

BOLDLY BECOMING ANTIRACIST: A TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY OF FEAR,  
LEARNING, AND GROWTH

by

ELIZABETH P. HUBBS

(Under the Direction of Caleb Seung-hyun Han)

ABSTRACT

The research team in a small undergraduate social work education program explored the implementation of antiracist best practices for pedagogy and practice, utilizing transformational learning and critical race theories to guide and inform this action research study. The research team sought to explore the impact on the faculty, students, and program's implicit and explicit curriculum by utilizing transformational learning and critical race theories to guide the change through research and theory-informed interventions.

INDEX WORDS: critical race theory; transformational learning theory; undergraduate social work education; social work; action research; Eliminate Racism; grand challenges for social work; antiracist pedagogy

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## DEDICATION

It is my hope that the changes within our program and within ourselves, and through the ripple effect in our community, help influence and guide antiracist and anti-oppressive beliefs and practices in our students, colleagues, and community partners. I dedicate this research to past, present, and future change leaders. It is my dream that this work, in some way, inspires others in positions of influence, to use their voices on behalf of those who cannot use their own. Let us continue to be guided by hope to lead and inspire change.

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## CHAPTER 1

### AN INTRODUCTION TO BECOMING ANTIRACIST

Institutional and systemic racism and oppression are profoundly embedded and interwoven throughout the foundations of the United States, tracing back hundreds of years (Teasley et al., 2021). This country's institutions, systems, and policies were built on a legacy of racism and White supremacy that continue to impact the lives of millions of Americans every day (American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare [AASWSW], n.d.). Racist policies, biases, discriminatory practices, and oppressive behaviors foster racial inequality (AASWSW, n.d.). Although fighting racist practices has been salient throughout America's history, specifically during the civil rights movement, it has become even more evident in recent years that the call for intentional, antiracist changes and practices remains necessary to promote equity and justice for all individuals. Social work, as a profession, has provided leadership in the movements towards civil rights and race equity; however, there is a profound need for leadership and action towards racial equity by social workers and the greater society at large (Barth et al., 2021). Social work has been criticized for a collective lack of action towards social justice, despite it being an essential tenet of the profession (Teasley et al., 2021).

More recently, there has been internal dialogue related to the embedded racism within the social work profession, starting in the educational systems and permeating the profession at every level (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2022). Consequently, as a profession, there has been a profound call for implementing antiracist practice and pedagogy, beginning at the educational level and continuing throughout all levels of the profession.

## Professional Responsibility Towards Antiracist Practice

Social work is founded on the principles and values of social justice, challenging social injustices, respecting all people's inherent dignity and worth, and committing to cultural competence. More explicitly, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (2021) states that "social workers must take action against oppression, racism, discrimination, and inequities, and acknowledge personal privilege" (p. 10). From this grounding and stated professional responsibility, it is evident that the profession is ethically directed towards engaging in social justice issues, especially towards antiracism and anti-oppressive systems, practices, and beliefs.

Additionally, the Grand Challenges for Social Work (GCSW) were developed by the AASWSW (Barth et al., 2021) in response to the increasing complexity of social issues and the growing need to bring clarity and a unified focus to social work. The GCSW initiative calls social work practitioners to take action through multilevel interventions and collaboration across sectors and outlines large-scale, deeply significant social problems that social workers should be united in addressing over the next decade in partnership with researchers and practitioners across various sectors (Keenan, 2016). The GCSW (Barth et al., 2021) initially only identified 12 grand challenges in 2016. However, following intensifying pressure and criticism from the profession at large within the social climate of 2020 and calls for justice by, for, and with people of color, the GCSW adopted the 13<sup>th</sup> GCSW, *Eliminate Racism*, in 2021 (Barth et al., 2021; Teasley et al., 2021).

Teasley et al. (2021) proposed the formal introduction of the 13<sup>th</sup> GCSW, *Eliminate Racism*, and provided a detailed history, purpose, and action plan for this grand challenge. They provided contextual information related to the "call for the social work profession to focus on the

centrality of racism and white supremacy, both within society and the profession” (Teasley et al., 2021, p. 1). Rao et al. (2021) also provided insight into the recent adoption of the 13<sup>th</sup> GCSW to eliminate racism; through content analysis, they studied 21 previously published articles related to the GCSW to determine their inclusion of race, ethnicity, and racism (RER). Their findings indicated limited discussion of RER in articles related to the initial 12<sup>th</sup> GCSW. They discussed the importance of the recent adoption of the 13<sup>th</sup> GCSW to prepare social workers to eradicate systemic racism more effectively (Rao et al., 2021). Collectively, as evidenced through the NASW Code of Ethics and the GCSW, the profession calls for active, intentional, professional action towards antiracist practice by social workers at every level. Of note, 67.4% of bachelor-level social workers identify as White, and 72.6% of masters-level social workers identify as White, which has been considered a significant criticism of the profession and its lack of diversity (Teasley et al., 2021). Such demographics are profoundly significant when considering the intersection of social workers and the professional call for social justice, which has prompted critics to ask: Why are there not more people of color in the profession if it is a profession focused on promoting racial justice?

### **Educational Responsibility Towards Antiracist Practice**

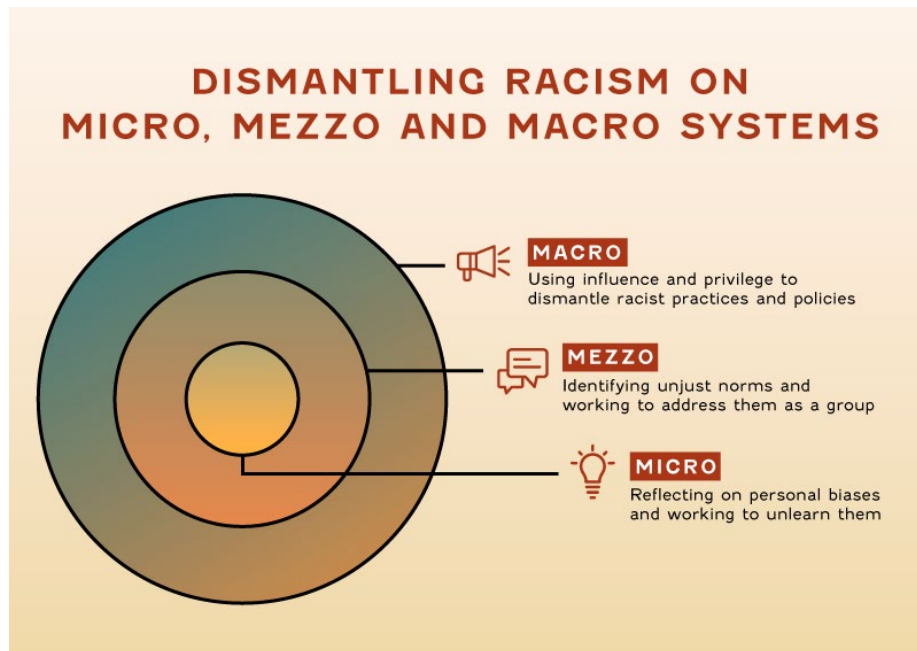
In addition to the professional call for antiracist practice, social work education also requires a profound change to align with the social work profession and the needs of modern society. The literature suggests that current social work education programs, although well-meaning, often assimilate to racism and racist practices by disseminating a “multicultural” perspective versus a critical race theory (CRT) perspective, which perpetuates “colorblind” thinking and behavior (Odera et al., 2021). Further supporting this criticism is that 61.1% of social work educators identify as White (Perez, 2021). The lack of change in implicit and explicit



curriculum and lack of diversity among social work educators highlights the sense of urgency for the implementation of changes to social work education in order to more effectively train social workers to engage in antiracist practice and actively work towards eliminating racism. Teasley et al. (2021) emphasized the need for social work education to be revised to address racist policies and practices and redesign both implicit and explicit curriculum to address structural inequities and White privilege. Phillippo and Crutchfield (2021) also discuss the urgency for social work education to make educational changes to align with best practices for an antiracist framework.

### **Understanding Antiracism Through a Social Work Lens**

Antiracism is “the practice of opposing and dismantling social, cultural, and structural instances of racism” (MSW@USC, 2020). Activist Angela Davis (2020) is quoted as saying, “in a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist” (as cited in MSW@USC, 2020, para. 5), which directly relates to upcoming changes for social work educational programs. The accrediting body for the profession, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), had not previously explicitly required programs to address racism through an antiracist framework (CSWE, 2015). Although social work has consistently advocated for social justice issues, changes issued by the CSWE (2022) now require programs to teach antiracist theory and to adopt implicit and explicit curricular changes to align with antiracist best practices and to prepare students to engage in antiracist social work practices. It has become a professional expectation that social workers move beyond being “not racist” to proactively engaging in antiracist practices at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Figure 1.1 offers examples of how to implement antiracist practices at all levels from the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work at the University of Southern California, which has been broadly insightful in informing and guiding the current study.



**Figure 1.1.** *Examples of Antiracism at the Micro, Mezzo and Macro Levels.* Note. From *How to Be Anti-Racist: A Social Worker's Perspective*, by MSW@USC, 2020, University of Southern California Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work (<https://msw.usc.edu/mswusc-blog/how-to-be-antiracist>).

### **Council on Social Work Education and Educational Standards**

Social work education in America is overseen by the CSWE, which accredits and provides oversight to baccalaureate (BSW) and master's (MSW) social work programs. The CSWE utilizes a competency-based education model for social work programs, indicating that all students must demonstrate competency in each of the nine outlined competencies to graduate with their degrees. Currently, the Educational Policy Accreditation Standards (EPAS) outlined by the CSWE in 2015 state that all social workers must understand diversity and difference, oppression and discrimination, and strategies to eliminate oppressive behaviors, which are

highlighted in Competency 2: “Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice” and Competency 3: “Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice.” The language in these competencies is broad and does not explicitly call for action towards social justice. Criticism from the profession at large has suggested that this stance does not demonstrate sufficiently strong promotion of antiracism in social work educational settings, that it currently does not align with the code of ethics and professional obligations, and that changes need to be made in educational settings to more adequately prepare future social workers (Phillippo & Crutchfield, 2021).

There has been a growing call for social work education to move towards intentional antiracist pedagogy, as supported by the addition of the 13<sup>th</sup> GCSW and updates to the CSWE’s EPAS (2022) (Teasley et al., 2021). In response to the growing sense of urgency, the CSWE has developed and recently disseminated EPAS for 2022 with much more explicit language and expectations that social work education support clear action towards antiracist practice. These revisions and expansions are thoroughly described below, and the old language is compared and contrasted with the newly identified competencies in the CSWE EPAS (2022).

### ***CSWE EPAS/Competency 2***

The name of Competency 2 has changed to “Advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice” (CSWE, 2022, p. 9). Additional examples of the changes to the language and expectations within Competency 2 include the following:

Social workers are knowledgeable about the global intersecting and ongoing injustices throughout history that result in oppression and racism, including social work’s role and response. ...Social workers critically evaluate the distribution of power and privilege in

society...Social workers advocate for and engage in strategies to eliminate oppressive structural barriers. (CSWE, 2022, p. 9)

This competency requirement then states that social workers must (a) “advocate for human rights at the individual, family, group, organizational, and community system levels” and (b) “engage in practices that advance human rights to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice” (CSWE, 2022, p. 9).

### ***CSWE EPAS/Competency 3***

The name of Competency 3 has changed to “Engage antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice” (CSWE, 2022, p. 9). Additional changes to the language and specifics for Competency 3 include the following:

Social workers understand how racism and oppression shape human experiences and how these two constructs influence practice. ...Social workers understand the pervasive impact of White supremacy and privilege and use their knowledge, awareness, and skills to engage in anti-racist practice. ...Social workers understand the societal and historical roots of social and racial injustices and the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination. Social workers understand cultural humility and recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures and values...may create privilege and power resulting in systemic oppression. (CSWE, 2022, pp. 9–10)

The competency then states that social workers must (a) “demonstrate anti-racist and anti-oppressive social work practice” and (b) “demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients...acknowledging them as experts of their own lived experiences” (CSWE, 2022, p. 10).

### **The Subject of the Current Study: The BSW Program at Kennedy College**

The subject of the current study is a small-sized Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program at a state institution in the Southeast, henceforth pseudonymously referred to as Kennedy College. The program has approximately 100 students enrolled as BSW students, with five full-time faculty. The BSW program is overseen by the CSWE and must be reaccredited every 8 years. The BSW program graduates approximately 20 students annually, who either work in the local community immediately upon graduation and attend graduate school to earn their master of social work (MSW) or directly enter the profession. All MSW programs are also accredited by the CSWE. Feedback from community partners and MSW programs has consistently shared how well prepared our students are to work in the profession and succeed at the graduate level. This program recognizes its successes in graduating competent, ethical, and professional bachelor-level social workers. Through implicit and explicit curricular changes, it is motivated to adopt new requirements from the CSWE (2022) in moving the program towards an antiracist approach. These changes will better prepare students to practice as antiracist social workers and to engage in antiracist theory and practice at the MSW level.

### **Identified Opportunities in the BSW Program**

As described above, profound shifts in the language and requirements of programs and students by the CSWE began to be implemented in 2022, with full implementation expected of all programs by 2025 (CSWE, 2022). The implications for changes within programs are significant as they require transformations in teaching capabilities and practices, curriculum, course assignments, field experiences, and student expectations. The action research (AR) team for the current project identified a crucial and urgent need for change within the program to comply with the program's accrediting body and to better prepare future social workers to

respond to the professional requirement for antiracist practice. The AR team recognized and deeply explored the required changes/expectations at the societal and educational levels. The team also assessed the current program and recognized gaps and deficits, providing a great opportunity to begin making changes towards transitioning the program towards an antiracist approach. The call to action embodied by the new CSWE EPAS (2022) offers an excellent opportunity for many programs, including the one studied, to respond through both implicit and explicit curricular changes to better prepare students to take up these calls as they begin their careers.

The increasing visibility of the need for antiracist social work education over the past several years has been accompanied by an increase in research studies related to antiracist education/pedagogy, especially in social work education. Several researchers have begun to research frameworks and models towards antiracist pedagogy within their respective social work programs, which were highly relevant for the change project of this dissertation and in implementing its activities and interventions (Albritton et al., 2021; Odera et al., 2021; Polk et al., 2021). In considering the need for faculty to embrace change, Perez (2021) introduced the importance of social work educators' perspectives and experiences and how they significantly impact classroom practices and students' experiences. Phillippo and Crutchfield (2021) and Perez (2021) helped articulate the gaps in both the explicit and implicit curriculum of social work education. They discussed the lack of faculty preparedness to teach antiracist practice, which contributes to a lack of professional preparedness in social workers to engage in antiracist practice themselves. A review of the current literature on this topic, discussed in the following sections, provided relevant insight for this change project in developing and implementing

antiracist best practices within the program and in studying change at the student, faculty, and programmatic levels.

### **Critical Race Theory and Issues of Social Justice in Education**

Critical race theory (CRT) has been studied and regarded as a primary framework for understanding and assessing racist and oppressive practices and policies and has been employed as a guiding perspective for making transformational changes towards social justice and in developing antiracist pedagogy and practice (Odera et al., 2021; Perez, 2021; Polk et al., 2021). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) identified the primary goal of CRT as “transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 3).

Critiques have suggested that social work has maintained a philosophy of “colorblindness” regarding racism by not taking a more proactive approach towards intentional antiracist education and practice (Teasley et al., 2021). Recent social tragedies have spurred the charge for social workers to acknowledge this omission and take a much more active and intentional approach towards antiracism. In modeling this professional and educational call for change, the AR team strove to recognize internal colorblindness, both implicitly and explicitly, in the program and use that awareness to inform our interventions. The core principles of CRT provided a relevant framework for understanding systemic and institutional racism and White supremacy in the United States. They can be meaningfully utilized as a foundation for racially just social work education and practice (Polk et al., 2021). As proposed by Razack and Jeffrey (2002), the core tenets of CRT specific to social work that can be used directly to influence change include the following: (a) “racism as the norm” (p. 260); (b) the “value of storytelling” (p. 262); (c) “critique of liberalism” (p. 262); (d) “recognizing power and privilege” (p. 264); (e)

“critique of Whiteness” (p. 264); (f) “integrating anti-racist discourse” (p. 266); (g) “legitimizing race scholarship” (p. 266); and (h) “globalized understandings of race” (p. 267).

Crenshaw et al. (1995) provided extensive and pertinent context for understanding the history of CRT and applying it as a framework for the current identified opportunity and planning and implementing this change project. Ortiz and Jani (2010) discussed using CRT as a paradigm shift to transform how social work education addresses race and diversity to ensure the integration of a diversity focus throughout the implicit and explicit curriculum. They asserted that, as a framework, CRT “allows for transformation of social relations through dialogue and social relationships” (Ortiz & Jani, 2010, p. 177). Based on its use by numerous scholars and practitioners as a relevant and guiding theory for assessing racist practice and providing a framework for antiracist practice, CRT served as a guiding theory for the core and dissertation projects.

### **Embracing Change Towards Antiracist Pedagogy in the BSW Program**

The BSW program recognizes the calls for social justice, the professional requirements from the NASW (2021) Code of Ethics and the 13<sup>th</sup> GCSW, and the recent changes from the CSWE (2022). The AR team also recognized the lack of alignment between the current program design and our goal of developing into an antiracist and anti-oppressive undergraduate social work program. In reviewing the literature on best practices for developing an antiracist program, the faculty agreed that the program is not currently aligned with evidence-based best practices for antiracist pedagogy as the program has not made the necessary changes at the individual, group, and system levels. The team recognized the need for interconnected, simultaneous changes at the faculty, program, and, ultimately, student levels.



One exciting opportunity for contributing to the literature relates to implementing an antiracist framework in a small, conservative town in the southeast. Specifically, a question for the faculty has arisen: How can the faculty, students, and program, in general, be prepared for pushback? Furthermore, how can we better prepare to embrace/respect the students' lived experiences, engage in holistic teaching, and promote antiracist perspectives and practices? This project sought to contribute insights concerning these questions to the literature, especially as they relate to the unique demographics of the school and community.

### **Literature Review**

The change project employed CRT as the overarching framework for assessing the BSW program, the faculty within the BSW program, and the students. The study utilized CRT as a guiding theoretical framework for developing and implementing interventions focused on change towards antiracist pedagogy and practice. Transformational learning theory (TLT) was used as the grounding adult learning theory to help inform a collective understanding of perspective transformation among students and faculty. TLT guided the research as the team explored how to transform the current educational model through a planned change process and understand change within the faculty and students through measurable outcomes.

As the AR team explored implementing change in the social work program towards antiracist pedagogy at the individual, group, and system levels, TLT was an effective guide for the study, providing opportunities for faculty and students to transform their current frames of reference to prepare for antiracist social work practice. Mezirow (1997) described TLT as being prompted to see the world differently or change one's frames of reference. Specifically, the AR team used TLT to assess the current perspectives of faculty and students and as a lens for evaluating the program's implicit perspective. The faculty are called to recognize and challenge

their perspectives on race and internalized racism to disrupt current beliefs and move towards antiracist pedagogy and practice.

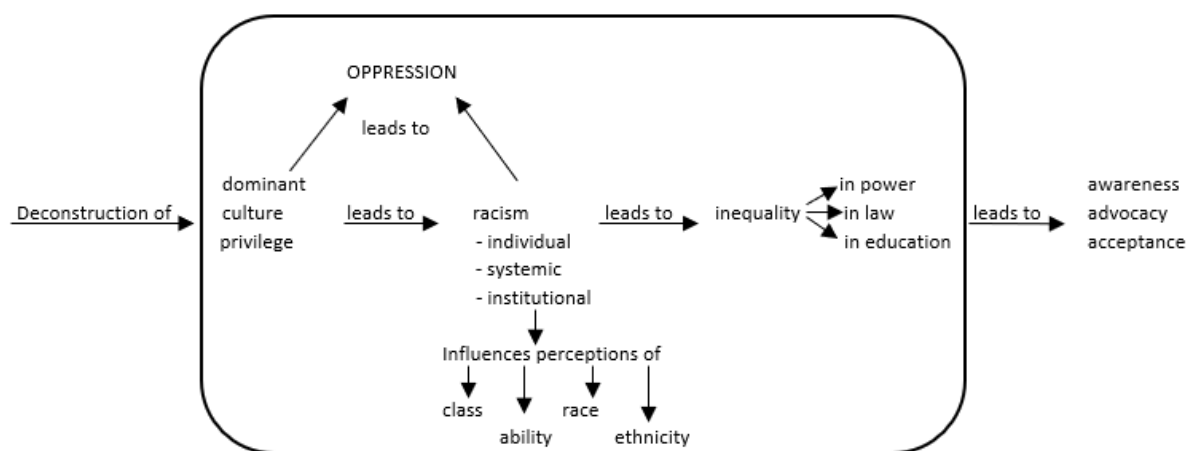
The AR team also employed TLT as the grounding theory for developing and implementing interventions at the individual, group, and system levels, focused on fostering perspective transformation towards antiracism. Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) described TLT as providing a framework for how “lived experiences provide a context for making meaning of the world,” which was both helpful and relevant to this study (p. 1141). As the AR team explored the complex and emotionally impactful concept of racism, TLT helped shape meaning-making by defining “the process by which people learn to develop and then integrate new assumptions into existing schemes and perspectives” (Brookfield, 2010, p. 78). The AR team sought to develop grounded interventions that challenged preexisting schemas, assumptions, and perspectives to help move towards competent, antiracist social work practice and education. Additionally, we believe that the faculty’s shift in understanding and perspective will help foster continuing changes in the program’s implicit and explicit curriculum.

The theory of change for the AR project posited that utilizing CRT as a lens to understand the program’s current gaps would help the team effectively guide the change project towards antiracist implicit and explicit pedagogy. Moreover, the AR team used TLT as a guiding adult learning theory in the development of transformational interventions to promote change at the student, faculty, and program levels and sought to understand change and outcomes by assessing perspective transformation. Guided by TLT through the framework of CRT, by creating disorienting dilemmas, the interventions attempted to challenge preexisting racism-related schemas and assumptions in students and faculty. A second goal was to help students

embody transformational growth and learning demonstrated through increased awareness of self and others and a demonstrated ability to engage in antiracist social work practice.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Ortiz and Jani (2010) discussed how CRT is situated within the framework of critical postmodern theory that “attempts to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to generate societal and individual transformation” (Tierney, 1993, p. 176). Critical race theory helps scholars and practitioners explore and work to alter the interrelationships among constructs of race, practices and beliefs promoting racism and oppression, and power structures (Brookfield, 2010; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Although introduced primarily through legal scholarship in the 1970s, CRT has become more widely adopted in the field of education since 1995, with a focus on recognizing racial inequalities in educational systems, rejecting the perpetuation of normative Whiteness, and recognizing the linkages of current educational inequalities and historical patterns of oppression (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Critical race theory also advocates against “colorblindness” or approaches that ignore race and social inequalities and that thus perpetuate and exacerbate racism, while striving to challenge structural changes (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020; Ortiz & Jani, 2010). Critical race theory provides conditions for transformational change in social relations through dialogue and relationships (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). These components of CRT are immensely relevant to the change project, as they directly connect to the upcoming changes from the CSWE (2022) concerning antiracism teaching and practice. Figure 1.2 below provides a helpful overview of CRT in action when using it to assess programs, systems, etc.



**Figure 1.2. CRT Model.** Note. From “Critical Race Theory,” by S. Movius, n.d., *Theoretical Models for Teaching and Research* (J. Egbert & M. Roe, Eds.), para. 7

(<https://opentext.wsu.edu/theoreticalmodelsforteachingandresearch/chapter/critical-race-theory/>).

Antiracist pedagogy is “a paradigm located within Critical Theory utilized to explain and counteract the persistence and impact of racism using praxis as its focus to promote social justice for the creation of a democratic society in every respect” (Blakeney, 2005, p. 119, as cited in Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, p. 296). Antiracist pedagogy addresses institutional and individual racism and provides an actionable framework for addressing race, ethnicity, power, and class (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Critical race theory advocates for a curriculum that analyzes how White supremacy is entrenched in practices, pedagogy, texts, guest speakers, videos, and other tools (Brookfield, 2010). Antiracist pedagogy and curriculum include teaching political, historical, and economic content from an intersectional perspective and working with students to brainstorm practical ways to fight against racism, which the AR team integrated into our intervention development (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). A tangible example of implementing antiracist pedagogy includes integrating racial context throughout the curriculum

instead of as something added on (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). The AR team sought to use this principle to guide interventions, including intentionally incorporating assignments related to racism throughout various classes within the program.

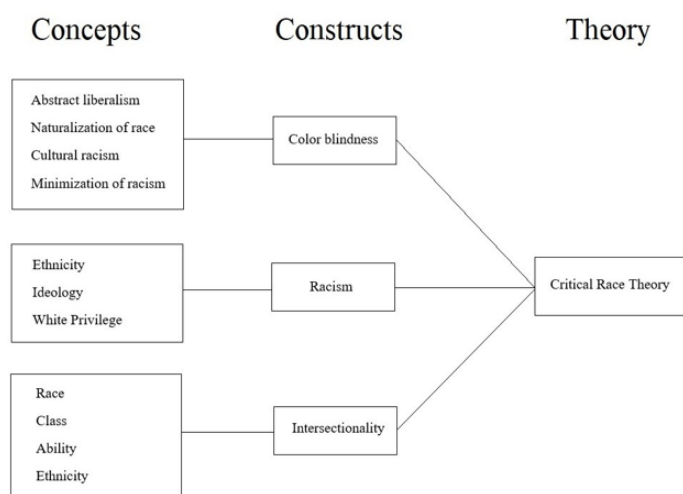
Additionally, CRT focuses on activism and challenging the overwhelming influence of White supremacy and White privilege that permeates society (Brookfield, 2010; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Critical race theory also acknowledges aversive racism, which is understood as the subtle racist behaviors espoused by progressive individuals who claim not to be racist (Brookfield, 2010). Critical race theory asks adult educators—particularly White educators—to analyze and confront the realities of racism in their research and practice by addressing the pervasiveness of racial microaggressions and aversive racism in education, including implicit and explicit bias, who gets called on, whose opinion is valued, and whose is not (Brookfield, 2010).

Identifying implicit and explicit microaggressions in the BSW program and practice, and making tangible changes, was essential for the change project and a crucial component of our CRT framework (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). As faculty and change leaders in this change project, we felt a sense of responsibility for recognizing implicit and explicit racist behavior to begin implementing changes in ourselves, the program, and in practice.

CRT also helped guide data collection and the intervention process through its focus on using narratives, especially counter-storytelling (Brookfield, 2010; Nash, 2013). Nash (2013) utilized critical theory as the grounding theory for her study focused on using CRT as a transformative pedagogy to help reframe early P–12 teacher education and to “help create counternarratives to address pervasive issues of inequity among minoritized students” (p. 151). Using counter-storytelling or counternarratives as both a form of data collection and intervention

tool allows people of color to share their experiences of racism from their perspectives and culture, which is intentionally counter to traditional White/oppressive forms of assessments (such as writing and formal assignments) (Brookfield, 2010; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

Figure 1.3 below illustrates the important concepts considered and assessed by the AR team within the implicit and explicit curriculum of the program through the constructs of colorblindness, racism, and intersectionality, which are all essential tenets of CRT (Movius, n.d.). Further, this graphic helps identify specific concepts that the AR team considered when seeking further understanding of the current perspectives of students and faculty.



**Figure 1.3.** *Relevant CRT Concepts and Constructs to Be Assessed.* Note. From “Critical Race Theory,” by S. Movius, n.d., *Theoretical Models for Teaching and Research* (J. Egbert & M. Roe, Eds.), para. 17

(<https://opentext.wsu.edu/theoreticalmodelsforteachingandresearch/chapter/critical-race-theory/>).

## Transformational Learning Theory

Transformational learning theory (TLT) was the guiding change theory for this study, intentionally integrating the perspectives and insights from various TLT scholars. Although it has been critiqued, modified, and refined from its inception, Mezirow's original and updated theory of TLT provided the core tenets for this AR project (Mezirow, 1978; Brookfield, 2010). At the core of Mezirow's (1991) and Mezirow et al.'s (2000) theory of transformational learning is the belief

that as adults mature their life experience impels them to develop meaning schemes (sets of assumptions related to specific situations) and meaning perspectives (assumptions constituting broad worldviews) that are increasingly comprehensive (including a broader range of events) and discriminating (understanding of the differences between particular events and phenomena). (Brookfield, 2010, p. 77)

Mezirow's (1978) definition was highly relevant to our goal to explore perspectives of racism based on schemas and assumptions held by students and faculty. Through this lens of TLT, the team sought to understand what broad and comprehensive perspectives on race and racism are held individually and collectively as an AR team and faculty members. Kegan (2000) asserted that "literally, trans-*form*-itive learning puts the form itself at risk of change (and not just change but increased capacity)" (p. 49, emphasis in the original). Further, Keegan (2000) explained that the change is not just in *what* we know, but in transformational learning that "changes...*how* we know" (p. 49, emphasis in the original). Kegan's (2000) perspectives informed the different *forms* in which this AR project sought to effect change: the program at large, the faculty, the students, and our attempts to measure how this change has influenced the different forms. How does the input of knowledge influence measurable, transformational

change in *how* participants know and understand racism in themselves and through their practice? Cranton and Taylor (2013) asserted that TLT is “based on the notion that we interpret our experiences in our own way, and that how we see the world is a result of our perceptions of our experiences” (p. 5). This understanding informed our approach to ascertaining students’ current racism-related perspectives and assumptions as an initial measurable variable before implementing interventions.

The AR team took a critical theory perspective on TLT, utilizing Welton’s (1995) extensive work to promote the “centrality of emancipatory adult learning theory to social transformation and human freedom” (pp. 1–2) and Tisdell’s (1998) work with a poststructuralist focus on the formation of identity through interlocking systems of gender, race, and class. Moreover, although we also acknowledge the importance of larger political outcomes, we took inspiration from Wilson and Kiely (2002), who brought the focus of TLT to a smaller scale: the process of individual transformation.

Transformational learning theory includes the basic tenets of life experience, critical reflection (CR), and the connection between learning development (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). These tenets helped inform and guide our interventions as the AR team recognized experiences and challenged assumptions, both our own and those of faculty and students, through intentional CR and development activities. Kasworm and Bowles (2012) described the domains of TLT within higher education through the lenses of experiential and active learning: (a) self-reflection, emotional capability to openness, and critical disjunctures; (b) strategies for CR; (c) supportive social environment; (d) use of arts, literature, film, and drama as tools for transformative learning; and (e) holistic, affective, and spiritual processes. These domains were helpful in utilizing TLT as a guiding theory for intervention development and implementation.



The AR team also employed TLT to inform intervention development, as CR is an essential aspect of adult learning and transformational growth and was utilized as an intervention tool for data collection, disorientation, and assessment (Brookfield, 2010). We also utilized TLE to help assess the change level within faculty and preparedness to teach antiracist social work practice. Mezirow (1978) proposed that adult development aims to recognize one's expanded sense of self by increasing self-awareness and engaging in intentional CR (as cited in Brookfield, 2010). Further, adult educators are responsible for helping to foster this development and growth by helping students critically reflect on their own and others' assumptions (Brookfield, 2010). The AR team acknowledged these stages of adult learning while designing interventions, especially when using CR tools.

As Mezirow (1997) stated, "we do not make transformative changes in the way we learn as long as what we learn fits comfortably in our existing frames of reference" (p. 7). Trilokekar and Kukar (2011) studied disorienting dilemmas experienced by student teachers while studying abroad through the lens of TLT to understand individual experiences of racism, outsider status, experimentation with new identities, and recognizing privilege and power. McIntosh (1998) provided insightful perspective of exploring and unpacking privileges within ourselves, our program, and our community members. The AR team considered these perspectives as we sought to create purposefully uncomfortable, disorienting dilemmas as experiential learning and development tools towards transformational learning for students and faculty through honest dialogue and CR. Figure 1.4 illustrates the stages of TLT.



**Figure 1.4.** *Stages of Transformational Learning Theory.* Note. From “Let’s Talk About Racism: Strategies for Building Structural Competency in Nursing,” by S. Davis and A.-M. O’Brien, 2020, *Academic Medicine*, 95(12S), p. S61. Copyright 2020 by Lippincott.

Critical reflection (CR) is highly impactful in fostering transformational learning and is relevant to the change project (Taylor, 2000a, 2000b). Dewey’s (1933) “habit of reflective activity” and Freire’s (1970/2000) development of “critical consciousness” are fostered through critical self-reflection, which enables perspective transformation as defined by Mezirow (1978) (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). The AR team employed CR as an essential theoretically grounded tool for the change project as we sought to transform frames of reference on preexisting assumptions regarding racism (Brookfield, 2010). Mezirow (1978) also identified dialogue as an essential tenet of TLT, particularly fostering discussion in which learners trust each other and the process (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). This tenet was fundamental to the implementation of interventions in our study, especially for creating psychological safety within AR team meetings and classroom settings. The AR team intentionally worked to develop genuine relationships and

allow open discussions and forums to foster transformational learning during the intervention processes (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020).

Lorenzetti et al. (2019) have argued that CR is an essential pedagogical tool to help foster autonomous and critical thinking to help better prepare social workers to engage in antiracist social work practice. Individuals can transform their habits of mind through deep CR on-premises to define the problem which, in the case of this study, was helping students and faculty to think more critically about systemic racism, White privilege, and the local context (Brookfield, 2010). Other significant aspects of transformational learning are objective and subjective reframing. To achieve these, one must engage in CR on objective reframing (assumptions of others) and subjective reframing (one's own assumptions) (Brookfield, 2010). Both were utilized in this change project to help increase insight and understanding of others and the self.

### **Critiques of TLT**

Mezirow's (1971, 1991, 1994, 2000) theory of TLT has been the subject of numerous critiques explicitly addressing the original theory's lack of attention to context, the impact of emotions and relationships, and social action (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Scholars and researchers have debated over what constitutes "transformative" learning (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Kegan (2000) also noted that "not every kind of change, even important change, constitutes transformation" (as cited in Jones, 2009, p. 59). This view was important in considering TLT from a developmental perspective, as one goal of the project was to promote transformational growth/change towards antiracism within college-aged students.

Further, Taylor and Cranton (2013) discussed five specific areas that need to be further researched to strengthen the empirical evidence for TLT. Specifically, they focused on the need

to expand research and theory development surrounding the role of experience, empathy, the desire to change, the theory's inherently positive orientation, and the need for research involving positivist and critical approaches (Taylor & Cranton, 2013). This study explored these needs in our approach, especially empathy, a desire to change, the role of experience, and integrating a critical approach (CRT).

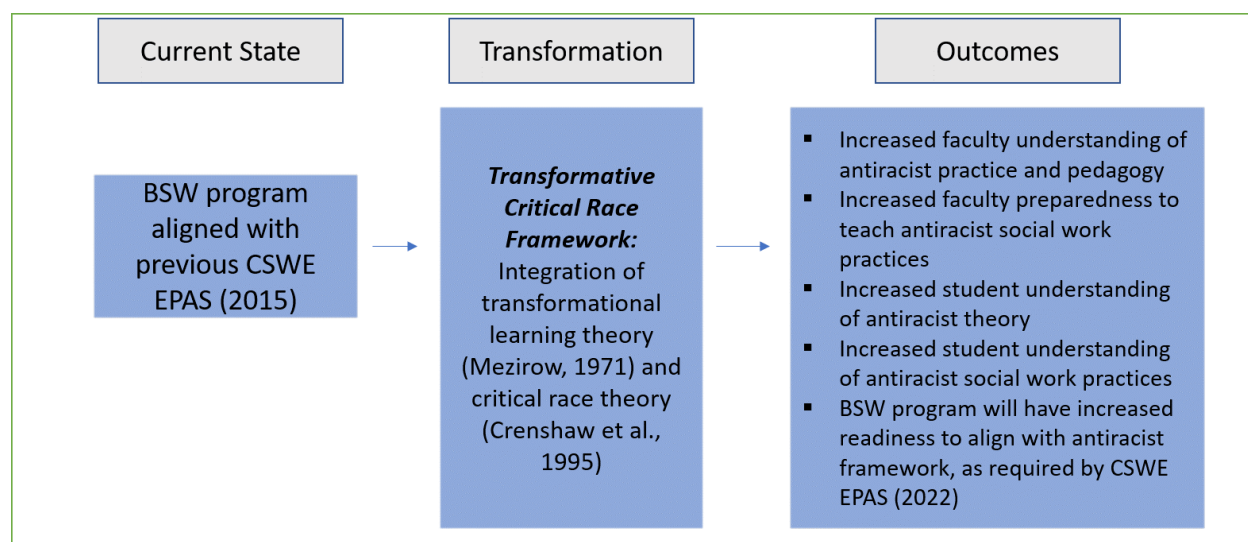
The AR team discussed some of these critiques as a team to ensure clarity in understanding how "transformation" was defined within the context of this study and how this understanding was shared with students and faculty. As we began this project, we anticipated that the findings from this study would contribute to the literature on TLT as the grounding theory for transformative learning and leading change towards antiracist teaching and practice in higher education.

### **Integrating CRT and TLT: Utilizing a Transformative Critical Race Framework**

Rojas (2018) studied the integration of CRT, transformative leadership theory in education (Shields, 2018), and critical teacher leadership theory (Bradley-Levine, 2018) in a qualitative study examining the intersection of teachers' commitment to social justice and leadership. Moore (2021) utilized a case study methodology grounded in critical Whiteness studies (CSW) to explore antiracist and critical race-oriented teacher preparation in education settings. While studying antiracist pedagogy and research, Grosland (2013) utilized CRT as a framework for understanding racialized emotions in higher education classrooms. These qualitative studies provided a theoretical framework for understanding TLT within CRT, in a higher education setting, promoting change towards antiracist and anti-oppressive pedagogy.

This study employed CRT and TLT as grounding theories that intersected and overlapped throughout the intervention design and implementation phases and through this project's data

collection, analysis, and interpretation phases, as depicted in Figure 1.5. The study considered individual or student interventions and changes at the micro level; group- or faculty-level interventions and changes at the mezzo level; and systemic or programmatic interventions and changes at the macro level.



**Figure 1.5.** *Theoretical Framework for the Present Study.* Note. Approved by the AR team in October 2022.

The faculty also began learning to use these specific tenets of CRT in their teaching to foster an antiracist pedagogy through the lens of TLT: (a) challenging assumptions and fostering students' critical analysis skills, (b) developing students' awareness of students of themselves and their social positions, (c) decentering positions of authority in the classroom and encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning process, (d) empowering students to apply theory in practice, and © fostering a sense of community in the classroom by focusing on collaborative

learning (Kishimoto, 2018, p. 546, as cited in Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, p. 296). Both TLT and CRT utilize the practice of storytelling to understand individual experiences, which we believed would be relevant for the students to better understand their perspectives, assumptions, and experiences (Brookfield, 2010; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Bornstein and Liou (2018) identified and utilized counter-storytelling as a relevant practice within CRT to challenge hegemonic, institutional racism, which informed the data collection methods in this study.

Dillon and Pritchard (2022) discussed the importance for social work educators to nurture safe and transformational learning environments in alignment with CRT. As part of TLT, educators' approaches also help foster and role model positive learning environments for minority students, who may have had challenges in the past combating systemic racism in educational systems (Dillon & Pritchard, 2022). Ortiz and Jani (2010) also explored using CRT as a framework for social work pedagogy, focusing on social justice and transformational change. Their focus on diversity and recognizing the various systemic barriers aligned with this study and helped inform the theory of change.

It is also essential, according to the tenets of CRT, to understand the unique experiences of students who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and their perspectives and assumptions to acknowledge and challenge the dominant ideology (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Dillon and Pritchard (2021) explored the experience of BIPOC students in social work education settings and found that BIPOC students experienced systemic racism through policies, practices, and group and individual microaggressions that impacted their academic success and aspirations to be social workers. Accordingly, the AR team used the integration CRT and TLT to foster supportive relationships while pursuing the ultimate change goal, which was to understand better

how students' and faculty's current schemas and assumptions could be challenged, re-learned, and integrated during and after the intervention phase.

### **Summary of Empirical Research**

Transformational learning theory (TLT) has been widely studied over the years, with evidence from numerous empirical studies to support its relevance and usefulness. Critical race theory has also been widely studied, especially in more recent years. Understanding the use of these theories in empirical studies helped me integrate the theories as a guiding change theory, or a transformative critical race framework, for the purpose of this study.

### **Empirical Review of TLT**

Most empirical research on TLT stems from Mezirow's conceptualization of TLT (Baumgartner, 2001). Mezirow's empirical work in the 1970s introduced critical theory or adult learning and helped propel the movement towards a critical theory of adult learning. As Mezirow (1981) stated, his work "represents the beginnings of a critical theory of adult learning" (p. 3), which he felt would provide the "foundation for formulating a comprehensive theory of adult education" (p. 16). Mezirow was a pioneer in adult education in integrating critical theories of Jürgen Habermas and Paulo Freire to create transformations of learning from experience through CR (Collard & Law, 1991, as cited in Wilson & Kiely, 2002). As part of Mezirow's original theory, he challenged traditional adult learning perspectives by critiquing current schemas and assumptions and highlighting critically reflective learning as the central aspect of adult learning (Wilson & Kiely, 2002). Mezirow's groundbreaking perspective helped to spur a new wave of thinking in academia in the 1980s, asking questions such as the following:

What makes adults adult? How to make a case for the uniqueness of "adult" learning how to understand and explain adult learning beyond the dominance of behaviorist, cognitive,

and humanist perspectives? And how to interpret adult learning in radical social movements? (Wilson & Kiely, 2002, p. 2)

Almost 40 years later, the final two questions still seem particularly relevant to the use of TLT as the guiding adult learning theory for this study. When considering the empirical evidence and validity of TLT for guiding interventions towards antiracist pedagogy and practice, how can TLT help to inform and guide measurable transformative learning, and how can it guide the interpretation of adult learning within a critical race framework?

Since its original publication, many scholars have reviewed, utilized, and critiqued Mezirow's (1971) theory. Mezirow (2000) also provided his own collection of thoughts, commentary, and insights from his initial theory, which evolved over time. Taylor (2000a, 2000b) expanded Mezirow's theory, advising that transformational learning is a complex process involving thoughts and feelings throughout the process of CR. The following overview of empirical studies helps support the legitimacy of TLT as an adult educational theory and its relevance for this AR study. As indicated below, much of the empirical research on TLT is qualitative, but a review of the quantitative use of TLT in other fields has been included to support the validity of this theory for this research study, as the AR team utilized both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods.

Several scholars have used mixed methods in their application of TLT to their research. Stansberry and Kymes (2007) studied TLT in teacher education using quantitative and qualitative data collection methods from a mixed-methods perspective. This study utilized pre- and postsurvey measurements to quantitatively assess teacher perspectives before and after developing individualized portfolios to help foster transformational learning (Stansberry & Kymes, 2007). They also collected qualitative data through CR papers to help provide additional



context and insights from the survey results and to better understand the depth of the perspective transformation. Brown (2006) also utilized mixed methods in her study, exploring transformational learning and critical social theories when studying leadership in education settings, specifically related to social justice and equity. Brown (2006) administered Pettus and Allain's (1999) Cultural and Educational Issues Survey (Version B) at the beginning and end of the project (twice in total) to quantitatively assess the impact of transformational learning strategies on the attitudes of leaders towards diversity in education. She also collected data qualitatively, including analysis of journal entries, CR, and student-identified changes in perspectives.

From a quantitative perspective, Kwon et al. (2020) studied the impact of psychological safety on transformational learning in a workplace setting. The findings of this study indicated a strong correlation between psychological safety and transformational learning when also considering the variables of social support and attitudes towards uncertainty. This study helped me develop a framework for using quantitative data collection methods in this study. It also supported the validity of promoting psychological safety among our students, faculty, and within our program in our intervention implementation to promote transformational learning. Table 1.1 provides a summary of the empirical research on TLT.

**Table 1.1***Empirical Research Review of TLT*

Author(s)	Methods	Significant findings	Relevance to current study
Cranton (1994, 1996, 2000)	Qualitative methods  Case studies/utilized tenets of Mezirow's theory of TLT in practice	1) Suggests instructors let go of their authority or "position power" in the classroom (Cranton, 1994, p. 147) 2) Recommends instructors understand students' individual learning styles	Helpful relevant empirical findings that guided and influenced practice and interventions as part of the study
Brown (2006)	Mixed methods  Study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to explore and measure transformational learning in educational leadership students studying diversity.	Findings from this study indicated that active participation in transformational learning activities can increase and influence individual student perspectives related to self-growth and action towards social change.	This study provided a relevant framework for utilizing a mixed methods design in the current study when assessing and measuring the possible influence of transformational learning activities in students and faculty.
Kwon et al. (2020)	Quantitative methods  Measured the impact of psychological safety on transformational learning in a workplace setting.	Findings indicated that fostering psychological safety led to increased transformational learning, as mediated by specific variables, including social support and attitude towards uncertainty.	This study used quantitative methodology, which helped support the use of quantitative data collection in this project when studying TLT. Further, this study highlighted the importance of fostering psychological safety as a construct when intending to promote transformational learning, which we also included within our change project and research.
Mezirow (1971, 1978, 1994, 2000)	Qualitative methods  Original theory derived from case studies/interviews; evolved and integrated through ongoing	1) Adult learning occurs in four ways: (a) elaborating existing frames of reference, (b) learning frames of reference, (c) transforming points of view, (d) transforming habits of mind (Mezirow, 1978)	Overarching, empirically studied aspects of Mezirow's theory of TLT were integrated into this change project throughout the various phases, including intervention, implementation, and analysis

Author(s)	Methods	Significant findings	Relevance to current study
	research and critiques insights from other researchers	<p>2) CR and rational discourse are essential aspects of transformational learning as an individual develops a new interpretation of their meaning of one's experience (Mezirow, 1994)</p> <p>3) Essential aspects of TL as empirically studied (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 168–169):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) A disorienting dilemma</li> <li>(b) self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame, sometimes turning to religion for support</li> <li>(c) a critical assessment of assumptions</li> <li>(d) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and others have negotiated a similar change</li> <li>(e) exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions</li> <li>(f) planning a course of action</li> <li>(g) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans</li> <li>(h) Provisionally trying out new roles</li> <li>(i) Renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships</li> <li>(j) Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships</li> <li>(k) A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective</li> </ul>	
Stanbserry and	Mixed methods	Quantitative findings indicated individual, perspective transformation through findings from the pre-and	Relevance of studying transformational learning utilizing mixed-methods data collection. Helped

Author(s)	Methods	Significant findings	Relevance to current study
Kymes (2007)	This study intended to influence and measure transformational learning in teachers through a development of an individualized portfolio.	postsurveys. Qualitative data provided additional context and insight to the experience.	support and provide insight as to how to measure transformational learning/growth.
Taylor (1997, 1998, 2000a, 2000b)	Qualitative methods  Content analysis and review; literature review and analysis	<p>1) Supported Mezirow's ideal conditions for transformational learning (2000a)</p> <p>2) Findings suggested that "fostering group ownership and individual agency" help to promote TL (Taylor, 2000a, p. 155)</p> <p>*3) Teachers being placed at the center of their own learning in a critically reflective and social group setting contributed to transformational growth and learning (Taylor, 2000a, p. 155)</p> <p>4) Focus on the interrelationship between CR and affective learning (Taylor, 2000a, p. 156)</p> <p>5) A focus on processing feelings increases the power and appreciation of CR when intentional promoting TL (Taylor, 2000a, p. 156)</p> <p>6) "Value-laden content appeared to foster transformational learning in those discussions about controversial topics 'provoked critical reflection...more so than other content'" (Taylor, 2000a, p. 156)</p>	Empirical research supporting Mezirow's belief in the need for a "safe, open, and trusting environment" that allows for participation, collaboration, exploration, CR, and feedback (Taylor, 2000a, p. 154)

### **Transformational Learning in Action Research Studies**

As a guiding theory, TLT has been utilized in research studies utilizing an AR methodology (Taylor, 2007). These previous iterations offered support for the use of TLT as the guiding change theory for this AR project. Feinstein (2004) utilized TLT in a study utilizing AR methodology, which found that TLT-informed interventions were effective in helping transform student perspectives. Gravett (2004) also utilized AR methodology for her research to study the use of TLT in a higher education setting, designed to transform the perspectives of higher education teachers towards a learning-centered mindset. Gravett's (2004) findings suggested the efficacy of AR as a viable methodology for studying TLT and the potential impact of TLT-informed interventions to help change educators' perspectives in higher education. Lange (2004) explored the use of TLT as a guiding theory within a research study that utilized AR as the methodology. Lange (2004) studied TLT-informed interventions to foster perspective transformations through a higher education class to increase social/citizen action. The findings suggested the efficacy of transformational and restorative learning in helping shift perspectives and the individuals' senses of self within their worlds (Lange, 2004).

McCusker (2013) explored the use of TLT through an AR study focusing on communication skills in social work education. McCusker (2013) utilized TLT to guide interventions, including core tenets of TLT, CR, and discussion-oriented learning, to help foster transformative learning in social work students. Christie et al. (2015) utilized AR as their research methodology to extensively review three case studies, seeking to better understand the efficacy of Mezirow's (1991) theory of TLT in practice in a higher education setting.

## Synthesis of Studies

Table 1.2 provides an overview of empirical research studies of TLT as an adult educational theory and guiding theory as specifically utilized in AR studies. As determined by the review, many studies utilizing TLT as a guiding theory within an AR methodology have been qualitative. This could be considered a limitation of TLT and has been highlighted in critiques, which have noted that much of the research is generated through qualitative processes and data collection methods.

Nonetheless, these studies contributed to the development of the current research study as they describe various data collection methods that are applicable in educational settings. Furthermore, they support the efficacy of utilizing TLT as a guiding change theory within an AR research project in an educational setting.

**Table 1.2***Empirical Review of TLT Utilized in AR Studies*

Author(s)	Methods	Significant findings	Relevance to current study
Christie et al. (2015)	AR methodology	Utilizing an AR methodology, this study explores three case studies to better understand how Mezirow's theory can be effectively utilized in higher education for staff development and education courses.	This study highlighted the use of TLT as a guiding theory through an AR methodology, exploring case studies and the use of surveys, interviews, and focus groups.
	Case study review		
	Review of mixed-methods data collection		
Feinstein (2004)	AR methodology	The study explored the perspective transformation in an educational setting, focused on the integration of Native and non-Native individuals, learning from Indigenous experts in Hawaii. Findings suggested student reframing, shifts in perspective transformation, and benefits of exploring one's positionality.	This study utilized an AR methodology, with TLT as the guiding change theory. This helped guide the development of the framework for this study and supported the efficacy of TLT to guide transformation in educational settings.
	Qualitative methods, use of questionnaires, integration in a classroom setting, journalling, projects, interviews, and participant observations		
Gravett (2004)	AR methodology	The interventions were designed to shift perspectives of higher education teachers to a learning-centered mindset, and findings suggested that TLT-informed interventions were effective.	The study confirmed the use of AR as a viable methodology for exploring TLT in higher education settings, which supported the current study's use of TLT in a similar setting.
	Qualitative data collection; journalling; questionnaires; workshop development and participation		
Lange (2004)	AR methodology	This study utilized an AR methodology to explore the use of TLT-informed interventions to promote social action through transformative and restorative learning in a college setting.	The study highlighted the use of an AR methodology, exploring the efficacy of TLT to help foster perspective transformation through learning and restoration and help promote social action and involvement as citizens in a higher education setting.
	Mixed-methods, double-spiral AR model, utilizing surveys, interviews, journalling, and involvement in a course		

Author(s)	Methods	Significant findings	Relevance to current study
McCusker (2013)	AR methodology  Mixed-methods data collection using a self- efficacy scale, semistructured questionnaires, focus groups, integration in class and class activities	This study provided helpful insight into intervention planning for the current study, as it utilized TLT as a guiding theory within an AR study. The findings suggested that for the majority of students, the use of TLT-informed interventions helped to challenge previously held assumptions and fostered transformative learning.	This study explored the use of TLT as a guiding learning theory in an AR study in a social work education setting, similar to the work of the current project.



## **Empirical Review of CRT**

A growing body of empirical research has implemented CRT as a guiding theory/framework. Nash's (2013) qualitative study offered practical suggestions for educators to address tensions arising from CRT to address inequitable practices and help meet the needs of minoritized students while also engaging in discussions surrounding race and racism. Nash's interventions, data collection methods, and analysis techniques informed the current study and helped develop understanding of the underpinnings and usefulness of CRT as a theoretical framework within education. Albritton et al. (2021) utilized a qualitative/case study method to analyze a social work program's current practice and implement changes towards antiracist practice. This study provided a model/prototype for promoting change towards antiracist social work education (Albritton et al., 2021). Odera et al. (2021) also utilized a qualitative design to study CRT through autoethnography, which provided insightful counternarratives about developing antiracist pedagogy and practices in social work education.

Perez (2021) and Polk et al. (2021) also utilized qualitative methods to study CRT through case study methods. Perez's (2021) study provided insightful information for this study to support the identified problem within the program and recommendations for making changes towards an antiracist program. Further, Polk et al.'s (2021) study described a relevant model/framework for changing our program towards antiracist pedagogy.

Rao et al. (2021) used quantitative measures to complete content analysis of previous studies, which found no discussion of the assessment of antiracist practice in social workers. This finding supports the importance of addressing and including the recently identified 13<sup>th</sup> GCSW directive to "eliminate racism" in social work education programs as we seek to understand how

to assess antiracist practice in alignment with the newly identified changes to the CSWE EPAS (2022).

As described above and depicted in Table 1.3, most empirical studies exploring CRT have utilized qualitative data collection methods. Considering the complexity of measuring and assessing critical race and individual perspectives related to race in educational settings, it is understandable that fewer studies have employed quantitative data collection methods. Accordingly, this study employed a mixed-methods design for data collection, seeking to contribute to the literature by demonstrating the usefulness of employing both quantitative data collection and CRT in AR projects.

**Table 1.3***Empirical Studies of CRT in Education*

Author(s)	Methods	Theoretical framework	Focus of study	Relevance to current study
Albritton et al. (2021)	Qualitative methods Case study methods → interviews, document review, community conversations, student input	CRT	Case study of the program's history to understand historical racism and oppression within the program/college. Changes towards an antiracist program were made based on the insights learned.	Provided a model/prototype for making changes towards antiracist social work education, with a focus on change at the program and more significant institutional levels
Nash (2013)	Qualitative methods Change-based; action inquiry; reflective; counternarratives	CRT	Focused on supporting the use of CRT as a transformative pedagogy to shift teacher educators' perspectives when working with minoritized students	This article provided applicable suggestions for interventions, data collection methods, and data analyses grounded in theory and pedagogy.
Odera et al. (2021)	Qualitative methods Reflexive methodology → collaborative autoethnography (CAE)	CRT/intersectionality theory Liberation theory	The study included narratives from four authors and reviewed divergences and convergences among their stories to generate critical thinking about ways to dismantle racism and White supremacy in social work education settings.	This study provided insightful counternarratives about developing antiracist pedagogy and practices in social work education.
Perez (2021)	Qualitative methods Case study/purposive Sampling	CRT	The focus of this study was to learn and understand more about the experiences of social work educators at the undergraduate level who teach about race and racism in their respective social work programs.	Provided insightful information to support the identified problem within the program and recommendations for making changes towards an antiracist program. The data collection methods were also a relevant model for the progression of this project.

Author(s)	Methods	Theoretical framework	Focus of study	Relevance to current study
Polk et al. (2021)	Qualitative methods Case study methods	CRT/intersectionality theory	A case study of a social work program that underwent a 5-year systematic change process at all levels to move their program towards an antiracist program, infused and guided by CRT	Provided a model/framework for changing our program towards antiracist pedagogy
Rao et al. (2021)	Quantitative methods Descriptive content analysis	CRT	Content analysis of 21 concept papers that included the 12 <sup>th</sup> GCSW to assess their inclusion of race, ethnicity, and racism (RER)	Importance of addressing and including the recently identified 13 <sup>th</sup> GCSW goal to “eliminate racism”

## **Empirical Review of the Integration of TLT and CRT**

Only a few empirical studies have specifically utilized CRT and TLT as guiding theoretical frameworks. Table 1.4 summarizes the studies that have integrated these theories and their relevance to this study. As discussed above, the significance of each theory and correlating studies support the efficacy of these theories independently and, thus, the usefulness of integrating them to form the grounding foundation of this study.

Lorenzetti et al. (2019) and Jones (2009) utilized TLT as the grounding theory for studies related to teaching and learning in social work education. Consistent results demonstrated the efficacy of supporting learning and transformational growth in the processes. Lorenzetti et al. (2019) also utilized TLT within critical pedagogy to develop a social work education framework intended to help better prepare social workers to engage in critical, anti-oppressive practice. Pittman and Gioia (2019) utilized TLT as the grounding theory in their empirical, qualitative study to guide a newly developed global social work course, focused on course content, travel, immersion, and CR, which helped the students to make meaning of their learning and experiences. The findings suggested the positive impact of following Mezirow's (1991) phases of transformative learning to promote growth and learning, explicitly including culture changes.

Additionally, Rojas's (2018) qualitative study explored the integration of CRT, critical leadership, and transformational leadership theory to better understand the intersection of teachers' experiences and commitment to leading social justice. Lastly, Walton-Fisette et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study focused on understanding how physical education (PE) teachers teach social justice-related issues. These studies provided helpful information related to the use of CRT and transformational leadership and insight into a relevant framework for data collection methods and analysis in this project. Table 1.4 summarizes these studies.

**Table 1.4***Empirical Studies Integrating TLT and CRT in Education*

Author(s)	Methods	Theory	Focus of study	Relevance to current study
Lorenzetti et al. (2019)	Mixed methods Qualitative focus groups/online surveys	Critical pedagogy and TLT	This study utilized TLT within a critical pedagogy framework to design an eight-step learning model to help foster critical consciousness and better prepare MSW students to engage in antiracist and anti-oppressive practice.	This study provided a helpful framework, using both CRT and TLT, for implementing learning tools in a social work education setting towards fostering antiracist practice.
Pittman and Gioia (2019)	Qualitative methods Semistructured interviews/CR	TLT/cultural learning	This study explored the influence on learning for social work students in a global social work course specifically guided by TLT.	Provided empirical evidence on the efficacy of using TLT as a grounding theory in a social work setting to help foster transformational learning and growth. It also provided insight into intervention planning.
Rojas (2018)	Qualitative methods Extensive data collection and analysis from previous empirical studies	CRT and transformative leadership	This study focused on the integration of CRT, transformative leadership, and critical leadership in a qualitative study examining teachers' commitment to social justice and leadership.	This study offered a helpful framework, grounded in theory, focused on teachers and students and their teaching/learning experiences centered around social and educational justice.
Walton-Fisette et al. (2018)	Qualitative methods Critical interpretive qualitative research	Transformational learning/social justice/critical theory	The study focused on understanding if and how PE teachers teach about complex issues surrounding social justice, including race, with an intent to provide theoretically grounded suggestions to others.	Provided relevant information for the intersection of TLT and critical pedagogy for understanding social justice pedagogy in education. Their data collection methods helped inform this study, including the utilization of surveys and individual interviews.

### **Relevance of Current Study**

For the current study, it was hoped that the implementation of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods would offer more meaningful results through the use of varied data collection methods. As described above, there are few quantitative data studies on TLT, CRT, and the integration of these approaches, which could be considered both a gap in the literature and a limitation. Thus, this study sought to contribute to the literature by utilizing AR methodology that integrated both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods while studying the integration of CRT and TLT in a higher education setting, specifically a BSW program. Using AR methodology helped the AR team understand the stages of the change project as it evolved and shift from first- and second-person learning perspectives while intending to contribute to third-person learning.

### **Purpose of this Action Research Study and Research Question**

Consistent with established AR methodology, this study comprised two parallel AR cycles: specifically, the core and thesis projects (Coghlan, 2019). The core project included the planned change process within the BSW program. The thesis project included scholarly inquiry into the change process itself. Although the projects were simultaneous and interconnected, each had its own purpose and research question.

The AR project aimed to implement a framework for antiracist pedagogy in the BSW program at Kennedy College. The purpose of this change project was to implement curriculum and co-curricular changes towards antiracist pedagogy, thereby addressing the professional calls for action and changes to the CSWE EPAS (2022), which clearly state that social work students must demonstrate competency in antiracist practice. To address this goal, the AR team at Kennedy College decided on the following course of action: (a) utilize a theoretical framework

to guide and frame interventions throughout the change process; (b) focus on implicit and explicit curricular and programmatic changes that embody antiracist practice; (c) engage all faculty in growth and development towards self-awareness and antiracist teaching and practice; and (d) support student knowledge and awareness of racism and foster antiracist practice in students.

Coghlan (2019) emphasized that an AR study should integrate the core and thesis projects. The thesis project inquired into the use of CRT as a guiding framework for change within the social work program, integrating TLT to guide interventions throughout the program. With that goal in mind, the purpose of the overall study encompassed both the core and thesis AR cycles. The study ultimately aimed to identify insights related to implementing an antiracist and anti-oppressive framework in a small undergraduate social work program in the southeast. The following overarching research question guided the study: RQ1) What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advances theory and practice in an AR project using CRT and TLT to foster transformational change towards an antiracist undergraduate social work program? The study also inquires into the following subquestions:

RQ1a) How does this program effectively implement sustainable changes, aligned with evidence-based practices, towards antiracist practices in its implicit and explicit curriculum?

RQ1b) How does the faculty challenge their perspectives and embrace discomfort to implement antiracist teaching practices and teach antiracist practices effectively?

RQ1c) How do changes in the implicit and explicit curriculum, and the faculty through their teaching, aid in fostering meaningful, transformational learning and growth in students to help them learn and demonstrate antiracist social work practices?



## CHAPTER 2

### UTILIZING ACTION RESEARCH TO LEAD CHANGE TOWARDS BECOMING ANTIRACIST

Action research (AR) provides a framework for researchers to understand identified problems within organizations through a planned change process, a collaborative team approach, theoretically grounded interventions, and intentional reflective practices. A systematic approach to knowledge generation connects to action and reflective practices to identify useable, practical solutions to identified problems (Bradbury, 2015). As Coghlan (2019) has described, simultaneous projects co-occur within an AR project: the core AR project is the systematic change project, while the thesis AR project is an academic inquiry reflecting upon and evaluating the change process as it evolves. By recognizing these simultaneous projects and being mindful through their development and evolution, as both insider action researchers and facilitators of the core change project, the AR team must maintain the distinctions between the two projects while also respecting their connectedness as an essential component of adhering to AR methodology (Coghlan, 2019). Additionally, the thesis project explores a greater understanding of first-, second-, and third-person learning (Coghlan, 2019).

#### **Research Purpose and Question**

The core project intended to develop and implement a framework for antiracist practice and pedagogy in the undergraduate Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program at Kennedy College. The purpose of this core project was to use theory and relevant literature to make changes in the program's implicit and explicit curriculum to align with best practices for

antiracist pedagogy and to engage all faculty in critical-conscious awareness and enhance their understanding of antiracist practices to encourage sustainable changes within the program, faculty, and students. To address this purpose, the AR team at Kennedy College: (a) utilized a theoretical framework to guide and frame interventions throughout the change process; (b) focused on implicit and explicit curriculum and programmatic changes that embody antiracist practice; (c) engaged all faculty in growth and development towards self-awareness and antiracist teaching and practice; and (d) supported student knowledge and awareness of racism and foster antiracist practice in students.

Coghlan (2019) has emphasized that the AR study integrates the core and thesis projects. The thesis project inquired into the use of critical race theory (CRT) as a guiding framework for change within the social work program, alongside transformational learning theory (TLT) to guide interventions throughout the implementation phase. The purpose of the overall study thus encompassed both the core and thesis AR cycles. The study aimed to identify insights related to implementing an antiracist framework in a small undergraduate social work program in the southeast. The following overarching research question guided the study: RQ1) What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advances theory and practice in an AR project using CRT and TLT to foster transformational change towards an antiracist undergraduate social work program? The study also inquired into the following subquestions:

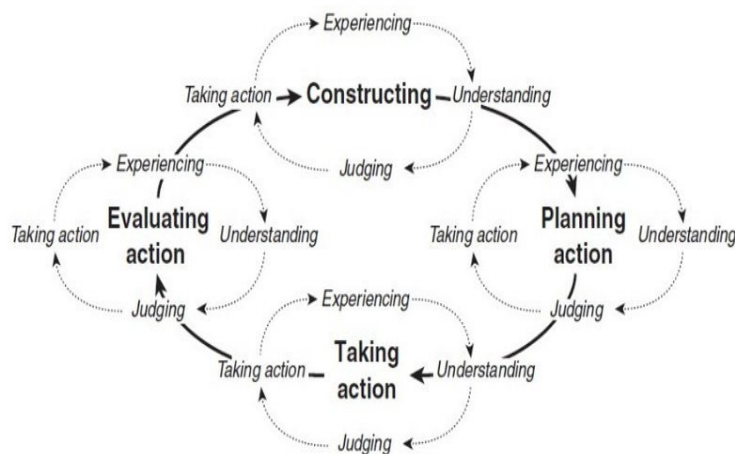
RQ1a) How does this program effectively implement sustainable changes, aligned with evidence-based practices, towards antiracist practices in its implicit and explicit curriculum?

RQ1b) How does the faculty challenge their perspectives and embrace discomfort to implement antiracist teaching practices and teach antiracist practices effectively?

RQ1c) How do changes in the implicit and explicit curriculum, and the faculty through their teaching, aid in fostering meaningful, transformational learning and growth in students to help them learn and demonstrate antiracist social work practices?

### Overview of Action Research Methodology

Coghlan (2019) has described how AR begins with what we do not yet fully know and seeks to find out what we did not know. A different way of conceptualizing research than traditional forms of research, this research methodology allows space for the unknown and intentional, consistent reflective practice that is embedded within the iterative cycles of the project/research. This AR project utilized Coghlan's (2019) AR cycle as a guiding framework, including various iterative phases that were essential to maintaining the quality and rigor of the AR project. Coghlan's (2019) AR cycle includes phases of constructing, planning, taking action, and evaluating action (Coghlan, 2019) and is illustrated in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1.** Coghlan's AR Cycle. Note. From *Doing Action Research in Your Organization* (5<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 38), by D. Coghlan, 2019, Sage. Copyright 2019 by Sage.

Recognizing and understanding the phases of an AR project are essential to maintaining quality and rigor. During the construction phase of the core project, the AR team worked collaboratively to identify and deeply understand the opportunity for growth within the program. The team utilized multiple data collection methods to inquire into the problem and to situate it within the literature. Within the planning action phase, the AR team collaborated to understand the problem at a deeper level and effectively plan the details of the change plan. While in the taking action phase, the team implemented the intervention plan and consistently reflected in-action. Finally, the AR team collected and analyzed, integrated, and interpreted the data throughout the evaluating action phase.

As the lead action researcher, I guided the AR team through the process and helped to cofacilitate all aspects of the core change project. The simultaneous thesis project also engaged in a similar cyclical pattern throughout the phases and cycles. This level of reflective inquiry allowed me, as the lead action researcher, to consistently evaluate the change process as it was evolving, not simply at the end. It also allowed the opportunity for changes to be made during the process, which will be described in greater detail in Chapter 3.

### **Principles of Quality Action Research**

As described above, AR is a uniquely complex research methodology that integrates knowledge and practice, allows for dual roles and responsibilities (insider action research), supports reflecting-in-action, making informed changes or shifts throughout the process, and focuses on what is learned by engaging in the systematic process, as informed by theory. Because of these distinctive aspects of AR, it is critical to follow, practice, and embody the core principles of AR to maintain the quality and rigor of the AR process and to ensure the trustworthiness of the research process and AR team members (Coghlan, 2019; Bradbury-Huang,

2010). I focused on understanding these principles and practices before beginning the research project and was dedicated to sharing this knowledge at every opportunity with the rest of the AR team throughout all phases of the research process. Of significance, many of the core principles of AR align seamlessly with principles of social work. Some of these parallel beliefs and principles include a focus on adhering to ethical principles and guidelines, a focus on a greater good for all, significance to the field, an expectation for heightened self-awareness and self-reflection, collaboration, and the application of knowledge in practice. Although all AR team members understood and embodied these principles, as lead action researcher, I helped ensure that all principles were being enacted in every phase of the project and throughout all aspects of the core and thesis projects. The specific core principles and how they were implemented in this project are detailed below.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Ensuring validity and reliability are vital aspects of quality AR. The AR team utilized strategies to promote qualitative validity to check the accuracy of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018). These steps included defining the construct validity of the quantitative/qualitative data collection methods within the research paradigm and focusing on trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018). Additional steps included using multiple validity procedures, such as triangulation, member checking, thorough descriptions, clarification of any biases the researchers brought to the study, presentation of all findings, and peer debriefing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Further, the team utilized qualitative reliability measures to ensure consistency in the approach across the AR team and throughout data analysis. Examples of the practices utilized include double-checking transcriptions for accuracy, ensuring consistency in code definitions, coordinating and

communication among the research team, and cross-checking codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These practices were undertaken formally and informally in AR team meetings and in submeetings with AR team members.

## **Ethics**

As in any research methodology, ethical issues can arise while engaging in AR. However, due to the unique lens of insider AR, action researchers must maintain a heightened awareness of potential ethical issues during the process and ensure transparency about role clarity (Coghlan, 2019). Identifying, understanding, and embodying ethical standards is an essential expectation when conducting AR, as in all research. Ethical standards support the voluntary, democratic partnership with stakeholders involved in AR (Coghlan, 2019). For both the core and thesis projects, this research team followed all research-related ethical practices and requirements, including but not limited to obtaining informed consent, maintaining privacy and confidentiality, maintaining objectivity, and respecting the rights and well-being of all individuals involved in the research (Coghlan, 2019).

As lead researcher, I ensured that ethical practices were consistently utilized and enacted in conjunction with the support and collaboration of all AR team members. Examples include securing data; maintaining confidentiality; ensuring the utilization of informed consent with all participants; confirming role clarity; maintaining objectivity through triangulation, member checking and thorough descriptions of patterns/themes; clarifying biases; presenting all findings; consistently debriefing with fellow team members/peers; and consistent engagement in reflective practices by all AR team members (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

## **Partnership and Participation**

The partnership and participation of the AR team and the various identified stakeholders strengthened the quality of this AR project. According to Bradbury-Huang (2010), partnership and participation refer to the quality of the relationships and the extent of the stakeholders' involvement in the research and collaboration among stakeholders, the AR team, and participants is essential. Such participatory collaboration is a critical aspect of the reflective inquiry in the thesis project and can occur all at once or develop over time, especially when considering the extent of second- and third-person learning (Bradbury-Huang, 2010). Exploring second-person learning reflectively and intentionally helps to enhance first-person learning and ultimately contributes meaningfully to third-person learning. Effective collaboration and mutual respect empower stakeholders to establish a culture of change and continuity of the change plan beyond the AR project (Bradbury-Huang, 2010).

This AR team had group synergy and collaborated well with one another and with all relevant stakeholders. All AR team members maintained positive partnerships and participation through clear communication with one another; ensuring the clarity of plans, meetings, and timelines; sharing relevant data; and maintaining respect and integrity for all involved participants and stakeholders. Mutual respect and respect for the purpose of the overall research helped create a space for open and safe conversation in meetings and a continued focus on partnership and collaboration. Our focus on partnership and participation is embodied in the AR team's decision to include community members as a response to data analysis in-action and a clearly identified need to partner with the community as a stakeholder and to share knowledge.

## **Significance to the Field**

Quality AR is centered on producing usable knowledge and applicable practices. As Coghlan (2019) stated: “Its interests and concerns are human living, the successful performance of daily tasks, and discovering immediate solutions that will work” (p. 55). As a research methodology, AR aims to bring action-oriented knowledge and discovery to a field of practice, enabling leaders to be change agents in their respective fields. Bradbury-Huang (2010) has acknowledged that “action researchers do not readily separate understanding and action, rather, we argue that only through action is legitimate understanding possible; theory without practice is not theory but speculation” (p. 93). Espousing knowledge of reflective practices, Schön (1983) posited that the researcher becomes a reflective practitioner who observes and responds to the organization’s needs. Thus, the opportunity to produce meaningful knowledge for third-person learning is a significant consideration for AR and a measure of quality and rigor. Action research work should strive to address identified problems within an organization while generating new and applicable knowledge for the larger field.

This AR team wholly embodied this principle of AR, as applying learned knowledge in practice is also an essential aspect of social work practice. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 1, the AR team understood the pressing relevance of this research due to the upcoming required program changes from the CSWE (2022) and the societal and professional calls for action. The team also focused on contributions to the larger field by using relevant and existing literature as a guiding resource, sharing and collaborating with external stakeholders, consistently using reflective practices, and sharing findings with the field of social work education. The team respected the value of the work that this study can contribute to the field, and team members have also planned to present and share this knowledge at national conferences.



### **Actionability and Practicality**

Quality AR is also guided by the principle of conducting work relevant to the organization's needs and put into action within the organization's functions. Bradbury-Huang (2010) defined actionability as "the extent to which the project provides new ideas that guide action in response to need" (p. 103). Actionability forms "an intrinsic part of change agents' participation" (Bradbury-Huang, 2010, p. 103). Thus, the changes being implemented in the core project should be theoretically grounded in planned change theories to strengthen the quality of the change process and ensure that a systemized change effort is utilized.

To engage in scholar-practitioner work, I engaged in extensive reviews of relevant literature on the guiding theories to ensure that interventions were grounded in empirically grounded theories, as described in Chapter 1. The AR team recognized the urgency of implementing sustainable changes to support the growth of faculty and students and was committed to the sustainability of the changes made in the program towards an antiracist framework. Moreover, the study addressed a tremendous need for the program due to the change in accreditation requirements from the newly released CSWE EPAS (2022), which state that programs must change towards antiracist teaching and practice. Because of the urgency of these upcoming required changes, there was a natural fit for the actionability of the project as these changes were relevant and necessary for the program, faculty, and students.

### **Commitment to Change**

Action research is grounded in the researchers' willingness to identify current problems in an organization and their collective commitment to implementing a systemized change process while studying the change process and its potential impact. As defined by Coghlan (2019), "action research builds on the past, takes place in the present with a view to shaping the future"

(p. 6). Action research aims to bring about transformative results that move organizations forward and improve overall efficacy, which necessitates awareness of the program's present state while envisioning a clear future state. Committing to an identified change process is an essential aspect of maintaining the quality and rigor of AR and must be agreed upon by the AR team in the construction phase of the process (Coghlan, 2019). It is also essential to have a clear vision of the organization's future state to serve as a benchmark and guide while journeying through the change process.

This AR team worked collaboratively to clearly identify the current state, including the identified needs for the program. These identified needs/problems were grounded in the literature and guided the research questions, intervention plan, and data collection and analysis processes. The AR team also worked closely to identify a future state, which admittedly evolved as the project ensued. Examples of this future state for the BSW program were a newly written mission statement, goals, and objectives; implicit and explicit curricular changes that embody best practices for antiracist pedagogy; collaboration and partnership with community members; faculty willingness to engage in ongoing learning and growth towards becoming antiracist; and students engaging, learning, and practicing as antiracist social workers. The team also recognized that the changes needed to be sustainable as these would be long-term shifts for the program.

### **Reflective Practices**

The iterative and reflective practices of AR are essential to maintaining the quality and rigor of the AR methodology (Coghlan, 2019). Reflective practices were incorporated into both the core and thesis projects as they are necessary for data collection to help provide insights into the changes as they unfold and help demonstrate changes and perceived changes. Reflective practices within the thesis project are necessary to support and enhance first-person learning and

essential to the core project to support collaboration and enhance second- and third-person learning.

### ***Knowing-in-Action***

Knowing-in-action “is grounded in the inquiry reflection process” as we introduce individual experiences, understanding, judgments, and decision-making and is significant during all aspects and phases of the AR project (Coghlan, 2019, p. 30). Knowing involves being consciously self-aware of one’s own experiences, understanding, judgment, biases, beliefs, and decisions in the moment. All team members brought their respective lived experiences to the work, and recognizing this personal experience strengthened the ability to be present and aware in the moment while engaging in AR. As part of the core project, the AR team kept consistent notes through audio recordings and written notes. In addition to objective notekeeping and ensuring the accuracy of dates, times, and events, team members also kept notes on individual insights, thoughts, reflections, and shared-group thoughts, insights, and reflections to foster and document second-person learning. The team members were dedicated to remaining objective and being cognizant of not reinterpreting or changing the meaning of participants’ shared information, as it is essential that the information and data collected through conversations and meetings retain the meaning ascribed to it by the participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The importance of this reflexivity offered a clear parallel experience to the purpose of the core project and the intention of becoming antiracist, which requires a consistent awareness of knowing-in-action as well.

As lead researcher, I focused on ensuring that AR team members consistently engaged in reflective practices by intentionally collecting notes and utilizing a shared document. I also consistently documented and reflected on my own work as part of first-person learning. In first-

person practice, the researcher's beliefs, values, assumptions, ways of thinking, strategies, and behavior are central themes to their reflective practices (Coghlan, 2019). For second-person practice, knowing-in action is essential for researchers to utilize self-awareness and conscious awareness skills to build and strengthen relationships, listen well, and demonstrate various social engagement skills with co-researchers and stakeholders to facilitate collaborative inquiry and shared action (Coghlan, 2019). The experiences that one has with co-researchers and stakeholders shape how those relationships are fostered and strengthened, which the team focused on positively developing and maintaining throughout the process.

Third-person practice inquiry takes action and inquiry to an "impersonal context where there has been no direct involvement and where an audience has not been engaged in the direct experience and is seeking to draw learning from it from a removed perspective" (Coghlan, 2019, p. 30). As an action researcher, it is essential to connect to the larger audience to strengthen the meaning of the experiences, understandings, judgments, decisions, and actions to provide context and greater understanding. The AR team was able foster connections due to the already embedded connections between social work educators and the interest in shared knowledge and information.

This focus on critical reflection and self-reflection/awareness was a critical aspect of both the core and thesis projects, as critical reflection is an essential tenet of both TLT and CRT. This focus on critical reflection and growth was a parallel process for the AR team, faculty members, and students throughout all phases of the projects.

### **Authenticity**

Coghlan (2019) has stated that "a critical feature of action research in your own organization is how you engage your own thinking and learning processes" (p. 29). The goal of

such engagement is that the researcher recognizes how their “insider” knowledge may be influenced by their experiences, roles, understanding, and judgments of the organization’s workings (Coghlan, 2019). As such, the insider action researcher must commit to staying as objective as possible and maintaining authenticity, which establishes credibility as a researcher and practitioner in the field.

To help action researchers commit to objectivity and an empirical method of data collection, Coghlan (2019) proposed four imperatives that “good” action researchers must enact:

- (a) be attentive to the observable data; (b) be intelligent enough to inquire about the possible explanations of data; (c) be reasonable in making judgments about the probability and certainty of explanations of the data; and (d) be responsible when deliberating and choosing between alternatives and taking action. (p. 36)

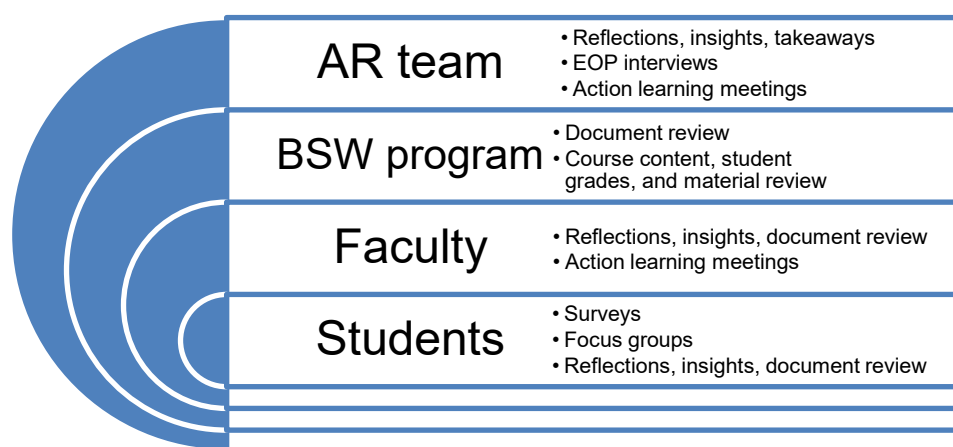
The measure of authenticity can also be balanced and assessed through reflective inquiry and the researcher’s focus on first-person learning, especially as part of the thesis project. I intentionally followed all recommended steps outlined above to ensure authenticity in the projects and consistently engaged in peer debriefing and member checking to ensure objectivity and shared perspectives.

### **Utilizing Action Research to *Become Antiracist***

Exploring the methodology of AR, including the process and uniquely important core principles of AR, provides a helpful framework for understanding the complexity of this research project. The AR methodology was extremely relevant and valuable for this research study. As described, the principles of social work align well with the principles of AR, helping the researchers to practice and apply the principles in action naturally. However, of great significance, the complexity and subjectivity of perspective transformation, CRT in action,

racism/antiracism, and ultimately *becoming antiracist* are all extremely individualized, sensitive, and multifaceted constructs that cannot be easily understood through more positivistic research methodology. Action research allowed for the flexibility, fluidity, subjectivity, reflexivity, and empathy needed to effectively facilitate this research project. The simultaneous implementation of interventions and data collection, as well as the parallel experiences and process that occurred through the projects, are detailed in the following sections.

Consistent with AR, there were several, interconnected participant groups, and numerous data collection methods. As insider action researchers, AR team reflections, inquiries, and outcomes were essential data to collect, code, and analyze. Similarly, the team reviewed various implicit and explicit aspects of the program, contributing significantly to the data collection. Additionally, the AR team utilized surveys, action learning meetings, and focus groups to obtain relevant and informative data.



**Figure 2.2.** *Research Design.* Note. This research design was originally developed by the AR team in September 2022 and updated in April 2023.

## **Participants**

The research project comprised various systems, with simultaneous interventions and data collection. As indicated in Figure 2.2, the AR team members served as the change agents coordinating and managing the subsystems of the project: the BSW program (system); faculty (group); and students (individual). As described in greater detail, community members (alumni of the program, practicum partners, and other local professionals) were included in the research plan during the project, and the AR team added a corresponding intervention and data collection, which all contributed meaningfully to the overall data analysis and interpretation process.

### **AR Team**

The AR team met monthly, for approximately 1–2 hours each time, throughout the project. The focus of the meetings shifted throughout the cycles, beginning with learning and understanding the problem, planning, implementing, and analyzing data. In all meetings, it was relevant and highly valued that all members shared insights, inquiries, and reflections. Meetings were recorded as needed, and notes were always taken to help ensure accuracy and to acquire relevant data. Relevant insights and takeaways from the meetings and conversations were analyzed and included as part of the findings of this study. The AR team completed continuous and ongoing reviews of relevant documents and materials throughout all phases, meaningfully contributing to the overall data collection and findings.

The AR team also reviewed relevant BSW program materials, including syllabi, program goals, mission statement, curriculum, guest speakers, videos, podcasts, and textbooks, to inquire into the effective implementation of antiracist best practices and to understand the impact of changes as they were made throughout the project. The findings from these inquiries were noted and analyzed as part of overall data collection. Lastly, I conducted end-of-project (EOP)

interviews with all AR team members to gain insights and takeaways related to the research process, project, and overall findings and conclusions.

### **Current Students**

Current students in the BSW program were the primary participant group. The data collection methods used with current students included two surveys, focus groups, course assignments and grades, and insights/feedback from assignments and class activities. The sample of students specifically included seniors in the program. All seniors were offered the opportunity to participate in the research voluntarily and were provided with an overview of informed consent by an AR team member, who also provided informed consent forms for student participants to review and sign.

Seniors were also actively involved in the new courses that were part of the intervention plan and engaged in the corresponding assignments, activities, and discussions throughout the implementation phase that were relevant for data collection and analyses. These included critical reflection (CR) summaries and assignments, feedback from class discussions, written discussion posts, and other assignments and activities. This data was collected and shared by the assigned faculty member (AR team member #3 [TM3])<sup>1</sup> with the rest of the AR team and was then analyzed as part of the evaluation phase.

### **Faculty**

All BSW faculty members were active participants in the research project. Faculty engaged in various interventions as detailed in the applied intervention plan, including engaging in readings and continuing education related to antiracism, ongoing group conversations and meetings, and three action learning meetings (which I facilitated as lead action researcher).

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<sup>1</sup> All team members have been assigned anonymous identifiers (e.g., TM1, TM2) to preserve confidentiality.



Several faculty members taught the newly developed/designed classes as part of the intervention plan. Faculty also experienced the dynamic interaction between students and themselves and the parallel journey of becoming antiracist.

Faculty contributed significantly to the data collection through their shared perspectives, insights, and reflections on themselves, as well as their overall perspectives on student experiences and programmatic implications. The faculty provided a unique lens for data collection as they shared reflections on their own perceived growth/increased capacity to teach from an antiracist lens; their perspectives on overall program changes towards an antiracist framework; and their perspective on student learning and growth towards antiracist practice. The AR team collected and analyzed this data. Insights and reflections were shared through monthly in-person meetings, informally via email and conversations, and through a shared document. As lead researcher, I was responsible for taking notes during the meetings, inviting faculty to share feedback through the shared document, and notetaking after milestones throughout the implementation phase.

### **The Research Plan**

The study was guided by the primary research question, along with subquestions specific to each level of intervention and data collection. The primary research question is as follows:

RQ1: What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advances theory and practice in an action research project using critical race theory and transformational learning theories to foster transformational change towards an antiracist undergraduate social work program?

The research plan breaking down this question into subquestions is summarized in Table 2.1.

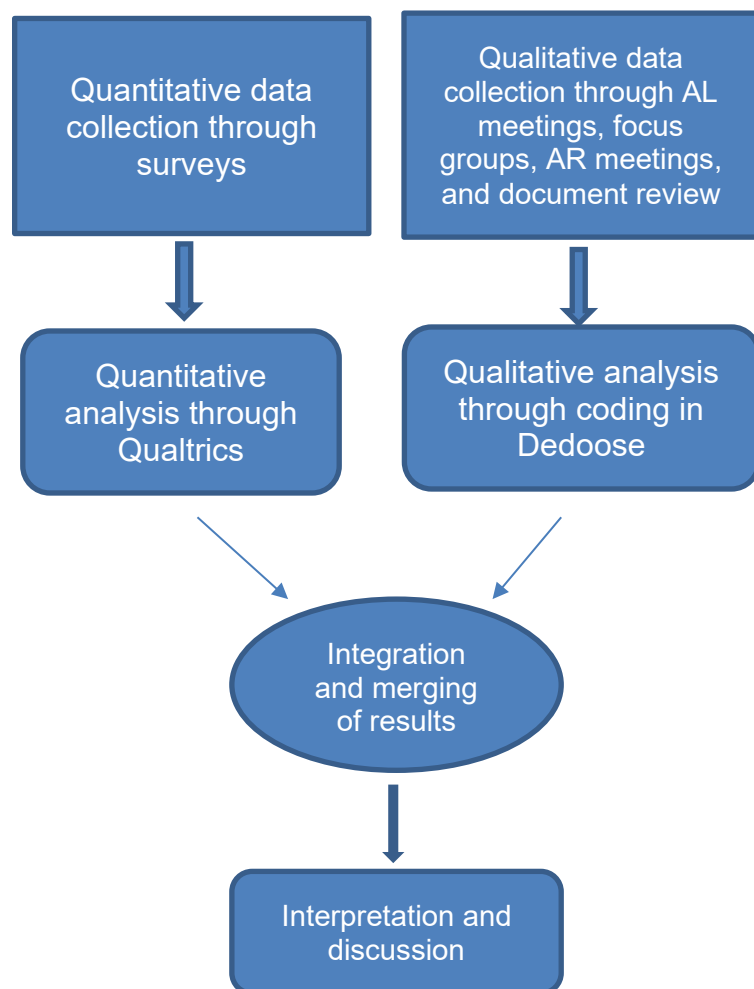
**Table 2.1***Research Plan*

Research question	Data collection method	Sample	Completion date
RQ1a) How does this program effectively implement sustainable changes, towards antiracist practices aligned with evidence-based practices, in its implicit and explicit curriculum?	Program/document review	AR team	August 2022 – May 2023
	Student focus groups	Current BSW students (seniors)	April 2023
	Student surveys (Qualtrics) Presurvey and follow-up survey	Current BSW students (seniors)	January 2023 and May 2023
	Review of BSW program materials, course curriculum and content, and program practices	BSW program implicit and explicit curriculum	August 2022 – May 2023
	Action learning meetings	BSW faculty	February–March 2023
RQ1b) How does the faculty challenge their perspectives and embrace discomfort to implement antiracist teaching practices and teach antiracist practices effectively?	Faculty insights, reflections, and feedback	BSW faculty	August 2022 – May 2023
	Action learning meetings	BSW faculty	February–March 2023
RQ1c) How do changes in the implicit and explicit curriculum, and the faculty through their teaching, aid in fostering meaningful, transformational learning and growth in students to help them learn and demonstrate antiracist social work practices?	Student surveys (Qualtrics) Presurvey and follow-up survey	Current BSW students (seniors)	January 2023 and May 2023
	Student focus groups	Current BSW students (seniors)	April 2023

Research question	Data collection method	Sample	Completion date
RQ1: What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advances theory and practice in an action research project using critical race theory and transformational learning theories to foster transformational change towards an antiracist undergraduate social work program?	AR team meetings	AR team	August 2022 – May 2023
	EOP interviews	AR team	May 2023
	Community members' pre- and postsurveys	Community members	March 2023
	Action learning meetings	BSW faculty	February– March 2023
	Student focus groups	Current BSW students (seniors)	April 2023

### **Data Collection Methods**

This research project implemented various interventions across the four levels and utilized mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative, for data collection and analysis. While not a traditional mixed-methods approach, AR does require using the best method to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014). Action research encourages the use of various methods to reach the target level of change. In this case, the research questions required multiple data sources, such as focus groups, surveys, and document reviews. At a practical level, a mixed-methods approach provides a “sophisticated” and comprehensive approach to research collection and analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). At a procedural level, it helps offer a deeper and more complete understanding of the research questions and subquestions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The team collected quantitative and qualitative data in response to the identified research questions. To maintain the quality and rigor of the study, the team utilized rigorous methods of triangulation, member checking, and maintaining an audit trail, as defined in greater detail below (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Following the phases described by Creswell and Creswell (2018), the AR team utilized a convergent mixed-methods framework for collecting, analyzing, integrating, and interpreting the data. This framework is outlined in Figure 2.3.



**Figure 2.3.** *Convergent Mixed Methods Framework.* Note. Adapted from *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 312), by J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell, 2018, Sage. Copyright 2018 by Sage.

## Quantitative Data Collection

### *Student Surveys*

In the spring semester, senior BSW students were invited via email by the lead

researcher to participate in two Qualtrics surveys (presurvey and follow-up survey). Only BSW seniors were invited to complete these surveys. All BSW seniors had previously completed informed consent for participation, but it was included again in both surveys to remind students that participation was completely anonymous and voluntary. The goal of both surveys was to obtain quantitative data to help strengthen the findings and to obtain information anonymously to help increase reliability and validity. The survey questions were intended to explore students' current understanding and perspectives of antiracist theory and practice, understanding of integration into social work educational settings, and perceived readiness to practice as antiracist social workers. The surveys were administered in January 2023 and May 2023 to help assess aggregate change and growth towards antiracist practice.

### ***Presurvey***

The presurvey questions were initially developed by the AR team (October 2022) and reassessed prior to distribution (January 2023). The questions used a Likert-type scale (with options of *strongly agree*, *somewhat agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, *somewhat disagree*, and *strongly disagree*) to help ensure the depth of potential responses. A thorough review of the literature did not reveal any previously developed and validated surveys designed specifically to assess student perspectives on antiracist pedagogy and antiracist practice in social work. Accordingly, the AR team integrated various resources and tools to develop a survey that was guided by current research but modified to address the needs of this study. The development of the questions was influenced by feedback and insights from the online resource *How to Be Anti-Racist: A Social Worker's Perspective* (MSW@USC, 2020). This resource offers various questions to guide introspection when assessing perspectives on racism and antiracism. The AR team also utilized Grzanka et al.'s (2020) White Racial Affect Scale (WRAS), a psychometric

survey instrument designed to assess White respondents' proneness to White guilt, White shame, and negation. Although the content of this survey does not explicitly align with this study's research questions, the structure and use of the Likert scale was helpful and relevant.

Construct validity was measured as follows for the presurvey: Student perspectives on antiracist pedagogy in social work education were assessed in questions 2, 3, and 4; student perspectives of antiracist social work practice were assessed through questions 1, 6, and 7; student perspectives on identifying racist and antiracist practices in others were assessed through questions 5 and 10; and student perspectives on discussing individual perspectives on racism/antiracism were assessed through questions 8 and 9. The AR team anticipated changes in construct measurements from the presurvey (January 2023) to the follow-up survey (May 2023) due to student involvement in the interventions.

### ***Follow-Up Survey***

The AR team utilized the same framework as the presurvey to develop the follow-up survey, which was finalized and administered in May 2023. The follow-up survey included small changes and a few additional questions to help capture students' perceptions of readiness as they were graduating from the BSW program. The follow-up survey was not modeled as a posttest for the presurvey, as there were several months between the administration of the two surveys and the students' responses were completely confidential, which was intentional to help promote authenticity in responses. Thus, the AR team recognizes the limitation that we could not compare direct responses for the same students. However, we accepted this limitation in order to ensure confidentiality. The goal was to be able to assess aggregate changes.

Construct validity was measured as follows for the follow-up survey: Student perspectives on antiracist pedagogy in social work education were assessed in questions 2, 3,

and 4; student perspectives of antiracist social work practice were assessed through questions 1, 6, and 7; student perspectives on identifying racist and antiracist practices in others were assessed through question 5; student perspectives on discussing individual perspectives on racism/antiracism were assessed through questions 10, 11, and 12; student perspectives of their knowledge and readiness were assessed in questions 8 and 9; and student perspectives of the efficacy of the BSW program's efforts in fostering preparedness for antiracist practice were assessed in questions 13 and 14.

### ***Community Member Surveys***

An additional aspect of our research plan that evolved during the implementation phase included involving community members, as detailed in Figure 2.1. As will be described in greater details in Chapters 3 and 4, data analysis in-action guided the faculty/AR team to develop and facilitate training on antiracist social work practice for community members. The training itself became an additional intervention, as detailed in Chapter 3, which I, as the lead action researcher, developed and facilitated along with another faculty member on the AR team (AR team member #5 [TM5]). To obtain relevant data and feedback, I and TM4 developed pre- and postsurveys, based on a pretest/posttest model, for the community members to assess their knowledge and growth based on this training. These surveys were both administered via Qualtrics. Community members were provided with informed consent and explained that participation in the surveys was completely voluntary. Community members were invited to complete the presurvey via email prior to the training. They were then reintroduced to the presurvey at the start of the training via QR code and/or link to the survey. At the end of the training, community members were then reminded of informed consent and provided the link to the postsurvey.



The community survey was developed following a similar framework to the student surveys. The AR team members utilized a combination of question responses, including a Likert-type scale (with options of *strongly agree*, *somewhat agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, *somewhat disagree*, and *strongly disagree*) and open-ended questions to help ensure the depth of potential responses. A thorough review of the literature did not reveal any previously developed and validated survey specifically designed to assess the perspectives of community members and/or practicum instructors on antiracist pedagogy and antiracist practice in social work. Hence, similarly to the student pre- and postsurveys, the AR team integrated various resources and tools to develop a survey that was guided by current research but modified to address the needs of this group of participants. The development of the questions was influenced by feedback and insights from the online resource *How to Be Anti-Racist: A Social Worker's Perspective* (MSW@USC, 2020) and from *The Antiracism Handbook* (Bryant & Arrington, 2022). These resources offer various questions to guide introspection when assessing perspectives on racism and antiracism. The AR team members also utilized Grzanka et al.'s (2020) White Racial Affect Scale (WRAS), a psychometric survey instrument designed to assess White respondents' proneness to White guilt, White shame, and negation. Although the content of this survey does not explicitly align with this study's research questions, we modeled the structure and use of the Likert scale to help develop the community member survey.

The presurvey included demographic information related to degree, professional experience, and licensure. These questions were not duplicated in the postsurvey. The questions were otherwise the same in both surveys to intentionally assess for change between the pre- and postsurveys. Construct validity was measured as follows: Previous trainings on this topic were assessed in question 10; understanding of the NASW Code of Ethics was assessed in question 8;

understanding of CSWE accrediting standards in question 9; individual understanding of antiracist social work practice in questions 12 and 13; preparedness for oneself to engage in antiracist social work practice in questions 14 and 15; knowledge of one's agency's current policies on antiracist practices (if applicable) in question 11; perceived ability to engage in antiracist social work practice in one's respective agency/professional community in questions 16 and 17; openness to engage in future trainings on this topic or a related topic in question 20; perceived intention of attending the current training in question 18; and interest in partnering with the BSW practicum program to help promote antiracist social work in the practicum program in questions 19 and 21. Although predominately quantitative, the survey did have some open-ended questions in which respondents could elaborate on their answers. This qualitative feedback was insightful and was analyzed along with the quantitative data during the analysis process.

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

Numerous qualitative data collection methods and points were employed throughout this project. Collective feedback and insights from AR team members were consistently noted and integrated into the overall data collection process. Consistent with AR best practices, the AR team conducted thorough document reviews at every level of intervention, including the individual, group, and system levels. At the individual (student) level, the AR team reviewed feedback from assignments, activities, and general interventions from class activities and assignments. At the group level, the AR team consistently reviewed and reflected on feedback from the faculty members through engagement in interventions and in response to interactions with students. The AR team meetings provided valuable insights and feedback. The final AR team meeting, conducted in May 2023, was extremely insightful as it provided an opportunity

for all members to share collective insights, feedback, takeaways, and plans for their own continued growth. The meeting was approximately 90 minutes long and was recorded (with consent from all members), transcribed in Otter AI, and analyzed in Dedoose. The significant takeaways and consistent themes were included in the overall data analysis.

Finally, the AR team thoroughly reviewed documents and practices at the system (programmatic) level, including syllabi, course content and materials; the program's goals, objectives and mission statement; the program's admissions application; the program's practicum applications; memos distributed to all students; and general program practices. These ongoing reviews and assessments were essential learning-in-action moments, which is a critical part of AR and also in becoming antiracist as so much is learned while doing and reflecting-in-action; these data were included as part of the overall data analysis process (Schön, 1983).

#### ***Action Learning (AL) Meetings (Faculty/AR Team Members)***

As part of the applied intervention plan, all AR team members engaged in three action learning meetings. Each meeting was approximately 90 minutes long. I utilized Watkins and Marsick's (1997) action learning (AL) toolkit to guide and inform this intention and the data collection. Key takeaways, insights, and findings were analyzed and assessed and are described in detail in Chapters 3 and 4. I facilitated all three meetings, which I audio recorded after verbal consent to audio record the meetings was given by each AR team member at the start of each meeting. These recordings were transcribed in Otter.ai and then analyzed through deductive and inductive analysis methods in Dedoose.

### ***Focus Groups (Students)***

Another significant qualitative data collection method was the facilitation of two focus groups with the students (BSW seniors), each lasting approximately 90 minutes. As lead action researcher, I facilitated both focus group meetings with students. Half of the students attended student focus group 1, and the other half attended student focus group 2. Informed consent was reviewed, and consent was given by all participants at the start of each meeting. Verbal consent to audio record each meeting was obtained from each participant at the start of each meeting. I also reviewed the overall purpose of the study and of the focus groups at the start of each meeting. These focus groups utilized a semistructured interview model in which I asked questions and guided the conversations. The questions were similar for each group session but diverged at times based on the feedback and engagement from the students in each meeting. The audio recordings were transcribed in Otter.ai and analyzed and assessed in Dedoose.

### ***End-of-Project (EOP) Interviews***

As lead researcher, I conducted EOP interviews with all AR team members at the end of the project (May 2023), each lasting approximately 45 minutes. Each interview was recorded, with consent, and transcribed in Otter.ai and analyzed in Dedoose. The feedback and insights from these interviews were extremely relevant as they helped provide data on faculty learning and growth and significantly contributed to the overall findings and conclusions of the study.

## **Data Analysis Methods**

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The AR team utilized Otter.ai and Dedoose to analyze the content and transcripts for qualitative data samples, including AL meetings, AR meetings, EOP interviews, focus groups, and document/program reviews. The AR team utilized deductive data analysis to identify

recurring themes, patterns, and categories from the study's theoretical framework to help organize and interpret the qualitative data collected from these various sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Further, the team also utilized inductive analysis as a reference point for the data collected and employed it to identify themes and patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The AR team developed a plan for data analysis to help with flow and clarity (Miles et al., 2018). For the quantitative data, the team utilized Qualtrics to administer the surveys and to analyze the results. The team also assessed student grades as a part of quantitative data analysis. The AR team analyzed the findings from the two surveys administered to current students. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the features of the quantitative data generated by surveys (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The AR team assessed general findings and differences among the constructs identified within the surveys.

As discussed in greater detail below, based on the findings from qualitative data analysis in real time, the AR team also developed and administered two surveys to community partners through Qualtrics. Both the pre- and posttraining survey results were assessed and analyzed in Qualtrics, focusing on descriptive statistics and comparative analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The findings of these results were very meaningful and contributed to the overall findings, implications, and conclusions of this study.

### **The Analysis Process**

The AR team met to assess and discuss the plan for analysis to help with clarity and outline the responsibility process, as given by Creswell and Creswell (2018)):

- (1) Organize and prepare data for analysis
- (2) Read/look at all the data

- (3) Code all of the data
- (4) Generate a description and themes
- (5) Represent the description and themes (p. 190)

Before beginning any qualitative data analysis, the AR team systematically and intentionally became familiar with the data. As lead researcher, I organized the data through transcription and shared it with the rest of the team. After members had the chance to review the data independently, the AR team members worked collaboratively to code the data utilizing inductive and deductive coding. After identifying codes, the team engaged in ongoing conversations to help provide additional context through discussion of the identified descriptions, themes, and patterns.

The AR team utilized triangulation and member checking to help maintain reliability and validity while coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The AR team analyzed insights from AR meetings, reflections, AL meetings, student focus groups, and program documents to contribute to the analysis process. I also led conversations with the entire team focused on deductive analysis of the thesis project's literature review to identify theory-driven codes to utilize in the analysis process.

### ***Data Integration***

Data integration is an essential aspect of mixed methods data analysis, which consists of merging and analyzing results from quantitative and qualitative findings. The AR team followed a convergent mixed-methods approach in three phases. The first phase involved analyzing the qualitative data by coding and synthesizing the codes into broad, relevant themes from the interviews and analysis of documents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The second phase involved analyzing the data from Qualtrics and understanding the survey's statistical results (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018). The third phase involved the mixed-methods data analysis of both sets of data and integrating the findings and takeaways (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Limitations**

The AR team discussed possible limitations of the study. The team identified that since the entire team is composed of professional social workers/BSW faculty, we could hold preexisting biases towards the importance of antiracist work (personally and professionally). Because of this possibility, the team intentionally checked in with one another to ensure that we were minimizing the biases we brought to the research study, either through interventions or data interpretation. Another limitation was that the AR team only used current seniors as the student subject sample. The goal would be to repeat cycles of this research with future classes to help increase the potential for third-person learning and for other programs to model the framework. Finally, the team discussed limitations to the data collection. A significant limitation was our utilization of current students, as they may have been less likely to share honest responses with faculty/AR team members in discussions and in the focus groups. In recognition of this limitation, the AR team also utilized confidential surveys in the hopes that students might feel comfortable sharing feedback through the surveys that they might not have been comfortable sharing in person.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

An essential principle of AR is reflecting on the AR process overall, which has been helpful on both the individual and group levels. Integrating individual reflections with collective reflections and takeaways has offered relevant insight. Specifically, recognizing the significance of our unique roles as insider action researchers and the delicate balance of navigating these dual roles and responsibilities has been humbling and enlightening. This heightened awareness of the

importance of striving for objectivity, managing biases, and remaining as neutral as possible as researchers involved new skills for all AR team members, as this was everyone's first experience utilizing AR as a research methodology.

It was helpful to reflect on possible opportunities for biases that could have impacted the research process, data collection methods, data analysis, and interpretation. Some key points of reflection were that the BSW faculty in the program, who were also AR team members, had preconceived beliefs and practices that were reflected on during AR meetings. Each member had their own perspectives regarding racism/antiracism and perspectives on students stemming from their individually lived experiences. Thus, it was important to recognize and discuss these internal beliefs at every phase of the AR process. Additionally, as all AR team members were insider action researchers, it was essential to remain aware of biases and engage in ongoing conversations with one another to help process these internal beliefs to minimize the possibility of them interfering with or impacting the integrity of the research. These discussions occurred formally through AR meetings as well as informally through conversations, emails, and the sharing of thoughts/takeaways in the shared document.

Engaging in the AR process has been exceptionally meaningful and has provided relevant insight for both the core and thesis projects. The team learned, as consistent with AR, that there was even more that had not been fully understood or considered in early meetings and data review. For example, a significant insight related to preparing students to engage in antiracist social work practice within the larger context of the local community surfaced during the implementation phase of the AR team's analysis of the AL meetings. Through the AL process and reflecting on the data analysis in-action, the AR team uncovered evidence to support the need to add an intervention level with community partners. The AR team recognized the value of



utilizing the AL process to facilitate conversations, as well as the benefit of engaging in collaborative data analysis to strengthen validity and to expand our first- and second-person learning.

In reflecting on the evaluation phase of the process, it was challenging at times to embrace all the qualitative data and become immersed, as there were several extremely lengthy transcriptions. However, in conjunction with TM4, I learned how to become more comfortable with identifying key aspects and narrowing the transcriptions to focus on key parts. It was helpful to collaborate with peers during member-checking and triangulation and to share knowledge in order to learn more efficient ways to manage the process. It was particularly inspiring to see the data come to life and to realize the impact of our research project in-action. The AR team appreciated these opportunities and experiences and the benefits that the overall change project, interventions, data collection and data analysis, and findings/conclusions had for first-, second-, and third-person learning.

## CHAPTER 3

### BOLDLY BECOMING ANTIRACIST: THE STORY

Reflecting on this journey over the past few years has been a powerful experience. As I prepare to share our story of *Becoming Antiracist*, I recognize the roller coaster of emotions we have experienced over the past 18 months. It has also become acutely apparent how much bigger and broader the idea of becoming an antiracist program really is. Were we prepared to learn what we did not know through action research (AR)? Possibly. Did we grow and change as an outcome of this process? Immeasurably. What follows is a sharing of our story and our journey through the cycles of fear, learning, and growth guided by a theory-informed AR project.

#### **Exploring Relevant Contexts**

This AR project explored changes at the individual, group, and system levels within a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program at a small state college, Kennedy College, in the southeast. In reference to Anderson's (2020) systems theory perspective on organization development, the contexts of the study included various interconnected systems: social work education at a national level, which is overseen by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE); the identified BSW program; the faculty within the program/AR team; and current students. Moreover, we considered the collective future impact on the community and the possible implications for other similarly sized programs. The interrelatedness of these systems was significant for the core and thesis projects and the impact of second- and third-person learning opportunities. As described in greater detail later in this story, the impact on the

community surfaced throughout the project and led to a profound shift in awareness, learning, and growth, thus expanding the contexts explored as part of the implications of this project.

### **Social Work Education and Professional Expectations**

The CSWE accredits social work programs nationally. All bachelor, master's, and doctoral programs strive to earn and maintain accreditation through the CSWE, as it is both the national standard and a requirement for professional practice and licensure. The CSWE updates its Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) every few years, providing updated standards for programs to maintain educational goals for students. The CSWE (2022) has just released its newest EPAS, with the expectation that programs will implement the changes by 2025. The BSW program has used this change project opportunity to initiate the necessary prescribed changes towards antiracism, as the implications from this project are intended to inform sustainable, long-term components of the BSW program in alignment with the updated CSWE EPAS (2022).

The Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative (GCSWI) (Fong et al., 2018) is another relevant contextual consideration for understanding professional responsibilities at large and expectations for students upon completion of their social work degrees. As discussed in Chapter 1, the GCSWI calls for courageous innovation and collective action to address critical, current social issues facing society (Fong et al., 2018). The faculty decided to focus on the 13<sup>th</sup> GCSW, *Eliminating Racism*, as it directly relates and connects to the new expectations delineated by the CSWE EPAS (2022) for expectations of programs, faculty, and students' achievement of competency.

### **The BSW Program, Faculty (AR Team), and Current Students**

The BSW program, faculty, and students were the primary systems and focus for the project, as the team identified the opportunity for changes in implicit and explicit curriculum to reflect best practices for antiracist teaching and curriculum. The implicit curriculum refers to the invisible, yet tangible, perspectives, values, messages, and beliefs that are espoused throughout the program and are influenced by the explicit curriculum, faculty, and leadership. Examples include, but are not limited to, attitudes and perspectives, language in materials, embedded practices, and beliefs. The explicit curriculum refers to the overt and visible aspects of the program, including courses, syllabi, assignments, policies, program manuals. The BSW program at Kennedy College is considered small, typically with approximately 100 students, graduating approximately 20–25 students each year. The CSWE has continuously accredited the program since its inception approximately 20 years ago. There are five full-time faculty members, including the BSW program director and myself, all of whom served on the AR team. The faculty consists of three White females, a White male, and a Black female. Although I served as the lead insider action researcher, all faculty members were active members of the AR team and contributed meaningfully throughout the project.

### **Change Project Leader, AR Team, and Other Relevant Stakeholders**

I served as the lead action researcher of both the core and thesis projects (Coghlan, 2019). I was well positioned to lead the change project, as I am a full-time faculty member in the BSW and the director of practicum education and have developed productive interpersonal relationships with the other faculty members/AR team members and administration. I have also focused on developing meaningful relationships with current students. As the director of practicum education, I have developed and fostered strong working relationships with

community partners. As lead researcher, I prioritized being open and transparent with all stakeholders and target groups throughout the projects to ensure role clarity and clear boundaries, thereby maintaining the integrity of this insider AR project (Coghlan, 2019).

The primary stakeholders include the faculty in the program and current students. As specified above, the AR team included all five full-time faculty in the BSW program, including myself and the program director. Additionally, the chair and dean of the program are primary stakeholders who, although not directly involved in the project, influenced it and showed interest in the changes and findings. Both were very supportive of the core and thesis projects. Other stakeholders include the college, upper administration, and other (similarly sized) BSW programs. The community was discussed as a primary stakeholder as well, as the students are actively involved in community agencies through their field education experiences.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

The core project aimed to implement a framework for antiracist pedagogy in the undergraduate social work program (BSW) at Kennedy College. The purpose of the core project was to use theory and relevant literature to make changes in the program's implicit and explicit curriculum to align with best practices for antiracist pedagogy and to engage all program faculty in critical consciousness and understanding of antiracist practices to make sustainable changes within the capacities of the program, faculty, and students. To address this purpose, the AR team at Kennedy College (a) utilized a theoretical framework to guide and frame interventions throughout the change process, (b) focused on implicit and explicit curricular and programmatic changes that embody antiracist practice, (c) engaged all faculty in growth and development towards self-awareness and antiracist teaching and practice, and (d) supported student knowledge and awareness of racism and fostered antiracist practice in students.

Coghlan (2019) emphasized that AR integrates the core and thesis projects. The thesis project inquired into the use of critical race theory (CRT) as a guiding framework for change within the social work program alongside transformational learning theory (TLT) to guide interventions throughout the implementation phase (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Mezirow, 1978). The purpose of the overall study thus encompassed both the core and thesis AR cycles. The purpose of this study was to identify insights learned related to implementing an antiracist framework in a small undergraduate social work program in the southeast. The following overarching research question guided the study: RQ1) What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advances theory and practice in an AR project using CRT and TLT to foster transformational change towards an antiracist undergraduate social work program? The study also inquired into the following subquestions:

RQ1a) How does this program effectively implement sustainable changes, aligned with evidence-based practices, in its implicit and explicit curriculum towards antiracist practices?

RQ1b) How does the faculty challenge their perspectives and embrace discomfort to implement antiracist teaching practices and teach antiracist practices effectively?

RQ1c) How do changes in the implicit and explicit curriculum, and the faculty through their teaching, aid in fostering meaningful, transformational learning and growth in students to help them learn and demonstrate antiracist social work practices?

### **The Prologue: Embracing the Need to Be Courageous and Bold**

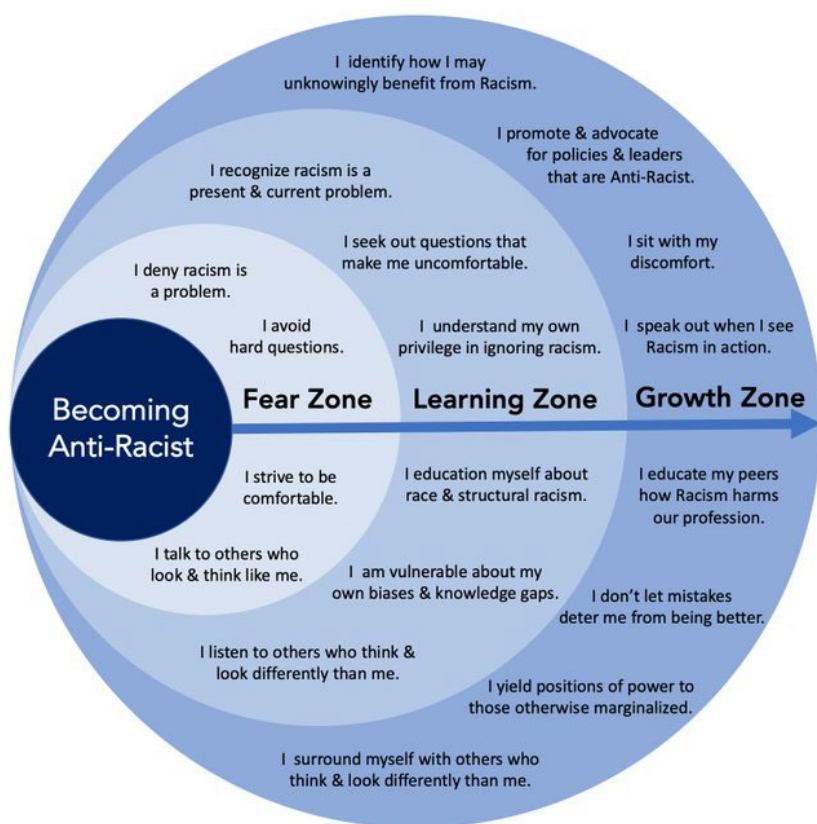
The story begins after my dissertation proposal defense. The collective feedback from this process guided the AR team to focus on a specific grand challenge, to expand change outside

of just students, and specifically challenged me to be braver and bolder in attempting to foster perspective transformation. Challenge accepted.

The AR team met and discussed opportunities for projects moving forward: *How could we narrow the project while being bolder? How could we implement pervasive, sustainable changes throughout the program?* Team members recognized and discussed the upcoming changes to the CSWE EPAS (2022) and the significance those changes would have for social work programs. Conversation, paired with research, ignited the idea to focus on one GCSW, the 13<sup>th</sup> (*Eliminate Racism*), with our change project focusing on every aspect of the program (Teasley et al., 2021). Our specific goal was to effect changes at the programmatic, faculty, and student levels to move our program towards becoming antiracist.

### **Constructing**

Through initial conversations and project ideas, it became apparent that becoming antiracist was an ongoing journey, not an end destination. This message surfaced through every cycle of the project, and is an underlying, consistent theme in this story. Utilizing the spectrum of becoming antiracist has been an essential pillar of our project and serves as the analogy for our story. As detailed in Figure 3.1, the outlined spectrum encompassing fear, learning, and growth provides a helpful visual for recognizing growth towards becoming antiracist while maintaining the cyclical nature of the AR process.



**Figure 3.1.** *Becoming Antiracist.* *Note.* This graphic was created by Andrew M. Ibrahim, MD, MSc, based on an unidentified COVID-19-related graphic, and shared in a Tweet on June 6, 2020. See *Learning a lot and striving to be better. Created this visual mental model as a way to help keep myself* [Tweet], by A. M. Ibrahim [@AndrewMIbrahim], June 6, 2020, Twitter (<https://twitter.com/AndrewMIbrahim/status/1269423199273525250>). Copyright 2020 by Andrew M. Ibrahim.



## **The Fear Zone: Facing the Fears and Planning for Action**

### **Historical Context**

Institutional and systemic racism have been profoundly embedded within the institutional and social fabric of the United States for hundreds of years (Teasley et al., 2021). Social work is founded on the principles and values of social justice, challenging social injustices, respecting all people's inherent dignity and worth, and committing to cultural competence. As explicitly required by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (2021), "social workers must take action against oppression, racism, discrimination, and inequities, and acknowledge personal privilege" (p. 10). The updates to the CSWE EPAS (2022) include a profound change in the language to indicate that social workers *must* demonstrate antiracist social work practice.

### **Identifying the Problem**

Through reflective and detailed conversations, the AR team discussed and reflected upon the calls for social justice, professional requirements, and the upcoming changes from the CSWE (2022) towards antiracist social work practice. We recognized the disconnect between the current program design and the goal of developing an antiracist and anti-oppressive undergraduate social work program. In reviewing the literature on best practices for developing an antiracist program, the team agreed that the program was not currently aligned with best practices for antiracist pedagogy and practices. Additionally, there had not been changes at the individual, group, and system levels, as the program did not intentionally or formally teach antiracist practice throughout the curriculum. The program did not have any opportunities to assess students' abilities to engage in antiracist social work practice. Moreover, faculty members did not have specific training or engage in educational opportunities related to teaching antiracist practice or

developing an antiracist framework for the program. Thus, the team confirmed that the lack of alignment with antiracist best practices was a problem as the program would not be prepared to adopt the pending changes required by the CSWE (2022). The AR team recognized the need for interconnected, simultaneous changes at the faculty, program, and student levels. Like the challenges professionals face, the social work program also recognized the urgency to increase social work students' abilities to engage in antiracist practice through implementing a program-wide change process towards antiracist pedagogy and practice. The team recognized the impact the project could have by contributing insights at the first-, second-, and third-person levels. The team reflected on and discussed the inherent challenges in researching a sensitive and provocative topic such as antiracism. We discussed concerns, barriers, and limitations and ultimately decided that as social workers, we were prepared to embrace the need to be courageous and bold by leading a change project centered around antiracist pedagogy and practice in a small, conservative town in the southeast. The team felt additional motivation to move out of the *fear zone* because it was required for our program to make these necessary changes.

### **Supporting the Identified Problem**

As part of the context and constructing phases of this project between fall 2021 and spring 2022, the AR team utilized various data collection methods to help identify and frame the problem, as well as to prepare effectively for the planning action phase and to begin the taking action phases (Coghlan, 2019; Ruona, 2020). Specifically, the AR team utilized member/stakeholder feedback, individual experiences, a review of existing literature, document review, and external feedback for current data collection and initial problem framing. In addition, the Master of Social Work (MSW) intern from the previous academic year thoroughly and

extensively reviewed the program's implicit and explicit curriculum. With her permission, we integrated the data she collected into the study's research review and data collection to inform the identified problem and intervention opportunities. Document reviews included student responses through essays and assignments, previous program outcomes, program manuals and forms, student evaluations, and informal feedback. The AR team also collected data through feedback on the program reaccreditation from the CSWE, which highlighted some areas for growth in the program.

### ***Implicit and Explicit Curriculum***

Upon thorough review of the program's implicit and explicit curriculum and reflection and conversations about these materials and ideas, several themes emerged that helped situate the identified problem and informed our opportunities for intervention and change. These are described in the following subsections.

**Outdated Mission Statement, Goals, and Objectives.** The AR team members discussed the program's mission and objectives, which we recognized had not been updated since the program was founded 20 years ago. The AR team members acknowledged this oversight as contributing to the identified problem, as evidenced by the lack of changes to the program, especially those regarding preparing students to engage in antiracist practice. The program's current mission statement, list of goals, and objectives did not mention a focus on preparing students to engage in anti-oppressive or antiracist practice. The mission statement said that the program would produce "culturally competent" social workers, which is considered outdated language that the social work profession is intentionally moving away from, as evidenced by the changes to the EPAS (2022), which specifically state that students will demonstrate "antiracist practice" (Odera, 2021). The team felt that updating this language was important for several

reasons, one being that the mission statement is the public message of the program and should thus be formally updated to reflect the current values and future goals of the program. The mission statement sets the larger context and tone of the program, and since the AR team sought to move the program towards aligning with best practices for antiracist practice, updating its conceptualization was significant. Most importantly, it was agreed that the mission statement should state the purpose of the social work program as producing antiracist social workers.

**Syllabi Review.** The MSW program intern conducted a research project utilizing an anti-oppressive practice (AOP) tool with which faculty could examine their syllabi, with scores ranging from 0–3, with 3 being the most positive. As part of this intern’s research methodology, in April 2022, each faculty completed the AOP review tool for two of their course syllabi. Her findings indicated that the average score for 2000-level classes was 1.83; for 3000-level courses, 1.34; and for 4000-level courses, 2.3. The findings indicated a growth opportunity for faculty to intentionally discuss and address content and assignments through an antiracist lens (here, CRT), as well as by aligning language in syllabi with best practices and the inclusion of various forms of assessment.

**Guest Speakers, Texts, and Class Content.** Through reflective conversations within the AR team, data collected from the MSW intern, document review, and informal feedback, it became apparent that there were opportunities for growth in the explicit curriculum, specifically concerning the demographics of our program’s guest speakers, textbooks, and general course content. All faculty agreed that diversity is essential, but no one had specifically and intentionally considered diversity in inviting guest speakers. Faculty had been more focused on knowledge and availability rather than using an antiracist lens when considering invitees. In a review of the textbooks used in classes, the findings of the MSW intern’s research yielded that of

the 29 texts used in the program, when authors were categorized by race, only one author identified as Chinese American; three as Black; and 20 as White, with race information not available for the remaining authors. These findings identified a profound opportunity to utilize texts authored by individuals from more diverse backgrounds. Additionally, a review of course content such as TEDTalks, videos, documentaries and podcasts also revealed a lack of an intentional use of an antiracist lens when identifying content. A review of the MSW intern's findings also suggested a lack of intentional content related to racism and antiracist practice.

**Course Curriculum.** In AR team meetings in fall 2021, the team reviewed all courses offered by the program. The AR team reflected on how the courses aligned with the professional needs of social work, the changes from the CSWE EPAS (2022), and the updated/pending newly written mission statement of the program. It was discussed that opportunities were limited to engage in antiracist work based on the current course curriculum since no specific class on diversity was offered. Discussions surrounding this topic continued with plans for change, which became an integral part of the intervention plan.

**Limited Preparedness for Teaching and Working with Diverse Populations.** Through reflective conversations and shared insights, faculty also expressed concerns about their preparedness to teach antiracist social work practice. Perez's (2021) findings supported such concerns, as all participants in her study (all social work educators) noted a lack of preparedness to teach about race and racism and discomfort with teaching antiracist content. Through the AR process, the faculty uncovered their own discomfort in teaching about racism, White supremacy, and antiracist practice and how such discomfort has perpetuated the lack of antiracist focus within the program. All faculty members read *How to Be an Antiracist* (Kendi, 2019) and discussed takeaways in an AR meeting in February 2022. The insights and perspectives shared in

this meeting reflected the complexity of the conversation surrounding racism, White supremacy, and antiracist teaching and practice. The faculty reflected upon everyone's individual and unique experiences and discussed the importance of addressing this growth opportunity as an essential part of the intervention plan. Specific feedback included this statement from a faculty member (AR team member #3 [TM3]):

*I really appreciate having the conversation about anti-racism teaching and practices with my colleagues as we embark on ways of dismantling racist teaching practices at Kennedy College (\*name changed for anonymity). I particularly enjoyed the common reading book that launched the discussion. One of the areas of the book that was so poignant was the reminder of MLK's concern about the integration of schools. "People with such a low view of the Black race cannot be given free rein and put in charge of the intellectual care and development of our boys and girls" (Kendi, 2019, p. 326). This concern played out not only in teaching but also in social work (you can add criminal justice, law enforcement, & housing). We have a similar percentage of White females as social workers and teachers. The evidence points to poorer outcomes for Blacks when interacting with social workers than Whites. Plus, White culture became the norm as a result of integration...We now dismantle racist practices by "championing resource equity by challenging the racist policies that produce resource inequity" (Kendi, 2019, p. 334).*

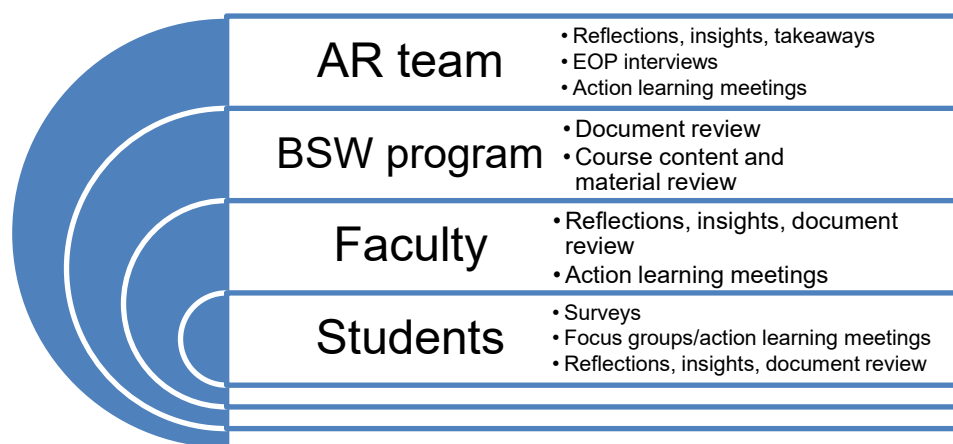
**Narrow Diversity Focus.** The team also discussed how the program's original focus on preparing students to work with two specific minority communities, Hispanic/Latinx and Appalachian cultures, was minimal and not reflective of current best practices. Although these focal areas are relevant and important in the local community, they have nonetheless proven

limiting of students' experiences and preparedness. Such limitations were evidenced in graduating students' reports that they did not feel prepared to work with a range of diverse populations during the informal student forum with an AR team member. Specifically, a student shared, "*I wish we had more opportunity to work with more diverse populations during field experiences*" (Student participant 3, personal communication, March 12, 2021). Feedback from the CSWE in the most recent reaccreditation feedback echoed a similar limitation, and AR team members reflected on this issue based on content expertise. As discussed in an AR team meeting, the CSWE accreditor articulated that the program's current design did not adequately cover ADEI (antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion) topics in academic coursework and field experience, as courses had previously focused only on working with Hispanic/Latinx and Appalachian communities. Recognizing students' limited preparedness to engage in ADEI work across diverse populations influenced our intervention planning.

### **Constructing and Planning**

Based on thorough review of the collected data and literature review, the AR team confirmed profound gaps and identified strategic and timely opportunities to transform the BSW program to better align with an antiracist framework at the individual, group, and system levels. The AR team identified the intersection between the needs of the profession at large and those as influenced by societal needs, the changes implemented from the CSWE EPAS (2022), and the misalignment of the practices of the current program. The team recognized profound opportunities for change in the implicit and explicit curriculum. The team also recognized the need for transformational growth within faculty to increase capacity for teaching about racism/antiracism and to more effectively teach and foster undergraduate students' preparedness for antiracist practice.

As part of the construction phase, the AR team developed a comprehensive research design and intervention plan on three levels: systemic/macro (BSW program), group/mezzo (faculty), and individual/micro (students) (Coghlan, 2019; Ruona, 2020). We decided that interventions would focus on making larger-scale programmatic changes to embrace best practices for antiracist pedagogy. Simultaneously, the individual and group change processes included specific interventions and scholarly inquiry related to individual faculty and student changes and outcomes due to the interventions. The levels of this research design and intervention plan are illustrated in Figure 3.2.



**Figure 3.2.** *Levels of Study and Data Collection.*

The team articulated that the future state of the program should include integrative teaching from an antiracist perspective across all courses, embodying best practices for antiracism in the program's implicit and explicit curriculum, and helping current students learn



and demonstrate antiracist practices. The interventions were informed by the literature and guided by CRT and TLT to influence transformational change at the program, faculty, and student levels, as assessed through a CRT framework. After interventions were developed, the team planned to undertake them beginning in the fall of 2022—preparing boldly, but naïve to the complexity of the journey ahead.

### **The Learning Zone: Learning Through Taking Action**

Nervously and excitedly, the team entered the taking action phase of intervention implementation in fall 2022 (Coghlan, 2019; Ruona, 2020). With collaborative support from the AR team and my dissertation committee, I helped facilitate interventions across the system, group, and individual levels. Due to the complexity of the plan, all AR members contributed and participated in different interventions. As commonly occurs in AR, our intervention plan shifted in some ways from the initial draft to the actual implementation. As described by Schön (1983), while in the “swampy lowlands,” engaging in critical reflection is an essential activity to help foster heightened awareness and introspection, which in our case, helped us effectively initiate small yet significant changes. Further, as with CMS 1, helpful feedback from my CMS 2 defense helped broaden the spectrum for meaningful interventions, which impacted the actual outcomes. An overview of the enacted intervention plan and outcomes are detailed throughout the story to help the reader understand the comprehensive, interconnected changes that occurred simultaneously between August 2022 and May 2023.

### **The System: Interventions and Learnings (The BSW Program)**

#### **The Invisible Web**

Stemming from a systems/interconnected framework, our applied interventions were interconnected across the macro/mezzo/and micro levels (Anderson, 2020). Holistically, we

recognized the importance of making large-scale changes at the programmatic level to initiate changes in the implicit and explicit curriculum. We worked collaboratively to enact these interventions as different team members carried different responsibilities. We shared insights, feedback, and takeaways through these interventions both informally and formally during AR meetings. Our collective findings from data collection and analysis at the system level indicated that the changes made were impactful and influenced growth and change in students.

An example of learning was shared by one student who had engaged in one of these interventions. The student shared about her engagement in the programmatic changes that she had “*learned that [being antiracist] could be small things like voting, signing petitions, researching, etc.*” The importance of specifically integrating practice opportunities into the new classes was significant learning for application at the program level, as the perceived lack of opportunity resonated with students. Another student shared, “*we did not have the opportunity to have an in-person class to discuss implementing antiracist practices or challenges that we may see in field this year.*” Recognizing the importance of pairing content/knowledge with practice/application was a key takeaway for the macro/system-level learning. On the application of content in practice, another student shared in a student focus group, “*But I think it’s once we actually go into an agency, how do we apply it?*” These findings suggest the identified gap in our initial intervention plan and implications for future practice. The applied intervention plan and outcomes are described in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1***BSW Program (System/Macro): Applied Interventions and Outcomes*

Applied intervention	Theoretical framework	AR team action	Completion date	Outcomes
Development of a new mission statement, goals, and objectives	CRT – To help align the overall mission of the program within an antiracist framework	The AR team developed an updated mission statement, goals, and objectives for the BSW program from an antiracist/anti-oppressive lens.	October 2022	Aligns the implicit/explicit curriculum with newly implemented and updated goals and perspectives.
Transition from field seminar class to integrative seminar class (fall and spring semesters, senior year)	CRT and TLT – Provide classroom opportunities for engaging and active conversations related to antiracist practices	AR team members #1 and #5 (TM1, TM5) each taught a section of the class in the fall. TM3 taught the whole class in the spring.	Fall 2022 and Spring 2023	Students generally reported increased understanding and capacity for antiracist social work practice. However, overwhelming feedback included students' desires to apply more conversations through the field education lens, especially in relation to antiracism/anti-oppressive practices.

Applied intervention	Theoretical framework	AR team action	Completion date	Outcomes
Development and implementation of new class, Diversity in Social Work Practice	CRT and TLT – Provide a specific classroom opportunity for engaging and active conversations related to working with diverse populations, especially coming from an antiracist perspective.	TM3 facilitated this class.	Fall 2022	Assignments and activities were conducted in this class specifically to help promote and foster increased self-awareness, empathy, and understanding of racism and antiracist social work practice. Students shared the value of this class and identified it as a primary factor in their increased learning and understanding. Feedback suggested increased opportunities to practice skills related to antiracist social work practice, including role playing, simulations, and/or utilizing the <i>Antiracism Handbook</i> (Bryant & Arrington, 2022) in conjunction with the other textbook.
Ongoing programmatic evaluation of content, materials, guest speakers, and language use in syllabi and other documentation throughout all classes and program documentation	CRT – A review of current practices to help provide insight and to inform changes that are based on CRT, increased conscious awareness, and intentional inclusivity in content and materials	The AR team collected relevant data, insights, and feedback to for data analysis and integration.	August 2022 through May 2023	Assessment of change, growth, and implementation of best practices.

## **The Group: Interventions and Learnings (Faculty)**

### **Turning Up the Dial**

Throughout the constructing and planning phases, and through the *fear zone*, the faculty/AR team members were consistently engaged in self-reflective and knowledge-developing opportunities (Coghlan, 2019; Ruona, 2020). Faculty embraced an iterative cycle of learning, sharing ideas, and contributing to the planning/taking action phases. However, seismic shifts happened for the faculty during applied interventions in the next phase, the *learning zone*. phase. The initial inertia stemmed from feedback during my CMS 2 defense suggesting that we should “turn up the figurative dial” on the interventions to produce more stimulating conversation and potential data from faculty. Specifically, the suggestions were to facilitate action learning (AL) meetings with faculty members.

Accordingly, with support from the AR team, I reflected in-action and updated the intervention plan to include AL meetings, once more accepting the challenge to be bolder, as outlined in Table 3.2. The faculty recognized that ongoing reading, learning, and content development was helpful and important but would not lead to the needed transformative change—we needed to be bold to become antiracist. The shift to utilizing AL meetings as the primary intervention for faculty, paired with the profound insights and implications coming from the meetings, are the crescendo of this story *on becoming*. Action learning is “an approach to the development of people that uses work on a real problem as a way to learn. It is based on the idea that learning can’t take place without action, and constructive action can’t happen without learning” (Watkins et al., p. 4, 2017). The focus of AL is on the group process of learning by helping individuals learn new skills while increasing capacity for change (Watkins et al., 2017). The group experience of learning provides opportunity to learn from experiences and to increase

team effectiveness while also impacting organizational effectiveness (Watkins et al., 2017). Given the foundational structure of the AL process, its use as the primary intervention for the faculty/AR team was highly effective as it allowed the AR team to focus on the individual and group process of learning through a real-life case scenario and offered us the opportunity to learn from this and apply the learned takeaways in action.

The outcomes from these AL meetings produced some of the most insightful and impactful realizations, implications, and actionable next steps for the future of the program. All faculty members shared similar feedback on the unexpected power of these meetings and the meaningful conversations that they fostered. The team recognized the importance of moving from content and knowledge development to application, very similar to student feedback shared above. As TM4 noted, *“I learned things about myself from these conversations I never would have considered previously.”* Similarly, TM1 shared, *“I underestimated the impact these learning meetings would have. I always found our regularly monthly meetings helpful, but these meetings have created opportunity for conversation we never would have had otherwise.”*

**Table 3.2***BSW Faculty (Group/Mezzo): Applied Interventions and Outcomes*

Applied intervention	Theoretical framework	AR team action	Completion date	Outcomes
Read <i>How to Be an Antiracist</i> (Kendi, 2019) and <i>The Sum of Us</i> (McGhee, 2022)	CRT and TLT – Increased knowledge, understanding, and insight into embracing and teaching antiracist practice; intentional critical reflection (CR) and purposeful shift in perspective	All faculty members read these books and engaged in conversation related to insights and feedback.	Spring–Fall 2022	Increased knowledge, language, understanding, and growth towards being antiracist
Faculty engaged in CSWE – Center for Diversity and Social & Economic Justice training related to teaching from an antiracist perspective	CRT and TLT – Active engagement and interaction with learning and knowledge related to teaching antiracist practices and behavior and implementation of that learning	All faculty engaged in content from the CSWE on a monthly basis.	August 2022 – May 2023	Engagement in ongoing educative opportunities to stay updated on current events and increase knowledge and learning
Faculty met monthly to discuss, engage, and reflect on insights learned from the project tasks and interventions	CRT and TLT – Helping to foster increased awareness, growth, and transformation within the faculty related to antiracist mindset, practice, and teaching through learning and practice	All faculty engaged in ongoing conversation and sharing of knowledge and insights.	August 2022 – May 2023	Fostered ongoing growth and opportunity to reflect-in-action to more deeply understand impact and implications.

Applied intervention	Theoretical framework	AR team action	Completion date	Outcomes
AL meetings	TLT- Fostering critical reflection and conversation to help initiate perspective transformation	All faculty members engaged in three AL meetings facilitated by me as lead action researcher	February 2023 – March 2023	Provided opportunity for deep, meaningful, and complex conversations that fostered learning, growth, and actionable next steps to increase the sustainability and impact of the project.



### **Becoming Bolder and Braver: Managing Turbulence in the Journey**

The AL meetings kicked off in February 2023 with a case presentation by TM2. The focus was a senior-level student who was having challenges in her field education/community placement. The original plan was to have several cases presented over the course of three meetings. However, as Table 3.3 delineates, the complexity of the first case facilitated robust and complex dialogue that required ongoing meetings. Thus, the initial meeting developed into three parts. The spectrum of becoming antiracist surfaced throughout the meetings. Questions surrounding fear, discomfort, and uncertainty surfaced as we asked ourselves and each other: *“Is this the right thing to do? How can we do it better? How did we miss this? How do we address an issue that is throughout the entire profession? How do we prepare those that do not want to be prepared? How do you prepare students to practice antiracist social work in a community with embedded racism?”*

Moments of internal self-reflection were realized, and faculty members reflected on their own fear, learning, and growth points. We asked each other questions; we listened to one another; we reflected; we sat in discomfort; we discussed gaps in the project; we developed action steps to address the gaps/concerns. Some of the major/key takeaways from these meetings included the following:

- (a) We have to focus on what we can change/influence (our program, ourselves, our students, and our community, not the entire profession);
- (b) Connecting and sharing knowledge with community partners is essential for the long-term success of preparing antiracist social workers;
- (c) Enacting changes in our practicum education program from an antiracist perspective will be essential to effectively align our program with antiracist best practices.

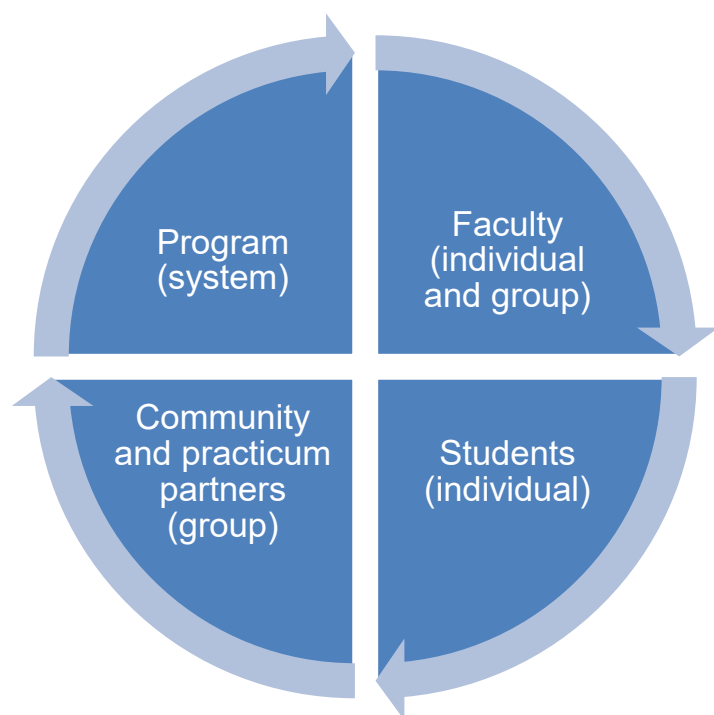
**Table 3.3***Action Learning Case Study (Developed and Presented by TM2)*

<b>Problem Narrative</b> <b>Context: BSW Field Education</b>
<p>1. Historically, this student experienced microaggression perhaps in practicum-our response was only to her. Was it appropriate? Sufficient? Did it impact our thinking about her practicum placement–did we attend to anything differently?</p> <p>2. Currently receiving problematic reports from field supervisor and task instructor on her performance. Attendance, timeliness, engagement. Thinking: Are we seeing bias/racism. Only Black member of team (and one of very few in institution) and only non-Spanish speaker. Much of work conducted in Spanish. We spoke with the student about possibility–but what of practicum?</p> <p>3. I directed student to see (Black, female, faculty member) if need someone to talk to. I can do that only because I know her, like all the faculty, are willing to see students and like to be helpful. But is it appropriate to do that (didn't ask first) and how to do that without there being this assumption that this faculty, just because she is a Black female, can or wants to speak to all-things race with students. It's not a role she should have to take on. How to navigate that.</p> <p>Ultimately, what did we not do properly up front when placing students in this placement? Institutionally what are we not explicitly considering about students when they are here and out in the world and how we should be addressing issues particularly with our Black and Hispanic/Latino/a students.</p>

**Boundary Spanning: Expanding Interventions and Insights**

The AR team evaluated the findings from reflective data analysis of these AL meetings and recognized the need to make a quick change to include community partners in the change project. The team conducted inductive analysis of insights and determined, after reflection, that it was critical to develop and implement an additional intervention and data collection opportunity specifically to address the identified gap/need in the community and with practicum partners. This experience exemplified the value of ongoing (versus summative) data analysis, as well as the importance of evaluating and reflecting-in-action, which created the opportunity for the AR team to implement changes during the change project.

Insights from the meetings and initial data analysis impacted the team’s decision to add an additional system/level, identified as “community partners,” which included local community members in partner agencies and/or alumni from the BSW program. The team also reimagined the interconnectedness of each level, as depicted in Figure 3.3.



**Figure 3.3.** *The Interconnected Cycle: A Transformed Perspective.*

The team also developed an intervention plan for this system/level driven by the study’s theoretical framework integrating CRT and TLT, which is detailed in Table 3.4. The team was able to facilitate the community-focused training and conduct the pre- and postsurveys with the

community partners in March 2023. I initiated the process of developing an advisory board in March 2023 and co-developed an updated field agency evaluation form in April 2023.

**Table 3.4**

*Community Partners (Boundary Spanning/External): Applied and Anticipated Interventions and Outcomes*

Applied and proposed intervention	Theoretical framework	AR team action	Completion date	Reported and anticipated outcomes
Facilitation of community focused training on antiracist social work practice	CRT and TLT – To help educate and inform community partners of changes and expectations within the social work profession related to antiracist social work practices	Two AR team members developed and facilitated this training to approximately 25 community partners.	March 2023	The team developed and conducted pre- and posttraining surveys to assess baseline knowledge and learning/growth following the training.
Development of a field education advisory board focused on implementing and expanding antiracist and anti-oppressive practices between the college and community partners	CRT – To help provide additional insights and feedback from community partners to help increase communication and collaboration between community agencies and the college	The team collected names of interested community partners who would be interested and qualified to serve on this advisory board.	March–August 2023 *Follow-up will occur after the end of this project	Focus groups will be conducted with the advisory board to obtain insights and feedback, which will be integrated into programmatic policies and practices.
Revised agency evaluation form and process	CRT – To help better understand student experience in their field sites related to their experiences with racist/antiracist practices	The team will update the field agency evaluation form to include questions from an antiracist/anti-oppressive lens. The director of	April 2023	The revised evaluation form was developed by the AR team and utilized in April 2023 as an evaluative measure of the students’

Applied and proposed intervention	Theoretical framework	AR team action	Completion date	Reported and anticipated outcomes
		field education will also have students complete these evaluations twice per year, instead of once per year.		experiences in their field agency settings. This ongoing data collection tool will help provide additional insights into the students' experiences in their assigned community agencies.
Development of programmatic anti-oppressive statement	CRT – Recognizing the importance of having a clear, outward facing position on anti-oppressive beliefs, practices, and policies for the BSW program	The team will develop an anti-oppression statement, informed by other programs, and will post it on the program's website and in other related materials.	August 2023 *Completion will occur after this project is completed	The statement will help to establish a clear expectation from the program on its position on oppression, which aligns with other programs and best practices for antiracist/anti-oppressive social work.

### Growing Out of Our Comfort Zones

Facilitating the training with community partners provided us with critical insight into their perspectives. We realized the importance of being brave enough to initiate these conversations outside the safety of our program walls. We discussed and reflected on our position in the community as representatives of an academic institution and our ability to share knowledge, and lead change. We realized that if we needed community partners to understand what it means to be an antiracist social worker, we were responsible for helping them learn by providing training and information. We felt the shared weight and responsibility of needing to

stretch out of the safety net of the invisible walls of our social work program and make our stance and perspective visible to the community as well. In truth, how could we fully prepare students to embody antiracist social work practices in community settings if we were not yet willing to have these conversations with community partners as well?

The team members who facilitated the training for the community shared their initial fears and discomfort on speaking about this subject. As TM1 shared, *“Even though I felt knowledgeable on the subject, I just wasn’t sure what to expect. It felt different than talking to each other or students.”* The co-presenter, TM5, echoed a similar sentiment:

*I normally do not feel nervous speaking in front of a room, but I could feel the nervousness presenting on this topic today. As a White male, I worry what others in the room will think, especially people of color. I question myself and my position to speak on this topic.*

## **Survey Feedback**

Following the facilitation and administration of the surveys, the team collected insights and feedback from the training. There was a collective sense of hope in the positive response from the community, both during the presentation and in the survey responses. Community members’ openness and interest in the topic quelled some of the team members’ hypothetical concerns about pushback or disinterest from the community. Similarly, consistent feedback and interest in ongoing training on this topic inspired the team to think ahead and start planning additional training. The posttraining survey results indicated that all 20 respondents were interested in taking future training on this topic. Other qualitative feedback from the surveys included that *“the training was very valuable”* and *“the subject of antiracist social work was very well explained.”* Similarly, a respondent shared, *“I feel that after this training, I could share with*

*my own institution helpful ways we can train staff and hold conversations.”* This feedback supported the team’s belief that this training was needed, relevant, and important for us to initiate and lead in future as well.

The highly positive turnout for the training also supported our belief concerning anticipated community interest and shared belief in the importance of partnership. The team reflected on the insights and feedback overall, and there was a collectively felt push along the becoming spectrum towards learning and growth. *Had we allowed fears to limit us? Were our own preconceived beliefs and assumptions impacting our hope and belief in community partners?* It was a profound learning experience to help us grow out of our own fear and discomfort, and embrace the courage needed to move into the learning and growth zones.

### **The Individual: Interventions and Learnings (Students)**

#### **Transformation through Fear, Learning, and Growth**

The focus on student-facing interventions was a critical and meaningful aspect of our story. The intersection between student-focused interventions and systemic/group interventions was clear but was also evidenced in how students engaged and responded to the interventions. The variation of interventions across various experiences, including class content and assignments, program curriculum, and practicum experiences, provided various teaching/learning and self-reflective moments for students. General collective feedback and key takeaways indicated that students recognized growth and change in themselves over the past year. Students articulated a profound increase in their own self-awareness, growth, and realized progression on the *becoming antiracist* spectrum. Students also reported feeling an increased sense of confidence, as shared in a student focus group:

*I think we all got braver; I know personally I got a little braver in my own home to try be able to find my voice to support, you know, have the words have the language of what to say.*

A student also shared during a focus group, *“I feel like I have made a lot of growth but I am always still learning.”* As an AR team, it has been inspiring and fulfilling to recognize and identify students’ perceived transformation towards becoming antiracist.

### **Student-Centered Experiences**

The BSW seniors in our program were the primary student population in this research project. Although their story technically dates back to the start of their junior year in August 2021, the research portion of their journey officially began as the project entered the *learning zone* in August 2022. They were introduced to programmatic, explicit curriculum changes with the introduction of two new classes: Integrative Seminar and Diversity in Social Work Practice. In fall 2022, I and TM5 each taught a section of the Integrative Seminar class in fall 2022, and TM3 taught the Diversity in Social Work Practice class. In those and other classes, students were taught and learned about racism/antiracist practices through various learning tools, including readings, textbooks, articles, class assignments, curriculum activities, and critical reflection discussions and assignments. Students were asked to apply their learning directly to their practicum experiences at their agencies.

Their story continued in the second semester, kicking back off in January 2023. The same students experienced another explicit curriculum shift by taking two new classes: Advanced Integrative Seminar as one class (as opposed to two sections), which was taught by TM3 (the same faculty who taught the Diversity in Social Work Practice class the previous semester). Another explicit curriculum change was to the Practicum Seminar class, which was facilitated



through an asynchronous learning platform (with no live class meetings). This class was facilitated by myself as the lead action researcher. Both of these classes also included content, readings, discussions, and activities specifically related to racism/antiracist practices.

Another significant shift in the journey happened after the faculty discussed and analyzed the profound benefits of utilizing AL as an intervention at the group/faculty level. The AR team decided that student focus group sessions should also be facilitated as both an intervention and an important data collection tool, as these would produce more meaningful and robust data. From there, it was decided that I would conduct student focus groups with the seniors, broken into two groups of 7–8 students for each session. Similar to the outcome of the faculty AR meetings, the student focus groups were profoundly informative and insightful. The data collected and analyzed from those transcripts are essential aspects of the understanding and context of this story and to the findings and conclusions of this research project. The details of the specific interventions and activities for students are described in Table 3.5.

**Table 3.5***BSW Current Students (Individual/Micro): Applied Interventions and Outcomes*

Applied intervention	Theoretical framework	AR team action	Completion date	Output
Participated and completed in explicit curriculum changes, including newly developed courses: Integrative Senior Seminar, Diversity in Practice, Advanced Senior Integrative Seminar, and Practicum Seminar	CRT and TLT – Introduction of content, knowledge, and personal narratives to help expand students’ knowledge, understanding, and self-awareness; the intentional use of various modalities to meet students where they are and help them connect to the materials	The team reviewed and analyzed students’ enrollment and participation in classes. The team coordinated with respective faculty regarding experiences and outcomes from classes. The team also analyzed relevant student assignments and activities.	August 2022 – May 2023	Students reported perspective changes and a significant increase in their understanding of antiracist social work. Students also identified specific activities from these courses that were particularly impactful.
Integration of CR activities and assignments throughout courses	CRT and TLT – Use of self-reflection tools to help students understand their own thoughts/beliefs/biases and begin to challenge these preexisting thoughts and beliefs through intentional and guided reflective activities	The team guided and supported faculty regarding using critical reflective activities. The team also reviewed and analyzed data from the assignments and activities.	August 2022 – May 2023	Students self-reported the benefits of these assignments and how they had helped increase their own self-awareness and expand their knowledge.
Students read <i>So You Want to Talk About Race</i> (Oluo, 2019) in Advanced Senior Integrative Seminar	CRT and TLT – Content, knowledge, and integration of critical reflection activities and conversations	The team coordinated with the faculty who taught the Advanced Senior Integrative Seminar and collected and analyzed aggregate data from discussions and related assignments.	Spring 2023	Students self-reported the benefits of reading this book and how it helped expand their perspectives of themselves and others. Students identified this as a particularly helpful and meaningful activity.

Applied intervention	Theoretical framework	AR team action	Completion date	Output
Students participated in focus groups (split into two groups), facilitated by myself as lead action researcher	CRT and TLT – Providing a safe, comfortable space to engage in conversation and to obtain thoughts, feedback, insights, and perspectives on the students' experiences throughout the year as part of this research project	The team analyzed the transcripts from these focus groups.	April 2023	The focus groups provided powerful and insightful data to inform findings at every level.
Utilization of activities from <i>The Antiracism Handbook: Practical Tools to Shift Your Mindset and Uproot Racism in Your Life and Community</i> (Bryant & Arrington, 2022) in Practicum Seminar	CRT and TLT – An integration of knowledge and practice for students to apply what they are learning related to antiracist practice in practice situations	The AR team coordinated with the faculty member to obtain feedback and insights and analyzed data from assignments and discussions.	Spring 2023	These activities helped students practice and apply the content and knowledge they learned. Students indicated that this was a helpful book and that these activities were impactful.
Utilization of the textbook <i>Anti-Oppressive Social Work Practice: Putting Theory Into Action</i> (Morgaine & Capous-Desyllas, 2023) in Diversity in Social Work Practice course.	CRT and TLT- An integration of anti-oppressive and antiracist theory to support learning and growth through content and activities	The AR team reviewed feedback from the textbook, the text itself, and assessed student assignments and reflections linked to the text.	Spring 2023	The students identified this text as being profoundly helpful and impactful in expanding their knowledge and providing meaningful activities that changed their perspectives of themselves and others.

## Leaning into Growth

Reflecting on the students' section of the learning zone helped the faculty make the transition to the *growth zone* of this story. The students' self-reported experiences, learning, and insights shared were particularly inspiring and validating. Integrating feedback, insights, and takeaways from interventions and every level and reflecting on the culminating impact was impactful and helped to transition all systems into the growth zone.

### The Growth Zone: The Circle of Becoming

As interventions wrapped up with the end of the semester in April 2023, the AR team entered the final phase of this research journey, the growth zone. The team spent time analyzing, reflecting, and evaluating the data, findings, and takeaways. The AR team met for a final meeting, and I conducted end-of-project (EOP) interviews with each AR team member. The final meeting and EOP interviews were helpful, informative, and validating. All team members contributed to the data analysis and interpretation over the course of several interactions through both informal and formal meetings. All team members also contributed to identifying the implications for our next steps, as our *becoming* journey will continue long past the end of this core and thesis project.

As the AR team reflected on the journey through the *fear zone* and *learning zone*, it was humbling and powerful to consider all the small and big learning moments we had encountered along the way. The team discussed the outcomes of the interventions during the learning zone and debated what should be kept and what should be adjusted for the next academic year for the program's implicit and explicit curriculum. The team also reflected on the data and findings from the students' learning zone. This conversation was powerful and reinforced the importance of

simultaneous interventions co-occurring at every level, as the students identified interventions from every level that had been impactful and transformative to their becoming antiracist journey.

The team also reflected on our individual growth and collective growth as faculty. It was reassuring for us each to recognize what we have seen transform in ourselves over the course of this project, and how all of this development intersects and contributes to the learning and growth of the program and students. We reviewed the *Becoming Antiracist* visual tool and each identified moments of learning and growth. We also recognized opportunities where we may reenter the fear zone, such as a resistant community setting, a challenging student, or pressure from the university-system level. A collective takeaway was that these zones of fear, learning, and growth are interconnected and that this journey of becoming is ongoing and cyclical, which inspired the theme of our story. A student summarized the same takeaway in a student focus group, stating, “*I see myself in them all—fear, learning and growth.*”

### **The Epilogue: The Circle of Becoming Continues**

Although the core project has ended, it is relevant to our story to share the epilogue, or the anticipated next steps of this journey. This change project was designed and implemented with the goal of sustainability, as not only will our program maintain the changes made, but we will continue (as faculty) to reflect and evaluate and make necessary and ongoing adjustments. The curriculum changes will remain, with the integration of suggestions and feedback from the students and faculty. The faculty are committed to continuing the journey of becoming through intentional knowledge development and ongoing meetings and conversations that will specifically include anti-oppressive and antiracist practices and pedagogy.

The faculty is also prepared to expand the integration of content, discussion, and practice throughout the entire curriculum, with responsibility and accountability falling on every faculty

member. No one class or one faculty member is responsible for producing antiracist students. Similarly, one book club or one webinar is also not enough to foster transformative change. We are planning to maintain and uphold the shared responsibility of becoming antiracist through ongoing, intentional, interconnected, and multilevel learning and growth as part of a commitment to our educational standards and professional responsibility. When the CSWE returns to evaluate our program for reaccreditation, we look forward to sharing the results not just of this project but also of our ongoing efforts over the next few years. We see our newly identified future state: a medium-sized BSW program, in a small, state school in a conservative town in the southeast, serving as a model program for anti-oppressive, antiracist practice and pedagogy. *Going Bold* for this core project felt ambitious, and certainly uncomfortable at times, but we have all collectively recognized the importance of the project and the successes of starting with small, bold steps to get to our big, bold future state.

## CHAPTER 4

### LEARNING, LEADING, AND SHARING THROUGH BECOMING ANTIRACIST

Through both quantitative and qualitative data analyses, this action research (AR) process has provided valuable insight and depth for discussion. This chapter summarizes the findings, insights, and conclusions from a comprehensive review and exploration of the AR project. Given the complexity of the project and the interconnectedness of the participants and collected data, the findings are detailed in response to the theoretical framework and thematic findings.

During the data analysis, the AR team engaged in discussions, analyses, and reflections from both second- and third-person perspectives. The AR team reflected on how much had been learned from both first- and second-person learning and how these findings and conclusions would impact future practices within our program. To facilitate third-person learning, the AR team integrated data from each individual level and synthesized the collective findings to address the identified problem, align with the existing literature and guiding theoretical framework, and inform future practices and policies. The AR team is optimistic that these findings, conclusions, and implications will significantly contribute to third-person learning.

The research was guided by one overarching question: *What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advances theory and practice in an AR project using critical race theory (CRT) and transformative learning theory (TLT) to foster transformational change towards an antiracist undergraduate social work program?* The study also inquired into the following subquestions:

RQ1a) How does this program effectively implement sustainable changes, aligned with evidence-based practices, towards antiracist practices in its implicit and explicit curriculum?

RQ1b) How does the faculty challenge their perspectives and embrace discomfort to implement antiracist teaching practices and teach antiracist practices effectively?

RQ1c) How do changes in the implicit and explicit curriculum, and the faculty through their teaching, aid in fostering meaningful, transformational learning and growth in students to help them learn and demonstrate antiracist social work practices?

### **Study Overview**

The AR project aimed to implement a framework for antiracist pedagogy in a small BSW program at a state university pseudonymously referred to as Kennedy College. The purpose of this change project was to implement curriculum and co-curriculum changes towards antiracist pedagogy, thereby addressing the professional calls for action and the changes implemented to the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE)'s 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), which clearly state that social work students must demonstrate competency in antiracist practice. To address this goal, the AR team decided to (a) utilize a theoretical framework to guide and frame interventions throughout the change process; (b) focus on implicit and explicit curricular and programmatic changes that embody antiracist practice; (c) engage all faculty in growth and development towards self-awareness and antiracist teaching and practice; and (d) support student knowledge and awareness of racism and foster antiracist practice in students.

The study was guided by a transformative critical race framework integrating CRT and TLT theories. Interventions were implemented at the individual (student), group (faculty) and



system (program) levels and were also expanded into the community. The study followed an AR methodology and utilized a convergent mixed-methods design for data collection, analysis, and integration.

### **Study Findings: Summary**

The AR team conducted a thorough review of the quantitative and qualitative data collected from students and integrated the findings as part of the research plan. The quantitative data provided validation for the qualitative data. Moreover, the data indicated consistency in the self-reported increases in knowledge of antiracist social work practice and the reported impact of practices implemented by the BSW faculty/program to promote student knowledge and readiness. Incorporating data and insights from students, the faculty/AR team, and the wider community enriched this study's findings and insights at the system level with relevant context.

The AR team conducted a collaborative review of the findings and supporting evidence at each level of data. The team thoroughly analyzed and discussed the findings, considering the perspectives of the primary research question, individual subquestions, and the newly developed theoretical framework. The ten findings presented in this chapter were identified from the data collected throughout the research study, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, action learning (AL) meetings, and document review. The study's findings at each level (individual, group, and system) are summarized in Table 4.1 and described in the following sections in relation to the level of learning that was most relevant to each finding.

**Table 4.1***Research Findings*

Research question	System level and finding topics	Findings
What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advances theory and practice in an AR project using CRT and TLT to foster transformational change towards an antiracist undergraduate social work program?	Thesis project (theory-based finding)	The transformative critical race framework has six core elements and provides a framework for understanding the findings, conclusions, and implications of this study.
How does the faculty challenge their perspectives and embrace discomfort to implement antiracist teaching practices and teach antiracist practices effectively?	<p><b>Individual (core project)</b></p> <p>Topics: Fear zone, disorienting dilemmas, discomfort, learning zone, critical reflection, taking action, growth zone, safe space, knowledge and practice, positionality and power</p>	<p>The process of becoming antiracist is an ongoing, individualized journey through fear, learning, and growth.</p> <p>Students require knowledge development as well as practice and application in a safe, supportive environment to foster transformative growth towards antiracist practice.</p> <p>Transformative growth for faculty and students was fostered through action and application of knowledge, through critical reflection and conversation.</p>
How do changes in the implicit and explicit curriculum, and the faculty through their teaching, aid in fostering meaningful, transformational learning and growth in students to help them learn and demonstrate antiracist social work practices?		
How does the faculty challenge their perspectives and embrace discomfort to implement antiracist teaching practices and teach antiracist practices effectively?	<p><b>Group (core project)</b></p> <p>Topics: Action research methodology, disorienting dilemmas, learning zone, critical reflection, multilevel collaboration and engagement</p>	<p>CRT- and TLT-informed interventions provided opportunities for engagement with disorienting dilemmas and can promote perspective transformation towards becoming antiracist for students and faculty.</p>

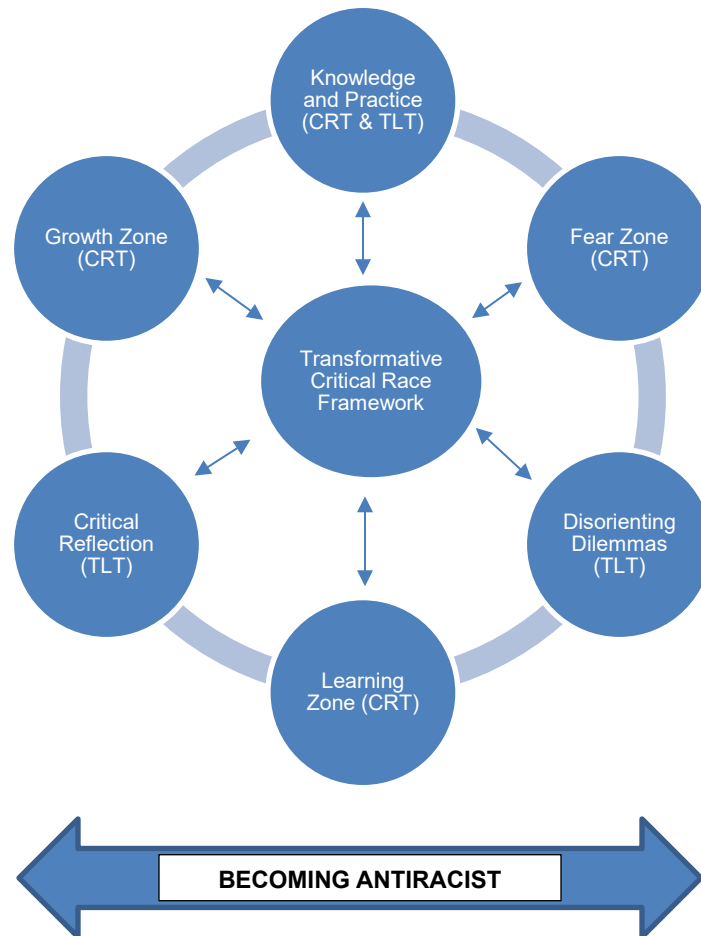
Research question	System level and finding topics	Findings
How does this program effectively implement sustainable changes, aligned with evidence-based practices, towards antiracist practices in its implicit and explicit curriculum?	<b>System (core project)</b>  Topics: Action research methodology, multilevel collaboration and engagement	Engaging in the AR project itself fostered perspective transformation for faculty members.
		Sharing knowledge and practice skills with community partners is essential to contributing to overall change and growth at every level.
		Multilevel interventions must be implemented simultaneously and collaboratively to effect meaningful change.
		The transformative critical race framework is effective for implementing change towards an antiracist BSW program.

### **Theory Finding (Thesis Project): Transformative Critical Race Framework**

#### **Theory-Based Finding: The Transformative Critical Race Framework Has Six Core Elements and Provides a Framework for Understanding the Findings, Conclusions, and Implications of This Study**

After analyzing the data, the team approached understanding the findings through the lens of the newly developed integrated theoretical framework. Interpretation of the findings was most adequately informed by the integration of CRT and TLT, resulting in the transformative critical race framework, depicted in Figure 4.1. It was essential to recognize the interrelated efficacy of integrating TLT and CRT and how this applied framework helped create a

foundational opportunity to support the program, students, and faculty on the transformative journey of becoming antiracist, as well as guides the meaning of the findings, conclusions, and implications of the study.

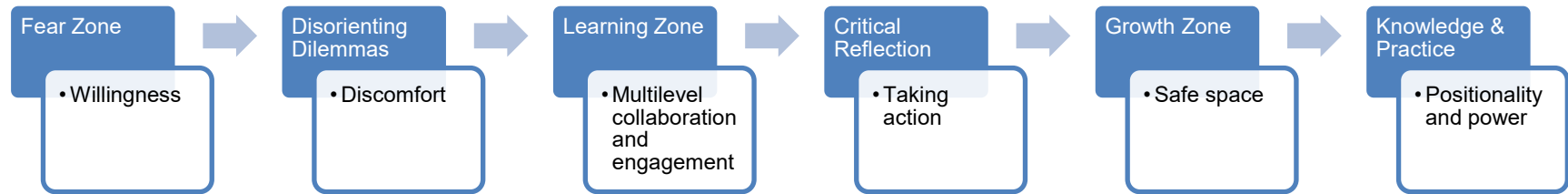


**Figure 4.1.** *Transformative Critical Race Framework for Becoming Antiracist.* Note. Developed and approved by the AR Team in May 2023.

### ***Theoretical Pillars and Thematic Finding Topics***

Upon reflection on the transformative critical race framework, the AR team determined that it comprises six core theoretically grounded pillars: The fear zone (CRT), disorienting dilemmas (TLT), learning zone (CRT), critical reflection (TLT), growth zone (CRT), and knowledge and practice (CRT & TLT). However, to explore these theoretically grounded pillars more deeply, the team identified incorporated primary finding topics as the space between these pillars. The finding topics helped the AR team understand and connect the findings back to these theory-informed pillars, and they also inform the overall findings, conclusions, and implications.

The thematic findings topics identified are the AR methodology, discomfort, multilevel collaboration and engagement, taking action, safe space, and positionality and power. Figure 4.2 illustrates the relationships among these thematic finding topics, or the space between the pillars, which are also described below. These thematic topics were consistent across all levels of the data and are considered an essential part of the transformative critical race framework when considering the connections among the theory-informed pillars.



**Figure 4.2.** *Theoretical Pillars and Thematic Findings: Exploring the Theoretical Framework and the Spaces Between.*

**Fear Zone (CRT).** The *fear zone* is recognized as the first theoretical pillar, informed by the *Becoming* visual, as it was consistent in our data that all participants had felt fear at some point in the journey and/or could relate to that feeling as part of this experience.

*I think, a lot of times, I can say that I know what to do. Or I say what I would do, because that's what I want to do. But when you're faced with it, sometimes it's more difficult, then.* (Student focus group #1, April 2023)

Another focus group student echoed this sentiment, saying, “*I think it's just part of it's just like the fear of not knowing where you're at, where everybody's at*” (Student focus group #2, April 2023)

The data indicated that, overwhelmingly, participants related feelings identified as belonging in the fear zone. As indicated by the principles of CRT, it is consistent for individuals to feel uncertainty when embarking on a journey towards antiracism.

*So, they probably have that same level of fear and discomfort [as us] when they're thinking, Well, sure, I can talk about my experience, I could talk about my kind of background, but am I going to be called out because this professional knows more?* (TM 4 end-of-project [EOP] interview, May 2023)

**Willingness.** As one team member explained in her EOP interview, *Although we had to engage in this work as part of changes from the CSWE (2022), I found myself very motivated and wanting to push through the discomfort because I realized how important that is for our growth and to role model for students.* (TM 2 EOP interview, March 2023)

Students, faculty, and community members were consistently willing to start the *Becoming* journey somewhere. The AR team determined that willingness was, accordingly, an essential theme for understanding how individuals move out of the fear zone. It was agreed that all

individuals wanting to focus on becoming antiracist must have a willingness, or they would not move out of the fear zone. This assertion was supported by the postsurvey results in a community member's response when asked about what antiracism means: "*Committed to stand up for my clients and address antiracism*" (CM postsurvey, March 2023). Another community member shared in their postsurvey response that "*I MUST take action addressing racism*" (March 2023).

**Disorienting Dilemmas (TLT).** As described in previous literature and empirical studies, engagement with *disorienting dilemmas* is a critical tenet of TLT and an essential step in fostering perspective transformation. Our data identified various moments of disorientation that were significant and impactful on learning and growth, including these two comments from student focus groups:

*"I feel like when you have privilege, you don't realize it until like, because you're just like, oh, this is the way it is for everyone, you just assume sometimes. Right? So, realizing where you fall on the chart and the different categories kind of makes you think of it differently."* (Student focus group #2, April 2023)

[About a specific activity in class]: *"It stuck out to us as much as it did the other group. I know for me, like, I think it's because we all see each other as equals, like privilege wise, because we're all together all the time. We're all in the same program. We're all going through the same stuff. We're all experiencing this journey together. So sometimes we can forget that some may be more privileged than others just by the way that we were born. And so I think doing that activity was just a good reminder of that."* (Student focus group #2, April 2023)



Data from students consistently indicated that many activities, assignments, and textbooks from theory-informed changes to the curriculum were successfully disorienting and thus effective at fostering transformative learning and growth in students. Participants from each level identified moments of disorientation that facilitated the opportunities for transformative change. The AR team has recognized the importance of creating and engaging in disorienting dilemmas as an essential step for moving through willingness to discomfort.

***Discomfort.*** The BSW students in the focus groups expressed feelings of discomfort and nervousness surrounding discussing topics of race, as indicated by this representative comment from a student focus group participant:

*“So, [racism and antiracism are] uncomfortable to talk about, but I don’t think that that’s necessarily because of like, the program. Because I feel comfortable in a class setting. In the professional world setting, not everyone is as comfortable to talk about it as we are. So, like with each other, we know that like – hey, this is what’s supposed to be happening. But, then when you’re out, in field [practicum], and out doing the work and stuff, it’s a little bit different, because you don’t ever want to run the risk of like, offending someone else. Whether that be a person of color, or someone that is the same color as you. It’s a lot different. Because not everyone gets the same training that we have. Like, that’s the hard part – it’s not that we’re not ready. It’s that there’s still just that nervousness and discomfort of knowing that not everyone is okay talking about it.”* (Student focus group #2, April 2023)

The AR team members articulated feelings of discomfort as well, as illustrated by one team member’s reflection on student feedback: *“hearing about these racist things every week, week after week, sometimes can be mentally exhausting”* (TM 4 EOP interview, May 2023).

The data across all levels also showed consistency in these feelings of discomfort being (a) the result of disorienting dilemmas and (b) motivators for moving into the *learning zone*. Different examples included sharing personal experiences in classes, having to teach about certain topics, leading the community training, or even sharing in AR team meetings. Facing one's discomfort and pushing through it consistently appeared to help individuals move into the learning zone.

Another significant perspective on discomfort came from TM 3, who shared their experience in their EOP interview as the only faculty member of color involved in this work:

*I think this work is interesting and has a level of uncomfortable, being uncomfortable for me as the only faculty of color when we talk about anti-oppressive work. We talk in an area with white faculty and majority white students judging how we're implementing it.*

(EOP interview, May 2023)

**Learning Zone (CRT).** As primary tenets of CRT, active learning (AL) and expansion of knowledge development are critical. A focus on learning was interwoven throughout interventions at every level. The data indicated increases in knowledge from participants across all levels, as indicated by this comment from a focus group student: “*We most certainly have...a better understanding of what antiracism and antiracist social work is*” (Student focus group #2; April 2023). Participants also shared experiences of feeling that they had entered the *learning zone*, such as when they recognized the connections they were making or the importance of embodying certain practices. The AR team recognized the necessity of the learning zone in helping to foster collaboration and engagement, as expressed by one team member: “*sometimes the frustrating part can be just because we see something isn't perfect. We don't always have the answers*” (TM 4 EOP interview, May 2023).

***Multilevel Collaboration and Engagement.*** Multiple AR team members communicated their views on the importance of collaboration in this work: “*And it's a program so the more aligned we are, the better all around*” (TM 4 EOP interview, May 2023); “*collaboration with each other is essential*” (TM 1 EOP interview, May 2023). As a result of increased knowledge and understanding, individuals can more effectively collaborate and engage with others in relation to embracing and utilizing antiracist practices. This improvement was observed within students, faculty, and in the community training. The data indicated that theory-informed interventions at every level helped the program shift towards becoming antiracist while also fostering individual growth and change. Most of the learning and perceived growth came from doing, engaging, and working collaboratively. Change across levels was fostered through intentional effort, as change and growth are not incidental and “*cannot just be the work of a person, it is a whole program*” (TM 4 EOP interview, May 2023).

**Critical Reflection (TLT).** The importance of self-reflection through critical awareness was highlighted by several participants. One student focus group participant remarked that the activities promoted “*Lots of self-reflection*” (Student focus group #1, April 2023). A community member described a primary takeaway from the community training in their postsurvey response: “*looking internally at biases and cultural competence is a huge priority*” (CM postsurvey, March 2023).

*Critical reflection* practices, as informed by TLT, are effective at fostering perspective transformation and reinforcing learning. The AR team recognized the importance of the critical reflection phase of the journey as it allows the space to reinforce learning from the learning zone and collaboration space and helps prepare individuals and groups for taking action. The data indicated that critical reflection activities helped foster self-awareness in relation to diversity,

race, privilege, and increased self-awareness in both students and faculty. The data also indicated that engaging in critical reflection, both individually and in group conversations, helped address implicit biases and increase accountability, which is essential when developing in the *Becoming* antiracist journey.

***Taking Action.*** A consistent theme in the data was the importance of *taking action*, as expressed by this student focus group participant:

*And I think also just even, if you're uncomfortable in different situations, obviously or wherever they will be at school at work, or whatever, knowing that that's your ring of influence. And that at least you have a seat at the table. So that's where you start. So, knowing whenever you see it, like, let's say, a coworker, so something like, then you might seem as racist, and for them, it might be a joke, but knowing how to address those things, as they come up, I think that's where you can start at least. (Student focus group #2, April 2023)*

Students and faculty members consistently recognized how important the practice of taking action is for learning, pushing through fear and discomfort, and for moving into the *growth zone*. Participants across each level recognized that the deepest learning stemmed from doing, not reading, talking, or thinking. The importance of action was thus recognized as a critical piece within the framework.

***Growth Zone (CRT).*** According to the *Becoming* visual representation (Figure 3.1), the growth zone is indicative of the most advanced level of antiracism. Several participants commented at length about their growth experiences through this work:

*So, the privilege part was really eye opening to me to think about listing the privileges in my life. And it was kind of interesting, because I learned absolutely about the ways that I*

*have privilege, I've experienced privilege throughout my life and how that is different for other people. They didn't experience some of the privileges I had. But then I also realized that there are some places where I didn't receive that privilege. And I was treated differently. Fortunately, I didn't know it. But now I can pay attention and see that there was some. I think the good thing about that, though, is to just show me that there are things that that I do or ways I might act or whatever, I don't even realize that I'm treating somebody differently, just because I have something or privilege to something that they don't. (Student focus group #2, April 2023)*

*And I think just being like, open with a client, hey, I, heard you say this, and it's okay to have those thoughts and feelings. But let me educate you on this. (Student focus group #2, April 2023)*

Participants across all levels recognized moments in which they felt they were in the growth zone and acknowledged their goal of being in the growth zone:

*I think that we, I think that we would do ourselves a disservice if we stopped assessing this stuff regularly. Like, you know, the discussions are one thing. But if we're not assessing and determining the comfort level, the students and determining our own comfort level and our own growth, and our syllabi, and like, I mean, the reasons the discussions are so valuable is because of the assessments that we did initially, that helped us start to say like, oh, that's not great. We're not doing that very well. And that's kind of problematic. Yeah. So I guess assessing for continued, you know, areas of growth is really, really important. Or else the discussions kind of start to lose a little bit of the concept. (TM 5 EOP interview, May 2023).*

**Safe Space.** Promoting and fostering safe spaces to have difficult conversations helped promote learning through discomfort for students, which was reflected in this representative comment from a student focus group participant:

*I think just in general being able to talk about this in a safe space, like I know we had talked about and the baseline thing. And then when we first started the program or even our sophomore classes, we were all hesitant about speaking these kinds of things. You know, it's uncomfortable. But as we went on, we got comfortable. And now we're used to having this conversation also. So just being able to have a safe space and doing this is beneficial.* (Student focus group #1; April 2023)

Facilitating group conversations in safe spaces was also indicated as important for faculty, as evidenced through shared feedback and reflective exercises:

*How can we better prepare our practicum placements to have the tools they need to be able to be antiracist? And how can we better assess them to determine if this is a safe space for our students to go into? And it's, you know, it's not it's not an easy solution. It's an incredibly complex solution didn't take a long time to fix and resolve.* (TM 5 EOP interview, May 2023)

Additionally, in response to the community training, a community member provided incredibly helpful feedback in the postsurvey on the importance of fostering a safe space when facilitating complex topics surrounding antiracist and anti-oppressive work:

*This training was very valuable. I would recommend at the beginning of the training giving participants a sensitive topic disclosure, due to the nature of the discussion. This will help participants feel emotionally safe in this space to engage and participate.* (March 2023)

**Knowledge and Practice (Integration of CRT and TLT).** The successful integration of *knowledge and practice*, informed by both CRT and TLT, is the culmination of effectively moving through the previous phases and experiencing safe spaces for learning and growth. Participants at all levels recognized this growth occurring, as indicated by student focus group participants: *“But then as social workers, we’re also supposed to always be learning and growing. And so, to continually be asking questions for our cultural competence and learning more being very open”* (Student focus group #1, April 2023); *“I feel like I would be somewhat good at describing it. I mean, comfortable. Yes. But it's harder actually getting the words out”* (Student focus group #2, April 2023).

Participants recognized that at times, although they had the necessary knowledge, putting it into practice was much more difficult. Such tension highlights the importance of moving through the phases with intentionality to help foster skills, comfort, and belief in one’s own ability to apply knowledge consistently in practice. The integration of knowledge and practice is also a critical phase when considering the last space of *positionality and power*. Understanding one’s own positionality and power creates opportunities for applying knowledge in practice with increased confidence:

*“So, I’ve also gained a lot of knowledge. So yes, more ability to speak. But generally, I feel like I’m much more educated at the process, beginning and hopefully in a way that will be beneficial to my students.”* (TM 4 EOP interview, May 2023)

A community member indicated in a postsurvey response that their most significant takeaway from the community training was “Learning about Practicing professional and personal steps in antiracism” (March 2023).

**Positionality and Power.** Understanding one's own positionality and power is an essential part of the *Becoming* journey and provides opportunity for effectively applying knowledge in practice. Participants' comments indicated that they were coming to such an understanding through this work, as reflected in this student focus group participant's assertion that

*And like, what position they are versus what position you are in, because you're saying coworker, so it might be my coworker, but that coworker might be a supervisor over other people, whereas I'm not. You know what I mean? It's like, there's just, that can be intimidating. Just the simple fact of their position in the company. (Student focus group #1, April 2023)*

Perceived barriers to engaging in antiracist practices include the type of relationship, power differentials, confidence, and getting out of one's comfort zone. These factors appeared consistently across all levels and were indicated for students, faculty, and community members. As one AR team member reflected,

*Because of the knowledge, now, we're more confident talking about it. And because of the humility, we're more confident and saying, like, hey, just because I'm informed on this matter, doesn't mean I have all the answers doesn't mean that I know. And I think that that is so freeing for a lot of the white students to hear someone say, hey, we can talk about race, we can talk about our privilege, we can talk about [what] the injustice is that we see. And we can also say, but I don't know all the answers. Yeah, I see the injustice, I see what we're trying to do. But, you know, we don't have to have everything figured out to be able to speak on the matter. (TM 5 EOP interview, May 2023)*



Another AR team member echoed these ideas in their EOP interview, acknowledging *that* “*Absolutely. It's everyone's responsibility, but especially those with power. Well, it's everyone's responsibility, but those with power and privilege should be using their power*” and noting that “*it doesn't negate the responsibility. And this is what I hope to get across to my students. You do have a responsibility in this problem*” (TM 1 EOP interview, May 2023).

Moreover, TM 3 shared an incredibly insightful perspective regarding the privilege inherent in even considering engaging in antiracist work, which was impactful when considering the importance of recognizing privilege and power as critical thematic findings:

*There's an awkwardness in your privilege of thinking about how you can implement it, I don't have a choice, I have to navigate this system. So as professors of what you might think I don't have that luxury, that is a privilege in itself. Having a conversation about anti-oppressive work, living in a place where you're constantly trying to equalize power dynamics is a different conversation. It's my reality, but I think sometimes I hear from students I'm like, what a privileged world we live in, that you don't see your uncomfortableness in this hour. As a privilege that you have an hour of being, Yeah, wow, we talked about race. And that's some that's people's reality, you know, so that's it.*  
(TM3 EOP interview, May 2023)

### **Overall Study: Individual-Level Findings**

#### **Finding 1: The Process of Becoming Antiracist Is an Ongoing, Individualized Journey Through Fear, Learning, and Growth**

*And then maybe help them think from the viewpoint of that individual or population. Just like an educating kind of thing. Sure. Yeah. Respectful education.* (Student focus group #2, April 2023)

*So, I guess just like finding a way to say like, I don't have to address it, but it's just finding a respectful way to say it without, you know, hurting the relationship. (Student focus group #2, April 2023)*

For faculty and students, the data consistently demonstrated awareness and understanding that becoming antiracist is an ongoing and intentional journey. The study evoked discomfort and fear at the individual, group, and system levels. However, the data indicated that it is essential to push through the fear zone and discomfort in order to experience learning and growth. It is also important to start somewhere, as otherwise no progress can be made. Community members also articulated an understanding of this model, as demonstrated through postsurvey results such as this participant comment:

*I would define it [antiracism] as understanding about ourselves and accepting if we have not stand up [sic] for racist comments or even saying something racist. I also understand that I need to come out of my fear zone, go to the learn zone [sic] and then continue to the growth zone. (CM postsurvey, March 2023)*

## **Finding 2: Students Require Knowledge Development as well as Practice and Application in a Safe, Supportive Environment to Foster Transformative Growth Towards Antiracist Practice**

[Reflecting on a smaller class size and discussion-oriented class structure]: *And it somehow engenders more compassion. (Student focus group #1, April 2023)*

*And then we did it like, small, then it was like, okay, more comfortable just expressing more, because we all get to, like, we all shared our point of views. And then we got to the circle, and we're like, okay, our experiences and stuff like that. So, I think we got more personal in the smaller groups. (Student focus group #2, April 2023)*

The students played a crucial role in this change project, as the primary objective was to enhance their knowledge and preparedness to engage in antiracist social work practice.

Understanding the effectiveness of the interventions was essential for the AR team to discern the implications of this work and reach conclusions for the project. It was also imperative for the AR team/faculty to understand which practices and tools were most effective so that they could continue to be implemented as part of the sustained changes.

General takeaways included that students collectively shared noticeable and significant self-growth in their understanding and knowledge of antiracist social work practice between August 2022 and April 2023, highlighted in the student pre- and postsurvey responses and confirmed through the qualitative data. Students also reported a collective understanding of and belief in the importance of professional social workers utilizing antiracist social work practices. Students also identified profound shifts in their perspectives of themselves, including increased self-awareness, understanding of biases, and understanding of privilege. Students verbalized and demonstrated an understanding of the ethical obligation to practice as antiracist social workers. Changes in the explicit curriculum were effective in providing meaningful opportunities and knowledge growth for students, thus contributing to their transformation towards becoming antiracist.

A comparative analysis of the student survey response data is detailed in Table 4.2. The questions on the student postsurvey were slightly different from the presurvey as the AR team felt that these small shifts in wording more accurately captured the constructs being assessed. The presurvey was administered at the start of the semester and the postsurvey at the end of the semester, which was also the end of students' senior year and directly prior to their graduation from the program. With that, the AR team adjusted some of the wording in the postsurvey to

capture student perspectives on preparedness in a graduate program and/or professional setting, as opposed to the BSW program (as evidenced column 2, Q8, Table 4.2). It is important to note that although some of the wording was changed in the postsurvey questions, the AR team was intentional in ensuring the constructs being measured were analogous to the presurvey questions.

**Table 4.2***Student Pre- and Postsurvey Findings*

Question #	Question text	Response <i>n</i> (%)						<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree		
1	Presurvey: I understand what it means to be an antiracist social worker.	-	-	-	2 (15.38%)	1 (7.69%)	10 (76.92%)	5.6 2	.74
	Postsurvey: I understand what it means to be an antiracist social worker.	-	-	-	1 (14.29%)	1 (14.29%)	5 (71.43%)	5.5 7	.73
2	Presurvey: I understand what it means to be an antiracist BSW program.	-	-	-	2 (15.38%)	3 (23.08%)	8 (61.54%)	5.4 6	.75
	Postsurvey: I understand what it means for a BSW program to integrate an antiracist framework.	-	-	-	1 (14.29%)	-	6 (85.71%)	5.7 1	.70
3	Presurvey: I understand why it is important for SW programs to adopt an antiracist framework.	1 (7.69%)	-	-	-	-	12 (92.31%)	5.6 2	1.33
	Postsurvey: I understand why it is important for SW programs to adopt an antiracist framework.	-	1 (14.29%)	-	-	-	6 (85.71%)	5.4 3	1.4
4	Presurvey: I agree with our social work program adopting an antiracist framework.	1 (7.69%)	-	-	1 (7.69%)	2 (15.38%)	9 (69.23%)	5.3 1	1.38

Question #	Question text	Response <i>n</i> (%)						<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree		
	Postsurvey: I agree that the BSW should adopt an antiracist framework.	-	1 (14.29%)	-	-	-	6 (85.71%)	5.4 2	1.4
5	Presurvey: I feel confident that I could recognize the racist practices of others.	-	-	-	2 (15.38%)	6 (46.15%)	5 (38.46%)	5.2 3	.70
5	Postsurvey: I feel confident that I could recognize the racist practices of colleagues or other professionals.	-	-	-	1 (14.29%)	3 (42.86%)	3 (42.86%)	5.2 9	.70
6	Presurvey: I believe in the importance of learning how to be an antiracist social worker.	-	1 (7.69%)	-	2 (15.38%)	-	10 (76.92%)	5.3 8	1.21
	Postsurvey: I believe in the importance of learning how to be an antiracist social worker.	-	-	-	1 (14.29%)	-	6 (85.71%)	5.7 1	.70
7	Presurvey: I believe in the importance of practicing as an antiracist social worker.	1 (7.69%)	-	-	2 (15.38%)	1 (7.69%)	9 (69.23%)	5.2 3	1.42
	Postsurvey: I believe in the importance of practicing as an antiracist social worker.	-	-	1 (14.29%)	1 (14.29%)	-	5 (71.43%)	5.2 9	1.16
8	Presurvey: I feel comfortable discussing the issue of racism in my social work classes.	-	-	-	2 (15.38%)	3 (23.08%)	8 (61.54%)	5.4 6	.75

Question #	Question text	Response n (%)						M	SD
		Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree		
	Postsurvey: I would feel comfortable discussing the issue of racism in MSW SW classes and/or other educational settings.	-	-	-	1 (14.29%)	1 (14.29%)	5 (71.43%)	5.5 7	.73
9	Presurvey: I feel comfortable sharing my perspectives on race, racism, and antiracism with the social work faculty.	-	-	1 (7.69%)	2 (15.38%)	2 (15.38%)	8 (61.54%)	5.3 1	.99
9	Postsurvey: I would feel comfortable sharing my perspectives on race, racism, and antiracism with a SW supervisor.	-	1 (14.29%)	-	2 (28.57%)	-	4 (57.14%)	4.8 6	1.46
10	Presurvey: I think the BSW faculty are prepared to teach antiracist practice in social work.	-	-	-	1 (7.69%)	4 (30.77%)	8 (61.54%)	5.5 4	.63
	Postsurvey: I believe the learning opportunities related to racism and antiracist social work practices provided by my BSW faculty helped contribute to my readiness to engage in antiracist SW.	-	-	-	2 (28.57%)	-	5 (71.43%)	5.4 3	.90

*Note.* M = mean; SD = standard deviation; SW = social work; BSW = Bachelor of Social Work; MSW = Master of Social Work.

## Student Surveys: Overview and Analysis

The AR team analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the students to ascertain the findings presented in this section. Specifically, two AR team members reviewed and analyzed the results of the surveys sent to BSW students in their senior year. These students were invited to complete a presurvey and a postsurvey. Thirteen students completed the presurvey (distributed in January 2023), and eight students completed the follow-up survey (distributed in May 2023). The findings from the surveys generally supported and validated the qualitative data. Although we were unable to link students' responses between presurvey and postsurvey, we reviewed the data in aggregate. Overwhelmingly, students indicated small improvements between the presurvey and the postsurvey. Specifically, there were notable shifts from *somewhat agree* to *agree* on several responses.

Students indicated an understanding of what it means to be an antiracist social worker, why it is important to practice as an antiracist social worker, why social work programs must adopt an antiracist framework, perceived confidence in being able to recognize racist practices in others, and perceived comfort in discussing racism/antiracism in either a graduate-level class or a professional work setting. Students generally also indicated that they felt that the faculty were prepared to teach antiracist social work practices (13 of 13 respondents agreed with this statement in the presurvey). Students generally agreed that learning opportunities provided by the faculty in the BSW program contributed to their knowledge and skills related to antiracist social work practice (seven of seven respondents agreed in the postsurvey) and to their perceived readiness to engage in antiracist social work practice (seven of seven students agreed in the follow-up survey). Furthermore, students generally agreed with the feeling of being prepared to practice as an antiracist social worker based on knowledge that they had gained during the BSW



program (seven of seven respondents agreed in the postsurvey). Six of seven respondents agreed in the follow-up survey that they believed in the importance of engaging in ongoing learning and growth related to antiracist social work practice.

By analyzing both the quantitative and qualitative data collected, the project team gained valuable insights into students' experiences and perspectives, which aided in identifying areas of improvement, determining effective practices, and recognizing the impact of interventions on student learning and growth. Of equal importance was analyzing the data to inform future action for future policy and practice. Overall, the data indicated that students learn complex content, such as antiracism, more effectively in a discussion-oriented class structure with a smaller class size.

*I stressed in my classrooms that this is going to be a safe space for people to be able to talk and share. (TM 4 EOP interview, May 2023).*

*Especially being, you know, white faculty, what could feel? Maybe we've been nervous to be that clear or say it in the past, maybe realizing that when we do, we're actually affirming, and then speaking truth to it, and bring it to the forefront for conversation versus it being a scary topic to talk about. (TM 1 EOP interview, May 2023)*

### ***Opposing Feedback***

It is important to note a perceived outlier in both student surveys. On both the pre- and postsurvey, one respondent either disagreed, somewhat disagreed, or strongly disagreed on several answers. Within each survey, these disagreements were from the same respondent; however, the team had no way of determining whether this respondent was the same student in both surveys. This student respondent selected some form of *disagree* statement in the presurvey in response to five questions concerning (a) understanding why it is important for social work

programs to adopt an antiracist framework, (b) agreeing with the BSW program adopting an antiracist framework, (c) believing in the importance of learning how to be an antiracist social worker, (d) believing in the importance of practicing as an antiracist social worker, and (e) feeling comfortable sharing their perspectives on racism/antiracism with the BSW faculty. Although we cannot confirm whether the student providing disagreement responses in the follow-up survey was the same as the one doing so in the presurvey, this respondent selected some form of *disagree* statement in response to five questions on the postsurvey, this time concerning (a) understanding why it is important for social work programs to adopt an antiracist framework, (b) belief that the BSW program should adopt an antiracist framework, (c) belief in the importance of practicing as an antiracist social worker, (d) belief in the importance of continuing to engage in ongoing learning and growth related to antiracist social work practice, and (e) feeling comfortable sharing their perspectives on race/racism with their social work supervisor and/or graduate school practicum instructor.

### **Finding 3: Transformative Growth for Faculty and Students Was Fostered Through Action and Application of Knowledge Through Critical Reflection and Conversation**

*Well, it would help to role play a racist situation. Like, if you were in line with this woman, what would you do? And how would you interact? And having more of those discussions about how do we respond? So, that we can learn and get more comfortable with how to respond. (Student focus group #2, April 2023)*

*And the discussion so from you all. I mean, like, I liked the discussion piece in that class in the with the antiracist exercises is, like, you know, responding to our peers and what their experiences were, I mean, that response thing, that dialogue of getting the different*

*field placements integrated in it – was really powerful.* (Student focus group #1, April 2023)

Students and faculty indicated a profound increase in self-awareness, internal biases, and awareness of others through critically reflective activities and exercises. Students and faculty also reported perspective transformation fostered by their increased understanding of positionality and privilege. To promote continued transformations of this kind, social work faculty must engage in intentional CRT/TLT practices through expansion of knowledge, reflective activities and exercises, team conversations and reflections.

As an AR team, we recognized how important doing and taking action were on this journey, regardless of how “ready” one feels—both for ourselves as faculty through our teaching, and for our students and their sense of readiness. Student feedback informed a key takeaway: Learning how to be antiracist is best reinforced by doing, reflecting, and integrating the knowledge. Accordingly, this finding has influenced the inclusion in the program’s explicit curriculum of more role-play opportunities, simulations, and reflective class discussions alongside knowledge and content development. Faculty echoed similar insights throughout the AL meetings, AR team meetings, and EOP interviews. Although the content and knowledge learned through this project was incredibly valuable, faculty members collectively shared that doing, enacting, and practicing had fostered the most transformative learning and growth for them as individuals, faculty members, and as part of the BSW program. These evidentiary points are highlighted in feedback from student focus group participants as well as from faculty in AR team meetings.

*And so what another important parallel process that we were hoping and hopefully some of the tools we did use was creating a safe space for our conversation. And then us being*

*realizing both intentionally and unintentionally how important that is in the classroom as well. (TM 1 EOP interview, May 2023)*

### **Overall Study: Group-Level Findings**

#### **Finding 4: CRT- and TLT-Informed Interventions Provided Opportunities for Engagement With Disorienting Dilemmas and Can Promote Perspective Transformation Towards Becoming Antiracist for Students And Faculty**

*It can be difficult, especially well, I guess, less professional, but more like, personal just where I come from, like, there's not a lot of diversity, there's a ton of racism. I grew up in, like a pretty racist home, too. So that's hard to navigate that, and I feel like maybe we could have all been more prepared on that. But like, learning about it and identifying it, definitely learned a lot. (Student focus group #1, April 2023)*

*I realized how much more comfortable I felt teaching about historical racist practices in class lectures. I realized it was okay to be clear about what these historical moments were- acts of racism. I would have been hesitant to use those words so clearly in past classes. I also felt how much more acutely aware I was of the responsiveness of the students of colors in my class. What I would have previously feared would have been judgement or a feeling of getting it “wrong” from students of color, I felt the opposite. Relief, appreciation; that I was speaking truths, and thus validating them and their perspective. These were some of the most disorienting, and thus transformative, moments of this research project for me. (TM 4, EOP interview, May 2023).*

Faculty must intentionally challenge themselves to learn and grow through fear and discomfort while providing opportunities for students to do the same. Intentional engagement with disorienting dilemmas helped foster perspective transformation and growth towards

antiracist social work practice. The findings from the faculty AL meetings also served as disorienting dilemmas for the faculty, especially concerning the importance of addressing practicum experiences for students and instructors and expanding our efforts with community partners. These profound realizations, derived through data analysis in-action and critical reflection, helped shift the project to include the community-focused training on antiracist practices, which produced incredibly relevant and meaningful data-informed findings and influenced our overall conclusions. Below are some representative AR team member comments:

*I feel like [this work is] to help me really start to intentionally focus on what I can do better. (TM 5 EOP interview, May 2023)*

*Intentionality is sort of the thing that I've taken away from this project the most, is that it put at the forefront of my thinking that while I was teaching particular concepts, to make sure that I was more intentional in being open and clear about this, especially with the history of social welfare, racism embedded in things. And also even just listening to students with diverse viewpoints and different backgrounds, just acknowledging sometimes that when they share things, when I think about sort of the students that are around them, and the culture that they're in, and where we are, that be sharing that and being vulnerable with some of the things that they share, must take a lot more for them, maybe then for some other students. So being just enough expressing gratitude that they shared, that is more of that intentionality, because I'm, as I'm thinking more about where they may be coming from, as they share or engage. (TM 4 EOP interview, May 2023)*

## **Finding 5: Engaging in the AR Project Itself Fostered Perspective Transformation for Faculty Members**

*The process itself transformed in-action, while fostering transformative change in each of us. (TM 2 EOP interview, May 2023)*

For faculty members, the impact of ongoing, reflective conversation and the intentional and collective focus on learning and embodying antiracist practices for themselves and to prepare students was transformative and profoundly meaningful. Learning from this study helped faculty recognize the importance of having ongoing conversations regularly, as a sustainable practice, to continue fostering ongoing learning, growth, and reflection. Faculty must embody an openness and willingness to engage in ongoing learning and growth towards becoming antiracist themselves in order to increase preparedness for teaching, and this process is supported through an AR methodology. Several AR team members indicated that the AR and AL approaches were useful in fostering continued learning and growth. One team member stated that “*some of the action research principles of our meetings, you know, and then also, I think those action learning means using action learning, using that model, as a framework can help*” (TM 1 EOP interview, May 2023). Other faculty echoed these ideas:

*I like that we have like, look, we're coming out with things that we can actually use. I liked that it was productive. Yeah. I agree. A mission statement or pools that we can use are ways to teach. At the end of the day, it wasn't just an academic exercise. Yeah. So that's something I appreciated about our process. (TM 4 EOP interview, May 2023)*

*Yeah, I mean, I think that it would be very difficult to argue that while we were having these meetings, we were not influenced in a positive way to make improvements to our courses. I know, every time we met, every single time we met, I left the meeting, thinking*

*this is a neat way I can improve my class this week, like it was immediate. And so I'm so grateful for that, to that it didn't just feel like we were talking just to talk, we actually had tangible things that we could introduce whether it was you know, getting different articles from different, you know, diverse backgrounds, or bringing in guest speakers or whatever, like, there was very, very much focused on doing and not just talking.* (TM 5 EOP interview, May 2023)

Moreover, TM 3 shared a similar perspective on the efficacy of the AL meetings: *"I think it just has so many elements to it, that it was an important case study for us to dive into as a team. So, I thought that was a very positive outcome"* (EOP interview, May 2023).

### **Action Learning Meetings**

A summary of the takeaways and findings from action learning (AL) meetings is provided in Table 4.3. These meetings were profoundly impactful learning moments for the faculty members (who were all AR team members) and a primary example of the value of utilizing an AR methodology, as it allowed for the team to reflect on the data in-action and to also make changes to the intervention plan in-action.

**Table 4.3***Action Learning Meeting Analysis Form: Identified Themes, Findings, and Supporting Evidence*

Meeting	Insights	Findings	Supporting evidence
Meeting #1: <i>Uncovering the Hidden Threads</i>	Initial case presentation utilizing action learning (AL) process	The initial identified problem (possible bias from a field instructor towards student related to race) was the tip of the iceberg.	FM3: <i>"I think it's part of our profession, our ability to assess placement facilities as a profession, we don't have a standardization in field experiences and a measurement tool for assessing field placements."</i>
	Increased awareness of community/agency issues and challenges	Intentional discussion and analysis uncovered larger issues within the community, the profession, and gaps in the faculty/program's current practices.	FM5: <i>"I think to go along with that one identified problem is that the social work profession has struggled with, in general, holding practicum placements accountable for their behavior, and for their expectations."</i>
	Focus on singular experience of practicum director and limited input of others	Initial awareness emerged that we had left out an essential group in the change project: community partners/field instructors.	FM4: <i>"I was also going to add that I thought there was like maybe a lack of understanding on the part of the agencies of how we want them to assess the status, like these are these specific things we want you to look at."</i>
	Assessment of student/field placement goodness of fit		FM3: <i>"We can't depend on our students to tell us everything."</i>
	Discussion of issues embedded within the profession's educational for practicum education		FM4: <i>"How are we currently evaluating our field agencies? Do we need to adjust how we are doing that?"</i>
Meeting #2: <i>Piecing Together the Paper Cuts</i>	Accountability of practicum agencies and practicum instructors for their behavior		
	Follow-up conversation from first meeting	Racism is pervasive and our students will encounter it.	FM3: <i>"Racism, it's all around. So, it's not a veil [it] is just very open. You know, your silence is very loud. It's very clear that this is a racist area, it's not a secret."</i>
	Discussion of pervasiveness of racism in local community	Recent professional changes and educational standards are setting the standard to make meaningful and impactful changes.	FM4: <i>"Do we set an example of saying, 'hey, that's not okay.' What do we do when a client says something racist?"</i>
	Conversation around potentially racist clients		
	Acknowledgement of embedded racism in		



Meeting	Insights	Findings	Supporting evidence
	community agencies and within field instructors	The importance of developing an antiracist/anti-oppressive statement as a program	<i>How do we help prepare our students for that? How do we talk to community partners about that?"</i>
	Identified lack of changes and accountability within our own profession, which perpetuates issues for educational programs and students	Taking a look inwardly at our profession	[Describing microaggressions] FM3: "I would describe it as like small little cuts, you know, small little paper cuts, they just, you know, when you fail, you don't want to touch it anymore, but it does hurt."
	How to handle student pushback/resistance		
	How to handle field agency resistance/pushback		FM1: "I certainly don't have an answer. But just to think of it, like pull the thread along the analogy, like certainly, we're talking about race. But how have we handled these conflicts in other situations. Can we apply the same thinking?"
	Importance of addressing gaps in changes at the larger professional level		FM4: "I like the idea of teaching it to students that way, taking a stance on all oppressive behavior."  FM3: "We, we haven't aligned. So I think. Yeah, shame on them for not keeping up. But shame on us for not helping them keep up."
			FM3: "In reflection paper, her mother was White, her mother was a drug addict. And her dealer was Black. And she said, that was one of the reasons why she had so much trouble with Black men."
Meeting #3: <i>The Ripple Effect: Expanding the Path for Change</i>	Final meeting to discuss the initially presented case  Discussion around the centrality of the community	Recognizing our own responsibility and accountability for influencing change outside our program	FM1: "Thinking about you know, starting with us, right, I remember saying that, like our mission statement, you know, I remember writing out this sort of from like, our program level, like, what are we doing? Like that ripple effect – it's

Meeting	Insights	Findings	Supporting evidence
	Recognition of the importance to address and include the community/field partners in the change project	We can make changes in ourselves as faculty, in the program, and influence growth and change in our students, but that will not be enough if we do not include community partners as well.	<i>starting with us. We can't control everything yet, but what change?"</i>
	Awareness of the profound influence of community agencies on our students and the need for our program to take leadership/ownership of educating and knowledge sharing	Discussion of facilitating a training for community partners	FM2: <i>"But where you are on the spectrum of antiracism? Yeah, it's the is the part that I would say we're making progress, but..."</i>
	Students can learn antiracist practices within our program, but they are learning and practicing in their assigned field agencies 16 hours per week	Discussion of other interventions and action steps to include community partners	FM3: <i>"I do have to say, one of the things that struck me about what we're doing, is that one of the one of our assets could be utilization of our community."</i>
	Change project's focus inside our program alone is limiting		FM5: <i>"The problem is we don't have a great way of assessing all of these things. Like there's not a standardized tool to assess if we are antiracist. Are we being an antiracism program? How antiracist and anti-oppressive are our field placements and practicum placements? Like, we don't have a good way to assess that data. Which means the problem, is we don't have the data to support whether or not those places are or are not engaged in antiracist behaviors. So, I mean, that's, I mean, it's hard to make intervention plans and treatment plans without data and assessments, tools."</i>
			FM1: <i>"Like, again, if we want to think about that as a potential like, intervention or tool we want to add from, you know, consider from this. Well, right now we do one evaluation of the agency and field instructor the end of the year. Okay, what if we increase that right? What if it was twice a year? It's one</i>

Meeting	Insights	Findings	Supporting evidence
			<i>opportunity, but also what if we really work together kind of pulling from W's standpoint, like either a task force or some of the questions we're asking right now? I don't think we ask anything about race, right, or racism or like any kind of oppression discriminatory question. So that would certainly give us some feedback."</i>

*Note.* FM = faculty member.

### **Finding 6: Sharing Knowledge and Practice Skills With Community Partners Is Essential to Contributing to Overall Change and Growth at Every Level**

Data from the community member surveys and general feedback indicated that collaboration and partnership with community partners is imperative to promoting transformative growth towards antiracist social work practice for students, since students spend so much time in their partner agencies throughout their senior-year internships. Further, data from the surveys indicated that community partners were lacking in knowledge related to antiracist social work practice, thus elucidating the important role of our BSW program in taking leadership in sharing this knowledge. Table 4.4 highlights the primary goals of the participants in attending the training, with the items *knowledge of antiracist social work practices* and *understanding how to apply antiracist SW practices in my practice/agency/community* having the greatest number of responses.

**Table 4.4***Results from Community Member Presurvey*

What do you hope to gain from this training? (Please select all that apply) ( <i>n</i> = 21)	
Ethics CEU credits	14 (9.4%)
Understanding updates to the NASW Code of Ethics	16 (10.74%)
Understanding of updates to the CSWE accrediting standards	15 (10.07%)
Knowledge of antiracist social work practices	18 (12.08%)
Understanding of how to apply antiracist SW practices in my practice/agency/community	18 (12.08%)
Real-life case examples of how to apply antiracist SW practices	17 (11.41%)
Ethical case studies including issues of racism/antiracism	13 (8.72%)
Resources for how to continue expanding my knowledge of antiracist SW practice	15 (10.07%)
Visual aids to help expand my understanding	13 (8.72%)
Group conversations related to antiracist SW practice and ethical practices	10 (6.71%)

The BSW program should use its position as the only academic institution in the community to take the lead in training and knowledge provision to help foster changes within agencies that will support student learning in their agency internships. As a postsurvey response shared in response to the training remarked, “*resources provided are a good starting point for me to take back to my agency - list of books useful!*” (March 2023).

The data reflected that academic programs must collaborate with community partners and strive to effect change and growth beyond the program. Community members are essential stakeholders on a programmatic journey of becoming antiracist and must be included in the multilevel systemic research design. Further, the data demonstrated the significance of community partnerships and the interconnection between the changes our program is making and the students’ experiences in the community agencies. The AR team also identified the profound impact that these agencies exert on our students and the need to better prepare community

partners to help students grow in their antiracist skills. The general demographic information of the community members who participated in our surveys is summarized in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5**

*Community Member General Demographic Information*

Questions	Responses ( <i>n</i> = 21)		
	Yes <i>n</i> (%)	No <i>n</i> (%)	Other <i>n</i> (%)
Do you have a BSW?	16 (76.19%)	5 (23.81%)	NA
Do you have an MSW?	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	NA
If you have an MSW, are you licensed?	12 (66.67%)	5 (27.78%)	1 (5.56%)
Are you a current or former practicum instructor with the BSW program?	6 (28.57%)	15 (71.43%)	NA
Are you a current or former practicum instructor for students from other BSW or MSW programs?	5 (23.81%)	6 (76.19%)	NA
If you are a social worker, for how many years have you been practicing (either as a BSW or MSW)?	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	
	9	45	
	5	25	
	2	10	
	2	10	
	2	10	

***Quantitative Data***

The community partners completed a presurvey and a postsurvey as part of their continuing education training, an integral intervention, and a data collection opportunity. The surveys yielded both quantitative and qualitative data, as some survey questions gave

respondents the opportunity to provide qualitative feedback. The findings from the surveys provided relevant insights into community members' current understanding, perspectives, and interest in ongoing educational opportunities.

Tables 4.6 and 4.7 highlight community members' responses to both the pre- and postsurveys. The sample of community members were all individuals who attended the community-based training on antiracist social work practice. The findings of the quantitative data were consistent with those from the qualitative data in that community members reported limited understanding/preparedness in the presurvey, with increased knowledge and understanding in the postsurvey. For the postsurvey, the AR team intentionally adjusted some of the wording of the presurvey questions to assess learning outcomes more accurately and capture community members' perspectives after participating in the training. For example, the presurvey asked community members whether they knew about changes to the NASW Code of Ethics (2021). As these changes were very clearly covered in the training, the AR team adjusted the wording in the postsurvey to assess level of understanding, as evidenced in Q1 (Table 4.6) and Q3 (Table 4.7). Importantly, although the wording of some items was adjusted in the postsurvey, AR team was very intentional in ensuring that the constructs being assessed were analogous to those in the presurvey.

**Table 4.6***Community Member Presurvey (n = 21)*

Question #	Question text	Response <i>n</i> (%)		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		Yes	No		
1	Are you aware that the NASW Code of Ethics has made recent changes to include an ethical responsibility for social workers to practice as antiracist social workers?	12 (57.14%)	9 (42.86%)	1.43	.49
2	Are you aware that the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE, 2022) has made changes to their accreditation standards to include an expectation for BSW/MSW students to demonstrate competency in antiracist social work practices?	7 (33.33%)	14 (66.67%)	1.67	.47
3	Have you completed any trainings that discussed antiracist social work practice?	3 (14.29%)	18 (85.71%)	--	--
4	Does your agency have any policies or expectations specifically related to antiracist practices?	Response <i>n</i> (%)		Unsure	
		Yes	No		
		7 (33.33%)	5 (23.81%)		
5	For the following question, please rate your current level of agreement with the following statement: "I feel confident in my	Response <i>n</i> (%)		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree		
		0 (0%)	3 (14.29%)		
			Neither agree nor disagree		
			4 (19.05%)		
			Somewhat agree		
			12 (57.14%)		
			Strongly agree		
			2 (9.52%)		

understanding of what antiracist social work practice is."

Question #	Question text	Response <i>n</i> (%)					<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree		
6	For the following question, please rate your current level of agreement with the following statement: "I feel prepared to utilize antiracist social work practices in my work."	0 (0%)	2 (9.52%)	4 (19.05%)	12 (57.14%)	3 (14.29%)	3.76	.81
		Response <i>n</i> (%)			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure				
7	Do you anticipate having any challenges in utilizing antiracist social work practices in your own practice with individuals/clients/families/groups/communities?	2 (9.52%)	6 (28.57%)	13 (61.90%)	2.19	.59		
8	Do you anticipate having any challenges in utilizing antiracist social work practices in your agency?	1 (4.76%)	16 (76.19%)	4 (19.05%)	2.14	.47		
9	Do you anticipate having any challenges in utilizing antiracist social work practices in your community?	3 (14.29%)	9 (42.86%)	9 (42.86%)	2.29	.70		
10	I would be interested in attending ongoing focus groups through the BSW program related to expanding knowledge and awareness of antiracist practices in our local communities.	10 (47.62%)	7 (33.33%)	4 (19.05%)	1.71	.76		



Question #	Question text	Response			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		Yes	No	Unsure		
11	I would be interested in attending future trainings or CEUs related to antiracism and anti-oppressive social work practices.	16 (76.19%)	4 (19.05%)	1 (4.76%)	1.29	.55
12	I would be interested in serving on an advisory board for the BSW Practicum Program related to antiracism and anti-oppression.	6 (28.57%)	8 (38.10%)	7 (33.33%)	2.05	.79

*Note.* M = mean; SD = standard deviation; NASW = National Association of Social Workers; BSW = Bachelor of Social Work; MSW = Master of Social Work; CEU = continuing education unit.

**Table 4.7***Community Member Postsurvey (n = 20)*

Question #	Question text	Response n (%)					<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree		
1	I feel confident in my understanding of what antiracism means.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (15%)	17 (85%)	4.85	.36
2	I feel confident in my understanding of what antiracist social work practice means.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (25%)	15 (75%)	4.75	.43
3	I understand the recent changes to the NASW Code of Ethics regarding expectations for social workers to engage in antiracist social work practice.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	19 (95%)	4.95	.22
4	I understand the importance of practicing as an antiracist social worker.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	18 (90%)	4.90	.30
5	I understand the recent changes to the CSWE EPAS (2022) and the expectations for students to demonstrate antiracist social work practices in all accredited BSW and MSW programs.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (20%)	16 (80%)	4.80	.40
6	I understand the recent changes to the CSWE EPAS (2022) and the expectations for all accredited BSW and MSW programs to teach and prepare students to practice as antiracist social workers.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	18 (90%)	4.90	.30

Question #	Question text	Response <i>n</i> (%)					<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
		Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree		
7	If I have a BSW or MSW intern planned with me or within my agency, I would feel comfortable discussing and supporting them in their antiracist social work practice development.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	5 (25%)	14 (70%)	4.65	.57
8	I feel comfortable talking to others in my agency about antiracist social work practices and expectations.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	9 (45%)	10 (50%)	4.45	.59
9	I feel confident that I can utilize resources to support my ongoing growth and understanding of antiracist social work practices.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15%	85%	4.85	.36
10	I am interested in taking additional trainings related to antiracist and anti-oppressive social work practices.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (15%)	17 (85%)	4.85	.36

*Note.* *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; NASW = National Association of Social Workers; CSWE = Council on Social Work Education; EPAS = Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards; BSW = Bachelor of Social Work; MSW = Master of Social Work.

### ***Qualitative Data***

Some questions on the community member postsurvey that offered participants an opportunity to provide narrative responses. Some supportive qualitative findings are included in this subsection as evidence of the efficacy of the training itself. In their postsurvey responses (all provided in March 2023), community members shared the following:

*The subject of anti-racist [sic] was very well explained. I was able to learn more about understanding the topic coming out of the fear zone. In my experience as a social worker, I have become aware that I am still in the fear zone, and I now want to go to the learn zone [sic] and the growth zone so I can talk more openly about this.*

*Important takeaways were strategies I can use in my practice to learn how to be an antiracist and reflect on thoughts and feelings that I come across to identify racism.*

*I feel that after this training I could share with my institution helpful ways we train and hold staff conversations.*

### ***Relevance to Practicum***

These insights are also relevant when planning for training for practicum instructors and planning for future training for community partners. General feedback was also obtained by an evaluation provided at the end of the community training and through conversation during and after the training. In general, the feedback was positive and supportive and validated the AR team members' perspectives that including community partners on the journey was essential and relevant. Further, programmatic changes and faculty teachings effectively conveyed the urgency and importance of social work programs adopting an antiracist framework. It is essential to continue to share this knowledge throughout the curriculum and directly from faculty.

## Overall Study: System-Level Findings

### **Finding 7: Multilevel Interventions Must Be Implemented Simultaneously and Collaboratively to Effect Meaningful Change**

*Discussions are so valuable. I mean, because it's one of those things where, when we get to talk about oh, I'm doing this in my class, and this is how I've seen students respond to it, it just helps the whole program grow from the from the top down. But, you know, if we as faculty, if we are sharing our ideas and our share of our successes and our challenges, then every course can benefit. So, I mean, if we don't have those conversations, we live in silos. And we have to encounter the challenge on our own time to come up with our own solutions. And students suffer as a result. (TM 5 EOP interview, May 2023)*

Conversations, assignments, and activities should be discussed and interwoven throughout all aspects of the implicit and explicit curriculum to maximize ongoing learning and transformative growth. The changes and interventions the AR team implemented across multiple levels effectively impacted students and promoted their increased knowledge of antiracist theory and practices. Moreover, faculty learning and growth is interrelated with student learning and growth. These interventions should be integrated into the curriculum as standard practices and as sustained change. The students who participated in these interventions also verbalized an understanding of cultural humility and the ethical obligation for social workers to practice cultural humility as part of antiracist/anti-oppressive social work. This understanding was fostered through various interventions across implicit and explicit curriculum changes.

The AR team discerned several important takeaways from the findings, including (a) the importance of fostering discussion opportunities in classes, (b) reducing class sizes to promote more discussion opportunities, (c) expanding opportunities to “do” through practice, and (e)

integrating takeaways and reflections into conversations with classmates, faculty, and practicum instructors. These findings reflect the importance of multilevel, simultaneous interventions to promote action and foster change.

Knowledge was effectively conveyed, and faculty shared the professional call for social workers to engage in antiracist social work practice. It is essential to continue to share this knowledge throughout the curriculum and to increase opportunities across the curriculum to practice and apply the knowledge. Examples of such opportunities include case scenarios, role playing, simulation, and practicum experiences and correlating discussions.

**Finding 8: The Transformative Critical Race Framework Is Effective for Implementing Change Towards an Antiracist BSW Program**

*We are always opening, allowing ourselves the space to grow and learn.* (TM 1 EOP interview, May 2023)

Transforming a program towards antiracism is a progressive and ongoing journey, just as it is for individuals. Faculty must continue to engage in ongoing learning and growth and embrace new moments of discomfort, including pushback from administration or resistance from a student. The intentional implementation of CRT- and TLT-informed changes and interventions provided opportunities for students to learn and engage in the learning of antiracist theory and the demonstration practice. Additionally, the theory-informed changes to the explicit curriculum through the course content and materials utilized were effective and impactful in fostering transformative growth for students and faculty. This comment from an AR team member reflects the importance of our approach to effect change:

*So, I think my biggest takeaway was just how productive it was, how productive this whole process was, you know, whenever, whenever you mentioned, you're doing your*

*research, and I kind of thought it was going be like, oh, yeah, we'll have some findings at the end of it. But it was so productive. Like, we actually had some legitimate changes. I think I had several legitimate changes. So, I was surprised at how, how much actually came from [this project].* (TM 5 EOP interview, May 2023)

### Conclusions and Critical Takeaways

The data-informed findings provided robust feedback and insights for the team to analyze reflect upon, especially when deliberating on the conclusions of this study. Summarized in Table 4.8 are the large-scale conclusions that the AR team developed through the integration of the findings from each level. These conclusions serve as a culmination of the project's findings and provide a comprehensive summary of our critical takeaways.

**Table 4.8**

#### *Conclusions and Critical Takeaways*

Conclusion based on findings	Critical takeaway
1) A simultaneous, multilevel approach to change, with multiple interventions, is essential to transform a program into an antiracist program, including interventions at the system/program, faculty, student, and community levels.	There is an invisible web of interconnection that requires simultaneous learning, growth, and reflection at every level.
2) The integration of CRT and TLT as a theoretical guiding framework and the utilization of CRT tenets and best practices from TLT to guide interventions was effective in fostering perspective transformation in faculty and students.	Perspective transformation towards antiracism is possible with intentional learning, critical reflection, and willingness.
3) Becoming antiracist, as a system or individual, is an ongoing journey that involves intentional and purposeful engagement in fear, learning, and growth, achieved through doing.	Becoming antiracist is an ongoing, cyclical journey that is only achievable through action.

The AR team focused on developing critical takeaways, stemming from the conclusions, to help contribute to third-person learning. In consideration of the complexity of this study, it was important for the team to streamline the critical takeaways that others could utilize when understanding the relevance of this study for making changes towards becoming antiracist.

**Critical Takeaway #1: There Is an Invisible Web of Interconnection That Requires Simultaneous Learning, Growth, And Reflection at Every Level**

*How important [it is] that it needs to be integrated across the entire thread of the program, right across the core curriculum across faculty across classes. But also one of the things we talked about was this sort of simultaneous change and growth, right? Imagine if we were like, we couldn't separate the changes, right? It's okay, well, we'll start with students, and then we'll start with faculty, and they will do it in the like it needed. Like it has to be happening at the same time, because it's all so integrated, like our learning is impacting the students learning, right, our learning is also impacting the changes we make at the program. Um, so if you weren't sort of doing these, like, I think like little, you know, change, like, one of mine was the word I'm, like, you know, gears like gears a little turning at the same time to get that change in motion. (TM 1 EOP interview, May 2023)*

TM 3 shared a similar perspective in their EOP interview:

*I think we continue to make sure that it is woven through the curriculum, that it's not the voice of people who are teaching the diversity class. It's not. And I think we are doing that, you know, what level we're doing that we don't know. But I do think everybody's having that conversation. So, I think it's important to be elements throughout the curriculum. And that various voices are saying, I think it's so important for people to*



*hear about anti oppressive work through older white women through younger white women through white men through you know, so those are the voices, it makes a difference. So, I think that piece is important to continue. And I think we need to continue to assess ourselves and challenge ourselves to be better. Like we can't It rests on this project guiding us that this needed to be this needed to be part of our work as a program.*

(May 2023)

The AR team views this takeaway as essential for future practice, policy, and research. Analysis of the data indicated that changes at every level, simultaneously, helped to foster change at the individual, group, and system levels. The team recognizes that interventions implemented at only one level at a time would not have had sufficient influence or impact to foster growth and change.

### **Critical Takeaway #2: Perspective Transformation Towards Antiracism Is Possible With Intentional Learning, Critical Reflection, and Willingness**

As illustrated in the theoretical framework depicted in Figures 4.1 and 4.2, the AR team devised a set of essential pillars, and spaces in between them, that are vital to the change process of becoming antiracist. The data informed us that this theoretically grounded framework offers a model with action steps that others can utilize to create opportunities for perspective transformation, growth, and change.

As TM 3 shared in an AR team meeting in May 2023, *“I appreciate the discussion of being antiracist expanded beyond the responsibility of faculty of color.”* This statement was a powerful reminder of the importance of shared, intentional learning and responsibility. In regard to students’ transformative growth, TM 5 shared,

*I have noticed since we've been so intentional about this, like when I reflected on this graduating class, and previous classes, I mean, it's light years difference, you know, like, this class is substantially just better informed about antiracism, anti-oppressive practice. Whereas, you know, we were to poll graduates from even 2, 3 years ago, they might be in the camp of like, I don't even know what that word means quite yet. So, so that's really promising just from the discussions, the students have much better grasp than in previous classes would have. (Final AR team meeting, May 2023)*

Similarly, when considering growth among students, faculty, and the profession overall, TM 3 shared this perspective on antiracism work:

*I think it's not just the students, this is us as faculty and us as a profession, that we have a better grasp, as we're talking about, we're given definitions that are helpful and material. That's helpful. (Final AR team meeting, May 2023)*

Community members also recognized the importance of intentionality in practice and application, as indicated in the postsurvey results: “*Intentionally advocating and confronting racist systems and policies at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels*” (CM postsurvey, March 2023).

### **Critical Takeaway #3: Becoming Antiracist Is an Ongoing, Cyclical Journey That Is Only Achievable Through Action**

The data consistently indicated that one cannot move through the cycle of change without taking action. Knowledge and learning are essential pillars, but putting the knowledge into action is what helps allows someone to move through the cycle (as depicted in Figures 4.1 and 4.2).

*Even as we're kind of coming to an end of this of this research project, like I'm still every time we meet and talk about it and thinking how can I improve next semester? How can I*

*improve the summer semester? Like it's, it's like this. It's this neat kind of opening? Every time we have the conversation, it opens my mind, like, how can I do better still? (TM 5 EOP interview, May 2023)*

*I definitely want to continue to read more material from leading experts in this topic. I mean, that was so, so awesome at the very beginning to read that book. And I felt like that was a really good kind of foundation. And so I would love to consume more content, whether it's Ted Talks, or CEs or workshops. Yeah, I mean, there's so much more professional development that I can do. So I will commit to continuing my anti racist kind of professional development. I can hold myself accountable for that. (TM 5 EOP interview, May 2023)*

Further, community members demonstrated their understanding of the ongoing aspect of the journey through post-survey feedback, describing antiracist social work practice as “*A growth opportunity and long-lasting process to educate, advocate, and promote antiracist comments, policies, and livelihood*” (CM postsurvey, March 2023).

Due to its action-oriented approach, AR as the research methodology was extremely conducive to the unique needs and complexities of this research project. By engaging in theory-informed interventions and the utilization of an AR methodology, the AR team was able to engage in meaningful critically reflective exercises and reflect-in-action, as reflected by this team member’s reflection:

*And, again, I think, hopefully really reflects the methodology of accent research that kind of allows for that. And, and, you know, well paired with what we were doing, right? I mean, it really is a research project that would be the most productive with this type of methodology. So that's why they use action researchers, and they want you to learn how*

*to be in the action and doing the research at the same time. So, we really lived that, haven't we? I mean, we're doing it, we're learning, we're applying and we're doing it in the moment.* (TM 1 EOP interview, May 2023)

### **Implications for Future Practice and Policy**

The findings from this project are relevant when considering future practice and policy development. As previously indicated, the data-informed findings provided numerous action steps and implications for this BSW program as well as other programs wishing to implement a similar journey. The changes to the BSW program implemented through this project will be maintained and expanded to continue to the journey of becoming antiracist. Policies within the program have been reviewed and will be revised and updated in alignment with feedback from the data to support best practices for antiracist practice and pedagogy.

The data-informed findings have significantly guided first- and second-person learning for future practice within our BSW program, specifically at the micro (student) and macro (program) levels. These findings have emphasized the importance of utilizing the newly developed theoretical perspective of the transformative critical race framework as a consistent lens for making all program decisions, including assessing and understanding the needs, goals, and infrastructure of the implicit and explicit curriculum, and for informing and applying practice and policy changes through consistent reflection, discussion, and integration. The findings are also relevant for third-person learning for practice and policy. The AR team is hopeful that the findings will offer insight and relevant guidance from a theory-informed perspective to help guide practice and policy in other social work programs.

Consistent insights from the data analyzed at the individual and system levels have informed changes to the implicit and explicit course curriculum within the program and for the

practicum education program. The findings have also guided changes in practice at the group and faculty levels to continue to foster second-person learning. In an effort to expand such learning opportunities, faculty members have also committed to the ongoing expansion and sharing of knowledge through collaboration with other social work education programs and content experts as an ongoing practice to help promote the continuing process of becoming antiracist at the individual, group, and system levels.

The practicum program will also continue to focus on sharing knowledge and clearly expressing the BSW program's focus on embodying antiracist and anti-oppressive best practices. In addition, the program will communicate expectations for students, both individually and in collaboration with the BSW program and their respective agency sites and agency instructors, to learn, demonstrate, and espouse antiracist and anti-oppressive practices. Similar emphasis will be communicated to community partners.

The findings have also elucidated changes to policies at the system (programmatic) level. The AR team suggests that these findings are also relevant for third-person learning in guiding and informing policy development in other social work education programs and similar settings. The findings have collectively demonstrated that it is critical to convey an intentional and powerful collective position as an antiracist and anti-oppressive program. This stance must then be strengthened through the foundational aspects of the program, such as through the implicit and explicit curriculum and through faculty teaching practices. Accordingly, the AR team has recognized the importance of utilizing a transformative critical race framework for making decisions regarding programmatic policies to help ensure that policies are aligned with best practices for antiracist and anti-oppressive pedagogy and practice.

## Theoretical and Research Implications

### Connection to Previous Research Findings

The findings of our study align with previous empirical studies that also utilized an integrated theoretical framework of critical and transformative theories. In reviewing the findings and conclusions of the previous studies in connection to our own, the team found correlating and relevant themes, which are summarized in Table 4.9. Further, the team suggests that our study's findings make meaningful contributions to the scholarly literature, as our findings support and extend those of previous studies.

**Table 4.9**

#### *Connections to Previous Studies*

Previous studies	Theoretical framework	Findings of previous studies	Thematic connections to current study
Lorenzetti et al. (2019)	Critical pedagogy and transformational learning theory (TLT)	Provided an eight-step transformative experiential learning model for graduate social work students, guided by the integrated theories of critical pedagogy and TLT. Findings from the model suggested increases in students' critical consciousness, personal growth, and development.	Critical consciousness; action-step model
Pittman and Gioia (2019)	TLT/cultural learning	Utilized the 10 phases of TLT as the guide for influencing change in students, specifically in an immersive diversity course. Students shared transformations in perspectives that were fostered through experiential	Disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection and dialogue

Previous studies	Theoretical framework	Findings of previous studies	Thematic connections to current study
		learning and intentional practice of critical reflection.	
Rojas (2018)	CRT, transformative leadership, and critical teacher leadership	Integrated theoretical framework studied how teachers committed to social justice through their leadership within and outside of their classrooms. Findings indicated that all teachers worked to disrupt existing school stratification systems, as guided by theory-informed practices.	Disruption of preexisting standards/expectations; stress and discomfort
Walton-Fisette et al. (2018)	Transformational learning/social justice/critical theory	Study focused on understanding transformational pedagogies utilized to teach social justice and sociocultural issues, guided by transformative pedagogy. The findings indicated that the use of theory-informed practices helped promote learning of complex topics, such as social justice and sociocultural issues.	Intentional and explicit curriculum; teachable moments; resistance and constraints; perspective transformation

Our study's findings connect to those of Lorenzetti et al.'s (2019) study, which confirmed that an eight-step transformative experiential learning model (guided by critical pedagogy and TLT) was effective in promoting critical consciousness, personal growth, and development in students. This finding aligns with our own supporting the transformative critical race framework as an action-step model, guided by the integrated tenets of TLT and CRT, and its effectiveness in supporting student growth, development, and increase in critical consciousness.

Similarly, the findings from Pittman and Gioia's (2019) study connect to our findings as they utilized the 10 phases of TLT to guide interventions in an effort to support perspective transformation in students in an international immersion course on diversity. Their findings support the efficacy of TLT-informed interventions in promoting perspective transformation and growth in students, especially highlighting the efficacy of disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, and dialogue. Our study's findings also support the efficacy of TLT-informed interventions and the impact of facilitating disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, and dialogue for students to support transformative learning and growth around complex learning topics such as antiracism.

The study by Rojas (2018) utilized an integration of CRT, transformative leadership, and critical teacher leadership theories to explore teachers' experiences in teaching social justice issues within and outside of their classrooms. The findings suggested consistency in experiences amongst teachers, specifically in their collective efforts to disrupt the status quo in an effort to create change. Other thematic findings included chronic stress, high rates of burnout, and discomfort in managing the challenges within the preexisting system when focused on teaching social justice issues, especially with vulnerable and minority populations. These findings resonated with our current study in the need that we ascertained to disrupt current expectations and standards, as well as the struggles of navigating systemic barriers. Similarly, the respondents' perceived stress and discomfort also resonated as consistent themes in our data-informed findings.

Finally, Walton-Fisette et al.'s (2018) findings also correlated with ours in several recurring themes. In their study exploring the teaching practices of physical education (PE) teachers focused on teaching social justice and sociocultural issues, transformational learning,



social justice and critical theories were used as a framework for understanding effective practices. Walton-Fisette et al. (2018) identified themes of intentional and explicit curriculum, teachable moments, and resistance and constraints. These themes correlated to our study's findings, as intentionality and explicit curriculum changes were both theory-informed practices and interventions utilized in our study and also highlighted in our findings. Our study also highlighted the importance of learning through teachable moments, as discussed in classroom discussions with students and AL meetings with faculty. Further, resistance and constraints were discussed in our study's findings as parallel experiences for both students and faculty, as were the realities of navigating these challenges. Lastly, the focus on perspective transformation was aligned in both studies, as both reiterated the importance of facilitating perspective transformation to help shift perspectives in an effort towards growth.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The AR team believes that the transformative critical race framework, depicted in Figure 4.1 and detailed in Figure 4.2, serves as a helpful, theoretically grounded action model for change. As our findings find correlations in those of previous empirical studies, as described in Table 4.9, the AR team believes that the findings from this study are consistent and can contribute meaningfully to future research. Although this framework was used in an undergraduate social work education program, the AR team believes that due to their theoretical significance, the elements of the framework can be utilized in other systems, including those outside of an educational program, to effect change.

### **Limitations**

In addition to reflecting on the findings, conclusions, and implications of the study, the AR team also discussed overall limitations of the study. While Chapter 2 highlighted the

limitations of the research from a methodological perspective, it is relevant to discuss other identified study limitations when considering implications for future research.

### **Theoretical Limitations**

Chapter 1 provided an extensive overview of TLT and CRT, including their limitations and identified gaps in the literature. It is equally important to recognize the relevant limitations of this study given this theoretical perspective. Transformative learning theory is a well-researched, grounded theory that provides a relevant framework for understanding perspective transformation, disorienting dilemmas, and, ultimately, growth through transformative change. However, due to its subjectivity, it is important to recognize how interventions are open to interpretation by those developing and implementing them. For example, what may seem a highly critically reflective exercise to one faculty member may not be viewed the same way by another. Another example concerns the interpretation of data-informed findings. Assessing growth and change through a TLT lens and from qualitative data can be highly subjective and based on individual characteristics and positionality.

When assessing transformative change, there is inherent subjectivity, as everyone is at different starting points—for example, one of our White students raised in a highly conservative home versus a BIPOC student raised in a more diverse community. Are we measuring change itself or overall outcomes? Due to this awareness of positionality and varying starting points among both students and faculty, our team was intentional in using the *Becoming Antiracist* (Figure 3.1) framework and spectrum-based measurement for assessing change, and we utilized evidence-based practices and tools for analyzing qualitative data. However, there is still considerable room for subjective interpretation, and continued efforts to develop tools for

measuring change through a TLT lens would be helpful for addressing this limitation in future research.

Similarly, CRT is also a well-grounded theory that has been widely utilized in many subject areas, as detailed in Chapter 1. Nonetheless, a profound and relevant limitation of its implementation is the current political climate and divisiveness that has driven fear and misunderstanding surrounding CRT. The team discussed these concerns throughout the study and reflected on whether utilizing CRT would impact receptiveness to third-person learning or even foster backlash from administration or community members. Ultimately, the team decided that the value and relevance of CRT as a guiding theory outweighed potential concerns. However, given the ongoing attention to CRT and the implications of that politicization, it is important to recognize and consider the potential limitations of utilizing CRT when considering third-person learning and future research. As TM 4 shared, *“This work done in this program, is done in a college and community that is conservative, dismissive of an anti-oppressive agenda and led by political leaders whose agenda is anti-immigrant, anti-woke, anti-critical race and anti-Black”* (May 2023). This statement was a powerful reminder of the context of the political climate in which this study was completed and the future implications of such environments as we continue on the journey.

When reflecting on the project as a whole and during the end-of-project (EOP) interviews, it was important for us as faculty and AR team members to consider whether any implicit fears or hesitations driven by the undertones of utilizing CRT (in a conservative town and state) may have impacted our thinking and, ultimately, our practices. *Did we hold back in class discussions? Were we too tentative in grading papers? Could we have been even bolder? Were we afraid that a student would report us? Did we overinflate positive student feedback*

*during data analysis?* Similarly, because the changes implemented were secondary to requirements by our accrediting body, CSWE (2022), this mandate provided an invisible shield behind which we can teach, espouse, practice, and research topics of racism and antiracism. However, for future research, non-social work programs would likely need to consider navigating backlash or opposition from administrations or other entities in the absence of unwavering support from an accrediting body.

### **Contextual Limitations**

The AR team also explored all aspects of the study to recognize other potential limitations. As discussed elsewhere, the composition of the AR team, which included only social work faculty, posed inherent limitations. Although the cohesiveness and collaborative efforts of the team during all cycles of the project were helpful, the lack of differing perspectives and experiences among us is a limitation. Additionally, as social workers, all members of the team had a personal belief in the meaning and value of the research project. The collective belief in the importance of antiracist practices certainly created a strong perspective, shared by all team members, that could have created blind spots at different points in the project. Specifically, the team discussed whether this inherent belief system may have exerted implicit influence during the intervention planning and implementation phases and the data collection and analysis phases. Although all team members made extensive effort to maintain objectivity, we also acknowledge the influence of subconscious belief systems in decision making, assessment, and analysis.

Additionally, recognizing this singular focus and collective belief system is relevant for others to consider from a third-person learning perspective. Other programs, both social work and other types, may not garner the same level of internal support for similar projects, which could also provide additional opportunities for implicit bias and influence. Given the sensitivity

and vulnerability required to study the topics of racism and antiracism, the possibility of utilizing an external consultant to provide insight and feedback during the planning and implementation phases and to contribute during the data collection and analysis phases was discussed as a potential resource for future research to help address underlying biases from any perspective.

We also recognize another limitation to obtaining truthful responses from students during various qualitative data collection opportunities. The inherent power dynamic between faculty and current students may have prevented students from being fully transparent at times. The team acknowledges that having a non-social work faculty member on the team might have encouraged students' willingness to be fully honest in their responses, especially during the student focus groups and other student-focused sessions.

Finally, another contextual limitation identified by the team is that the changes enacted as part of the research project were also prompted by requirements from our accrediting body, CSWE (2022). Although this was helpful for motivating large-scale changes, earlier than the required timeframe set forth by the CSWE (2022), it also likely impacted the team's overall perspectives on the project. All team members were very agreeable and engaging throughout the process. However, it remains an open question whether participation and enthusiasm might have been different had the changes not been "required" in some capacity. We recognize the importance of this limitation, particularly for non-social work programs. There are generalizable takeaways from this research for third-person learning that can be relevant for other programs of study, similar to how our study referenced many research projects from the field of education. If non-social work programs were to utilize our study's findings, theoretical framework, and logic model, considering collective "buy-in" in situations where such programmatic changes are not

required would be important, and integrating additional tools to encourage and increase participation and support might be necessary.

### **Summary: A Parallel Transformational Journey**

The journey of both the core and thesis projects of this AR study has been transformative. I have grown as a social work educator and as an AR practitioner. I have learned so much about the process of becoming antiracist and teaching antiracist social work practice while, simultaneously, learning deeply about the process of AR and consistent self-reflection. I realize that the same journey of fear, learning, and growth applies to my thesis project and my own journey as a developing researcher. The journey was greatly appreciated, attesting to the importance of being brave and bold in leading meaningful change.

Similarly, the simultaneous, multilevel interventions also created a parallel journey for students and faculty, as several AR team members expressed in their EOP interviews: “*Yeah, that's another great parallel, students fear classmates and faculty. Faculty fear other professionals and administration*” (TM 1 EOP interview, May 2023). Regarding students and faculty, TM 4 concurred, stating that “*In truth, our learning processes in some ways are not different at all*” (EOP interview, May 2023).

The faculty began this journey into the unknown with identified fears of backlash and resistance from administration. Students also began their journey in the unknown, with concerns about power differentials and discomfort with faculty and/or practicum instructors. Students and faculty continued on the journey of building trust in oneself, one another, and in the process itself. Each person has their own starting point, their own pathways through fear, learning, and growth, but shared partnership and mutual respect is an essential component of the journey and

was paralleled in the AR process itself. As TM 4 shared, “*It's not just our journey, it's going to be their journey*” (EOP interview, May 2023).

### **Reflections**

Reflecting on this “becoming” journey, from start to almost finish, provided insights and takeaways about the journey itself. The parallel journey of becoming antiracist while also becoming a doctoral student turned doctoral candidate turning Doctor of Education unknowingly helped me integrate the tenets of TLT that were such a guiding framework for this study.

### **Individual Reflective Insights**

All AR team members were asked to share their biggest takeaways from engaging in this AR study. In this section, their feedback and insights as they describe their biggest individual learnings are provided.

#### ***TM 1***

I experienced my own disorienting dilemmas, as part of the research itself and as part of the process, that I believe have collectively contributed to my overall learning and transformative growth as an antiracist social worker, educator, and action researcher (Mezirow, 1978). The most provocative disorienting dilemma for me during the project occurred when TM5 and I facilitated the community-based training on antiracist teaching practice. I remember feeling fear and anxiety about how it would be received by community members who were in attendance voluntarily—unlike students, who are required to attend classes. My anxiety spiked when the training began and I realized that there were two Black female attendees whom I did not know. I immediately (internally) panicked. I worried that they did not know me, or my intentions. *What if they challenged the information I was sharing, questioning me as a researcher AND as a White*

*female?* I doubted myself and my value. I immediately, and almost innately, felt myself revert back to the fear zone on the *Becoming Antiracist* spectrum (Figure 3.1).

As the training proceeded, I was almost immediately proven wrong. These attendees participated, validated, and supported all aspects of the training. Their engagement was invaluable as they shared and strengthened the presentation, alongside many other attendees. I actively engaged with both of the attendees in a lengthy and meaningful conversation after the training, as they shared their hopes and intentions to partner with our program and attend future trainings provided by our program. However, although appreciated, feeling validated as a presenter was not disorienting. Through intensive reflection, I recognized that the disorientation and transformative growth from this experience were grounded in my fear of being challenged by the collective response and engagement from the audience, especially the two women of color. Instead of seeing myself as an advocate dedicated to the objective work of antiracist social justice, I saw myself as an imposter who was not equipped to be presenting on this topic. This awareness helped me to see my role as an advocate, educator, and social worker differently, especially regarding social justice work.

This parallel transformative journey was also highlighted in the learning experience of conducting this project. As we asked our students to embrace antiracist practices, defined by action and doing, I realized how much that directly applied to me as well. I am not an expert on racism or antiracism. I am not a person of color. I am not a 20-year veteran action researcher. But I am a professional social worker, educator in higher education, and doctoral student who cares profoundly about teaching and leading others towards antiracism, whether that be students in our program, graduate interns, community members, or other social work professionals/educators. This experience and subsequent reflection served as a disorienting



dilemma that drastically shifted how I saw myself and my role in this journey and validated my seat at the table. I recognized that I will not always get it right, but my willingness to learn and try embraces vulnerability and an invitation to be part of the journey. I was encouraged to challenge my preexisting belief of fear and dismissal and journey towards belief and support.

## **TM 2**

TM 2 recognized many areas of growth, which they described as their biggest takeaway when reflecting on the project overall:

*I went into this endeavor fully aware that I had much to learn about myself as an individual and that this learning would be essential to preparing to teach and evaluate students on competency 3. I have learned far more than I ever imagined and feel that the learning and growth must continue, as it is truly a journey, not a destination. After decades as a professional social worker committed to cultural competency, it has been illuminating to learn there is much more to being an anti-racist and that "cultural competence" is a standard that falls far short as a standard for social workers individually and collectively. I have been humbled and proud to work alongside my colleagues as we took on the challenge of reflecting on ourselves, our program, and how we both succeed and fail. It has not been an easy task, but I believe we have benefitted tremendously. (EOP interview, May 2023)*

## **TM 3**

TM 3 described several individual takeaways that had contributed to their learning experience. The first was that “*if I want to be intentional, that there's so many resources, and people who are further along than I would love to continue being a learner and being in the process.*” A second was that the experience “*has raised conscious [sic], it's been a conscious*

raising exercise for students, agency instructors, and our faculty” (TM 3 EOP interview, May 2023).

#### **TM 4**

TM 4 shared several significant individual learning moments, described below:

*I would completely agree with what you said about sort of that discomfort about stepping into this process and feeling like you should even have a voice at the table. But I have learned that it's also unfair to think that this problem only belongs to the group, when they're not the ones who perpetuate it. And actually, like, literally don't have the power to not perpetuate it.*

*I've gained a lot of knowledge, to just from the tools and materials that have brought you brought from this research. Because while I would have said, I know, from my studies over many years, a lot about racism, the materials we've gone through show just how sort of deep and insidious it can get, and sometimes even in ways that you don't think too much about because I'll be honest, I've never thought too much in general about, say, What if our field instructors are being racist? Because you're going to go, well, they're social workers, I should not be, that sounds – You know, their students feel like they're being treated differently than their classmates or, to the books we have validate the experiences of people like them. (EOP interview, May 2023)*

#### **TM 5**

TM 5 also shared their biggest learning moment:

*The biggest thing that I learned about myself from an individual perspective is that it is okay to talk about these things, even though I'm not necessarily the vulnerable population. So, like, for a long time, I always kind of felt like who am I to talk about race*

*and equity? And does it look like I'm just virtue signaling. And so I mean, I think that I learned because of the research that we were doing, because of the readings that we were doing, because the conversations we were having, that it's okay to talk about race and acknowledge that there could have been things that I've said that will be seen as racist. There could have been times where I should have spoke [sic] out against something. Yeah, you know, when I read the book where it talked about how he had had moments of racism in his life, that he perpetuated as a black man, right? And that was so validated to hear like, okay, you can have these little moments where you're like, man, that sucked. I could have done a lot better, but it doesn't define your identity. And it means that there's this constant growth that can happen. That was probably the biggest influence on me.*

(EOP interview, May 2023)

### **Group Reflective Insights**

The AR team also highlighted moments of transformative disorientation that were critical to their individual transformative growth and, ultimately, the findings of the study.

TM 1's takeaway highlights the dynamic impact of our individual growth as faculty on our students through our teaching. Our willingness to push through fear and discomfort and embrace change creates an opportunity for others to do the same. It also models one of the most core principles of *Becoming Antiracist* (Kendi, 2019): taking action. We recognized, as faculty, that by consistently doing, through implicit and explicit curricular opportunities, we can create a safe space for ourselves and our students to embrace discomfort intentionally through learning, doing, reflecting, and applying.

The importance and relevance of our group conversations in a safe-space was also highlighted as a group takeaway. TM 5 shared that

*The biggest group takeaway for me is, I felt like, every time we had a meeting, there was so much consensus on the way that we felt about different things, and the progress that we were making, and the discomfort that we at times have felt. I just felt like we were so much on the same page. It didn't really ever feel like, you know, there was this sense that like someone had completely figured out 100% of the time, we kind of were struggling together, we were succeeding together. So I just felt like it was very much a, we all had each other's back. (EOP interview, May 2023)*

TM 4 added, “yes, it was a safe learning experience” (EOP interview, May 2023). TM 5 concurred:

*I think that we helped establish that safe environment for each other. Which, you know, I think, is a credit to our personalities, but also a credit to the way that you [referring to lead researcher] formatted the conversation. (EOP Interview, May 2023)*

The value of utilizing an AR methodology for this project was also discussed and affirmed by team members:

*[Thinking about] how embedded I've been in action research since I applied to my program, you know, so to hear your lived experiences and perspectives is neat because I'm so in it, you know, like to hear like, what it created and what it offered and how hopefully it really aligns. It really was a great methodology for the needs of our research. (TM 1 EOP interview, May 2023)*

TM 3 shared their perspective on engaging in the AR process, expressing that “It was a learning exercise for me as well. There are so many things about it I like” (EOP interview, May 2023).

The group also reflected that the project had experienced less pushback or resistance from students than initially had been expected. TM 4 shared that *“I almost expected more pushback from some of our students in a conservative community”* (EOP interview, May 2023).

The importance of being a journey was emphasized as a group learning, with TM 4 sharing that *“it is a journey. That we're not 100% there where we have to ultimately be”* (EOP interview, May 2023).

TM 2 shared an important perspective on the timing and relevance of this study as it relates to the changes from the CSWE EPAS (2022):

*If we hadn't had the structure of the specific project, I think it would have been harder to programmatically to do the work that we needed to do. So, the timing was beautiful when 2 years ago I said what are we going to do? And how do we even begin to approach EPAS when we don't even know ourselves if we're antiracist? It ties in perfectly with what you wanted to talk about. So, I appreciate the project being a good foundation for us to jump from because otherwise we would have had to figure this out on our own.*

(EOP interview, May 2023)

Further, the realization that the journey is ongoing and this study was a starting point for students, faculty, and community members was recognized and discussed. TM 3 shared,

*So, I think the conclusion, whatever conclusion, isn't going to be the conclusion because it's continuously work. And we're going to have students that the light bulbs going to go come on, rather, in the years to come. So, planting the seed is as important as well. Now it's planted. And I think for our faculty as well, I think it's planted to see for us to be more intentional and conscious about what we're doing and what we're saying in our we're*

*walking through this world. So, I think just so many positives [from this study].* (EOP interview, May 2023)

### **Third-Person Reflective Takeaways**

Engaging in this depth of a learning and uncovering process has been immeasurably insightful and meaningful for us as individuals, as faculty, and as part of the BSW program. The team has learned, consistent with AR, that there was much that we did not know and did not realize we would learn. As the project began, we often asked ourselves: *How do we prepare for the unknown?* We realized that we were somewhat prepared for the journey, equipped as we were with social work backgrounds, a passion for social justice and eliminating racism, and our total belief in the applicability of CRT and TLT theories to guide the project. However, upon continuous reflection and discussion of the journey, we realized that preparedness is not a clearly defined, measurable point.

Instead, we have learned to reimagine preparedness as a state of readiness and willingness to push through discomfort and fear and to take action. We have realized that we cannot ever be fully prepared for these large-scale, complex changes, just as social workers can never fully be prepared for their work with clients. However, as we learn to *do* as professional social workers and as we teach our students, we equip ourselves with the knowledge and tools to foster readiness, utilizing an ethical compass and a framework for action steps. Our team has recognized the parallel process of *Becoming Antiracist* and the analogous perspective of preparedness. The findings and conclusions from this research study have given us (and, hopefully, others) the tools to foster readiness for antiracist practice by utilizing an evidence-based logic model and theoretical framework for action steps. Our intention is to continue to utilize this perspective in our ongoing journey, apply it to other transformative change projects,

and to continue to share our knowledge with others, thereby continuing the journey of becoming antiracist through ongoing first-, second-, and third-person learning. TM 3 recognized that this work is valuable and is relevant within social work and for others, sharing in response to TM 1 leading this core and thesis project the following:

*I appreciate your work. And you're you know, like you said no one in your cohort is doing it. We are in social work. There are a lot of people doing it because it's been brought to our attention. So, as we think about the wider audience in the world, which is not just social work, not everybody's having this conversation. So, I appreciate that you've taken it on and helped us. I feel like we make a leap that we wouldn't have necessarily made otherwise. (EOP interview, May 2023)*

### **Final Thoughts**

One finding from a previous study particularly resonated with us, and we have used it to help us stay grounded as we consider the robust work behind us and still ahead. Odera et al. (2021) shared their findings that “transformation occurs through radical resistance. Embracing vulnerability, promoting authentic relationships, and normalizing emotional and cognitive engagement with course content are key takeaways for social work educators” (p. 816). This statement reminded us of the importance of cultivating vulnerability within ourselves, one another, and our students to create a safe space for learning and growth. It also reminded us to focus on what we have always prioritized as social work faculty: nurturing relationships with students and welcoming emotional and cognitive engagement. Social work is an emotionally charged field, and we have recognized that although racial justice work is a “full body experience,” our knowledge and skills and willingness to learn and grow throughout the process

have equipped us to pursue this work (Odera et al., 2021). We hope to instill the same sense of belief and purpose in others.

As we conclude this part of the journey, we collectively reflected on this profound quote from the co-founder of the Hull House, collaborator of John Dewey, and widely regarded mother of social work, Jane Addams: “Nothing could be worse than the fear that one had given up too soon and left on unexpended effort that might have saved the world” (as cited in Bentley, 1960, p. 27). Her words impacted us, imploring us to push through fear, as the changes we lead can positively impact the lives of others. Although changes may seem small or inconsequential at times, the ripple effect is immeasurable; and for that, we must continue to be bold and progress on our journey of *becoming*.



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