are first-generation or underserved students. They’re willing to put forth that effort, but they don’t see the institution backing them or supporting them—for that matter, making their lives, their day-to-day, a living hell. You can’t blame them for leaving.

Overall, participants noted that—even with a formal Racial Justice Team—there were ongoing issues around institutional commitment to and cohesion around antiracism. When it had historically been, and continued to be, the same small group of people (mostly people of color) who were engaged in antiracism work, without institutional support, people were bound to be overburdened and potentially leave.

**Resistance and Complacency**

Although participants were clear about the issues of racism that they saw and experienced in the policies, practices, and college climate, they noted that many employees at the institution resisted and downplayed the work that needed to be done to foster a more socially just space. Inasmuch as many of their colleagues either denied the presence of racism or did not want to address them, participants experienced resistance to increasing institution-wide racial justice, inclusion, and equity measures. Participants spoke of wanting to have honest conversations and brave dialogues among staff, faculty, and administrators at the college—they deeply believed in the value of working together, of getting messy, of engaging in difficult dialogues, collaborating, and collectively investing as an organization in the success of students through a social justice lens. However, all of the participants witnessed widespread and persistent resistance to these efforts. Bambi expressed:
The hard part is that the college thinks it’s sophisticated and cutting edge around these issues… there’s resistance to the idea that there’s more work to do. It’s hard for the college to recognize its challenges because it’s so embedded in them… the idea that it could be hurting people doesn’t sit well with the institution—it does not like to see itself in that vein…and resists efforts to engage in that way.

Participants shared that many (especially White) employees had a lack of understanding or resisted seeing structural and organizational problems that were at the heart of disparate student and staff/faculty experiences and outcomes. Donovan described the resistance that he witnessed in terms of what he deemed as the culture of the institution:

There’s a lot of work that goes into doing the cultural analysis of the institution to find out where those antiracism roadblocks lay, and strategizing and talking about ways of moving the college forward. It’s like trying to go up Niagara Falls, because that culture has been here for so long.

He continued onto say that even as the Racial Justice Team had evolved, much of the cultural roadblocks and obstacles had not really changed. Those who had been involved on the team had a keen desire to help educate and work with their colleagues; however, such work of trying to garner collective buy-in was notably laborious and exhausting for participants. They named how the persistent issues of racism led to fatigue and to the departure of a number of practitioner-educators of color over the years.

Nonetheless, a number stayed at the college, and found some traction and hope from the Racial Justice Team and a small number of other groups on campus, which remained primary vehicles for racial justice and providence for “comradery and community.” Donovan poignantly noted the following points, which seemed to be reflected by most other participants’ as well:

I think the thing I most got out of it was just being able to see and have dialogue about what are those gaps that are hurting this college, but no so much complaining about it, but…how do we help the institution as a whole move and grow and push into their discomfort? How do we push [staff and faculty] to become more aware of those gaps and helping all students succeed? What does that mean [in terms of] getting everyone on the same page about student success and utilizing a shared analysis of systemic racism? What does that mean as it relates to the college campus and helping people be more
aware that…just because you feel like you’re not seeing it doesn’t necessarily mean that it doesn’t exist. It exists, but…how do we help you gain that knowledge and gain that experience and gain those lenses to see that? …I [had thought] of diversity and inclusivity in my work, but having been a part of this team allowed me to see what other concerns were going on outside of [my office] and what did that mean for the college as a whole? And I think that that shaped me into having much more of an awareness and more emotional investment in wanting to see the college succeed in spite of some of the challenges in which the college struggles to do so.

Summary of Professional and Organizational Realm

In tangent with participants’ personal and educational trajectories, their professional and complex organizational contexts also greatly influenced their praxis. Participants talked about their philosophies regarding student success comprising seeing student success as a shared responsibility between the students and the institution (and institutional agents), and their having holistic understandings of students with an aim for equity. In turn, they engaged in a number of individual-level actions: first, they worked to actively learn about and form validating, supportive relationships with students, whether that comprised administering surveys to get to know students at the beginning of each term or providing intrusive verbal assurance and encouragement to students that they belonged at the college. Second, they built coalitions with colleagues at the college, enacted agency, and gained comradery within their respective contexts and spheres of influence to help transform unit- and/or institutional-level policies, practices, and cultures.

Participants also discussed pervasive institutional dynamics of racism that had in fact precipitated the birth of and sustained the need for the Racial Justice Team. They talked about overt and more subtle forms of racism that they had witnessed and experienced at the college that had been ill-addressed by institutional leaders. They brought up the value of training and education on topics of antiracism and related topics, with several participants citing the
transformative benefit that they, themselves, had experienced through a 2.5-day antiracism training prior to joining the Racial Justice Team. Each participant also emphasized the influential role that leaders at multiple levels at the institution had in fostering antiracism, both symbolically and in terms of implementation of new policies and practices that engaged various stakeholders on campus.

While acknowledging some promising strides that had been made at the unit and institutional levels, participants also brought up the problematic structure and compensation policies that served as barriers to the work of antiracism, including the fact that part-time faculty (and faculty in general) often had very little ability or institutional support to engage in such efforts. Further, they noted the unsustainability of antiracism work being on the shoulders of staff, faculty, and administrators of color—and the importance of this work being carried on by White institutional agents as well. While there had been resistance and complacency by many stakeholders on campus (particularly White employees) to name and address issues of racism, members of the Racial Justice Team nonetheless noted that the best chance of fostering institutional change (and to find fellowship in such efforts) was to remain connected to the team, as well as to other groups on campus. Indeed, what a number of the practitioner-educators communicated with me in terms of their motivation to participate in the study was the importance of the research topic, the opportunity to unpack the multifaceted dynamics of their work, and the hope that they had still for institutional transformation with the central goals of antiracism, equity, and social justice for students and all members of the campus community.
CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION

Historically, community colleges have been deemed the “people’s college” for their open-access structure and accessibility to student populations that have been historically excluded from other segments of higher education, including and especially students of color. Yet, there is a juxtaposition of this aforementioned nickname with both the quantitative feedback (i.e., disparate rates of success among racial groups) and qualitative feedback (e.g., parts of my father’s educational experiences) of the dynamics that have also given the community college the nickname of “contradictory college” (Dougherty, 1994). While some literature has emphasized individual or pre-college factors that correlate with these discrepant measures of academic success, other research has centered the role that institutions and practitioner-educators play in engaging and fostering the success of racially diverse students. Inasmuch as institutions and practitioner-educators play substantial roles, research on how practitioner-educators engage in their praxis (i.e., what their practice looks like), as well as how the practitioner-educators cultivate these orientations, is critical.

Through a social justice lens, the ability to engage in effective educational practice with racially and culturally diverse students incorporates the goals of liberation and of recognizing and dismantling oppressive structures and cultures that get in the way of student success. This
study utilized an antiracism framework, which states that racism is embedded into most educational institutions’ histories and cultures but that educators have agency in deconstructing these norms while becoming more antiracist (Kailin, 2002). Through a phenomenological approach looking at a select group of practitioner-educators’ praxes, this dissertation uncovered a number of key components of their life experiences, education, and professional and organizational contexts that cultivated antiracist and asset-based praxis, as well as how this praxis manifested in their work. Broadly speaking, I found important interconnections and interactions between participants’ personal and educational experiences, and their professional trajectory and praxis. This discussion centers what scholars and practitioners can take away from these findings; how they connect with prior research; and ways in which both past research and the findings of this study can inform future practice, policies, and scholarship.

One of the key findings that emerged from this study is that participants’ personal and educational trajectories and experiences centrally influenced their current praxis and their vocational calling. Among participants of color, experiences of racism and their racial and/or ethnic identity development gave them the capacity and fuel to cultivate an antiracist and asset-based praxis within their practitioner-educator roles. They had gained what Freire (1993) conceptualized as “power that springs from the weakness of [being] oppressed… sufficiently strong to free both” (p. 10) themselves and their oppressors. Among White participants, their recognition that racism threatened not only the humanity of people in their lives with whom they had developed relationships (i.e., friends, family, community members) but also their own humanity helped cultivate a praxis of antiracism. One participant shared about moving from a paradigm of charity (what she had been taught earlier in life) to a paradigm of working in
solidarity with people of color. As Freire (1993) noted, the ability to engage in antiracism ultimately requires such a transition:

True solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these “beings for another.” The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor—when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love. True solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis. (p. 11)

Through learning that spanned each of their personal, educational, and professional contexts—what was meaningful to them personally (i.e., equity, fairness, and the humanizing of themselves, their families, and people who have been socially marginalized) became what was important to them professionally.

Within their formal educational realms, this study illuminated the positive examples that participants saw in the teachers and mentors they had had, including the validation and broadening of their interests, to the brokering of further educational or professional opportunities. In the face of racism, sexism, and other oppressive dynamics that sometimes communicated to participants that they were not capable or did not belong—memorable teachers and mentors provided key academic and cultural validation. Subsequently, participants found gratification from being able to “pay forward” the validation, investment, and opportunities that had been given to them by others.

Participants shared experiences of hardship within their educational journeys, including experiencing racism enacted by peers and even educators, and feelings of self-doubt or under-preparedness within their educational trajectories. Yet, what seemed to buffer them from these experiences being determining of their continual trajectory were the key mentors, peers, and/or family members who affirmed and sustained them in their cultural, academic, and personal
identities. Understanding the importance that academic and cultural validation had on their own educational trajectory and holistic growth, the work that participants did at present entailed—in turn—cultural and academic validation of students of color and other marginalized student populations. One of the most memorable and moving illustrations of this was when Sharon, a faculty member, noted: “If one person someday is sitting down in an interview and says, ‘this professor told me I could do it, and I hadn’t heard that before, and so then I did it’—I think that’s powerful. I’d like to be that example that other people provided for me.” Just as Sharon named that it had been important that this mentor was a woman in the natural sciences field (where women were/are highly underrepresented), it was poignant that almost every participant reflected upon having one or more form of a marginalized identity (namely race, gender, sexuality, and/or first-generation college going status) in settings that they felt were not built for people like them—and the importance of having someone who believed in and invested in them.

The salience of these experiences echoes literature showing that validation is particularly vital to marginalized students’ success, inasmuch as higher education settings and dominant social settings at large have historically not deemed people of color, women, first-generation college students and individuals who have other socially marginalized identities as valuable members of educational communities (e.g., Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Hurtado et al., 2011; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). Further, what these reflections and interconnections between educational and professional “realms” was that practitioner-educators’ understanding of the importance of having been validated, and subsequently working to validate their students was a type of asset. Indeed, without having had the experiences and modeling of validating and supportive relationships with key individuals in their own educational and personal journeys, it seems unlikely that participants would have had the degree of the motivation and the cultural
intuition to engage in such a similar praxis in their current roles working with students. The
good praxis from which they benefited was reproduced in their own current work. This set of
findings bears implications for how current and future practitioner-educators can be recruited,
hired, and recognized for the cultural intuition and ability to validate students.

Another way in which participants’ educational contexts (both in the classroom and
outside of it) contributed to their praxis comprised opportunities for critical reflection about their
social identities and understandings of the world. One participant talked about how her view of
race and class changed due to experiences within her graduate assistantship and relationships in
which she engaged with a predominantly African American community; another participant
talked about owing his coming out to his family to the research and reflection he had done on
Latino and gay identity development in graduate school. From these stories, we see that
practitioner-educators were (and still are), first, learners—and that their transformative learning
experiences (again, both in and outside of the formal classroom in higher education) contributed
to their development of critical social consciousness and that subsequently influenced their
career trajectories and praxis. Such findings bear implications for student affairs graduate
preparation programs and higher education institutions, as is discussed later in this chapter. In
what ways can graduate preparation programs and (to some degree) colleges engage practitioner-
educators in critical reflections of their cultural and social identities and in critical social
consciousness?

Indeed, this study showed that practitioner-educators’ learning did not stop in their
formal educational experiences (i.e., school). They continued to learn within and throughout
their roles at the community college. Most participants (both participants of color and White
participants) brought up the beneficial—and in some cases, transformative—effect that
professional development opportunities, such as the antiracism training, had on their understandings of their social contexts, their specific institutional context, their positionality, and their praxis. Participants also discussed wanting even more professional development opportunities; for example, faculty noted that in order to grow and become more effective antiracist practitioners (e.g., using antiracist pedagogy in science courses), they needed to see examples of this and continue being able to hone their practice. Participants also expressed needing to continue learning about diverse identities, multiculturalism, and issues of social justice, particularly as they reflected upon their own positionalities, their and their students’ own complex identities, and in what ways they could enact socially just and effective educational practices.

Beyond engaging in fruitful individual praxis, participants also acknowledged the need to work with other staff, faculty, and administrators in order to cultivate more antiracist policies, practices, and cultures at the organizational level. Participants described both the strides and the challenges (barriers) to fostering antiracist educational praxis that they witnessed within their respective units and at the institutional level. One area of importance was good leadership. Participants noted that how leaders acted (i.e., how they financially supported efforts, and either encouraged or required certain standards of practitioner-educators), as aligned with what they said, made a difference for the institutional community at large. What was meaningful to participants in terms of leadership echoes the literature on antiracism, which names it as a social process in which “leaders of antiracism movements… engage not only in theorizing, but also in developing a praxis that seeks to confront and transform unequal power relations” (Kailin, 2002, pp. 56-57). Indeed, what this study tells us is that institutional leaders play significant roles in long-term efforts to infuse and transform institutions with racial justice.
What came about from this study was also the resistance that antiracist practitioner-educators largely encountered in getting others at the college on board with racial justice and inclusion measures. Participants spoke of wanting to have honest conversations and brave dialogues among staff, faculty, and administrators at the college—they deeply believed in the value of working together, of getting messy, of engaging in difficult dialogues, collaborating, and collectively investing as an organization in the success of students through a social justice lens. However, all of the participants witnessed widespread and persistent resistance to these efforts, likened to “swimming up the Niagara Falls.” Barr and Strong (1988) noted that “resistance to multiculturalism is well-entrenched in higher education” (p. 87), and my own professional experiences echo these findings. This study found that, even at an institution that had an institutionally supported “Racial Justice Team,” there commonly exists resistance to the work of antiracism.

Several of the participants also noted their belief that many of their colleagues at the college were well-meaning and wanted students to succeed, but perhaps simply lacked awareness of issues related to social and racial justice and equity. Within a focus group, Kevin (who had been at the college for 13 years) posited: “people are really very good people…who are willing to put the students first.” Working to move college employees from being spectators to being actively engaged in the work of antiracism was one of the components of the educational mission of the Racial Justice Team.

An important set of findings within this study is the differentiation—and indeed differences in experiences and privileges—of full-time faculty and part-time, contingent faculty roles at the college. These findings are corroborated by national-level research that suggests large portions of part-time community college faculty members are insufficiently compensated
and invested in by institutions in terms of money and support, and that they are often given fewer expectations and less communication and training, are by and large not as fully integrated into the institution as their full-time, permanent counterparts (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2006). Suffice to say that this similar finding was echoed even in the participant recruitment phase of this study, when I received the name of only one part-time faculty member from recommendations by members of the Racial Justice Team. Initial interpretation of this dynamic centered on the notion that part-time faculty members at the college did not have much interaction with full-time faculty, staff, or administrators. It seems as though the dynamic spans larger, however: that both generally at community colleges and specifically at MCC (where, notably, part-time faculty make up 75% of the instructor base), part-time faculty feel and are less able to participate in developing and in engaging in effective praxis, even if the interest was there (and Molly, a part-time faculty member, noted that the desire was there among many of her part-time colleagues). Levin et al. (2006) surmised that “without access, temporary employees become not only marginal but also alienated from the organization, which, in turn, deprives part-timers from the personal satisfaction, relatedness, and meaningfulness of participating in a college’s culture” (p. 2). This study, therefore, reifies the need for both scholars, practitioners, and institutional leaders to invest in the greater compensation, support, and integration of the high (and likely increasing) numbers of part-time, contingent faculty.

Regarding the institutional dynamics that precipitated the formation of the Racial Justice Team at the college, participants named numerous instances and dynamics of both overt and covert racism. It was, frankly, surprising to me that a number of under-resolved, blatant accounts of racism had occurred at this community college recently, particularly because I had
spent time at the college and particularly in considering the mission of the community college to foster access and equity. This surprise was dually expressed by Kevin, who commented that the job of the Racial Equity Team had seemed much of the time to be “putting out fires” and that he thought the institution as a whole was “better than that.” Incidences such as what the participants described are sadly reflective of the racial hostility (Museus et al., 2015) that occurs in higher education at large. A surprising finding of this study, as such, is that dynamics of racism at colleges today show up not only as implicit cultural biases (that, while discreet, can also have harmful effects) but also as outright racial hostility unaddressed by institutional leaders and agents. In an era in which racial hostilities both in and out of higher education are commonplace, how can scholars and practitioner-educators be better attuned to and work to address the climate, practices and policies in place, as well as the wellbeing of minoritized individuals and groups?

Altogether, the findings of this study highlight the persistent effects of racism in higher education and echo the importance of “layered, policy discussion and analysis about struggles in education institutions that have diversity as a goal that has not been achieved in reality” (Parker & Villapando, 2007, p. 523). While the personal and educational assets and experiences of practitioner-educators equipped them to engage in much individual-level praxis, the organizational realms uncovered within this study indicate that the institutional support for and accountability to the goals of antiracism and social justice were also necessary. The progress that they saw and worked to foster is reflective of the capacity for change within educational spaces, as Parker and Villapando (2007) noted:

Several scholars suggest that fostering racially just educational spaces is not impossible to achieve, because evidence already exists documenting how schools can provide racial equity, high student performance, and school improvement through the current climate of
accountability, if the focus is on changing the culture of schools to meet the educational and emotional needs of the students, parents, and staff to create a different community based on love and caring for students of color. (Parker & Villapando, 2007, p. 523)

Indeed, participants found a sense of meaning and fulfillment in their professional praxis, and saw some institutional progress. However, this study suggests that individual efforts are not entirely sustainable without institutional support and overall shifts in institutional culture. Though the findings are contextual and may be limited in some ways (as discussed below), there are promising lessons for practice, policy, research, and teaching that can contribute to a more socially just, equitable landscape of higher education and community college praxis. These specific implications are additionally discussed below.

**Study Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. In terms of the sample, the formal members of the Racial Justice Team consisted of mainly full-time faculty, administrators, and mid-level staff members. As discussed prior, there are evident barriers to college members participating on the team, and therefore this study may have failed to include individuals across a wider spectrum of roles at the college who possessed antiracist and asset-based approaches to their educational practices. Though I was able to get the recommendation of (and recruit) one part-time faculty member, I was unable to recruit multiple part-time faculty members to participate in the study. This limitation is worth noting, given that part-time faculty make up a segment of faculty that is marginalized, as well as understudied in the higher education literature. The sample also lacked full racial representation, as there were no Asian American, Native American, or Pacific Islander persons, which may have rendered additional perspectives and insights. I am uncertain what the full racial breakdown of members of the Racial Justice Team was; however, it would have been worthwhile to note whether this study sample was representative of the group, as well as if the
group was racially representative of the community college student body. Replication of this or a similar study should strive to examine these questions and to include more racially diverse identities and roles.

It should also be noted that the community college site at which this study took place had some deviations in the breakdown of students by race as well as those who were Pell Grant-eligible as compared to the average statistics of community college students in the U.S. For example, at MCC, just over 5% of the students were Black or African American, while across all two-year public institutions in the U.S., the mean was 17% and the median 9%. MCC also had a much higher percentage of Asian students, with roughly 20%; the national mean was 3%, and median 1%. MCC also had a higher percentage of students who were Latino/Latinx: just under 20%, versus the national mean of 16% and median of 7%. In addition, a much lower percentage of students at MCC were Pell-eligible (roughly 20%), versus the national average of 49%. These demographic differences may be accounted for by the location of MCC, which is in a suburban, relatively affluent district in the Midwest. While acknowledging the differences in the demographic breakdowns of student populations with community college populations writ large, MCC nonetheless has many elements of the community college that are pertinent to this study, which center on the open-access nature of the college.

A third set of potential limitations entails the fact that I had had an initial read on the institution through my having previously formed collegial relationships with a number of the staff and faculty (albeit not knowing much about the Racial Justice Team). While carrying some benefit to the project—insofar as my already having developed rapport with a number of participants presumably allowed for increased comfort, credibility, disclosure of information, and mutual investment in the research project—my process of reflexive journaling and peer
debriefing indicated that I had carried prior (largely positive) perceptions of how the institution was doing that needed to be bracketed. That is, I needed to set aside my prior, albeit brief, experiences at the institution in terms of racial inclusion and social justice, in order to be fully responsive to the depth of the data that I was receiving within this study.

Lastly, the inductive and single case/site approach of this study brought about strengths as well as limitations. I was able to obtain great depth in the data; however, some of the findings (particularly those regarding the professional/organizational realm) may have been, at least in part, specific to the college and/or the Racial Justice Team, and may not be entirely transferrable or generalizable to practitioner-educator experiences or dynamics of antiracism at other institutional sites.

**Implications for Research and Teaching**

This study sought out to address the research topic at only one institutional site, utilizing a purposive group of people (the Racial Justice Team); a clear implication for future research is to replicate this study at one or more community colleges, looking for commonalities and differences in the findings, both at the individual-level (individual stories) and at the institutional-level. Further, minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), particularly Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Asian American Native American and Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions make up a substantial portion of community colleges. Recent, albeit limited, research has highlighted promising practices in the way of supporting students of color and fostering their success through culturally responsive and asset-based practices (e.g., Lindquist & Win, 2016; Murphy & Tomaneng, 2016; Padron, 2016). In light of findings from this study suggesting potentially powerful benefits that can be derived from engaging in culturally responsive comprehensive practices (both from the review of literature
and participants’ testimonies), I suggest continued research of community colleges that also serve as MSIs. Such research may be helpful for community colleges at large, inasmuch as these institutions may particularly have the capacities to and intentionality around enacting culturally responsive, antiracist practices.

Certainly, the centering of students’ perspectives and experiences of educational praxis would be critical to expanding understandings of the impacts of antiracist, asset-based praxis. What are the qualitative elements of their working with practitioner-educators that enact, or work to enact, asset-based and antiracist educational praxis? What dynamics or practices within their higher education settings and experiences function to optimize or leverage their cultural assets or CCW toward fostering educational success, a sense of belonging, and more? Complementing how practitioner-educators engage in this praxis should be the experiences of students themselves.

Essentially, this study sought out to begin to operationalize the construct of CCW and the ways in which practitioner-educators engage in antiracist, asset-based praxis. While a qualitative approach was most fitting for such a purpose, there is no doubt that complementary quantitative studies may open possibilities for measuring the impact of this kind of praxis on student success, racial campus climate, and more. While there are detailed conceptualizations of related constructs such as multicultural competence (Pope et al., 2004; Pope et al., 2014), comprehensive scales within higher education have not yet been widely used. While the creation of a trustworthy scale for measuring the ability of practitioners to engage in an antiracist, asset-based framework (or the like) would require much time and resources, such a tool would undoubtedly be beneficial for both researchers and institutional administrators/practitioners in investigating issues of racial equity and institutional effectiveness.
Literature that highlights the phenomenon of developing social consciousness through relationships with different others has been primarily been focused on college students (in settings such as intergroup dialogues; e.g., Gurin-Sands, Gurin, Nagda, & Osuna, 2012; Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002). However, acknowledging that practitioner-educators, too, are learners, the basic concepts of intergroup dialogue (or at a basic level, the engaging of both the head and the heart) can help guide an understanding of cross-racial learning and investment in racial justice issues among White practitioners. Given that practitioner-educators undergo similar adult learning processes as student, action research that engages practitioner-educators at a community college in intergroup dialogue could be an interesting and exciting bridge between understanding educators’ development of racial and social consciousness and the ample research that has been done on intergroup learning and dialogue.

Research on racial justice efforts and diversity work in education has emphasized the need for practitioners to engage the institutional contexts, as opposed to focusing solely on individual education, in order to effectively foster organizational change for social justice (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). That is, beyond efforts to change individual attitudes and practices, these scholars have argued that educators need a sense of how they fit into an institutional system in which they play a role, and have the capacity and navigational ability to impact change. As the findings of this study echo these lessons as well, higher education scholars should consider conducting research on efforts around antiracism (and other diversity and social justice work) within institutions through an organizational change model. Ample insights and scholarship on organizational transformation may also be found in other fields, such as business (e.g., Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Senge et al., 1999); therefore, a truly cross-disciplinary research approach may be helpful to implement in
future research.

One of the findings of this study entailed the overburdening of staff, faculty, and administrators of color in terms of service and their addressing issues of racism on campus, as well as the psychological taxation they endured in dealing with racism. While racial battle fatigue among students has been researched (e.g., Parker & Villalpando, 2007), there is certainly a need to further investigate how this impacts practitioner-educators. Relatedly, Museus et al. (2015) described “cultural taxation” or “racial taxation from excess service” (p. 66), which encompasses the large—and potentially unsustainable—loads of research, teaching, and service that faculty (disproportionally faculty of color) take on, where they might be consistently asked to serve in roles that are intended to foster racial justice. While these dynamics have been documented and explicated, scant research has investigated what ways in which practitioner-educators interact with and manage multiple service demands, are able to foster physical and psychological health and well-being, and can retained in their roles. Research investigating these dynamics would be fruitful in terms of shedding light on the experiences of and support needed among practitioner-educators who engage in antiracist and social justice-oriented praxis.

Lastly, research that is conducted on community colleges and racial equity should be disseminated, analyzed, and continued by scholars/faculty and students in higher education and student affairs programs across the country, such that current and future student affairs practitioners will be greater equipped to work at two-year institutions. More faculty should be hired, promoted, and supported who are conducting critical research on community colleges, historically marginalized student populations, and/or equity or social justice efforts within this sector. Further, because of the important role that community colleges play in enrolling and educating students of color and other marginalized populations (as well as generally enrolling a
large portion of postsecondary education students in the U.S.), it is my strong opinion that every higher education and student affairs preparatory program should require students to take a course on community colleges that takes on critical and current perspectives on access, equity, and multiculturalism.

**Implications for Practice and Policy**

The findings of this study pose a number of implications for practice and policy for institutional leaders and practitioner-educators. Suffice to say that many of these implications came directly from the participants of this study, and are particularly aligned with opportunities for institutional leaders and administrators to help engage organizational change for racial and social justice and equity.

First, this study highlights the need for practitioner-educators to be engaged in continuing education and professional development that moves them to: (1) reflect upon their own positionalities, paradigms, biases, and approaches to working with students of diverse backgrounds; (2) learn about institutional racism, inequalities, and diversity-related matters through a critical lens; (3) collaborate and process with others in the college in order to foster support, comradery, and accountability; and (4) learn about and re-imagine new ways of working with students of color and other marginalized groups using asset-based and critically multicultural approaches. Institutional leaders can consider bringing in trained facilitators from outside organizations (such as what MCC engaged in through the Racial Justice Team) and should allocate institutional funds to do so.

Noting that practitioner-educators may have limited time and opportunity and/or may experience hesitancy in engaging in such continuing education and professional development, institutional leaders should either (a) require these elements as part of employee’s job
responsibilities, or (b) reward and incentivize such continuing education and professional development. Such practices demonstrate institutional commitment to fostering a more equitable and socially just institutional environmental, as well as can capitalize on many practitioner-educators’ desire to put students first and foster their success.

Another important consideration that should be made is how to involve part-time or contingent faculty members, who are found to be less integrated overall into the fabric of the institution, less supported, and often ill-treated in terms of compensation for their labor. For starters (and as suggested by the participants in this study), the implementation of compensatory incentives for continuing education may not only be fair but also could strategically help foster engagement by part-time faculty. Even as institutions move toward having increasing portions of part-time faculty as part of a larger phenomenon of academic capitalism, practitioner-educators should form alliances and seek interest convergences in trying to establish greater equity in the treatment and support of contingent faculty and their abilities and opportunities to develop as practitioner-educators while being adequately supported. In terms of funding, this may take on the form of pushing for critical audits of institutional funding structures. To seek additional support for research and engagement in promising practices that aim to foster racial equity, institutions may also consider seeking out district-, state-, or federal-level funding (such HSI and AANAPISI funding for which many community colleges may be eligible to apply). Finally, in a landscape of academic capitalism and neoliberalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), institutional agents may consider interest convergences around the desire of decision-makers for economic growth and mobility of the district or state’s adult population.

Institutions should also consider creating regular opportunities for administrators, staff, faculty, and students alike to bravely discuss, dialogue, evaluate, and strategize around social
justice change at the organizational level. These conversations could incorporate evaluations of
the campus climate, which can and should incorporate various members of the college
community (students, staff, faculty) in a way that keeps in mind tenets of antiracism. Though
conversations involving a wide range of institutional community members would almost
certainly be challenging, the findings of this study and my prior practitioner experience assert
that dialogues in which people can speak freely are critical to the process of organizational
transformation. To the degree that people feel safe enough to share their experiences and what
their desires for change might be, such brave conversations also can promote trust,
understanding, and accountability between members of the college community.

On even a smaller scale, members of a college community could come together for
support and mutual learning. It should be revisited that the Racial Justice Team began in part as
an informal reading group of faculty members who wanted to examine the topic of White
privilege. This group then, through various iterations, became the Racial Justice Team. This is
to say that even informal gatherings may entail powerful and liberatory praxis that spurs
practitioner-educators to think and engage in more antiracist and equity-oriented ways and may
lead to other avenues for change. Being in supportive relationships with one another may also
help to mitigate any isolation that could otherwise be felt in experiencing issues of racism or
other forms of marginalization on campus. Practitioner-educators may engage with one another
in community to assess their wellness and to help carry each other’s loads.

Hiring practices and policies at community colleges that largely serve students of color
and historically marginalized populations should additionally be assessed, evaluated, and
enhanced—addressing the goals of both the institution and department in which the hiring is
taking places, and being sure to center these goals around antiracism and equity. How can
institutions bring in more people who possess the asset of understanding students through an anti-deficit and antiracist lens? Human resources, institutional and departmental leaders, and individuals participating in search committees should strive to recruit practitioner-educators who have exhibited these assets, by being intentional in their recruitment processes (i.e., job descriptions and ways in which they are expanding their networks of potential employees). Relatedly, critical assessments should be done on the racial and cultural diversity of faculty, staff, and administrators at the college, with centralized offices for hiring (i.e., Human Resources) at the helm of promoting outreach and other proactive measures of recruiting diverse employees to the college, particularly for positions that have large potential impact on student success.

Altogether, institutions and institutional leaders would benefit from honoring and celebrating the assets of their practitioner-educators who engage in asset-based, antiracist praxis. They can do this by not only bringing in individuals who exhibit promising praxis in their philosophies and in their work, but also by harnessing and fostering the assets that many of their employees may already have, by providing time and resources for them to cultivate their praxis. One further way of doing so is for institutional and unit-level leaders to give practitioner-educators (faculty, as well as student affairs practitioners) freedom and encouragement to engage in culturally responsive topics in their curriculum and programming with students. As in Kevin’s positive acknowledgement of his departmental leaders and dean being supportive of him and other faculty to engage students in a variety of culturally meaningful topics, I believe this type of practice can also help to engage students of color, and to center the knowledges and stories of communities of color.
Finally, the findings of this study suggest that institutional transformation for social justice requires good leadership. Participants noted that what leaders said—the symbolism that was derived from this—and what they did—how they financially supported efforts, and either encouraged or required certain standards of practitioner-educators—made a difference for the institutional community at large. An important implication for practice, then, centers on the recruitment and cultivation of good leaders who can effectively guide institutions toward transformative racial justice-oriented change. This may entail having leadership trainings, academies, and support structures in place for institutional leaders to continue developing, growing, and being able to effectively impact change.

**Conclusion**

An overall conclusion may begin with the reassertion that racism exists and permeates higher education—including and perhaps especially at community colleges, which occupy the lowest rung of the institutional hierarchy (Jain, 2010)—in a number of ways both easily and not easily seen. Dynamics of racism also permeated various aspects of participants’ lives, and important sets of experiences and dynamics—including cultural assets and being validated by teachers and mentors in otherwise oppressive environments, and acquiring of critical social consciousness through relational experiences and reflection—seemed to ultimately cultivate practitioner-educators’ antiracist and asset-based praxis. These assets that they possess ultimately also interrupted the status quo within their organizational contexts—that is, the practitioner-educators have learned how to humanize, support, and validate students of color in the face of sometimes racially hostile or demeaning environments, perpetuated by structural inequities.
As posited in Chapter 2, the ability to acknowledge CCW or non-dominant assets is a prerequisite to culturally responsive and antiracist educational praxis. In this study, whether participants explicitly used the terminology found in the CCW model or termed them as “cultural assets” or not (they mostly did not), participants named attributes key to student success and that they believe were exhibited by many of the students with whom they worked as characteristic of resilient capital, aspirational capital, familial capital, and social capital (Yosso, 2005). Participants also very clearly possessed CCW themselves, from the ways in which they navigated their institutional contexts (navigational capital), to how they were resilient in their past and in their present (resilient capital), to how they brought with them important values from their families and even how they thought of the college like a family (familial capital).

Germaine to their asset-based praxis was also that these practitioner-educators placed trust in their students as learning partners, as having the capacities to succeed, as whole persons, and as individuals worthy of respect and of being invested in. On a philosophical level, such a disposition aligns with the idea of praxis suggested by Freire (1993) as necessitating “trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason,” “the liberation of the oppressed is a liberation of women and men, not things” (p. 66) and in becoming “jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (p. 80). These two dynamics, then, seem to go hand-in-hand. That is: to trust individuals, one must perceive them as trustworthy, and as having innate and developed capacities for self-determination and success (i.e., as having an asset-based perspective). Such a paradigm requires that one believes in the full humanity of another, void of overpowering racial prejudice or other dehumanizing pre-conceptions or biases.

One of the key takeaways from this study is that learning and teaching are relational and contextualized processes. Students bring their stories with them onto college campuses, as do
practitioner-educators. Therefore, the *praxis* of practitioner-educators within community college settings needs to take into account the backgrounds of students, the history and current dynamics at community colleges, and the importance of relational, critically multicultural, and validating relationships between students and institutional agents. Long (2016b) articulated that “when students perceive their college environments as void of love, faith/trust, and personal meaning, many of them leave, never to return. Personal meaning becomes meaningless within the context of mistrust” (p. 243).

While *trusting* their students, participants were also keenly aware of the structural barriers and marginalization that the college participated in, and that students of color and other marginalized students faced. Part of what facilitated these practitioners’ antiracist and asset-based *praxis*, it seems, was their awareness of the shortcomings of the institution (and the society at large) in terms of racial and social justice and equity, and their individual and collective responsibility to make the college (their sphere of influence) more just, humanizing, and equitable for all students. They felt invested in the work of antiracism, because this goal transcended not only their professional objectives, but also what was important to them on a personal level.

On an individual level, participants believed a core part of their jobs entailed actively learning about students and continuing—in multiple capacities—to learn, grow and reflect upon their roles. They were student-teachers, with recognition that they were constantly growing and learning—and that being engaged in antiracist, asset-based praxis required as much. The work of antiracism was a constant process among participants that implicated them to continually learn *as* they were teaching/educating. In their day-to-day work with students, they worked to actively learn about and form validating, supportive relationships with students (e.g., by administering a
survey to gauge student needs and opportunities, as Molly did and as she encouraged all new faculty to do), being intrusively engaged in how students are faring not just academically but personally/interpersonally (e.g., being truly accessible in one’s office hours, as Kevin exhibited), having a curriculum and/or educational approach that is critically multicultural and inclusive of different styles of communication and of learning (e.g., as Sharon began to implement in her science course), and encouraging and brokering curricular and co-curricular opportunities for students whenever possible as all participants did.

Beyond individual-level praxis, participants also engaged in—because they saw the need for—broader unit-level and organizational changes. There was an underlying desire of participants to have fellowship and comradery with their colleagues, and bring other people into the fold through trainings, ongoing education, and dialogue and action. However, participants spoke of experiencing fatigue in working to foster antiracism within the institution, speaking to the very real and documented fatigue experienced by social justice practitioner-educators. There remained a sense of hope, passion, and a commitment to their students and to each other that—perhaps through having spaces and groups such as the Racial Justice Team—that seemed to help them remain vehicles for organizational change.

A look at these practitioner-educators’ current praxis and their past educational and personal trajectories indicate that, just as conventionally-perceived forms of educational and cultural capital can be reproduced, so can good praxis. Building off the conceptualization of CCW, the ability to see and validate students through a humanizing, asset-based, and critically multicultural lens was an asset to these practitioners and to the institutions. A takeaway for the broader educational community, therefore, is that—if they are serious about engaging in the work of antiracism and social justice—the abilities that practitioner-educators possess to
understand and work with students through anti-deficit, antiracist, and critically multicultural ways—to acknowledge the CCW (Yosso, 2005) in their students—is an asset itself, and should be sought out in new employees, and honored, activated, and further cultivated among all employees.

Ladson-Billings (2004) described multicultural education as “less thing than a process…[one that] is organic and dynamic…[with] aims and purposes that transcend all conventional perceptions of education” (p. 51). I believe that the work of antiracism is a process as well: one that is messy but is altogether worthwhile and needed for the democratizing of community colleges. Despite dynamics of racism at present at all levels of education—including at community colleges—institutional and practitioner-level orientations toward antiracism are “not impossible to achieve… if the focus is on changing the culture of schools to meet the educational and emotional needs of the students…and staff to create a different community based on love and caring for students of color” (Scheurich, 1998, p. 523), as well as a striving to regain humanity of all participants and stakeholders.

How can those of us invested in the future of community colleges and racial justice work to promote environments in which students feel loved, trusted and valued, and can thrive? This study suggests that one component is the greater and more widespread cultivation and engagement of antiracist and asset-based educational praxis, through the valuing of these assets, the continual education of the educators, and the humanizing and validating of every student attending community colleges. Opportunities to intervene in the undercurrents of racism and to reach racial equity among the people whom community colleges serve may lie largely in the roles and capacities of practitioner-educators and institutional leaders to critically self-assess, to engage in the process of learning antiracism both individually and collectively, and to capitalize
on their desires to see students succeed and to see students through new lenses. At the heart of antiracist education and the engagement of asset-based frameworks is the humanizing of historically marginalized peoples; to see this occur in educational settings—including one of the most important areas of higher education—requires the humanization of individuals (students and practitioner-educators alike) and difficult yet sustained organizational transformation. Inasmuch as the practitioner-educators within this study engaged in such a praxis, we can learn from them. The questions (and only some of the answers) visited within this study warrant greater time, energy, and love from all those interested in the future of community colleges and the populations whom they serve.
APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER TO MEMBERS OF ANTI-RACISM TEAM
Subject: Information about a Research Opportunity

Dear [Potential Participant],

I am seeking participants for my dissertation research study: Exploring Community College Practitioners’ Cultivation of Asset-Based, Antiracist & Multicultural Approaches to Education: A Phenomenological Study. You are receiving this email because you are a member of the Anti-Racism Team at Oakton, an identified purposive sample for the study. Your email address was obtained from the directory of the college’s website.

This study explores the cultivation of practitioner-educators’ multicultural approaches to working with students of color at community colleges. I will ask questions geared toward your life experiences, education, and your professional/organizational settings, along with opportunities for reflection and links between these categories. If you take part in this study, you would be asked to take part in a 60- to 90-minute one-on-one interview on campus in late February or March (at a specific date/time and location to be determined between the two of us), your validation of my interview summary over email following the interview, and a 50-minute focus group in April. Compensation would comprise Amazon gift cards valued at $25 and a lunch provided during the focus group, or pro-rated compensation for the respective portions of the study in which you participate.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please reach me at esihite@luc.edu or (206) 225-3289. Thank you in advance for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Best regards,

Ester

Ester Sihiite, M.A. | Ph.D. Candidate & Research Assistant
School of Education | Higher Education Program
Loyola University Chicago
esihite@luc.edu | 206.225.3289
APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER TO IDENTIFIED PART-TIME FACULTY (SNOWBALL SAMPLE GROUP)
Subject: Information about a Research Opportunity

Dear [Potential Participant],

I am seeking participants for my dissertation research study: Exploring Community College Practitioners’ Cultivation of Asset-Based, Antiracist & Multicultural Approaches to Education: A Phenomenological Study. You are receiving this email because you were identified by a member of the Anti-Racism Team at Oakton, an identified purposive sample for the study as someone who demonstrates characteristics in which this study is interested. Your email address was obtained from the directory of the college’s website.

This study explores the cultivation of practitioner-educators’ multicultural approaches to working with students of color at community colleges. I will ask questions geared toward your life experiences, education, and your professional/organizational settings, along with opportunities for reflection and links between these categories. If you take part in this study, you would be asked to take part in a 60- to 90-minute one-on-one interview on campus in March (at a specific date/time and location to be determined between the two of us), your validation of my interview summary over email following the interview, and a 50-minute focus group in April. Compensation would comprise Amazon gift cards valued at $25 and a lunch provided during the focus group, or pro-rated compensation for the respective portions of the study in which you participate.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please reach me at esihite@luc.edu or (206) 225-3289. Thank you in advance for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Best regards,

Ester

Ester Sihite, M.A. | Ph.D. Candidate & Research Assistant
School of Education | Higher Education Program
Loyola University Chicago
esihite@luc.edu  |  206.225.3289
APPENDIX C

PRACTITIONER ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
1. Introduce myself.

2. As you know, I am conducting a doctoral study about the experiences of practitioners who exhibit the ability to utilize asset-based, antiracism multicultural approaches to education. This study entails conducting one-on-one interviews with participants, which should last 1-1.5 hours. I will need to follow up with you once over email to have you check out my field notes of highlights of our conversation, as well as some of the preliminary analysis I will have done.

3. I would like to audio record our conversation in order to allow me to listen more carefully to what you say. Do I have your permission to use the tape recorder? All of your information will remain confidential and we will use a pseudonym for the interviews. (Select pseudonym.)

4. Present Information Form. Would you mind taking a minute to complete the information form? (See Appendix E.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Experiences</th>
<th>1. Can you share a story about growing up that gives me a sense of your family dynamic in terms of culture?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Can you share at least one life event from earlier in your life that shaped your understanding of your social identities, including but not limited to race, gender, and/or socioeconomic status? Where were you at the time? How did it shape you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. What special people have you known in your life?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Who has shaped and influenced your life the most?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Who are the guides and helpers in your life?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Who most helped you develop your current understanding of yourself?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td><strong>Professional/Organizational Settings &amp; Reflection I</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4. In your undergraduate or graduate career, did you have any memorable or favorite professors/instructors? How did they influence you? | 7. How did you end up in this field/the type of work that you do?  
  • What is important to you in your work?  
  • Why do you do this work?  
  • What does it take for you to do your job well? |
| 5. Can you describe any courses that you took that changed how you saw yourself or the world around you? | 8. Can you describe the students with whom you work? |
| 6. What was the most salient co-curricular experience (e.g. an internship, organization involvement, etc.) you had that influenced your personal or professional identity? | 9. In your experience, what are some key assets that students of color and students from historically marginalized backgrounds bring to the college environment?  
  • In what ways do you validate these assets in students, if at all? |
| | 10. What professional development opportunities, committee involvement, or leadership opportunities have you partaken in at the college? |
| | 11. Can you describe a memorable learning experience you’ve had through one of these forms of engagement? |
| | 12. Why and how did you decide to join the Anti-Racism Team at MCC? |
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Project Title: Exploring Community College Practitioners’ Cultivation of Asset-Based, Antiracist & Multicultural Approaches to Education: A Phenomenological Study

Researcher: Ester Sihite

Faculty Sponsor: OiYan Poon, Ph.D.

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Ester Sihite for a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. OiYan Poon in the Department of Higher Education at Loyola University Chicago. You are being asked to participate because you are a member of the Anti-Racism Team at Oakton Community College, an identified purposive sample for a study regarding the cultivation of practitioner-educators’ approaches to working with students of color through an assets-based lens. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore how practitioner-educators (both staff and faculty) at community colleges cultivate the ability to use asset-based, multicultural approaches to their work with marginalized student populations, particularly students of color.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this part of the study, you will be asked to:

• (1) Participate in a one-on-one, in-person interview lasting 60-90 minutes at a location (to be determined) on campus. This interview will entail questions asked in a respectful and supportive manner regarding your life experiences, education, and your professional/organizational settings, along with opportunities for reflection and links between these categories. This interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for the purposes of analysis.

• (2) Engage in a “member check” via email, whereby you will be asked to look over and verify field notes and a summary of the interview, in order to optimize validity of the data and narrative accounts the investigator gathered.

Potential Risks/Discomforts and Benefits:
The questions you will be asked in the one-on-one interview and focus group are of a moderately personal and potentially sensitive nature and, therefore, may cause some emotional discomfort in the process of recalling situations pertaining to the topic of this study. Further, you may experience a perceived or real risk of retribution for discussing dynamics in their engagement as a current employee of the college. Several measures will be taken to optimize privacy and confidentiality. (See Privacy & Confidentiality section below.) Finally, your participation in the study is completely voluntary, and you may opt out at any time.

There may be a benefit to you as a participant in terms of your own cognitive and/or affective processing of experiences, narratives, and dynamics related to this topic. Your participation in this research project will help contribute understanding to the wider higher education community about how asset-based, anti-racist, and multicultural approaches are cultivated in practitioner-educators in higher education. Findings will be discussed and reported in a PhD dissertation, (which will be posted in 2017), as well as anticipated presentations and publications reaching a variety of audiences in the higher education community.
Compensation:
In an effort to compensate you for your time, should you participate in this study in full (taking part in a one-on-one interview, member check conducted over email after the interview, and focus group), you will be compensated with a $25 Amazon gift card, along with a provided lunch during the focus group. If you participate in only the one-on-one interview, you will receive a $15 gift card; if you participate in the interview and the member check, you will receive a $20 gift card. All compensation will be given at the conclusion of the data collection.

Privacy & Confidentiality:
All consent and participant information forms collected during data collection will be electronically scanned and stored on password-encrypted files on a secured computer, and deleted at the conclusion of the study. During each of the interviews and the focus group, I will use participant-selected pseudonyms. During the latter, I will remind participants to use pseudonyms, as well as verbally agree that comments made during the focus group will not be repeated outside of the setting. The recording and transcription of the interview will be stored on password-encrypted files stored on a secured computer and deleted after the conclusion of the study. Only the primary investigator (Ester Sihite) and the faculty advisor (OiYan Poon, Ph.D.) will have access to these files. Lastly, only pseudonyms and corresponding general titles (i.e. faculty member, administrator) will be used in any reports, presentations, or papers developed from the collected materials.

Voluntary Participation:
You are free to choose whether or not you would like to participate in any phase of this study. You may withdraw at any time during the course of the interview, focus group, or during any of the phase of the research project without consequences of any kind. You may also choose to skip and not answer any question asked at any point.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Ester Sihite at esihte@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor, Dr. OiYan Poon, at opoon@luc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Chicago Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

_________________________________________  ______________________
Participant’s Signature          Date

_________________________________________  ______________________
Researcher’s Signature           Date
APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM
• What is your job title? ______________________________________________________
• In what department/division/unit do you work? ______________________________________
• Do you work full-time or part-time? Circle one: F / P
• How long have you worked at the college? ______________________________________
• How long have you been working in your respective professional/functional area?
_________________________________________________________________________
• What is your educational background?
  Degree(s): ____________________________________________________________
  College/University: ________________________________________________
  Major/Area(s): ______________________________________________________
  Degree(s): __________________________________________________________
  College/University: ________________________________________________
  Major/Area(s): ______________________________________________________
  Degree(s): __________________________________________________________
  College/University: ________________________________________________
  Major/Area(s): ______________________________________________________

• Gender: ______________________________________________________________
• Age: _________________________________________________________________
• Race: _________________________________________________________________

• Pseudonym you wish to use for the study: ________________________________
APPENDIX F

PRACTITIONER FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
1. Re-introduce myself.

2. As you know, I am conducting a doctoral study about the experiences of practitioners who demonstrate an ability to utilize asset-based, antiracist multicultural approaches to education. I’ve met with each of you once before over a one-on-one interview. Today, we’ll be engaging in a group conversation regarding the remaining components of the research topics I seek to explore, which comprise professional and organizational settings and additional reflection. We have allotted roughly 50 minutes for this conversation.

3. In continuing the study, I would like to brief with you again the purpose of this study, the potential risks and benefits, compensation, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of your participation. [Pass out consent forms.] At the bottom of page 2, please provide your signature if you choose to consent to this segment of the study.

4. I would like to audio record our conversation in order to allow me to listen more carefully to what you all say. I would also like to use the pseudonyms that each of you chose for the interview, so as to keep the information you share confidential.

| Professional/ Organizational Settings Part II | 1. How would you describe the role of the Anti-Racism Team at MCC?  
2. In what ways has your department/division/unit either fostered or made challenging inclusive, anti-racist, and multicultural approaches to education?  
   
   Probing: Can you talk about an instance or situation that illustrated/s this?  
3. What would you change?  
4. In what ways have institutional dynamics at large either fostered or made challenging inclusive, anti-racist, and multicultural approaches to education?  
   
   Probing: Can you talk about an instance or situation that illustrated/s this?  
5. What would you change? |
APPENDIX G

FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Project Title: Exploring Community College Practitioners’ Cultivation of Asset-Based, Antiracist & Multicultural Approaches to Education: A Phenomenological Study
Researcher: Ester Sihite
Faculty Sponsor: OiYan Poon, Ph.D.

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Ester Sihite for a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. OiYan Poon in the Department of Higher Education at Loyola University Chicago. You are being asked to participate because you are a member of the Anti-Racism Team at Oakton Community College, an identified purposive sample for a study regarding the cultivation of practitioner-educators’ approaches to working with students of color through an assets-based lens. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore how practitioner-educators (both staff and faculty) at community colleges cultivate the ability to use asset-based, multicultural approaches to their work with marginalized student populations, particularly students of color.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this portion of the study, you will be asked to:

- (1) Participate in a focus group with other participants (namely other members of the anti-racism committee but also two additional staff/faculty at Oakton), lasting approximately 50 minutes at a location (to be determined) on campus. This focus group will entail questions asked in a respectful and supportive manner regarding professional/organizational dynamics at Oakton pertaining to inclusion, anti-racism, and multiculturalism.
- (2) Engage in a second and final “member check” via email, whereby you will be asked to look over and verify field notes and a summary of the focus group, in order to optimize validity of the data and accounts the investigator gathered.

Potential Risks/Discomforts and Benefits:
The questions you will be asked in the one-on-one interview and focus group are of a moderately personal and potentially sensitive nature and, therefore, may cause some emotional discomfort in the process of recalling situations pertaining to the topic of this study. Further, you may experience a perceived or real risk of retribution for discussing dynamics in their engagement as a current employee of the college. Several measures will be taken to optimize privacy and confidentiality. (See Privacy & Confidentiality section below.) Finally, your participation in the study is completely voluntary, and you may opt out at any time.

There may be a benefit to you as a participant in terms of your own cognitive and/or affective processing of experiences, narratives, and dynamics related to this topic. Your participation in this research project will help contribute understanding to the wider higher education community about how asset-based, anti-racist, and multicultural approaches are cultivated in practitioner-educators in in ever-diversifying higher education settings, particularly community colleges. Findings will be discussed and reported in a PhD dissertation, (which will be posted in 2017), as well as anticipated presentations and publications reaching a variety of audiences in the higher education community.
**Compensation:**
In an effort to compensate you for your time, should you participate in this study in full (taking part in a one-on-one interview, member check conducted over email after the interview, and focus group), you will be compensated with a $25 Amazon gift card, along with a provided lunch during the focus group. If you participate in only the one-on-one interview, you will receive a $15 gift card; if you participate in the interview and the member check, you will receive a $20 gift card. All compensation will be given at the conclusion of the data collection.

**Privacy & Confidentiality:**
All consent and participant information forms collected during data collection will be electronically scanned and stored on password-encrypted files on a secured computer, and deleted at the conclusion of the study. During each of the interviews and the focus group, I will use participant-selected pseudonyms. During the latter, I will remind participants to use pseudonyms, as well as verbally agree that comments made during the focus group will not be repeated outside of the setting. The recording and transcription of the interview will be stored on password-encrypted files stored on a secured computer and deleted after the conclusion of the study. Only the primary investigator (Ester Sihite) and the faculty advisor (OiYan Poon, Ph.D.) will have access to these files. Lastly, only pseudonyms and corresponding general titles (i.e. faculty member, administrator) will be used in any reports, presentations, or papers developed from the collected materials.

**Voluntary Participation:**
You are free to choose whether or not you would like to participate in any phase of this study. You may withdraw at any time during the course of the interview, focus group, or during any of the phase of the research project without consequences of any kind. You may also choose to skip and not answer any question asked at any point.

**Contacts and Questions:**
If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Ester Sihite at esihite@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor, Dr. OiYan Poon, at opoon@luc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Chicago Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

**Statement of Consent:**
Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

____________________________________________  ____________________
Participant’s Signature                                      Date
____________________________________________  ____________________
Researcher’s Signature                                      Date
**Life/Personal**
- Attaining knowledge of social injustices
- Experiences of and dealing with racism
- Exposure to differences in social identities/experiences
- Influence of family in terms of who they are today
- Acknowledging intersectionality and complexity in their own identities
- Relating to different others / having relationship with individuals who had different social identities
- Salience of own racial and/or ethnic identity
- Process of reflection (engaging in)
- Struggle and resilience (engaging in)
- Taking care of community (as an important value)
- Valuing of education
- Vocational discernment and calling to current role

**Education**
- Attaining knowledge of social injustices
- Challenged by teachers and educators
- Enjoyed and liked school
- Experiences of and dealing with racism
- Experiential learning
- First generation to go to college
  - Had help navigating college
- Influence of past teachers
- Recognition of opportunities brokered by mentors or others
- Relating to different others / having relationship with individuals who had different social identities
- Salience of own racial and/or ethnic identity
- Process of reflection (engaging in)
- Struggle and resilience (engaging in)
- Validation (receiving)
  - Academic validation (having someone believe in your academic abilities)
  - Cultural validation (having someone affirm your cultural identities within educational context)
- Vocational discernment and calling to current role

**Professional**
- Adjunct faculty experience
- Attaining knowledge of social injustices
- Antiracism team
  - Challenges
  - Origins and history
- Challenge of working with colleagues
- Challenges to diversity work
- Comradery with other college employees (having it and/or desire for it)
- Desire to continue learning (about diversity/social justice/how to improve their practice)
- Enjoy working in education
- Hopes and developments for organizational progress
- Lack of institutional response to racism (observing)
- Overburdening of staff and faculty of color
- “Paying it forward”
- Problematic employee structure (re: salary, benefits, opportunities)
- Process of reflection
- Professional development opportunities at the college
- Requirements to do job well
- Seeing/experiencing racism on campus
- Seek to improve the institution
  - Individual agency
- Taking care of community
- Vocational discernment and calling

**Praxis:** How do they validate and activate the CCW of students of color? ➔ How do they work to allow an environment in which SOC can thrive?
- Dedication to student success
  - Equity as being related to student success
  - High expectations for students
  - Seek students’ sense of belonging
  - Shared responsibility for student success
    - Individual (educator) responsibility
    - Institutional responsibility
- Fostering relationships with students
- Growth and malleability in teaching style
- Learning students
  - Acknowledging complexity/intersections of students’ identities
  - Holistic view of students
- Validation (giving)
  - Academic validation (indicating to students that they believe in their academic abilities)
  - Cultural validation (affirming students’ cultural identities within educational context)

**Other**
- Overlap (explicit) of personal, educational and professional values and activities
APPENDIX I

IMAGINATIVE VARIATIONS: VISUALIZATION OF ELEMENTS OF PRACTITIONER-EDUCATORS’ PERSONAL REALM
APPENDIX J

IMAGINATIVE VARIATIONS: VISUALIZATION OF ELEMENTS OF PRACTITIONER-EDUCATORS’ EDUCATION REALM
APPENDIX K

VISUALIZATION OF ELEMENTS OF PRACTITIONER-EDUCATORS’
ORGANIZATIONAL REALM
Personal Motivation for Work
- Belief in value of education
- Enjoying / finding meaning in the work
- Paying it forward

Paradigms Around Success
- Holistic understanding of students, with aim for equity
- View of student success as shared responsibility (institutional- and individual-level)

Individual-Level Approaches to Promoting Student Success
- Actively learning about and forming validating, supportive relationships with students
- Continuing to learn, grow, and reflect on their roles
- Staying connected to and engaging with the institution

Institutional Dynamics
- Racism on campus and lack of critical institutional response
- Need for institutional support

Strides & Challenges
- Antiracism Team
- Personnel changes
- Training
- Problematic structure and compensation
- Resistance and complacency
- Overburdening of staff and faculty of color
REFERENCE LIST


Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2014). *Contingent commitments: Bringing part-time faculty into focus.* Austin, TX: Author.


Rendón, L. I. (1994). Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and


VITA

Ester U. Sihite was born in Jakarta, Indonesia, immigrated with her family to East Lansing Michigan at age 3, then settled in Seattle with them at age 6. She completed her primary through Master’s-level schooling in Seattle—attending the University of Washington and receiving her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in 2008, and attending Seattle University and receiving her Master of Arts in Student Development Administration in 2012. For her Master’s thesis, Ester explored the influences of intergroup dialogue among undergraduate students.

While at Loyola University Chicago, Ester worked served as a research assistant on a number of research teams, and helped produce research on the social identity development and activism among Asian American students, racial disparities in higher education, and critical pedagogies used in higher education classrooms. In 2016, Ester was awarded the School of Education’s Distinguished Research Award as she was wrapping up her dissertation proposal. Her family story, practitioner experiences working in community colleges, and research experience have cultivated her interest in the cultivation and use of asset-based and critical multicultural frames and praxis of community college faculty, staff, and administrators, and the relationship between critical multicultural education and community college student success.