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Dangerous associations: Racializing urban communities and the influence of one critical service-learning course to disrupt racist ideological habits

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ABSTRACT

This study examined pre-service teachers' initial perceptions of urban communities and schools. Furthermore, it explored whether engaging in critical service-learning coursework incorporating an anti-racist curriculum disrupted the mechanisms that perpetuate racist ideological habits and associations. The narrative analysis deconstructed 12 participants' reflective essays using a critical race theoretical lens. The overall findings revealed that the participants experience urban communities through racist associations and ideologies promoting white supremacist thinking. The critical service-learning course did influence the perceptions of the participants. However, findings suggest that a single critical service-learning course is insufficient to prepare pre-service teachers with the anti-racist pedagogies necessary for disrupting the ideological habits they bring to the classroom. Therefore, this study concluded that teacher education programs should infuse anti-racist development as an ongoing and progressive aspect of their program.

Introduction

Hidden within the pedagogy, schools and teachers harbor implicit bias. The result of historical oppression, normalized and forgotten unchecked bias destroys opportunity through overt and implicit injuries. Inexperienced practitioners, unaware of their weapons, wield them with indifference inflicting damages that compound and metastasize (Bloom et al., 2015; Ferguson, 2003; Sleeter, 2001, 2012, 2017; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018).

Ladson-Billings (2006) described the damage as an educational debt incurred over generations of oppression. The debt diminishes or eliminates opportunities building an increasingly inequitable school system and growing disparity (Gregory et al., 2010; Kinsler, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Morris & Perry, 2016; Pearman et al., 2019).

Teacher education programs (TEPs) are uniquely situated to significantly reduce the damages incurred due to implicit bias (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006; Sleeter, 2012, 2017). U.S. schools, unlike most institutions, are compulsory and positioned to influence cultural perspectives and ideologies. Providing instruction to pre-service teachers (PSTs), TEPs have the potential to perpetuate or disrupt the ideological habits that preserve systematic and individual bias. Moreover, providing a curriculum that disrupts implicit bias can begin to

disrupt all forms of bias and dismantle institutional oppression. However, the path to anti-racist teaching is long. Furthermore, revealing the systems hidden in the fabric of American mythologies remains an enormous undertaking.

This study analyzed the reflective essays of 12 participants immersed in a critical service-learning (CSL) course targeting first and second-year college students. The CSL course engaged students in an urban classroom environment and complementary coursework designed to promote anti-racist ideologies. The main campus is situated primarily in a rural and suburban community; however, the satellite campus is housed in an urban center. Their assigned field-experiences sites were situated in an urban P-8 or 9–12 public school¹ or urban afterschool programs that serve the local school system. All of the field placements occurred within a Midwestern public school district with a population greater than 175,000 (U.S. Census, 2019). The public school serves a diverse and underserved student population. However, the neighborhood schools in the district tend to have more homogenous populations. For example, one P-8 school population is majority Latinx and incorporates robust English language learner (ELL) programs. In contrast, a few miles away, another P-8 school is predominantly African American. All of the schools share a title I designation² and represent schools where a minimum of 35% of the student population are considered low-income and 86% are eligible for free and reduced food services.

The course content explores rudimentary teaching practices, listening skills, and an anti-racist curriculum rooted in critical race theory. Furthermore, the course content emphasizes growth and developmental mind-sets (Helms, 2007; Howard, 2016). Appendices A and B provide the course's outline and projects that support the CSL experience. The study explored how participants contextualize and perceive urban communities. Furthermore, the research examined if participation in the CSL course influenced their perceptions of urban communities and urban people, as revealed in later essays.

Literature review

Public consciousness stereotypes urban spaces within racist ideologies.³ “Urban” (consciously or unconsciously) exists in racist and socioeconomic terms for much of the general population (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Public consciousness imagines urban communities with images of catastrophe, depravity, and deficiencies (Johnson, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Moule, 2012). Meanwhile, much of the “urban” teaching force, steeped in privilege, exemplifies society's racial and social tensions (Sleeter, 2017). Interrupting the cyclical nature of implicit bias requires teacher education programs to reimagine how they prepare new teachers. Schools, administrators, and teachers willing to confront and disrupt the habits that contribute to ideological oppressions represent a critical alliance for addressing the injuries incurred through systemic oppression (Howard, 2016; Johnson, 2018).

Arising from ideological habits, implicit bias frames the fundamental problem of prolonging the systemic oppression sustained in many urban communities. It emerges as individuals automatically associate another individual's behavior, aptitude, or attitude to their past experiences, knowledge, or socially constructed stereotypes (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Essential to implicit bias is the acknowledgment of its implicit nature; that is, the actor does not recognize nor realize that their perceptions and actions derive from hidden assumptions and hidden ideologies (Fields, 1990; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995).

The resulting social exclusions act as a means to “other” non-dominant groups through social interactions, including discursive language, actions, and inactions (e.g., punitive gaps, presumptions of deficiency) (Johnson, 2018; Lister, 2004; Spivak, 1985). People experience those social exclusions as sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, or racism (among others). Thus, dismantling biased actions in and out of the classroom begins with recognizing the mechanisms that all biased perceptions share. The easy answer is to look to an actor and point out bias as an individual flaw. However, fundamental change requires an intentional examination of the shared mechanisms that create and perpetuate the bias.

Racism provides an appropriate start to examine the mechanisms that create and perpetuate implicit bias. Moreover, it acts as a blueprint for all oppression. As a “master category . . . [it] has become the template of both difference and inequality” (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 106). Race and racism symbolize the tools and processes that the dominant culture employs to subjugate “others” within the society (Spivak, 1985).

Implicit bias formed and continues to re-form from the ideologies developed over generations of White supremacy⁴ (Fields, 1982). The invention of race, racism, and the resulting blueprint for other oppression evolved in a slow progression of habits supporting an ideology structured in centrist and normative thinking (Fields, 1990; Noel, 2018; Omi & Winant, 2015). Fields (1990) explained that “race becomes hereditary” as it passes historically to future generations (p. 101). Systemic oppression, then, passes through familial and social belief systems often hidden from individual awareness as a natural and normal part of life. Yet active in discourse, policy, and perceptions of the populous and polity.

Reframing the concept of implicit bias and racism as ideological and structured in repetitive rituals reimagines racism into ideological habits (Fields, 1990). Like habits, they persist unconsciously; therefore, the actor remains unaware of their biased behavior as they act out their implicit bias. Racism and other bias become invisible in their ritualized repetition, constructing an unconscious and normalized oppression.

Thus, critical race theory (CRT) provides an essential lens to deconstruct how narratives and discourse hide racial biases and ideological habits in written descriptions. Three fundamental CRT tenets serve the analysis of this work. The first tenet proposes that racism exists as an integral part of American society controlling social systems and recognizing that those controls benefit White people and exploit Black and Brown people.⁵

The second tenet critiques “color-blindness,” which attempts to rationalize and ignore how privilege masks oppression. White America’s desire to see equality supersedes the ability to recognize racist practices and policies, deceiving society. Moreover, rugged American individualism and meritocratic principles present society with a false dichotomy. Consequently, many people within American society adhere to the false narrative that racism is a product of individual character rather than rooted in systems of oppression.

Finally, White normativity and White value systems supplant nonwhite value systems, normalizing White culture and “othering” nonwhite cultures. The presumptions born from Whiteness as property⁶ shapes false perceptions and reinforce racist ideologies and assumptions (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Salazar, 2018; Sleeter, 2017; Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

TEPs seeking to dismantle the racist and biased mechanism often fail to provide a curriculum that allows PST to engage in anti-racist work. Berry (1989) described how his observation of racial oppression changed how he and others observed their lived experience. He wrote, “I had done a thing more powerful than I could have imagined at the time; I had scratched the wound of racism, and all of us, our heads beclouded in the

social dream that all is well, we're feeling the pain" (p. 53). Teacher education programs that seek to disrupt implicit bias "scratch the wound of racism" and reveal the ugly truth of privilege and oppression. Unfortunately, too many programs only expose the wound of bias and leave it to fester. Consequently, pre-service teachers and other learning communities either stall in their development or retreat to comfort their racist ideologies (Howard, 2016).

Critical service-learning (CSL) aids learners through the arduous journey to anti-racism (cultural awakening) travels through self-discovery. It includes reflecting on how implicit bias relates to privilege, how social structures (including meritocracy and individualism) preserve privilege and implicit bias, and how attitudes, actions, and assumptions contribute to the culture and systems of oppression (Howard, 2016; Johnson, 2018). Freire (1970) suggested that liberation starts with recognizing the oppression and that noticing oppression becomes the essential catalyst for change. Furthermore, Tatum (1999) concurred when she wrote that "the conflict between noticing something and not noticing generates tension, and there is a great desire to relieve it" (p. 101). Essential to the personal and challenging work to incite a culturally awakened (anti-racist) teaching force is fostering a learning environment that cultivates a re-awakening to ideological habits and a self-reflective posture focused on development (Butin, 2007a; Zeichner et al., 1996).

Sweet's (2018) introduction to cultural humility serves the PST as they begin to shed the dualistic thinking that situates them into a racist not-racist zero-sum game. PSTs learn to recognize their bias and locate it in a continuum focused on growth rather than a personal failure or deficiency. Self-reflective practices create space for PST to engage in communities with a culturally relative positionality.

Self-reflection further serves learners when allowed to examine the structures and policies in authentic settings. Gorski et al. (2013) explained that an essential aspect of developing anti-racist and anti-classist educators rests in the learners' understanding of "threshold concepts" that provide the foundational insights required for more complex and sophisticated approaches to theoretical constructs (p. 4). Those threshold concepts develop more fully when "learners are caught in the dissonance as they grapple with the possibilities of new ways of seeing in the light of old ways of knowing" (Gorski et al., 2013, p. 5). In the broadest sense, disrupting oppressions requires programs to create a learning environment where learners can observe the examples and effects of implicit bias and then have space to resolve their subsequent cultural dissonance (Butin, 2007b).

A critical element to pre-service teacher development relies on its praxis within context (Butin, 2007b). Therefore, providing a space to observe, practice, and exercise the theoretical constructs developed in coursework is vital in creating a meaningful experience for pre-service teachers (Bleicher, 2011; Burant & Kirby, 2002). Historically, field placements have provided that essential component. However, findings suggest that PSTs sometimes leave field placements with unproductive and even damaging habits (Wiggins et al., 2007). The scholarship led Wiggins et al. (2007) to conclude that "[field placement] experiences might do more harm than good" (p. 654).

Therefore, the ideal TEP and service-learning experience seek to develop a transformational experience, "one that embraces the notion of educating teachers as transformative intellectuals around the demand of critical pedagogy and cultural politics" (Giroux, 2005, p. 186). The CSL framework moves students toward a cultural awakening and an anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-sexist, anti-ableist, anti-heterosexist, or a pro-all developmental position. CSL creates space in the classroom that draws from

experiential learning and builds a space to discuss, debate, and critically analyze experiences “foster[ing] [a] democratic apprenticeship” rather than the apprenticeship of observation that often guides public understanding (Butin, 2007b, p. 182). The goal to recognize and disrupt oppression fits within a critical race theoretical lens that builds on tenets focused on dismantling racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Furthermore, the prompted discussions promote self-reflection and discovery as PSTs explore essential elements that lead to an awakened disposition (Greene, 1977).

Embedded in the CSL course work, anti-racist pedagogy rejects the racist, not-racist dichotomies promoting a growth mind-set. Lynch et al. (2017) defined anti-racist education as “a deliberately politicised [sic] pedagogical approach, concerned with confronting systemic and structural oppression” (p. 134). Using a variety of methodologies and approaches, anti-racist educators seek to achieve three fundamental goals. First, they seek to unmask the mechanisms of systemic oppression, making those systems and institutions that oppress visible to the public. Second, they challenge the “distancing and indifference” (Greene, 1977) that allows for the denial of and complicity in the lived realities of oppression. Third, anti-racist pedagogies seek to disrupt and transform institutional inequity (Lynch et al., 2017). Through recognizing and actively disrupting institutional racism, the anti-racist educator creates a place and space for all learners to recognize their power and voice.

The following study used PST narrative essays to explore the following questions:

- (1) What do the participants’ narratives reveal about their overall perceptions of urban communities, schools, and students?
- (2) Does participation in a CSL course shift PST perception of urban communities, schools, and students?
- (3) How are perceptions changed through CSL coursework?

Methodology

The data collected for analysis intentionally drew from participants’ reflections assigned during the CSL course. The researcher categorized all of the participants into alpha-numeric designations for longitudinal analysis. Furthermore, all e-mail correspondence occurred through university analytics, further securing the participants’ anonymity. After successfully attaining IRB approval, the researcher requested that all students who participate in the critical-service learning course between the fall of 2016 and the spring of 2019 receive invitations to participate in the study. University analytics sent invitations to potential participants asking for reflective essays completed during the CSL course offering.

Thirteen participants responded to the e-mail invitation. One participant enrolled in a course that the primary investigator instructed and was eliminated from the research. The remaining 12 participants completed a release form, their documents randomized and anonymized. E-mail notifications and the consent forms informed the participants that participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Furthermore, e-mail notifications and consent forms reminded the participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and provided procedures for their withdrawal.

The study did not collect individual demographic information. Therefore, the participants' race and gender are unknown. However, according to enrollment data, the student population at this public university is 5% Latinx, 4% African American or Black, and 82% White. Therefore, this study made the educated assumptions that a large majority of the PSTs in the sample were White.

The data, scrubbed of all identifiable information from the documents, were categorized and coded. One of the participants did not return the second reflective essay; the study still included their first and third reflective essays for analysis. The missing document from the data was labeled "N/A." The documents were categorized, assigning each participants' reflective essay with a letter from A-L. Then, the researcher coded the reflective essays chronologically with "1," "2," or "3." The researcher could then identify data sets alpha-numerically, allowing for later longitudinal analysis, e.g., "A1" representing participant A's first reflective essay, "A2" representing participant A's second or midterm essay, "A3" representing their third and final reflective essay.

The three reflective essays highlight the beginning, the middle, and the end of the CSL experience. The first reflective essay's prompt asked CSL student participants to describe their perceptions and understanding of "urban" communities. The first essay, assigned on the first day of class, captures the participants' baseline assumptions and perceptions. Subsequent essays use prompts that increasingly required PSTs to confront their epistemic privilege and ideological habits (Fields, 1990).

The narratives exposed the participants' assumptions about urban communities and the students who learn there. Then, as the semester progressed, participants' writings further demonstrated how they resolved their cultural cognitive dissonance when their coursework and field experiences challenged previously held assumptions and ideologies (Howard, 2016). The study conducted a structured analysis examining participants' perceptions of urban communities and revealed persistent racialized associations that may contribute to implicit and explicit biases.

The study approached the collected narratives (data) from a post-structural disposition that created an opportunity to learn from the descriptive nature of participants' lived experiences and construct new knowledge through interpretation after plugging in theory (Giorgi, 2018; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Saukko, 2006).

The initial coding involved becoming familiar with the documents and establishing common language and ideas. Descriptive coding summarized emerging topics throughout the reflective essays. Writing analytic memos created a platform to examine the excerpt while bracketing assumptions. It further checked the researcher's assumptions and created a space to interpret the participants' meaning from the texts without researcher bias.

The second round of coding retained its focus on the descriptive experiences of the participants; again, bracketing the researchers' assumptions protected the integrity of the participants' voices. In round two, the goal was to connect the language with individual perceptions, positionality, and emotional experiences. The study then returned to round one, repeating the coding processes multiple times until the point of saturation, when new topics and themes failed to emerge (Charmaz, 2014).

The coding process "plugged-in" theory deconstructed and examined the language of the narratives through various conceptual and theoretical lenses (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). The critical race theory's tenets of experiential knowledge, the permanence of racism, and

Whiteness as property guided the structural coding process (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Sleeter, 2017). The intentional coding through the CRT lens allowed the subtle and often invisible biases that make racism visible.

The analytic memos explored how the researchers' privilege and position influence the interpretation of the data. Moreover, because the researcher instructed the course, he asked how interpreting data benefits personal interests. These and similar questions guided the data analysis. Finally, the study sought out external expertise to corroborate the findings. Experts in the field reviewed the work, confirming or refuting the findings as appropriate. A reevaluation process examined questionable findings and discussed potential assumptions related to those findings offering insight and clarity. Moreover, maintaining a post-structuralist interpretation allowed for complex findings in the in-between (shedding false dichotomies). Participants in that space could live in their contradictions as a part of the developmental process.

Limitations

The focus of the study centered on an elective class and therefore has some inherent limitations. Participants chose to take a course that focused on diverse communities. The intention to take the course could suggest an intrinsic interest in urban communities that potentially reveals a biased sample. Furthermore, the convenience sample represented participants who took the interest and initiative to respond to the request for documents, then provided those documents for analysis. Data collection dependent on participant cooperation represents an essential component of this research and a limitation to its veracity.

The subset of participants represents past students who may already maintain an interest or concern related to anti-racist or social-justice-oriented education and, therefore, might not represent the perceptions and beliefs of a larger group of CSL students or colleges of education students who chose not to participate in the CSL course offering. Moreover, the sample's demographic background is unknown but presumably homogeneous, considering the Midwest university's demographic make-up. However, it is not clear how the CSL course influences perceptions of Black and Brown pre-service teachers without the demographic data. Finally, the collected documents derive from graded assignments, which are inherently subject to suspicion. Participants, eager to succeed in a course, might write to presumed expectations of the course objectives rather than represent their real thoughts, feelings, or actions regarding "urban" communities (Howard, 2016).

Findings

The thematic analysis showed deep-rooted ideological assumptions about people who live in urban communities. The assumptions, structured in ideological stereotypes (habits) and supported in the media, depicted urban communities as places where primarily Black and Brown people live. Moreover, for many participants, urban areas represented places needing rescue, where disaster is imminent, violence, crime, and catastrophe are synonymous with urban. For example, one participant described urban communities as "Black, poor, less educated, no motivation, higher dropout rate, gangs, dangerous, etc. When I think of an

urban environment my brain immediately thinks “city” (E1). The description exemplifies how socially constructed perceptions seep into the social psyche. This quote is discussed later in more detail.

“Urban” people as Black and Brown

The participants pictured urban residents as predominantly nonwhite (not dominant culture). Because this study occurred in the United States where bias, too often, centers on skin color, all nonwhite, non-dominant cultures will be termed Black or Brown people (although the author recognizes the limits of this term). Although the descriptions vary from minority, e.g., “most of the student population is made of minorities . . . Many students seem to be African-American or Latin American” (B1); to immigrants and racially diverse, “referring to urban school districts, they typically describe students that live around the poverty line, racial and ethnic diversity, immigrants, and linguistic diversity” (D1); participants share the inaccurate assumption that Black and Brown people predominantly inhabit urban communities. (U.S. Census, 2019). Participants’ narratives coded descriptive language (presumably unconsciously), creating racial and racist symbols for “urban” and “poor” (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Recognizing the participants’ assumptions about the racial make-up of urban communities further contextualized their descriptions of urban communities. The shared belief that “a diverse group of kids [and] parents” (H3) signifies a code for Black and Brown people. Participants’ quotes regularly associated “urban” communities with racial diversity. H, for instance, in their first reflective essay, helped clarify “diversity” when they wrote, “an urban community is defined as having a large, dense population size, being very diverse (mostly African American or hispanic [sic])” (H1). Participants overwhelmingly described “urban” as communities of Black or Brown people. The racial perceptions of urban populations shape the participants’ perceptions and their expectations of “urban” communities. Even the participants who did not explicitly describe urban communities within racial generalizations still implied that “urban” places are racially diverse. Participant G, for example, did not explicitly describe urban communities as diverse. Instead, they described their community as “96.9% white,” implying that urban communities are not White and, therefore, diverse (i.e., Black or Brown). Directly or indirectly, 10 of the 12 participants prefaced any other description of “urban” with images of Black and Brown people. Moreover, participant perceptions paired the racialized “urban” with poverty and neglect.

“Urban” communities as poor

Racist assumptions found in participants’ documents also accompanied descriptions of poverty and deprivation. One reflective essay noted that

the main thing that is thought about these schools is that they are poor: the school itself, the areas in which they are located, and the students who attend. The schools themselves are poor in that they lack the resources and finances to hire proper help. (A1)

Later, in the same paper, Participant A emphasized their demographic assumption, “the main word that comes to my mind when thinking about urban schools is poor minority students” (A1). Indeed, all of the participants shared the perception of urban poverty,

for example, “Many students seem to come from low-income homes, with families that are divided” (B1); “The people they feature living in these communities are usually living in poor conditions with little money, food, and education” (K1); “They are low income, high crime, almost dangerous areas to be in” (J1). Similar descriptions thread all of the documents. A deviant analysis assured this finding’s trustworthiness and yielded no examples that did not include poverty as a significant description of urban communities.

“Urban” communities as deficient

One of the more noteworthy findings is the frequency at which participants associate people living in urban communities (whom they describe as mostly Black and Brown people and primarily poor) with presumptions of deficiency (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Again, 10 of the 12 participants constructed the race, poverty, and presumed deficiency associations. A quote highlighted previously further illustrates this finding. “Black, poor, less educated, no motivation, higher dropout rate, gangs, dangerous, etc. When I think of an urban environment, my brain immediately thinks “city” (E1). This quote typifies the regular occurrences of pairing people who live in urban communities (i.e., “Black, poor”) with symbols of deprivation and catastrophe (i.e., “less educated, no motivation, higher dropout rate, gangs, dangerous”).

The pairings paint the people living in urban communities into a portrait of Black and Brown people living with scarcity in depravity. The descriptions range from neglect and apathy, e.g., “Students will come to school in smelly/ dirty clothes and not have eaten since they left school that past day” (H1); “their parents aren’t making an effort to teach them about taking care of their bodies” (E1); to inferior values, immorality, and violence, e.g., “urban students do not want to learn, they do not care about their education, or that they are violent” (G1); “Someone ends up getting arrested or suspended and there may be a teen mom or a drive-by shooting” (D1). The continuous association threads through the research, consciously and unconsciously sewing ideological assumptions into the participants’ thinking, feelings, and actions. The associations veil the ideological habits that perpetuate implicit bias.

Ideological habits

Critical race theory (CRT) and specifically Barbara Field’s (Fields, 1990) description of ideological habits offered insight into how participants’ perceptions of urban environments were constructed and reinforced through stereotypes. Each ideological habit contributed to the participants’ perception and perpetuated othering, strengthened normative assumptions, and developed the hierarchical thinking that leads to presumptions of deficiency and (White) superiority, including White savior complexes and other forms of reintegration (Howard, 2016; Straubhaar, 2015).

An essential element to hierarchies, binary thinking frames the world into dualities (False dichotomies) (Martusewicz et al., 2015). Participants, then, view ideas within absolute conditions. Existing as an absolute, they exist as rich or poor; Black or White; urban, suburban, or rural. Absolute positionality situates dualisms into a hierarchy. The participants (and society), through the ideological habits and oppressions, pointed out in Fields

(1990), position each category into a valued hierarchy (Martusewicz et al., 2015). The participants unable to find intersections and commonalities reframe the duality as truth, confirming their implicit and hidden ideological supremacy.

The participants' first reflective essays established that the participants' limited experience in diverse communities reinforced ideological habits. Furthermore, for many participants, the critical service-learning experience marked their first exposure to diversity. Stereotypes, White normativity, and epistemic privilege forged their understanding and thinking about "urban," creating an incomplete and myopic picture. "Urban" images filtered through White supremacist ideologies; consequently, dangerous associations shaped the participants' attitudes, perceptions, and positionalities, feeding their implicit bias. (Howard, 2016).

However, the reflective essays also revealed curiosity and excitement about better understanding "urban" communities. For example, Participant A expressed that they were "personally, very excited, and eager to work in an urban school and be able to make a difference in someone's life (Reflective essay). Their interest, still focused on fixing "urban" communities, aligns with other participants. Nevertheless, most participants expressed some trepidation and that they "[did] not know what to expect" (C1). Participant G's first reflective essay demonstrated the type of openness necessary for teacher preparation programs to develop a curriculum that disrupts the stubborn habits:

I don't want to sound ignorant or uneducated about urban schools, but the truth is I don't know much about them. This semester I am given the opportunity to experience something new and out of my comfort zone as or right now, but I intend to come out with a better understanding of what it means to be a part of an "urban school" and see what makes urban schools not so different from my own, as well as some things that may be major differences in culture, and location. (Reflective essay)

The ideological habits and stereotypes that structured most of the participants' imagery of "urban" communities in their first reflective essays remained present in Participant H's subsequent reflective essays. Participant H seemed trapped in the ideological habits that they expressed at the beginning of the CSL course.

Like many participants in the first reflective essay, Participant H made the "urban" associations of race, poverty, deprivation, deficiency. Participant H: "Thought urban areas were low-income areas with high rates of crime . . . that lacked cleanliness, [the students were] diverse and, in some cases, disrespectful . . . with kids who won't listen" (H1). Each segment chunk draws on the ideological habits that shaped H's perception. The participants associated "urban" within hierarchical presumptions of deficiency as "low income" and "high-crime" and, then, connected those images with "diverse," Black and Brown people, who are "disrespectful" or not acting within White norms. Later in the same essay, Participant H described "othering" in "White" normative terms and urban flight:

Middle and upper level parents are more subtle about the way they view urban schools. Rather than saying anything, they are simply taking their kids and moving them out of the urban school systems, leaving only the racial minorities and low-income individuals we've highlighted before. (H1)

The subtler interaction with "urban" communities and schools or White (urban) flight posed that those left behind are "racial minorities" and "low-income individuals." Therefore, they are not White nor middle-class. The participant distanced their identity

from “the other” and reinforced the CRT Whiteness as property. The suburbs, where schools are presumably better, are possessed by Whiteness, where the “racial minorities” and “low-income individuals” do not live.

The baseline essay reflected participants’ limited experiences and contact with the “other.” Their limited experience provided little context outside media representations and social constructs. They were stuck in the ideological habit, unable to recognize their perceptions as habits or problematic.

Participant H’s second reflective essay expressed shock at the perceived deprivation of the “urban” school and children:

Every Monday and Wednesday, it is hard to drive through the town that surrounds [the elementary school] and not notice these physical attributes. Although it makes me feel grateful at times, it is sad to witness and reminds me of the rundown Chicago town described in the story of chapter one. (H2)

The shock rooted in White normativity insinuated that White people possess “good” neighborhoods. Then, the participant refueled pity as a hierarchical ideological habit implying that the “urban” conditions are unlike their experiences and, therefore, inferior. Finally, they expressed sadness (pity) for “urban” children and gratitude for their privilege. Later in the essay, Participant H leaned into individualism to explain the noticed inequity:

From toys, to markers, to even time with me, they never really appear to never really want to share. My assumption is that majority of the kids do not have a lot of things to call their own at home, so they hang onto things in the classroom that they do not favor to share in order to get that feeling of having something as their own (H2).

Participant H constructed the ideology that “urban” children lack values and morality due to deficient home lives, specifically “sharing.” Clinging to hierarchical thinking and presumptions of deficiency, Participant H associated limited values and character with “urban” assuming a position of superiority.

Finally, Participant H created a White savior in the form of the host teacher. They explained that a “majority of the families of the preschoolers speak their foreign language at home. Therefore, it probably makes transitioning to English for only several hours of the day an extra challenge for the kids” (H2). The host teacher filled the perceived deficiencies through their efforts to communicate with bilingual “urban” students. They explained: “This again had me impressed because [the host teacher] learned bits and pieces of Spanish simply to help that particular student which I found was very heartwarming and courageous of her” (H2). The participant viewed the host teacher from a White linguistic normative position. Rather than recognizing the students’ accomplishments becoming bilingual, the participant regarded the host teacher as a White savior for “learn[ing] bits and pieces of Spanish.” In their praise for the host teacher’s efforts, they minimized the accomplishments of students’ bilingualism.

Participant H’s second essay demonstrated a capacity to develop alternative narratives and explanations that support White supremacist ideologies. Rather than noticing ideological habits, they clung to them and invented alternative explanations that bolstered the habits’ power and reinforced their racially constructed associations about “urban” communities.

The CSL course provided a catalyst for the participants to better understand their relationship with “urban” communities. Moreover, it represented an essential place for the pre-service teachers to establish contact with “urban” students, and the course content guided their work and progression toward anti-racist identities. The content focused on helping the participants “notice” the ideological habits that create implicit biases and understand how the mechanisms that perpetuate oppression operate (Greene, 1977).

The CSL course’s reflective essays exposed the persistence and severity of ideological habits within teacher education programs. The participants exhibited implicit bias as othering, White normativity, and hierarchical thinking. Furthermore, they reinforced ideological habits through meritocratic and individualistic principles. Critical race theory helped uncover how Whiteness as property and the permanence of racism contribute to systemic oppression. Moreover, it demonstrated the essential need for counter story-telling (experiential knowledge) to provide authentic voices to fully understand the injuries caused by ideological oppression. Learning about the impact of implicit bias emerges from the voices of those who suffer under its oppression.

The reflective essays revealed how participants construct “urban” through race, poverty, and deprivation associations, making it difficult to extract their thoughts from the cycles that reinforce White supremacist thinking. The associations strengthen the ideological habits and help to veil the bias from the participants. Furthermore, individualism and meritocracy reinforce habits allowing them to further fade into the background of White privilege.

Participant narratives suggested that the CSL course influenced the participants’ thinking, feelings, and actions related to “urban” and Black and Brown communities. Furthermore, participant documents showed evidence of participants noticing and disrupting the ideological habits and their biases. While most participants remained trapped within some ideological habits, the final reflective essays reveal that CSL courses can significantly influence PST thinking as their biases are revealed.

The final reflective essays revisited participants’ descriptions of “urban” schools. They asked them to discuss how the critical service-learning course changed (or did not change) their perspectives and perceptions of “urban” communities. The final narratives aligned with the complexities found in the participants’ previous essays. Immersed in cognitive dissonance, they often recognized biased associations and habitually participated in other associations. However, the shifts in thinking demonstrated a forward momentum that edged incrementally toward an anti-racist identity. Most students (11 of the 12) expressed some shifts in thinking about “urban” communities. However, one participant remained consistent in their assumptions of urban communities.

The ideological habits and stereotypes that structured most of the participants’ imagery of “urban” communities in their first reflective essays remained present in Participant H’s subsequent reflective essays. Participant H seemed trapped in the ideological habits that they expressed at the beginning of the CSL course.

After completing 15 weeks of anti-racist coursework and at least 30-hours of CSL field experiences Participant H’s:

perceptions of urban areas have stayed the same as before, this is because students did come from different ethnical [sic] backgrounds, teachers were qualified but a majority of students did suffer with behavioral problems, and living conditions were not sufficient. (H3)

Most of the participants exhibited cognitive dissonance in their narratives, often struggling with new awareness. Participant E's experiences in the CSL course and field placement demonstrated their complex reflective processes.

Participant E's first reflective essay paralleled many other participants. They constructed the "urban" associations of race (Black and Brown), poverty, and deprivation. "Black, poor, less educated, no motivation, higher dropout rate, gangs, dangerous, etc. When I think of an urban environment my brain immediately thinks 'city'" (E1).

Furthermore, they struggled with recognizing ideological oppressions in the second reflective essay. The participant relied on ideological habits and exhibited White normative assumption: "I believe that with the strong personalities they could be very rude and off-putting at times but could also use that for good. If they really tried hard enough, they could change their bad behaviors into genuine kind behaviors" (E2).

Participant E's final reflective essays described their experiences throughout the CSL course and provided a helpful progression that demonstrated their knotty developmental process. Their initial apprehension and annoyance, "I did not feel like I needed to be working in an urban environment . . . I was annoyed at the time that I didn't have the opportunity to work in a traditional school" (E3), aligned with their first and second reflective essays. The participant still clung to many of the ideological habits and struggled to notice Whiteness or the consequences of implicit bias.

However, the participant began to gain "a new perspective on an educational system outside of my own experience" (E3). The "new perspective" stems from noticing (Greene, 1977) their bias, Participant E explained:

Before starting this class, I had preconceived notions that the school I was going to be in was going to be filled with extremely troubled kids, not very many students who actually wanted to be learning, and teachers who were strict because there was no other way of talking to the kids and having them listen. But once again, I was wrong. (Reflective essay)

Recognition for Participant E, like many of the participants, also reconnected with old ideological habits. For example, the participant still applied the individualistic principles and presumptions of deficiency to explain educational debts:

After being at this school for nine weeks I have learned to understand just what these kids are going through. Their home lives really influence the person that they are, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it will influence the person that they will become. As a teacher in an inner-city school, you have to be that person for the students that they might be missing from their home lives. (E3)

Although Participant E did not see the "urban" students as culpable for perceived deficiencies, they shifted the blame to "urban" families. The shifting associations leaned into their ideological habits, reinforcing bias.

Challenging the continuously resurfacing ideological habits means that the participants move between seeing and unseeing bias, often in the same paper. After adjusting their presumption of deficiency, Participant E recognized that they need “to create [their] own assumptions before taking into consideration the assumptions of others and the considerations of society” (E3), only to return to hierarchical thinking:

When you find out that maybe some of your assumptions were true, you have to be able to adapt to the environment that you were thrown into. I think being able to adapt to new environments and students and being able to teach well no matter what is thrown at you is what is going to make the best teachers out there. (E3)

Participant E reconnecting with the ideological habits “maybe some of your assumptions are true” demonstrated a minor retraction followed with a desire to “adapt to new environments.” (E3). The transition does not recognize (notice) the ideological habits as oppression. However, the progression from the first reflective essay to the last suggests that the participant experienced cognitive dissonance related to challenges to their implicit bias. In their cognitive dissonance, Participant E started to question and, in their questioning, planted a seed to cultivate later.

In the final essay, eight of the 12 participants wrote that their perceptions about “urban” communities changed during the CSL course. Significantly, the participants reflected on how ideological habits surface in their lives. Participant B’s final reflective essay described their awakening to personal bias:

Every time I was on the [the busline], I would make sure to stay aware of my surroundings. Many of the people I saw on these buses were of a minority ethnicity. Sadly, there is a correlation here. I would not consider myself racist, but when I was on a side of town that I was not used to or familiar with, I made sure that I kept myself aware of the activity around me . . . I never felt threatened during my time traveling to and from the [after school program], but I decided I would be conscious of my surroundings. I believe this is due to implicit bias. (B3)

Participant B is accurate, that their response does reveal an implicit bias. However, noticing the implicit bias marks a critical step toward disrupting the bias. Their approach, “I need to make sure for the future that I am not using implicit bias when in these situations” (B3), represents an action aimed at developing anti-racist dispositions. Through recognizing their implicit bias, they expressed a willingness to accept diverse truths (Howard, 2016). Participant F, also aware of bias, noted:

I was timid and anxious before beginning my [CSL] placement. I had my own biases before entering the class, and some of the readings prior to our first field-placement added to my nerves and biases. However, after my experience volunteering at the [afterschool program], I have come to think differently about urban schools. While some of my biases weren’t completely untrue, I have learned a significant amount about the dangers of biases, especially wrong ones, in a school setting. (Reflective essay)

Moreover, Participant F’s explicit description of the ideological assumptions makes their disruption of those ideological habits more likely:

I assumed all urban school students would be unruly, hard to teach, and would be coming from an unstable home life. Ultimately, my biases lead me to expect students who had the odds already stacked against them but didn’t even have the desire to learn. After one day, I realized how wrong I was. (F3)

The participant recognized their ideological habit (presumption of deficiency) and engaged in changing that habit. Moreover, noticing that “odds” are against “urban” students suggests that the participant is aware of how external systems damage “urban” communities. Contact with the “urban” students disrupted the stereotypes and forced the participant to begin questioning the ideological habits that reinforce them.

Participants also noticed the systemic nature of racism in their final reflective essays; Participant G, for example, described the mechanism of implicit bias, connected that bias to the reality of Black and Brown people, then acknowledged the role of Whiteness and privilege:

This means that based on the stereotypes that one may have about a person of color, regardless if one is aware of it or not, they use those stereotypes against them. Meaning that in an officer’s case, when they see a black person doing something that can be seen as the slightest bit suspicious, or doing anything that they can be penalized for, the likeliness that they will get punished is much higher than that of a white person. (G3)

Participant G connected that because implicit bias or ideological habits may exist subconsciously, people may be unaware of their biases. Next, they chose to witness and highlight how the biases actively discriminate: “They use those stereotypes against them” (G3). Finally, the participant recognized that those biases are structured within institutions, specifically law enforcement.

Similarly, Participant B connected implicit bias to issues in the classroom when they wrote:

I believe implicit racist bias in situations like these has origins in the criminalization of African American people since slavery was outlawed . . . Another problem when addressing urban education is to make sure that students who seem to struggle with curriculum, are not being “taught down to” . . . This is something that I struggled with in my time at [the afterschool program]. I believe unintentionally teaching down to a student because they are of a minority ethnicity would be a form of implicit racist bias. (B3)

The participant used the Ayers et al. (2008) readings to connect systemic racism to situations within a classroom environment “being taught down to” and then associated that ideological habit to their behavior: “This is something that I struggled with in my time at [the afterschool program]” (B3). Moreover, they noticed the ideological habit and associated that habit with behavior that they intend to change.

The longitudinal analysis showed shifts in the participants thinking over 16 weeks. However, the progression toward anti-racist dispositions is complicated and regressive. Most of the participants did demonstrate changes in thinking, feeling, actions during the CSL course. However, their forward progress toward anti-racist development proved to be slow and turbulent. Significant to the findings within the third essay was also what was missing. The initial associations or “urban” as Black and Brown, “urban” as poor, and “urban” and deficient threaded in the first and second essays decreased significantly in the third. Most of the participants’ narratives recognized the communities where they worked as complex, rich with culture, and systemically oppressed.

PST final essays demonstrated an unveiling of the racist ideologies that clouds their perceptions of the real communities, providing an opportunity to recognize how “urban” problems exist in all communities and that most of those problems situate themselves in biased inequities. The participants demonstrated a growing ability to separate perceptions veiled in implicit bias from problems rooted in economic inequities

Discussion

Habits begin with associations, and ideological habits begin with racialized associations that support White supremacist ideologies. Noel (2018) described the mechanisms that construct habits, writing. “Habits are internalized ways of interacting with regular, frequent, and common environmental stimuli. Habits of Whiteness are regular actions and routines oriented towards oppression, dominance, and exclusion. Habits of Whiteness produce and replicate white supremacy” (Noel, 2018, p. 53). The “regular, common, and environmental stimuli” occurs when people pair ideologies, creating spurious interpretations. The result is that many truths or seemingly “natural” ideas stem from an inherited association structured in ideological oppression (Fields, 1982). The building blocks of implicit bias cure in the foundation of associations and become naturalized.

The following anecdote demonstrates the dangers of associations. One of the projects assigned to students enrolled in the CSL course asks them to complete a descriptive map of a designated community (schools). Students create a physical representation of the community surrounding their field placement, then write a descriptive essay. Inevitably, students return their assignments describing their communities with the same deficiencies relayed in the participants’ reflective essays. CSL students saw catastrophe in “urban” places and described “urban” communities as places of neglect and degradation. The CSL students draw from socially constructed associations that rely on heuristic interpretations building false narratives.

A segment from Participant K’s reflective essay could have been written in the mapping assignment when they described their field placement as “that part of the city . . . in an area in which a neighborhood with old rundown looking houses” (reflective essay). Following the mapping assignments, the participants revisit their placements and look for specific examples of the “rundown” houses and “dirty” conditions described in their assignment. Many students return to the class, baffled to discover that the “urban” yards are often well-kept and clean, and the community is quiet. They approached “urban” communities with a single story then, through heuristic associations, constructed that vision.

The anecdote illustrates how associations slip and skip creating implicit biases structured in ideological associations and stereotypes. The associations become so ingrained in the subconscious that participants truly see catastrophe whether or not it exists. The false narratives get passed generationally through ideological habits. They become naturalized and persistent. The result is that many PSTs look for confirmation of their associations and see the stereotype, not necessarily what is real.

Furthermore, the associations become malleable and limber enough to jump and twist, making perception untrustworthy for many PSTs. Noel (2018) again wrote: “These habits are socialized, handed down by prior generations, because of their utility. Habits survive because they work; they reliably secure predictable advantages for whites and exclusion for non-white people” (p. 53). The utility and advantage of the associations give them power and make them intractable.

The first association noted in the findings creates an essential capacity for participants to maintain a “color-blindness” while supporting White supremacist ideologies (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Associating “urban” with race and specifically, Black and Brown people arranged a necessary euphemism to discuss and uphold racist ideological habits and maintain a not-racist sensibility. It is important to remember that participants, often unaware of racist

euphemisms, unknowingly perpetuate the ideologies. Bonilla-Silva (2018) explained that “rules of how to speak properly come ‘naturally’ to people socialized in particular societies. Thus, whites construct their accounts with the frames, style, and stories available in color-blind America in a mostly unconscious fashion” (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 78). Ten of the twelve of the participants in the study associated “urban” with racial diversity. The association essentially fixed “urban” as a racialized and racist determinant. “Urban,” for the participants, meant Black and Brown people.

After the initial fixing (the “urban” to Black and Brown people), the association often faded to the narratives’ background. The participants’ associations became a veiled assumption throughout the reflective essays; however, it remained present in that anything “urban” distilled to a specific characterization, beginning with the racialized assumptions. The mechanism allowed the participants to observe “urban” communities within racist social constructions and omit their White supremacist origins. They could safely use “urban” in place of Black and Brown and maintain an illusion of “not-racist.”

The participants’ next association paired “urban” and poverty. The association represents the most consistent association for participants (all the participants associated urban with poverty). Furthermore, the association plays to individualistic and meritocratic principles that underlie ideological habits. The participants concluded that people in “urban” communities “lack motivation” (C1) and engaged in “dangerous” or “potentially illegal activities” (C1). The associations fueled by cultural principles (individualism and meritocracy) create the message that “urban” communities deserve poverty. Coupled with the initial racialized associations, the participants further implied that “urban” (Black and Brown people) also deserve their impoverished place in society.

The participants’ final associations, urban is deficient, builds on the justification and rationalization of ideological oppression. The participants, again, drawing on meritocratic and individualistic principles, observe inequity as a deserved position. The individualistic story explains to participants that gaps in achievement, punishment and education stem from personal limitations and failings, key among those failings is the necessary work ethic to succeed (meritocracy), e.g., “If they really tried hard enough, they could change their bad behaviors into genuine kind behaviors” (E3), then presumably become successful as defined by the dominant culture.

Once established, the associations can shift partnered pairings as necessary to justify bias and oppression. The three associations, “urban” as racial, “urban” and poor, “urban” as deficient, played to the participants’ social constructions. Participants observed racial oppression and justified it through individualistic and meritocratic principles. Initially, the participants assumed that perceived deficiencies in urban communities resulted from a “lack of motivation” (C1) or that “urban students do not want to learn, they do not care about their education” (G1). Observing inequity through an individualistic lens, the participants ultimately secured their “understanding” that individual character and hard work determine students’ successes, not social systems that favor the dominant (White) culture.

The CSL course challenged the associations and assumptions through contact with “urban” communities and course content that triggered (or attempted to trigger) shifts in understanding. Rooted in individualistic and meritocratic principles, the participants transferred responsibility from “urban” students’ failure to “urban” communities and families’ deficiencies. When the participants’ associations lack validity, they create a new

avenue of rationalizing inequity. Because “urban” students could no longer shoulder the responsibility of failure alone, the participants re-aligned their associations. They concluded gaps occurred because:

Poor guardians who do not encourage school and learning creates a learning struggle for the child throughout their academic career. A student can work hard in school, but if they are in a poor home environment where school is not made a priority and guardians are not able to help their child with schoolwork, then excelling in school becomes a great challenge for them. (K3)

Participants freely changed their associations to support previously held assumptions about “urban” communities. Each new challenge to their ideological assumption provoked a retreat to the individualistic principles that allowed the participants to take respite in ideological habits, implicit bias, and privilege. Individualism and meritocracy become the tools to rationalize and justify the reemergence of bias.

What challenges the findings of this study and PST perceptions of the urban communities remains the vast economic disparity that clouds the narrative analysis. The economic gap found in urban communities contributes to neglect, increased crime, food scarcity, and increased health problems. Poverty does create real problems found in urban communities. However, the economic challenges do not define “urban.” The singular (deficient) assumptions about urban communities diminish the complexities. The urban center connected to this project is vibrant and wealthy and poor, and under-resourced.

Meritocracy and the “urban” poverty association also supported socioeconomic bias. Participants built a cognitive narrative from meritocracy that suggested hard work results in success. Conversely, they assumed that the lack of hard work resulted in poverty. Unable to recognize the systemic mechanisms designed for social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986), the participants equated effort with success. The meritocratic principle amplified the “urban”-poverty association fixing culpability for poverty on the individual.

Individualism and meritocracy maintain a crucial alliance for ideological oppression. Challenges to socially constructed assumptions about “urban” communities (Black and Brown communities by association) caused participants to retreat to individualistic and meritocratic principles for direction. The shifting culpabilities arose from an entrenched and persistent reliance on the cultural principles (individualism and meritocracy) that displaced the systemic root causes of bias to individual “grit.” Consequently, institutional bias and, specifically, racism persist to the next iteration without challenge. Maintaining an individualistic principle prevented the participants from recognizing generational ideological habits. Moreover, the same individualism prevented the participants from recognizing their privilege and bias.

Individualism exists in dualistic assumptions, a good versus bad binary. Moreover, dualistic assumptions offer participants a false choice. Either “urban” students are good and work hard and, therefore, successful, or students fail because they lack something. Participants’ narratives demonstrated a pull toward these dualisms, making it difficult to escape the ideological habits that cloud their thinking. Furthermore, individualism supports ideological oppression on two fronts.

Individualism supports ideological habits by maintaining the focus of successes or failures on individual merit and character. The participant, free of systemic entanglements, can look for individual flaws to account for achievement gaps. To fill the gaps, the heuristic

analysis draws from historical associations, ideological habits, and systemic racist ideologies. Participants, then, judge “urban” communities through an ideological lens that supports systemic oppression.

Secondly, the duality inherent in individualism prevents participants from acknowledging the systemic nature of oppression. Participants who recognize their culpability in systemic oppression must first grapple with individualism. If they adhere to individualistic principles, their racist tendencies must derive from individual character (or lack of character). Moreover, the social constructs that support ideological oppressions have made racist dispositions an undesirable characteristic (2016–2020 challenges this position). The contradiction required participants to mask racism, even from themselves. Therefore, participants often depended on their associations in partnership with individualism and meritocracy to account for implicit bias and racist tendencies.

For the participants to recognize their bias begins with dismantling the dualities associated with individualism and meritocracy. Next, the participants had to re-remind how systemic ideologies, primarily individualism and meritocracy, taint their thoughts. Participant B described their obstacles while trying to resolve the social contradictions:

I would not consider myself racist, but when I was on a side of town that I was not used to or familiar with, I made sure that I kept myself aware of the activity around me . . . I never felt threatened during my time traveling to and from the [after school program], but I decided I would be conscious of my surroundings. I believe this is due to implicit bias. (Reflective essay)

The participant expressed concern about being “racist,” recognizing their racist ideologies. The critical step marks a point where the participant noticed their contribution to racist ideologies. However, maintaining that level of self-reflection is painful in a society that judges in good-bad, racist/not-racist binaries. The impasse with dualisms resolves that one can only be racist or not-racist. The result is that learners have no path toward anti-racist development and little incentive to become or remain self-reflective.

Some participants eventually broke through individualistic and meritocratic principles recognizing the systemic nature of oppression, e.g., “I believe implicit racist bias in situations like these has origins in the criminalization of African American people since slavery was outlawed” (B3). The participant’s acknowledgment of criminalization and racism demonstrated a movement away from individualism, recognizing the systemic oppressions. When they centered the culpability of implicit bias onto the systems that created it, the participant was free to reflect on racially charged associations and their resulting ideological habits with a cultural humility (Bourdieu, 1986; Fields, 1990; Sweet, 2018).

Unfortunately, more participants showed little evidence of shedding their individualistic or meritocratic principles. Even in later documents, many of the participants’ narratives clung to individualism to explain systemic oppression. They often shifted blame for achievement gaps from students to parents, e.g., “at the ages of four and five, it is not entirely expected of kids this young to remember themselves to take their backpack; thus it shows the guardians’ lack of concern when it comes to school” (K3). The shifting of blame maintained the individualistic principle because the participants still displaced responsibility for “forgetfulness” from the student (who was too young) to the parents (who “lack concern”). Furthermore, shifting blame maintained the “urban” as

Black or Brown, “urban” as poor, and “urban” and morally deficient associations securing their implicit bias and resolving their cognitive dissonance without challenging false assumptions.

The participants’ frequent shifting of responsibility for the opportunity gaps observed in urban communities demonstrates the influence of individualistic and meritocratic principles on maintaining ideological habits. The principles retain power over the participants thinking, shaping how they explain their experiences. Moreover, participants judge every challenged stereotype, micro-aggression, and ideological habit through individualistic and meritocratic principles. The strength of the principles are rooted in normativity and the perception that they exist as a “natural” phenomenon.

Therefore, if an “urban” student works hard and is still not academically or socially successful, the participant must resolve the contradiction contradicting meritocratic principles. Consequently, most of the participants constructed narratives that affirm the principles. They shifted responsibility to the parents, the school, or the community, rationalizing inequity due to some community deficiency. The conflicting ideas resolved with their faith in individualism intact.

Individualism (with meritocracy) fuels ideological habits creating a catalyst to renew and reproduce systemic oppression. The catalyst obfuscates habits by making them seem natural. Understood as truth, the participants use the principles to rationalize inequity and feed the ideological habits. Furthermore, transitive laws allow the participants to shift their presumptive associations, securing perceptions structured in ideological habits and bias. Although some escape the reinforcing cycle, many remain trapped by individualistic and meritocratic principles.

The final reflection did demonstrate shifts in participants’ thinking. Although incomplete, their descriptions shed the dangerous associations prevalent in their first essays. Participants’ discourse, observations, and experiences began to show systemic awareness and understanding of the ideological habits that create implicit bias and how those biases impact urban communities.

This narrative analysis provided an opportunity to explore PSTs’ perceptions of diverse students and “urban” communities before entering TEPs. The initial associations structured in the participants’ descriptions of “urban” aligned with previous scholarship and, specifically, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who concluded that “urban” “has come to mean black” (p. 60). The first reflective essay also described racialized associations with presumptions of deficiency and poverty (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lareau, 2015).

Research supported the findings that the participants’ images and perceptions of “urban” conformed to socially constructed stereotypes. Unaware of their privilege and ideological oppressions and habits, the participants imagine “urban” within White normativity, media images, and family lore. They visualized “urban” within social constructs and stereotypes. The result is that participants approach “urban” communities believing they are Black and Brown, poor, and deficient.

Participation in the CSL course offering influenced participants’ perceptions of “urban” communities, and the participants demonstrated a new awareness of ideological habits and the damages of racial oppression. However, the mixed results reinforced the urgent need to infuse anti-racist education into all aspects of teacher education programs. Indeed, a singular class or experience is insufficient to dismantle the stubborn and dangerous associations that share and perpetuate implicit bias.

Recommendations and future studies

The increased attention and movement toward anti-racist pedagogies in TEPs signifies a critical first step to dismantling ideological habits. Unfortunately, anti-racist content and curriculum often exist in ethereal discussions and theoretical constructs. The CSL highlighted in this research provides essential lessons for anti-racist pedagogy and individual development.

The critical service-learning format created an essential context for PST to engage in anti-racist work. Specifically, diverse (underserved) field placements balanced with coursework objectives focused on revealing systemic oppression. When PST engaged in authentic learning environments, they could contextualize what “systemic bias” looked like in real-time. Furthermore, their self-reflective practices allowed for a critical examination of mechanisms that perpetuate bias. Finally, their analysis of systems provided a space to consider racist and biased ideologies that shaped their habits. Thus, the content should begin to approach culture from what Sweet (2018) calls “cultural humility.”

Recognizing the damage of dualistic thinking Sweet (2018) suggests that “dualistic Western thinking that dominates planning practice, if the planner is competent, then the subjects of the planning are not competent, requiring the expert to fix them and their communities” (p. 7). The “fixing” of communities supports the hierarchical assumptions rooted in White supremacist thinking. Cultural humility uses self-reflection to dismantling the power dynamics and create a space for understanding. Sweet (2018) wrote,

The power dynamics (such a competent/incompetent framework) are socially constructed but have real-world consequences for the subjects of planning. while they cannot gain competence in another culture, they are obligated to examine their own culture and professional position in an effort to disclose their biases, limited vision, and privilege, and to understand. (p. 8)

Teacher education programs that approach their work from a culturally humble positionality enter as guests building a space for a reciprocal learning experience. Indeed, any profession that engages people with humility honors the culture as equal.

The coursework outside of the field placement offers the critical aspect of self and social reflection. PST can engage in content that challenges dualistic thinking. Content that directly teaches about dualistic thinking and teaches how those dualisms, in the form of individualistic and meritocratic principles, create false perceptions; shifts thinking from a stagnant to a growth mind-set. Eliminating the racist/not-racist good/bad binaries, they see themselves and the communities on a continuum of growth rather than a label.

The discussions and projects that directly taught the mechanisms that perpetuate bias with specific systemic bias and racism examples allowed the PST to understand how those systems influence their thinking. Later, they used that knowledge to analyze how school policies and practices contribute to or disrupt ideological habits. Self-reflection demonstrated a growth toward a more anti-racist disposition that recognized systemic and personal biases.

The CSL course aimed at first-year and second-year college students formed a critical starting point for PST development. However, analysis of the participant narratives suggests that a single class is insufficient for this work. TEP must engage in an anti-racist/anti-biased

curriculum as a part of each class. Two simple examples include; classroom management courses that should consist of content on punitive gap learning theories and culturally responsive teaching practices.

Future studies should explore similar CSL courses' and examine participants' efficacy and progress through racial identity developmental lenses. Moreover, TEPs must get involved and develop a data-driven anti-racist curriculum that retains the same persistence as ideological habits. Incorporating action research models, TEPs can dismantle the mechanisms that taint young teachers' thoughts, teaching them to remain wide-awake. Finally, building scholarship that includes a shared White/racial identity development orientation and language. Dismantling the racism requires TEPs to invest in developing an anti-racist curriculum focused on growth and dismantling mythological dualism that our teachers are racist or not-racist. Growth gives room for all teachers to become anti-racist educators.

Notes

1. P-8 serves students in preschool to 8th grade (3 years old—15 years old). While 9–12 serves students from 9th grade to 12th grade (14 years old to 18 years old).
2. Title I provide additional federal financial resources to underserved communities based on economic need.
3. Racist ideologies refer to those beliefs that situates White people into hierarchical positions of power and situates minoritized groups into subordinate positions within society, resulting in prejudiced actions and inactions toward the minority group.
4. White supremacy often conjures images of the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazi, and overt military clad racists with swastika tattoos and assault rifles. However, White supremacy thrives in formal policies, subtle details, and daily interactions that serve White people (Gillborn, 2015). Like “othering” White supremacy exists to legitimize a system of oppression designed to oppress nonwhite people (Fields, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).
5. Black and Brown people represent traditionally oppressed minority groups within the United States, including decedents of slavery and the Latinx community.
6. Draws from historical property laws that leads to the White social possession of material and nonmaterial social values.

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Appendix A. Course outline

Week	Content	Readings:	Due:
1	Introductions Protocols for discussion Set groups for Selfie on the 6 Description of schools	Syllabus	Volunteer Form Scheduling form Reflection #1: In 1000 to 2000 words (double-spaced): Selfie on the 6
2	Problem solving, Attention & Metacognition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you study? • How do you learn? • Why is it boring? <i>Standard 1</i> <i>Standard 2</i> <i>Standard 8</i>	City Kids, Introduction (“Nice White Lady”) Introduction Part 1	Trial run to School (Field-notes)
3	Continued problem solving Teaching Strategies, Blooms, Begin Family in Poverty project Work Day <i>Standard 1</i> <i>Standard 2</i> <i>Standard 8</i>	Teaching Strategies	Field-notes Mapping assignment
4	Teaching Strategies, Blooms, and HLP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening skills <i>Standard 1</i> <i>Standard 2</i> <i>Standard 8</i>	City Kids, Chapters 1, 3 HLP	Field-notes
5	Teaching Strategies, Blooms, and HLP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-determined Learners Begin disrupting stereotypes PBL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common perceptions <i>Standard 8</i>	Greene (1977) Howard, Intro	Field-notes
6	“Danger of a Single Story: & Discussion PBL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Origins of perceptions <i>Standard 1</i> <i>Standard 2</i>	City Kids, Part 2 Introduction Howard, Chapter 2	Field-notes Mapping revisit due
7	PBL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of perceptions discus- sion/presentation <i>Standard 2</i>	Fields (1990, p. 1982) Howard Chapter 3	Analysis of perceptions (PBL group) Field-notes
8	The Languages of Isms: Activity discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotypes • Prejudice • Discrimination <i>Standard 2</i>	City kids, Chapters 12 Howard, 4	Reflection Paper #2: In 1000 to 2000 words (double-spaced): Field-notes
9	Dangers in Deficits: Deficit thinking activity & discussion	Invisible Knapsack, McIntosh Howard Chapter 5	Field-notes
10	Deficit and Hierarchical thinking PBL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radical noticing 	City kids, Chapters 23	Field-notes
11	Culturally sustaining pedagogies Intersectionalities <i>Standard 2</i>	Wendell Berry (1989) Howard Chapter 6	Family in Poverty (FIP) Projects Due Begin presentations Radical Noticing assignment due
12	Family in Poverty presentations and What if . . .	Johnson (2018) Chapter 2	Field-notes

(Continued)

Week	Content	Readings:	Due:
13	FIP Discussions of experiences – unpacking	Ladson-Billings (2003)	Field-notes
14	FIP & Discussion, Power and Privilege		Field-notes
15	Discussions and reflect		Journals, Rewrites, & Final reflections: In 1500–2500 words (double-spaced):

Appendix B. Critical service-learning course activities and assignments

Activities/Assignments

- Protocols:
 - Establish protocols for civil discussion of difficult conversations
 - Describe protocols
 - Students and faculty establish discussion protocols together
- Problem Solving
 - Analyze problem-solving methods and establish a personal flowchart for problem-solving.
 - Watch you tube
 - Analyze “problem-solving methods.”
 - Develop a flowchart to share at the next class
 - Introduce HLP (giving feedback)
 - Share flow charts
 - Provide feedback for revision
- Professional Listening
 - Introduce active listening model
 - Describe parroting, paraphrasing, and empathy
 - Practice with partner
 - Discuss questions and advise
 - Introduce “I-statements”
- Teaching with strategy
 - Thinking strategically about learning
 - Introduce High leverage practices, Bloom’s taxonomy, and teaching strategies
 - Split into groups of 3 or 4
 - Students develop a non-academic lesson plan that includes HLP and teaching strategies
 - Teach the lesson to the class
 - In small groups, identify levels of Bloom’s taxonomy in the lesson
 - Share out
- PBL introduction (Gorski et al., 2013)
 - Split into groups of 3 or 4
 - Ask students to revisit their first reflective essay that asks them to describe “urban.”
 - On the whiteboard, describe common perceptions of “urban
 - Ask students to examine each groups’ description and note differences and commonalities.
 - Discuss what might account for differences and commonalities
- PBL part 2 origins
 - Return to original PBL groups
 - Brainstorm the origins of “urban” assumptions
 - Press for specifics
 - Ask what “day to day” messages reinforce common assumptions about urban communities.
- PBL part 3, analysis of perceptions
 - PBL groups will pick one of the stereotypes and research its accuracy
 - Find three scholarly sources (nonpartisan or for-profit) that speak to their assumptions

- At the next class period, the group presents their findings
- Return to the question of origins and discuss Fields invention of race and ideologies
- PBL part 4 Affects
 - Each groups' research is used to reflect on the effect the perceptions have on urban students and communities
 - The discussion introduces the presumptions of deficiencies and ideological habits
- PBL part 5 radical noticing
 - Groups are encouraged to journal for one week and write down examples of ideological habits they "noticed."
- Mapping assignment
 - Develop a physical map and description of the urban field-placement
 - Students draw a map of the physical space surrounding their field-placement
 - A two to three-page description of the communities and reflection.
- Mapping revisited
 - After introducing ideological habits, students revisit their sites and complete a strictly descriptive analysis that looks for evidence of their original findings
 - Return to your placement and find examples that support your original findings
 - Include a reflection of the experience
- Field-notes
 - Descriptive notes that describe the students field-experiences
 - Before the field-placement describe your planned activity and intention for the session
 - After the session, describe what occurred.
 - Write a brief reflection on the activities and through for the next session
- Reflective essays
 - Essay 1 (baseline) before course work or field-experience (1000–2000 words)
 - Prompt: You are about to participate in a field-experience in an urban school. In 1000 to 2000 words, describe your perception of an "urban" community and school? What do you anticipate your experiences in an urban school system will be like? What will the students, teachers, and community members be like? Be sure to include your readings in the essay and cite your work
 - Essay 2 completed at midterms (1000 to 2000 words)
 - Prompt: In 1000 to 2000 words, describe your field-placement. What challenges have you faced with your placement? Using your readings and experiences, describe how your perceptions have changed or not.
 - Essay 3 Completed at the end of the term (2000–3000 words)
 - In 2000 to 3000 words, revisit your first two essays and describe how participating in the critical service-learning course has affected your perception of urban communities. Be sure to include your readings in the final essay and cite your work.