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Ruth Schumacher-Martinez & Sherrie L. Proctor

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Untangling the Grip of White Privilege in Education through Consultation and Systems Change: Introduction to the Special Issue

Ruth Schumacher-Martinez ^a and Sherrie L. Proctor^b

^aUniversity of Missouri-St. Louis; ^bQueens College, City University of New York

ABSTRACT

This article introduces the articles in the special issue, *School consultation grounded in social justice: Dismantling white privilege in education*. The authors first highlight salient aspects of each of the five articles. The article ends with a call to action for educators to use consultation to effect systems change that will interrupt white privilege and racist practices in education.

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It is not uncommon for educators' storytelling to celebrate the upward mobility afforded to individuals who "worked hard" and attained academic success. However, these stories often fail to present a complete narrative and accurate picture of who has access to power, resources, and privilege within education and who does not. Knowledge of how racism has historically and currently operates within the US, including K-12 and higher education systems, is critical to understanding the imbalance of power in educational systems. In addressing white privilege, defined as any phenomena – individual or structural – that serves to privilege white people while oppressing people of color and promoting white supremacy (Blanchett, 2006), all white people are implicated and must work to dismantle educational systems gripped by white centrality, the oppression of those deemed other, and the privileging of whiteness (Applebaum, 2007).

White individuals within educational systems sometimes experience defensive feelings when challenged about white privilege within policies, curriculum, and systems level practice. Implicit bias – that is, attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner – is noted when white people tout their accomplishments as earned entitlements with no acknowledgment of unearned privilege due to racism (Watt, 2007). Critical whiteness studies demonstrate that nice white people are complicit in maintaining systemic oppression through the superficial need to be seen as good and not part of the problem, instead of an openness to engage in critical self-audit awareness (i.e., viewing the pieces of

oneself that are not socially desirable and are centered on privileging one's whiteness) (Bartky, 2002).

These topics are important to address because racism coupled with white privilege has detrimental effects on students' of color educational experiences and outcomes. For example, educators may conceptualize deficits as residing within students of color instead of analyzing and acknowledging how systemic and ecological factors impact their access, opportunities, and inclusivity in schools. Educators must interrogate and disrupt educational systems that categorize students as other or different if they are not white; the assumption of whiteness as normal is a sickness within our schools that needs intervention at a systems level in order to advance educational practices that benefit *all* children and families (Takaki, 2008). One way to accomplish this is through consultation that addresses white privilege in education systems. Thus, this special issue presents five articles that help us understand how white privilege manifests in educational institutions and how to begin addressing the detrimental impact of white privilege via school-based consultation.

Holter, Goforth, Pyke, and Shindorf's qualitative discourse analysis study investigated microaggressive statements directed toward Native Americans in history textbooks used in Montana. Findings revealed the textbooks included microinvalidations, microinsults, and microassaults in the curricula used to instruct K-12 students. The results are discussed from the perspective of white privilege and recommendations are made to help school-based consultants tackle prejudice that is engrained in curricula.

Sabnis, Castillo, and Wolgemuth's qualitative study provides rich interview data that explores why several schools that utilize Response to Intervention (RtI) failed at reducing disproportionality of Black students in specific learning disability identification. The researchers analyzed the social process involved in RtI through interview data and how problem analysis and evaluation may be skewed based on viewing the information through a dominant culture lens that privileges whiteness. Recommendations move school-based consultants toward greater understanding of how to help schools develop transformative practices that are anti-oppressive.

LaSalle, Wang, Wu, and Neves' quantitative study examines student and teacher racial composition at the school-wide level to analyze if there is an impact on high school students of color and their perceptions of cultural acceptance and connectedness. Their article provides recommendations for school consultants to address school climate and offers guidance for professional development that will combat white privilege.

Chittooran's conceptual article on solution-focused consultee-centered consultation presents a model to dismantle white privilege in a university training program. This article describes the responsibility that training programs have to address this issue both as relates to improving practices within higher education spaces as well as improving the quality of practitioners who graduate from these

programs and will serve K-12 students. This article presents a case study to further highlight an example of putting this model into practice to actively work against privileging whiteness at the university level.

Williams, Hanssen, Rinke, and Kinlaw's article reports on a multi-year study on building faculty capacity to create inclusive classrooms. Through the analysis of this study, the team built the Creating Inclusive Communities model. These researchers determined that it was essential to build capacity within their faculty to effectively support students in building culturally responsive practice and dismantling white privilege. The article provides detailed steps for creating transformative systems change; they document how this was advanced in their setting and provide suggestions for practice and research.

The articles in this special issue do not shy away from the reality of how white perspectives have driven practices in educational settings. Through this collection of work, readers are provided with examples of systemic racism in education that is centered on white privilege. The articles provide sound recommendations that can help as readers work to build their own blueprints to dismantle white privilege in their settings. It is an urgent task we must all commit to in our daily personal and professional lives.

We encourage readers to read these articles more than once. We anticipate that readers may have a range of reactions to the articles. Some readers may feel validated, some apathetic, others defensive, while others self-congratulatory. Sharing these articles with colleagues can support cognitive and emotional processing of the articles, while simultaneously help build community with others committed to interrupting white privilege and working toward anti-racist education environments. After reading this special issue, we hope readers will do two things. First, be open to acknowledge their biases and how their biases present in small and large ways in their work. Second, take actions to disrupt racism and white privilege in education settings (see Gorski & Erakat, 2019 for discussion of role and impact of white activists in racial justice movements). Through using consultation strategies and engaging in a self and systems-level audit it is possible to stop white privilege and white supremacy from damaging more students and families of color. It is essential that we break the cycle of being complicit with white privilege and racist practices in education.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Ruth Schumacher-Martinez  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6861-0233>

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Notes on contributors

Ruth Schumacher-Martinez, PhD is an assistant professor of school psychology at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Sherrie L. Proctor is an associate professor of school psychology at Queens College, City University of New York.