

Leadership Enactment of Students of Color Providing a “Youth Undoing Institutional Racism”

Training

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Abstract

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Education Policy, Organizations, and Leadership

This paper addressed the topic of youth leadership enacted by students of color. Current research speaks to the potential youth leadership can have in creating systemic change and school reform. However, racism perpetuates inequities and limits the opportunities students might have in leadership development opportunities within the conventional school democratic participation system for students. In my pilot study I examined the questions (1) How do groups of low-income, students of color, enact their leadership in providing professional development to their own teachers and staff? and (2) How do youth leaders describe their motivations and development as leaders in this context? I used data from student group interviews, documents, and observations to build three emergent themes. This study helped provide an understanding of the implications that conversations examining systemic racism can have for youth and teachers.

Introduction

Youth activists enact leadership in their schools and communities by advocating for issues relevant to their lives. Using their surrounding resources, they take initiatives to find solutions to the problems they face. For example, one student who witnessed a shooting in Parkland Florida, was Emma Gonzalez. She and other students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSDHS) are current examples of the potential of youth leadership for change. After surviving the Stoneman High School shooting, Emma became an icon and an advocate for gun control laws. Gonzalez stated, “I’m 18 years old, Cuban and bisexual. I’m so indecisive that I can’t pick a favorite color, and I’m allergic to 12 things. I draw, paint, crochet, sew, embroider—anything productive I can do with my hands while watching Netflix. But none of this matter anymore” (González, 2018). What matters to Emma is creating change and ensuring that this tragedy doesn’t occur again. This is an example of how student voice and the new form of youth leadership is concerned with meaningful issues. Mitra (2008) defines this new form of student voice as one that ‘broadens the educational conceptions of professional collaboration and distributed leadership to include students as members of school-based learning communities’ (p.9).

Emma has publicly stated her opinion on the need for gun control laws and is encouraging an entire generation of youth to demand changes to firearm legislation. As Kahn (2009) states, youth leaders mobilize others to take action towards issues in their life. Kahn et al. (2009) stated the definition for the development of youth leadership as “young people empowered to inspire and mobilise themselves and others towards a common purpose, in

response to personal and/or social issues and challenges, to effect positive change” (p. 6). For example, Emma has created campaigns and delivered speeches on the issue. Youth are challenging the notion that they are uninvolved by taking an action-oriented approach to issues; youth instead are examining their positions in the community in order to challenge situations in relation to the sociopolitical context surrounding them (Mira, 2013).

The students from MSDHS have been a profound influence for youth leaders across the nation where more than 500,000 people - in major cities like New York City, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and Portland - marched in solidarity with them. They have demonstrated leadership and are inspiring other youth in the United States to organize alongside of them. These students have urged students, and adult allies to take action towards gun violence prevention and school reform.

In youth organizing, youth are seen as agents of change. Youth leaders can guide a movement, but it is different from youth organizing and they are closely associated but not identical. It is possible for youth to lead without being involved in the organizing and planning for changes with other youth. Organizing efforts help bring youth together to identify and select an issue that affects their lives, and through collective action, build the necessary power to achieve their aims (Warren, Mira, Nikundiwe, 2008; Mira, 2013). The young people leading efforts to address gun violence and other issues in society are students and youth organizers. Youth organizing finds its origin in American traditions of community organizing, the civil rights movement, and the Chicano movement; youth organizing typically features several distinguishing characteristics as compared to most adult community organizing such as: (1) developing political consciousness from the ground up (2) connecting local organizing to

national movements (3) and mentoring youth organizers (Warren, Mira, Nikundiwe, 2008). The students of MSDHS have encouraged students to become politically involved and their activism is an example of youth leadership for change.

Despite students like Emma taking action to make change, they are still often marginalized in school decision-making processes. Our current education policies, systems and practices do not consider youth as valuable stakeholders in education reform (Kirshner, 2015). However, as demonstrated by the Parkland students, young people can be powerful participants in education reform. Their experiences and insights can provide us with a vision for equitable change within schools. When low-income youth of color participate in education reform, they can change policies and structures to better address their needs and priorities (Checkoway, & Richards-Schuster, 2006). We continue to need a better understanding of how youth leadership develops and is enacted in order to achieve educational justice in schools serving predominantly youth of color.

Some public policies in schools reinforces teachers' fear of urban youth and promotes the negative perceptions that they have of students of color. This affects students of color and disproportionately impacts their academic opportunities for success and healthy development in schools. I will provide a model for an alternative perspective that designates students of color as the leaders of change within communities. I will also analyze the present student leadership structures in schools that lack racial representation and activities that go beyond the social-emotional climate in schools. I explore the potential for change when the table and conceptions of leadership are expanded beyond current conceptions of youth leadership. My study hopes to understand how a group of students of color develop, prepare, and enact youth

leadership to provide a professional development training for their teachers.

Public Policies Reinforce the Fear of Urban Youth

Low income students of color are often seen as incapable of learning at high levels or are seen as disruptors who must be controlled (Warren et al., 2008, p. 30). “Urban” youth are often portrayed by media, administration and teachers as apathetic about their education and as students who must be motivated to learn. Public policies can perpetuate stereotypes of urban youth of color as a “menace to society” who need to be controlled and contained (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002, p. 82). For example, California’s Juvenile Justice Crime Bill (Proposition 21) like other similar measures across the nation allows courts to try juveniles as adults. Such policies are fueled by a fear of urban youth that serve to reinforce ideas and negative assumptions about urban youth of color. These negative assumptions and ideas of youth of color do not create a supportive environment for students to learn. Instead, teachers will avoid interaction and, therefore, will provide less support. A teacher could draw a conclusion from stereotypes or racial bias instead of knowing the students better (Rocque, M. 2010). There are other results stemming from negative assumptions that Warren (2014) states as “schools serving large numbers of students of color have fewer qualified teachers, larger class sizes, fewer and older textbooks, less advanced curricular material, older facilities, and fewer computers than schools serving more affluent, white students” (p. 3). Consequently, less funding, fewer resources and unqualified teachers results in lowered expectations for students of color and poor academic outcomes. When educators make judgements based off of bias the effect can also be seen in the student’s grades.

This fear towards urban youth of color results in disproportionate discipline rates and harsher punishments towards students of color in schools. For example, Khalifa et al., argues (2013) that “there are deep and discriminatory differences in how school suspensions and discipline policy are implemented. Students of color are far more likely to be sent to the office and sent home after they arrive” (p. 498). In a separate account, members of a parent group, Jóvenes Unidos, examined their school districts discipline data to find that police ticketing in schools had increased by 71% between 2000 and 2004, and expulsions had increased by almost 30%, with more than half of the expulsions being for subjective and nonviolent offenses (Rogers et al., 2012). The data also showed that students of color were 70% more likely to be disciplined than their white peers for similar offenses. Warren (2014) illustrates one example of an emerging educational justice movement fighting against the school-to-prison pipeline; community and youth organizing groups were some of the first to speak out against harsh and racially inequitable disciplinary practices in schools over fifteen years ago and to connect these practices to what was initially called a “jailhouse” track.

Other examples, by Ginwright & James (2002) found that “[I]n California, for example, Proposition 187 denies undocumented immigrants public benefits, Proposition 209 outlaws affirmative action policies, Proposition 227 bans bilingual education, and Proposition 21 gives courts greater authority to sentence youth as young as fourteen years old as adults” (p. 29). These examples illustrate how policies target and make it difficult for students of color to succeed. However, we can examine how a student's awareness of prejudices against students of color, influences their responses to forces that consider them powerless. This allows them to develop sophisticated knowledge of the causes of social problems which generates unique ways of

dealing with them (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002). When examining race as a factor in differential treatment, Hinojosa (2008), presents a range of research findings that implies how teachers expectations and perceptions have a greater impact on black students compared to white students. “African American students describe receiving less support from teachers, report less interaction, and report less praise from their teachers when compared to white students” (Hinojosa, 2008, p. 176). This evidence that African American students are subject to differential treatment from teachers leads into my next point that assesses the impact of teachers’ perceptions on students of color.

The Negative Perceptions Teachers Hold

Racist policies have the capacity to reinforce, affect and create negative perceptions teachers have towards students of color. Teachers have an important role in schools, they assess students’ behavior and have the potential to impact their students’ academic and social outcomes. As described previously, the differential treatment of students is based on cultural, linguistic, and ethnic factors rather than personal or academic characteristics (Hinojosa, 2008). Teacher’s negative perceptions, based on race, leads to different expectations created for students of color. As found by McKown and Weinstein (2008), “teacher expectations of European American and Asian American students were much higher than teacher expectations of Black and Latino students with the same record of achievement” (p. 252). Warren (2014) found that teachers perceptions were critical to the performance of Black and Latino students, and that implicit bias and cultural misunderstandings leads teachers to exaggerate disruptive behaviors which contributes to the racial disparities in school discipline and the school to prison pipeline. These reduced expectations for students of color have negative impacts on youth development and

contributes to the conditions in which youth confront a cycle of violence that adds to their social and economic problems. “Young people are often portrayed as apathetic about their education, as students who must be motivated to learn. Worse, low income students of color can be seen as incapable of learning at high levels or as disruptors who must be controlled” (Warren, Mira, Nikundiwe, 2008, p. 30) Understanding the nature of this deficit perspective as a barrier to the participation of all students, teachers can begin to think critically about strategies that increase student voice and participation in school reform. The teachers and administration in schools can develop opportunities that include all students in decision making contexts in schools.

Effect on Students

The effect of these negative student perceptions results in more punishments, school suspensions and misunderstandings with teachers. The student’s race also increases his or her likelihood of experiencing these unequal punishments (Rocque, M. 2010). For example, “African American students report a significantly higher mean for school suspension than white students” (Hinojosa, M. S., 2008, p. 180). “When students believe that their teachers have higher expectations of them, their probability of out-of-school suspension is decreased by 26 percent, and probability of in-school suspension is decreased by 28 percent” (p. 189 - 190). Students of color are left with few opportunities to change the narratives held of them. These inequities also manifest themselves on a broader district level because we continue to fund our schools in unequal ways. The social and emotional consequences of trauma often experienced by children in these situations profoundly affects their ability to learn in school and grow into healthy adults” (Warren, 2014, p. 3) One way to resist these negative perceptions is by students of color taking on leadership roles. These new leadership roles would allow them the opportunities to express

their needs and create opportunities for change.

Students of Color as Leaders of Change

Students of color can provide us with a new insights and opportunities for changes in schools. “The cultural memory that Black youth have access to, facilitated through informal intergenerational conversations and networks - builds trust, skills, and optimism about changing the problems in people’s lives everyday lives” (Ginwright, 2007 p. 409). Social justice emerges in students by fostering a deep awareness of social inequality and by providing opportunities for young people to change the social and community conditions that prevent a positive, healthy process of development. (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 93). The process of young people mobilizing other youth around academic and curricular issues is one definition of student organizing (Checkoway, & Richards-Schuster, 2006). The effects of students organizing has created school improvements, connections and opportunities to advance their educational needs. Students have achieved these things by challenging administration and districts negative perceptions of them. Ginwright, (2007) studied how Black youth, who were members of Leadership Excellence (a community-based organization in Oakland California), challenged the negative concepts of black youth and facilitated critical social capital. Ginwright, (2007) stated that “critical social capital was created and sustained through opportunities where Black youth were viewed as legitimate political actors” (p. 411). The expectation that Leadership Excellence adult community members held about the images of Black youth were reconstituted from civic problems to civic problem solvers. The need for youth leadership development goes beyond the mainstream model of youth development that focuses on the acquirement of life skills.

Instead, in order to address the systemic racism and bias in schools, engaging students of

color in dialogue is important. Melanie Bertrand (2014) argues for the need for reciprocal dialogue between educational decision makers and students of color. In her study of discursive preconditions of reciprocal dialogue—an aspect of Third Spaces, Bertrand states “the findings have implications for the potential of student voice efforts to challenge systemic racism in education—endemic, institutionalized inequalities along race lines” (Bertrand, M., 2014, p. 836). Shah, Seema, et. al (2008) illustrated youth groups that work with young people to develop a structural analysis of the disparities in educational, economic, and social provision and outcomes, but who also actively engage youth in social change efforts to alter these conditions. (p. 45). Amplifying the voices of students of color, in and of itself, presents a challenge to systemic racism, which is associated with and bolstered by discourses that frame these students as problems (Bertrand, 2014).

Narrow Conceptions of Youth Leadership

Providing leadership and governance opportunities for students is a step in the right direction towards democratic participation in schools. However, this still does not suffice because schools have a narrow definition of youth leadership. The civic participation opportunities currently available are limited to student government, student councils or committees. “In most schools, student leadership is conceptualized as participation in student government and extracurricular clubs, in which access is often limited to students who stay out of trouble and perform well in school” (Shah et al., 2008, p. 50). Conventional ideas of youth leadership fail to create school wide youth empowerment. Mitra (2002) states, “Most student governments exercise little power, focus primarily on social activities, and do not represent a cross-section of the school” (p. 9). Schools restrict access to leadership positions for students

with high grades or popularity; as well as those with privilege, wealth, and a white identity (Kirshner, 2015; Mitra, 2008). This model of youth leadership cultivates a belief in meritocracy and limits opportunities for marginalized youth to create solutions to problems in their schools. Systems founded on the premises of meritocracy will inherently benefit white students more than students of color, since in the current education systems white students are granted with more tools to enable them to succeed. Our current notions of African American and Latino students are not of them as leaders or decision makers.

Schools that serve students of color from low income communities do provide opportunities that foster a belief in school wide democracy and student voice. However, these student council positions are “often restricted to high achieving students or those who have time and encouragement to engage in voluntary, resume building activities” (Krishner, 2015, p. 178). These positions also sometimes tokenize students of color and do not prioritize their voices over wealthy white females (Mitra, 2008). This dynamic of student leadership access is not a coincidence; it is reflected in historical dynamics of educational leadership and the structure of school reforms. As Khalifa (2013) states, educational leadership practice serves to primarily reproduce conditions of white privilege and objectivity; these oppressive reproductions occur because educational reforms (including leadership reforms) have been historically beneficial for the upper-tier of students and not intended to be challenged. “For example, the principal as a primary leader in the school, as one who makes decisions without the community’s perspectives, as one who was not chosen by the people that he leads, and one who does not speak local languages, as one who may not be spiritual, or even as one who emphasizes hierarchical leadership is all an indication of the very Whiteness, Westernized approach to school leadership”

(Khalifa, 2013, pg. 500). To address and solve disparities within youth leadership, it is essential to acknowledge and recognize the racism that affects students of color.

Expanding the Table and Conceptions of Leaders

However, youth leadership can act as a vehicle that unites urban youth from similar backgrounds and aligns them towards a common goal of education reform. The current model of youth/student leadership is deemed a privilege for students with backgrounds of high academic achievement, and experience with leadership (Kirshner, 2015; Mitra, 2008). Consequently, “rather than confront inequality, our educational system reproduces inequalities, as more successful students, typically white and affluent, then gain access to higher incomes and greater levels of civic and political participation” (Warren, 2014, p. 8). Furthermore, the way in which youth contest, challenge, respond and negotiate the use and misuse of power in their lives varies. Examining the various ways that youth resist is important and can provide more equitable school policies. The first-hand experience, and cumulative knowledge that youth have becomes a primary source to inform changes in their communities. I will examine youth leadership, during a “Youth Undoing Institutional Racism” (YUIR) training that students led for their teachers at Villa High School, with the support of Youth Action Alliance (whose name has been changed). As schools expand their definition of leaders, they can better hear marginalized student needs and voices.

Research Questions

Researchers such as Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002, have shown that following a Social Justice Youth Development (SJYD) model can help students of color conceptualize and

enhance their awareness of their personal potential, community responsibility, in order to successfully become leaders of change. However, in order for youth participation to be an effective tool for change, schools will need to integrate youth voice, action and participation in a material and structural context. My research answered the following main questions: (1) How do groups of low-income, students of color, enact their leadership in providing professional development to their own teachers and staff? and (2) How do youth leaders describe their motivations and development as leaders in this context? I used data from student group interviews, documents, and observations.

Conceptual Framework

To critically analyze the YUIR training I will use the Shawn Ginwright and Julio Cammarota (2002) Social Justice Youth Development Theory (SJYD). This framework analyzes the development of youth leadership, and I will be using SJYD to analyze how youth leadership gets enacted in a training session for high school teachers. There are five key principles of this theoretical framework that will be guiding my research in order to examine youth leadership in this context. This theory frames the goals of youth development as more than just healthy adulthood, but rather building a more equitable society through the engagement of critically conscious citizens, through SJYD principles and strategies. The first principle is “analyze *power* in social relationship.” Youth are taught to identify power holders within their communities and schools by asking specific questions, such as, “Who has the power to influence the quality of our education?” I will be observing the dynamics between students and teachers during the training looking for unspoken gestures, interactions, and paying attention to who is directing or guiding

conversations in the space. Throughout the interviews, I will be asking youth leaders to identify their roles in the school, community, and in the training. I will ask questions about their roles as leaders of the training and the importance of leadership in their school. Analysis of power often reveals hidden systems of privilege and encourages critical thinking about social problems (Ginwright, S. & James, T., 2002, p. 36). In my observations and interviews I will be paying close attention to ways that youth talk about power and where it comes from.

The second principle of SJYD is “[making] *identities* central” to the development of young people by examining the power and privilege granted to different identities (with the most power granted to white, heterosexual, middle-class men). Uniting youth with similar identities allows them to advocate for social change. “Critical social capital creates a collective racial and cultural identity among Black youth that provides them with a unified understanding of their plight in American society” (Ginwright, 2007 p. 411). During my observations and interviews I will be examining what identities the youth leading this training connect with i.e. racial identity, ethnic, and cultural. I will be paying close attention to how youth identities seem to relate to their development of leadership in this context.

The third principle of SJYD, “[promoting] *systemic social change*,” focuses on developing the capacity of young people to transform institutional practices that do not satisfy their needs and counters the practice of blaming the individual for the effects of structural inequalities. This principle allows me to explore what conditions limit and constrain the lives of youth, but also how their strategic resistance is incorporated into their daily lives through poetry, organizing, and researching community problems (Noguera, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2013). This principle calls attention to the ways that youth view social problems, and the complex ways

that various forms of oppression work together (Ginwright & James, 2002). My interview and observation protocols will investigate the important topics that are discussed during the training. I will ask what messages the youth wanted to convey to their audience and to what extent issues of race and social justice mattered in this space.

The fourth principle, “[encouraging] *collective action*,” encompasses a range of strategies involved in organizing and activism, including sit-ins, rallies, marches, and boycotts. The premise is that the capacity to change oppressive social conditions lies in collective efforts, not only in individual ones (Ginwright & James, 2002). The strategic resistance of youth is the conscious action they take in order to achieve a goal. What steps did the youth take in order to accomplish their goals for this training, and which goals did they have for the training? I will look for elements of collective decision making by asking about the ways in which they organized themselves and how others got involved.

The last principle, “[embracing] *youth culture*,” is seen by celebrating youth culture through organizational culture such as language, personnel, and recruitment strategies. Youth culture is unique with its own style of dress, language and can even be described as hip-hop culture. One of the main outcomes from a SJYD approach is that youth become agents to transform their environments, and are not simply forced to adapt, survive and build immunity to their circumstances. Youth culture manifests differently from one setting to another and can bring a new way to view an issue at hand. I will evaluate if the training reflects the needs of young people by observing what gets done (what messages did the youth want to convey), by whom (the youth describe their role in the training), and how the environment is created (how

were topics chosen). I will also be examining youth culture by paying close attention to the materials developed and the language used during the training.

Therefore, in this study, I will examine the extent to which (if at all) the five principles are evident, in an effort to develop the ability of student leadership to teach educators about institutional racism. I will develop codes based off this framework- for example: power, identities, systemic social change, collective action, and youth culture - to guide my data analysis.

Methods

Sample

My unit of analysis for this study was the “Youth Undoing Institutional Racism Training” (YUIR) conducted by recent high school alumni as professional development for teachers at the school. My study sought to understand the YUIR within the specific context of high school alumni students conducting the training for teachers. This training was sponsored by the Racial Equity Team at the school as part of the efforts to address racial and gender disproportionalities in student discipline. The Racial Equity Team at the school sought to provide a professional development workshop to be led by youth for staff. Members of the team felt it was necessary for teachers to hear from the students impacted by racism and facilitate this training and guide the broader discussions. The RET members felt that youth should be included in the discussion of racism and solution to address this at their school. This was the first youth led training provided for teachers this year. The Youth Undoing Institutional Racism was developed in 2001 as a partnership between The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, the American Friends

Service Committee, and the Seattle Young People's Project (People's Institute Northwest, 2018).

The YUIR training was an opportunity for multigenerational discussions to be had around anti-racist and anti-oppression education. This training was an opportunity for students to take action in their schools and communities to bring forth what they feel needs to be changed. The youth adapted their training after the People's Institute training, although without the collaboration or guidance from them.

The training was held after school in the school's library for one hour and thirty minutes on a weekday. The training was meant to bring a youth perspective to the issues of racial bias, racism, and its effects on students at the school. There were three students that were expected to facilitate this training. Two of the students were alumni that graduated last year, while the third student was a current senior at the school. Marcus was one student leader who identified himself as a queer Black American and graduated in 2017. He is currently a freshman enrolled in college and wants to be teacher. The second youth leader, Michelle, was a high school senior and identified herself as the "legit African-American" because her father was from Gambia. The youth were also compensated for their time and preparations to conduct this training.

Since I want to understand the "how" and "why" of this event, the pilot study allowed for a small scale and an exploratory study into a broader domain (Glesne, 2008; Yin, 2008). Using qualitative research methods, the boundaries of this study were defined as a single case of one training at Villa High School (whose name has been changed), gathering evidence surrounding the preparations of the training, examining the leadership skills taught to youth, and the decisions made by the youth conducting the training.

The study examined the leadership skills taught to youth, and the decisions made by the

youth conducting the training at Villa High School. The school is rooted in community-based organizations that play a major role in supporting students and developing their leadership in the community. Located in the south end of Seattle, in Washington State, the school is surrounded by an international community that serves a predominately African-American, immigrant, and refugee student population. The school is comprised of students from working class families and first-generation immigrants and more than 60 languages are spoken in the neighborhoods.

With the support of the community, teachers, parents and students, the school has continued to build a restorative justice community. Community-based organizations play a major role in supporting students and developing their leadership. One organization housed in the school provides academic-year long mentoring and supports, social justice programming, and a corps of “Servant Leader Educators” to work with teachers and students in classrooms. During the summer, they run a 6-week “Freedom School” that includes culturally-based academic enrichment as well as place-based social justice leadership development. The summer program is modeled after The People’s Institute Northwest organization which supports the Tyree Scott Freedom School (the civil rights era Freedom School model) to provide racial justice education to youth through a number of organizing networks around the country (People’s Institute Northwest, 2018).

In the past students have marched and successfully advocated for social changes from the City of Seattle for all students at their school. More recently, Villa High School students successfully advocated at the district for building renovations. There are multiple youth serving organizations working collaboratively at the school to provide mentorship, and academic services to students. However, Youth Action Alliance, is an organization in the school that

focuses on the development of intergenerational leadership and provided support to the youth facilitating the YUIR.

Villa High School has a participatory culture that encourages students to engage in social changes. Students take part, organize, and express their needs to create necessary changes to their community and school. Student voice has a unique role in the community which allows them to participate in conversations surrounding their visions for social change.

Collection of Data

The data collection and data analysis strategies for this case study relied on multiple sources of evidence that I used to triangulate. I collected information about students' leadership dynamics, identities (social, racial, or cultural), how their leadership capacities developed by conducting this training, previous leadership experience, and goals of the training. I analyzed three forms of data in this study: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documents. Participant observations brought a rich detailed description as well as an understanding of how students and teachers interacted within the training. I also conducted in depth interviews with two youth facilitating the training to understand their perspective, description, and insights on the training. The interviews were semi structured for forty minutes to one hour. With these interviews I gathered an understanding of the ways youth prepared to conduct this training as well as the affect this training had on them as youth leaders. These interviews provided a different perspective of the role that the student's racial identity played in the selection of topics for the training.

To understand the dynamics of the training and to observe the youth leading the training,

I conducted an observation of the training itself and the session for questions and answers afterwards. During all of my observations I was an outside observer and took fieldnotes. I made note of the general audience present, nonverbal reactions to the presentation, the levels of teacher participation, and underlying relational dynamics between students and teachers.

I also collected documentation of the presentation given to the audience. The purpose of these documents was to gather key information into topics the youth prepared for the training. The documents provided additional information on the vision and the messages the youth intended to convey to their audience. This presentation was also important because it provided notes on the sequence of events during the training and notes gathered by the facilitators on the participant discussions.

Analysis

Before beginning my data analysis, I made sure my information was in chronological order. My first step was to do a rapid data reading of my observation field notes, presentation documents, and the interview transcriptions with a notebook and pen. I was trying to find “ing” processes codes that made note of actions, perspectives, processes, values, and things that stood out to me according to my research questions. By using the framework, I had, I then highlighted key concepts and ideas, then coded these highlighted segments using codes derived from the Ginwright framework. Some of my codes were power, community, and leadership (see appendix for all codes). Those coded segments were then grouped into buckets. Some segments had multiple codes and for those segments I chose the most prominent code to categorize it properly. Throughout my coding and highlighting process I also took notes of any ideas, or key statements

that presented themselves. I then gathered my coded segments and examined them for any themes and patterns. In this step, I grouped codes with intersecting codes to construct emerging themes. For example, one segment could be coded with: power, identities, and leadership; I would then find another segment with the code, “leadership” and read them together to find a broader theme or pattern between these two segments.

Using the same coding process outlined above, I coded my observation field notes, presentation documents, and the interview transcriptions “line by line”. This helped contextualize and connect the student responses with the presentation and the training I observed. Last, I continued to find the intersecting codes to find the relationships across my various data sources. I physically arranged and rearrange coded data by cutting out segments and taping them under a category. Throughout the sorting process I made analytical comments and looked at the ways participants explicitly talked about racism, reform, and equity. It was important to notice how these topics were talked about and by whom they were referenced throughout my data.

Validity

To help ensure the validity of my analysis I shared my transcriptions, initial coding, and themes with some fellow colleagues for a cross check analysis. I also shared a copy of the interview transcriptions with the youth group I interviewed - I asked the students if this transcription captured their depiction of the training they conducted. I gathered any feedback given on the interview transcriptions for data analysis.

I am also a student, a researcher, and moved to Seattle from another state. I have not been a teacher in Seattle public schools. So, my perspective and understanding of schools comes from my formal education and not through experience with a formal school setting. The lack of

experience can at times, constrain the kinds of conversations that I can engage in or limit my understanding of the dynamics playing out in a room full of teachers, administration and students. I have to be aware that due to this, the data I collect and pay attention to is different.

As a researcher, I am also seen with a specific motive, intention, and purpose in a space. The school that I worked with has had some negative experiences with researchers and their work negatively impacting their community. The work by previous researchers has portrayed their communities in a negative, hostile manner that community members did not agree with, others have also quoted students in the past without giving them credit or have covered a story without acknowledging the student leaders behind certain campaigns. These negative perceptions may have affected my data collection by participants withholding information or delaying communication processes so as to reduce my understanding of the training preparations. I have to be aware of the negative perception that comes with associating myself as a researcher, and the institute that I work with. Due to this association, I understand that the flow of information might be constrained, stifled, or difficult to collect. There was some hesitancy when I asked to attend preparation meetings, but I tried to have a patient, yet persistent approach. I built trust with the students by being consistent, reliable, and transparent about my intent for this project. I was also understanding of the participants availability and communicated authentically in order to gain access to the training, and conversations with students. For example, I asked one student for help contacting the other facilitators, knowing he had a better connection with them than me. Before our interview, I stated that I was willing to travel to the school and understood that starting our interview at a specific time wouldn't be the expectation but a suggestion.

I was also aware of the power of my position as a student and how this allowed me to relate to the students in a way that provided me access. I didn't feel like I was in a position of power there, but this might have been an assumption that I made according to the identities that I have. My experiences as an activist brought a different perspective of people's dynamics in my research. I also know that my efforts "to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to make improvements in society" is a bias that I have and that it shaped the kinds of questions I asked participants in my study.

Being raised in a low-income Latino family myself created a sensitivity to families with similar characteristics. I may have interpreted certain actions or decisions that are made by these families differently because of my connection to this identity. I realize that having this bias may have influenced the way I evaluated and interpreted various situations. However, I have taken feedback from colleagues, asked myself questions about the purpose and intention of my study throughout the various stages of my study.

Limitations

This training was only a snapshot of the professional development offered to the school. The training was also an adaptation from a pre-existing training offered by another organization. The students and facilitators were following a structure influenced by YUIR, so the training was also not the "full training" usually offered due to time constraints. The original YUIR training takes place over the course of multiple days and the youth receive training by the institute on how to facilitate the YUIR training at their school. At the start of this training the facilitators acknowledged this training would be much shorter, readapted, and facilitators asked attendees not to expect solutions from this single discussion on racism.

The YUIR training follows an outline and has a certain structure. The decisions that the youth made were based on the outline of the original training. In the future it would be useful to see the difference in decision making and how this structure or lack thereof, affects the training and how the youth prepare to conduct the training. It was also unclear and unknown to me what the exact guidelines were for the original YUIR training were supposed to be. It would have been important to know why or how this training was different from the original. I also did not have insight into the selection process of the youth facilitators. There was a total of three youth that were involved in the training, and I interviewed two, Marcus and Michelle, (whose names have been changed).

Ideally, I would have received responses from all the youth participants to understand their roles and their goals for the training. One of the youth that I interviewed (Michelle) did not participate as much in the presentation aspect of the training, although she did facilitate one of the small group discussions. Two of the three students were high school alumni, and only one was a current student. It is not clear what the selection criteria was and why more current students were not selected to participate. These youth facilitators have worked together in the past and were selected by adults for their demonstrated leadership. I don't know if the students' race played a factor or not, and how much of an emphasis did this have on being selected.

I did not get to see many things during my data gathering stages that would have provided a better understanding of the training. Before the training, communication between myself, teachers, and students was sparse. I would get few updates and did not know when their preparation meetings were. Since I did not have access to the preparation meetings prior to the training, my perspective and understanding was limited. During the training I was sitting towards

the front of the room and sat with one group of teachers. The conversations that I had with teachers was with only a small selection of the entire group of teachers present. This small sample size was not sufficient to be representative of the sentiments of the larger group present. In future studies, it would be more impactful to have more recording devices at the other group discussions, or float around to other group tables and participate in the discussion to probe in certain parts.

Emergent Themes and Evidence

This training was held in order to help highlight key issues regarding racial equity and to resolve the question of, “how do we address racial bias in our school?”. The policy in schools today addresses these problems by providing professional development and trainings. The Racial Equity Team at this high school partnered with an in-school non-profit organization allowing students the opportunity to provide this training. The training took place in the school’s library promptly after school. The training was announced over the intercom as a “mandatory all staff training”. One of the RET members present at the training stated this was the highest teacher turnout for a professional development training so far, and I observed over thirty teachers and staff present.

The training was planned and placed on the school’s professional development calendar by members of the Racial Equity Team. The Racial Equity Team was composed of teachers and staff at the school. Additionally, there were two staff members that also helped facilitate the training, although they were not members of the RET team at the school. Based off of one of my conversations with the students, one member on the RET helped select some students to facilitate

and plan the training, and then those students referred other students to help organize as well. There were three students that helped plan, organize, and co-facilitated the training. I overheard one youth state, “Where are all the teachers, they are supposed to be here. They are not being responsible.” This statement seemed to suggest the student’s need to hold teachers accountable. Thus, in order to show youth representation at the training and to ensure teachers were being held accountable, there were a few students present at the beginning of the training, but they did not have any organizing role throughout and left at the beginning of the presentations. The training was opened up by a staff member from the organization Youth Action Alliance with a cheer that engaged the teachers and staff. The cheer is used during the Freedom Schools program that takes place over the summer and provides academic and leadership enrichment. This staff member then gave updates and instructions on upcoming events at the school. Following this opening, another staff member opened up the space with a historical recollection of racial inequities in public schools. This presentation was important because it contextualized the problems this program helped to resolve. Afterwards, this staff member instructed the audience to collectively agree upon a set of community agreements. These community agreements laid the framework for how the audience should conduct themselves and clarified the boundaries of the space. After the community agreements were established he proceeded to ask the audience to collectively define one of the key terms that would be discussed: racism.

Following this group discussion on community agreements five topics were addressed: (1) The classroom environment (2) Greeting, checking in and building relationships with your students (3) curriculum and teaching style (4) addressing behaviors in class and (5) showing your humanity.

The teachers discussed the topics with their tables in small group discussion. Some groups were facilitated and guided by students and our group was guided by one staff member. During these small group discussions there was student input on the slides addressing (a) curriculum and teaching style (b) addressing behaviors in class and (c) showing your humanity. These student inputs were suggestions, recommendations, and explicitly stated what students wanted teachers to do in order to address racism as it pertained to those topics.

At the end of training the students all recognized important teachers that had made some kind of positive influence through their pedagogy, or their curriculum highlighting the work, experiences, and history of people of color. The training was concluded by answering some questions that had been asked anonymously by teachers prior to the training. The staff member addressed the questions, with additional comments made by the students. One student read a poem to conclude the session and spoke of her experience with teachers at the school. Following the poem teachers were encouraged to stay for a separate session to finish answering the anonymous questions. About 10 teachers stayed for this separate session and the staff facilitated this discussion as well.

Ginwright Principles

To analyze the training, I used Ginwright's framework with five principles (1) Analyzes power in social relationships (2) Makes identity central (3) Promotes systemic change (4) Encourages collective action and (5) Embraces youth culture. The goal of the theory is to build a more equitable society, through the engagement of critically conscious citizens. Through the analysis of my data I analyzed how each principle related to the enactment of youth leadership in

this context. Three main principles stood out the most: power, identity, and systemic change. By using the analysis of these principles, I constructed three emergent themes.

Analyzes power in social relationships

For this principle I was searching to see if students were aware of hierarchies in the training. In current education processes the common practice is for students to learn from teachers. The people with power and decision-making capacities are teachers and administration. The data showed that students want to dismantle that hierarchy. The training provided students with an opportunity to distribute power.

The YUIR institute provided opportunities for students of color to name and shift power in relation to their teachers, recognize white privilege, and to have their narratives heard.

The youth leaders both spoke to different issues happening at Villa High School on a state and district level. Marcus, one of the alumni youth leaders in the training, spoke of his desire to try and change some of these issues head on because he was seen as a leader at his school. The responsibility of addressing issues directly is something that Michelle, one of the current high school students in the training, also addressed in the classroom. She spoke about an incident with a teacher and a student, in which a teacher used negative language towards a student, “One teacher, said, ‘You’re acting like an idiot.’ And I stopped him, and I was like, ‘You cannot call students out of their name.’” During the YUIR training she made sure this teacher was listening. She continued to analyze the power dynamics of race, gender, and positionality as a student and the ability to challenge these dynamics moving forward. Michelle said, “He is a white male, and when I called him out, he kind of said, ‘I appreciate you calling me out. And I

appreciate you holding me accountable.’ I said, ‘I’m glad that you appreciate it, but I also want you to remember that you can’t keep doing that. It has to stop. You can’t use that language no more.’ So, me being a student and it kind of helped me because I’m in these classrooms, so I was letting them know what I’ve experienced, of what I’ve seen.” Both Marcus and Michelle spoke to the importance of Black youth speaking to teachers and how this was liberating for them as well as empowering. Marcus stated “A lot of the people that were there to listen were white folks and that was their role, and our role was to educate, and spread the word, and also have them recognize their privilege, and make sure that when they’re in these spaces of teaching amongst a large amount of black and brown youth that are engaging their curriculums, that everything that they’re taking in is a reflection of the curriculum and who you are.” In this instance, Marcus was aware of the power hierarchy that exists between students and teachers. However, he used this training to give himself power and a position to have his experience heard, validated, and taken seriously. He shifted the power to himself and allowed his perspective as a black male affected by racism to take precedent over the experience of uncomfortable white teachers.

Conversations around race and racism can result in discomfort from white audiences, skirting the conversation away from a positive dialogue. In this instance Marcus made sure to name the privilege that comes with the power to do that, white privilege. The experience Marcus has had with schooling was validated and heard by teachers that otherwise would not have paid attention due to the existing power hierarchy.

In a separate example of analyzing power in social relationships Michelle stated how an understanding of racism helped her deal with her schooling experience. In Michelle’s words, “So when you’re educated about it and you have so much wisdom and knowledge, especially when

you get it from someone else, I wouldn't say it puts you in an easier position, but it's an easier mindset. If I wouldn't have known what racism is or how it affects black people, how do you think I'm able to go to school and deal with these white teachers?" Thus, it can be concluded from both Marcus and Michelle's experiences that an understanding of power dynamics in social relationships can improve the quality of the educational experience of students of color.

Makes Identity Central

The issue observed here was whether or not students had the opportunity to develop their identities in the context of this training. The development of identity and being a part of something bigger is usually provided by clubs or sports in schools. The data showed that the training provided students with an opportunity to create an alliance and work together to have their needs heard.

The YUIR institute provided students of color with a platform to speak, lead, and challenge racism in their own schooling experiences.

Marcus stated, "These white women who are so instrumental and very important in the school's transformation of radical justice, but they're also providing platforms for us to speak, while simultaneously, we're also being able as people of color, students of color, to lead things and have them listen to us regardless". This meant a lot to Marcus as a black, queer, male who being at the intersection of different powers and privileges sees the values of his experiences being shared.

Another student spoke about her first year working with a non-arrest crime prevention nonprofit. She's in high school and is working on projects within her community to help change

the perception of her neighborhood away from being “bad” or “scary”. She stated, “So even though we have adults, we've had youth try to push, I'd probably say, situations that weren't the best away so what we do is instead of living with this, ‘Oh, our neighborhood is bad,’ ‘The neighborhood is this,’ we try to change that.” This statement by Michelle gives us insight to the way she perceives change needs to occur. She has taken an active approach to changing the narrative and perceptions of her neighborhood because she is conscious and aware of the negative implications this has for her and her classmates.

Students attending the school know the implications that fear, surrounding their community, has on teachers at the school. They are aware of racist disciplinary incidents that result from the misconceptions that teaching in their school endangers teachers, and consequently makes teachers fearful of their students. Marcus stated, “Our POC teachers, they're not scared of no students, at all. But I feel that all just comes from the system's whiteness, white supremacy and racism, period. It's like I as a teacher can walk into a classroom and be fearful of students who are paying attention in my class, partaking in my curriculum, and that I can be fearful of them? It's like, where does that come from? It also goes back to what Michelle was saying about the perception of our neighborhood and a lot of people from outside of here will say, ‘Oh, your neighborhood is ghetto, it's hood, it's ratchet. It's full of violence.’” Marcus and Michelle both developed an awareness of the socio-political forces that influenced their identities and built solidarity with each other because they shared in the same struggle. By being part of this training, they were a part of something meaningful and productive, that allowed them to critique and flip the narratives surrounding the misconceptions about their identities, and instead transform them into sources of pride and celebration.

Promotes Systemic Change

The current culture in schools does not make space to address personal traumas and or the need to change social conditions by amplifying student voice. The data showed that in this school context students were involved in actions like marches and walkouts to help address their needs, and challenge systemic issues. However, the training didn't facilitate the opportunity for direction action and didn't encourage this in the presentation. However, if students engaged in more actions they would have the potential to address issues in their schools and surrounding communities.

Youth in this context drew on their intersectional identities as a resource for systems change.

The students' leadership was enacted when they interacted with their peers. They found solidarity in their shared experiences as youth. Their peers and themselves possessed "inside" knowledge of the schools needs and the adultism that stifled their voices. Marcus recalled his experience as a school leader stating, "I mean, the school's generally intersectional period, 'cause we're all so diverse and come from so many backgrounds, but particularly for the intersection like queerness and our blackness, our Latin heritage or Asian heritage. These different backgrounds coming together and forming this alliance to be heard and be visible for what we wanted." The liberation of these groups comes from addressing the various forms of social oppression that they all experience. There is a sense of optimism and empathy for the suffering that is fostered through the shared experience of addressing various systems change.

The youth leading the training had different identities and held strong relationships with one another. They supported each other outside of the training and in the training spoke of the

trauma they had witnessed and the need for teachers to mitigate these situations. During the training one student advised teachers not to call security when a student misbehaves because this traumatizes students, and the students at this school are already being overpoliced. She stated, “Students should never, ever be a threat.” By recommending which ideas and behaviors teachers should refrain from doing, they helped bring awareness to the ways this is oppressive for students of color. Marcus and Michelle brought their experiences and ideas to address racism at their school and took an active approach to help address social inequities.

Conclusion

The academic literature describes youth leadership enacted in schools as underutilized, and an undervalued strategy for change. There is not enough emphasis on the role of youth leader’s identities as a defining factor in the leadership development of youth organizers. This pilot study brings attention to the need in recognizing student’s race, and economic background as influential factors that shape youth leadership. This study describes the potential that youth leadership has in addressing the current systemic inequalities. My findings suggest that trainings like the Youth Undoing Institutional Racism training might benefit both youth and educators. There needs to be more dialogue and stories from the students directly impacted by racism, through concrete suggestions. We need to take a black and brown student centered approach to reform and addressing racism in schools. Teachers planning these trainings are suggested to use a more equitable selection criteria standard that takes the opinions of the student body into consideration as well as interest to participate. In the selection of student facilitators there is potential to challenge racial hierarchies surrounding conversations around racism by adding race

as criteria for selection. The Social Justice Youth Development framework provided an additional way to analyze and identify how youth leaders addressed systemic inequalities in their schools and communities. This research will help provide insight into the direction that my future research could move towards.

In my future research I would like to know how students of color can fill the expectations between what educators think they provide and what students feel they need. It would be more impactful to also conduct a longitudinal study and compare this training with that of a different school context. This longitudinal study would also allow me to analyze the effects of the YUIR training and analyze the effectiveness, implications and implementation in that school. In a larger study, I would do more in-depth research on the trainings offered by schools that take a youth-centered approach to addressing racism. I would like to compare and contrast these approaches across schools. To demonstrate that race and ethnicity plays a role in the enactment and effectiveness of a Youth Undoing Institutional Racism training, in future research I will consider the teacher and student demographics when selecting a site. The elimination of racial bias in schools is possible, and I hope that by conducting this research we can provide solutions, possibilities and knowledge about what is effective and impactful. I hope that this research will help raise awareness of the need to include young people in the process and the conversations that seek to address systemic racism.

**Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Youth Facilitating “Youth Undoing
Institutional Racism Training”**

Questions:

1. How long were you at Rainier Beach High School? Did you live in the neighborhood? If so, for how long?
2. How would you describe Rainier Beach High School students to someone who’s not familiar with the school?
3. What classes, programs or activities made a difference to your experience at the school? Why?
 - a. What was your role in those programs/activities at the school?
 - b. Were you involved in any leadership capacities at the school? If so, which ones and for how long? What was your experience in those like?

4. I am also interested in understanding the Youth Undoing Institutional Racism Training, can you describe the goals of the training for me?
 - a. What is the message that you want to convey?
 - b. What do you hope the audience receives from this training?
 - c. How did you choose the topics you are presenting on?
 - d. How did you decide these topics are important to share with people? Why?

5. I am particularly interested in understanding the role of students of color conducting this training.
 - a. How did you get involved with this work?
 - b. Can you describe your role during this training?
 - c. Who else has been involved?
 - d. What are some ways you organized yourselves?
 - e. How would you racially or ethnically identify yourself as?

6. Which skills do you feel helped prepare you to lead this training?
 - a. What kinds of things have you learned through your involvement in the training?
 - b. What aspects of the training did you enjoy most? What challenged you?

7. Do you think youth can be leaders at your school? If so why?
 - a. Can you describe what youth leadership means to you?
 - b. Do you think youth leadership is important in schools?
 - c. What role do you think issues of race or equity have in this leadership context?

8. Is there anything else I didn't ask that you think is important to know about your role during this training and your leadership preparations?

Appendix B: Observation Protocol

Setting:

Where is the meeting taking place?

What are the dynamics of the training? What is being worn?

Who is the leader?

How are they demonstrating leadership?

Events:

Acts being made by people in the space?

What kinds of questions are students being asked?

What issues are being discussed?

Participants: Students/ Teachers

Who is in the room? Who are they? Age, ethnicity, role?

Who interacts with whom?

How are nonverbal responses reactions being reflected during statements?

How much space is used and shared with those around them?

How is enthusiasm or boredom demonstrated?

What gestures stick out and why?

Leadership observation:

How are race based conversations being led?

What are the relational dynamics between students and teachers?

Appendix C: Codebook

Codes:

Power

Identities

Systemic Social Change

Resistance

Community

Collective Action

Youth Culture

Youth Experiences

Relationships

Leadership

History

Appendix D: Fieldnotes for Youth Undoing Institutional Racism Training

Initial Fieldnotes: Rebeca Muniz

Date: March 23, 2018

Location: Villa High School

Participants: Facilitators were: Two Organization staff, and three students.

Purpose of the training: The training provided teachers and staff with professional development. The purpose was to help give teachers tools to help dismantle racism in their school by hearing from the students' perspective and receive advice on how to solve the issue of

racism in their school. However, one staff facilitator reminds the audience that this is not the only thing plaguing the school.

Acronyms: Youth Action Alliance

The YUIR training

- The training was a “mandatory all staff training” and over 40 teachers were present. There were four tables and I was sitting at the table with known teachers. There are about 12 people teachers per table with some lingering in the back.
- this training is usually much longer than it will be today, in 90 minutes they will receive what the training would cover over the time span of a week.
- Freedom schools is introduced and their “cooperation contract” is introduced to be used in this space in the space. Teachers will need to abide by this and meant hold people accountable.
- They ask the audience to define racism and ask for consensus on whether they agree or disagree about the definitions.
- One staff member introduces training by talking about the 1700 and the education system and the expectations it had for Black students and how it affects students currently.

Relationship with Students

- Questions in the training was: What are some of the elements that you all use to have conducive learning environments?
 - Teachers stated: beginning with clear routines, have positive interactions, mindfulness, greeting at the door by name. “Glad to see you here”. Keeping students aware, and pulling students aside, create relationships, checking in, put student work on the wall. Every day is a new start. Try to open with a question that will reach their lives. Notice the small things students moved five times. Ask “What's going on outside of the school?”

Curriculum and Classroom

- Questions in the training was: How are we manifesting curriculum? From a student perspective? How do we fill the gaps?
 - Looking at examples at the institutional and at the society breaking down vocabulary. A teacher talks about learned helplessness. A teacher talks about setting high expectations privately, failing the students that deserve it, asking what are the supports that you need?

Analytic Notes:

- During a call, out and response. The most people giving responses are concentrated in one table with the most people saying things and contributing.
- At the beginning of the training on organization staff pumps up the teachers with a cheer “red hot” a cheer that the Freedom School uses to pump up students during the summer. The

students present know the teacher well and about half the room is participating. But this is a good indicator of the youth culture present in the space.

- A student acknowledged teachers, thanking them for affirming them in the classroom when he went to school here. The other students like Michelle comment that they have the same teachers. I think this speaks to a trend in which teachers have strong relationships with students, and I'm curious about what these teachers did to gain the student respect and recognition.
- One student shares a poem, "Young kids", that speaks to the different sides that a student has and their stories. Her poem says, "Teachers reactions have a past, it does not start with classroom management. You are not taught patience. Don't flip your lid on students. Don't send them out. Be Conscious of your language." She's advises them that when you they security, teachers are retraumatized students because students here are being overpoliced. "Students should never, ever be a threat." This speaks strongly to power in the relationships that student have with students. This dynamic is very important, and I have not seen students and teachers interact this way.
- One teacher urges teachers to build a rapport with teacher who do have the good relationships with students. She states that the social studies department is here for them to help deconstruct their Eurocentric curriculum and help find sources from poc authors. She asked to say and acknowledge the elephant in the room meaning their white identity and the racism in all classrooms. She asks teachers to be explicit "for scholars they already know your race, so being very conscious about identity in the classroom and what student's identities bring to the classroom is important to address racism.
- Marcus speaks to having poc representation in the classroom, speaking to the resistance perspective in history, and to have a platform and go the extra mile. Your students will go there. If you do these four things, you are undoing racism in yourself." Another student would later recommend: humanizing students to address teachers fear of students.

Methodological Notes:

- I'm asked to share, but I don't share anything, in the future I think I should share something.
- I didn't ask the teachers in my group or the facilitator if I could record the training. It was for my own note taking but realized afterwards how that may have been unethical as a researcher.

Personal Notes:

I think everyone in the room knew I was not a teacher and it made me uncomfortable. I wonder if introducing myself at the beginning would have helped. Communication with the students prior to the training were sparse but there one who was warm and friendly when we greeted and met each other.

Rebeca: Okay. This is Rebecca Muniz. It is April 5th. I am at Villa High School and I am with Marcus and Michelle. Awesome. All right. So, the first question is, how long were you at Villa High School and did you live in the neighborhood? And if so, for how long?

Michelle: Yeah, I attend Villa High School. I've been here since my freshman year, so since 2014. I'm gonna graduate here, so that'll be four years. I've lived

in the south end since birth, so 17 and a half years. More than that, 'cause I turned 17 in less than two months.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay. What about you, Marcus?

Marcus: Can you repeat the question?

Rebecca Muniz: Yeah, so how long were you at Villa High School and did you live in the neighborhood? And if so, for how long?

Marcus: I attended Villa High School for all four years. The school is the bomb diggity. Love it. It has its vices obviously, but yeah, I love this school. Here for all four years. I particular came to the south end, I'd say around my freshman year. I did, 'cause my dad's house ... I mean, what are you-

Michelle: You went to Aki, though.

Marcus: Yeah, but does that count as the south end? That's Hillman City, though.

Michelle: But the [inaudible 00:01:34], though?

Marcus: Does that count as the south end, then? Are you sure? But this ... But that's like Villa Valley.

Michelle: [inaudible 00:01:44] past that than Villa Valley.

Marcus: Okay. So, I guess I'll say, 'cause we moved there, I'd say around fifth, sixth grade then. So, I've been here for a very long time. Very, very long time.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay, and how would you describe Villa High School students to someone who's not familiar with the school?

Marcus: I would describe RBHS students as very diverse, 'cause we all kind of have this struggle we go through as not only are we people of color, but we're also majority low income, so not a lot of us come from these polished and very well set foundations that other schools have. A lot of us are, I think in my opinion, fighters. A lot of us end up coming to protests or rallies and also on top of that, a lot of us are very creative people. We're very smart and intellectual, like all the south end people might think of the community, they'd say that we are very ... What's the word I want to use? We're very resourceful and we use what we have to the best of our ability. I think the saying is "Making a dollar out of 10 cents," that's what my mom says. When you don't really have much, you stretch it out and make

sure you're using that resource to the best of your capacity. So, that's how I would definitely describe RB students.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay.

Michelle: Can you re-ask the question please?

Rebecca Muniz: Of course. How would you describe Villa High School students to someone who is not familiar with the school?

Michelle: Kind of what Marcus said with being a fighter of the school has been through a lot of ups and downs. There was a point in time where Villa High School was gonna be shut down, so I mean, there's also the terrible, I'd say, misconceptions about Villa and also the neighborhood, so a lot of people who don't go here and a lot of people who don't even live in the area, say it's ghetto or it's violent or we don't have a good education.

Michelle: Of course, Villa has its flaws, but even with the IB courses, I feel like that's kind of helped me, especially with the IB curriculum. It might not be five stars, but I can definitely give it 3.75. I felt like I've learned a lot. I feel like especially about the things that we learn about, we're learning about Cuba, we've learned about apartheid. We learned about China and how ... We're learning about authoritarian states and it's good to have that knowledge within your brain, so I'm very appreciative of what I've gotten, even though I know I deserve better than all four the years that I've been here. What I can say is a lot of us ... How would I say it?

Michelle: Just 'cause a lot of people give off this terrible representation of Villa and the thing is, if you go here, if you live here, you realize it's not as bad as what people make it out to be.

Rebecca Muniz: My third question is, so what classes, programs or activities made a difference to your experience at the school, and why?

Marcus: I know a specific class that changed things for me, 'cause I want to mention that they're catching everything that I'm saying.

Rebecca Muniz: They'll catch it.

Marcus: I know for me, Mrs. Black, she's a history teacher here. She has a course and the courses specifically focus on ... It's like African resistance towards colonial oppression and just colonialism, colonization period, and that's so radical and transformative in comparison to all of the other history courses I've been taking from kindergarten all the way up to, I'd say, 10th, 9th grade, 'cause all you learn about from my experience, I won't speak for

other people, from my experience as a black American, and also a gay black American, I'd rarely ever seen representation of people like me in text books, but also in terms of colonial narratives, you never even get the chance to even hear that the ...

Marcus: I feel like for me, to even hear that resistance was a thing for African slaves that were taken and that we weren't just taken willingly, we didn't just fight back. That was something that was never taught to us, so internally, I kind of internalized these small things about who I am as a person, who my people are, because these colonial narratives ... They're not inclusive towards the oppressed that they were capitalizing off of.

Marcus: So, to learn about all these different Maroons and even Haiti being the first black nation to liberate itself from just colonialism period, it's just these beautiful stories that you would never hear or think about that were even true. They actually exist and we're kind of getting sick and tired of these false colonialism, colonialists white narratives being taught to us over and over and over again. That's so deprecating to student's mental health. I know when I believe certain history classes before her class, I would come in and leave with a heavy head or even a heavy chest. Just my eyes would kind of well up, 'cause it's just you learn your people are just slaves all the time and it's like, we're not just that. We're also more than that. We have so much history before that that's been so erased from history textbooks and etc. So, I'd say one example of that is Mrs. Black's history class.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay. Did you have a role in that class?

Marcus: I was a student.

Rebecca Muniz: Just a student? Okay.

Marcus: Yeah, I wasn't really necessarily leading anything, 'cause it was taught by her, but we did have projects and essays we would write.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay, cool. Were you involved in any leadership capacities at the school?

Marcus: Yes.

Rebecca Muniz: Which ones and for how long?

Marcus: I was the school's GSA, gay school alliance, sexuality alliance, president for three years, but it really started getting active until the last two years, and that was hella dope, because it was a whole bunch of intersectional queer people. I mean, the school's generally intersectional period, 'cause were all so diverse and come from so many backgrounds, but particularly

for the intersection like queerness and our blackness, our Latin heritage or Asian heritage. These different backgrounds coming together and forming this alliance to be heard and be visible for what we wanted.

Marcus: Not even wanted, that was just our basic human right. Some of the things that we got was we got the gender neutral bathroom put in here and that was dope. We also got the staff training about queer issues and topics to be like educational for them to learn, 'cause I know some staff kind of struggled with how they could interact with queer students. Also, we did so much stuff. It's hard to remember off the top of my head. We did day of silence the last three years and it's always been a very big turnout. I mean, it's just amazing.

Marcus: And also, even Michelle 's not queer, she's ... We even call her an ally, she's more so an accomplice and I'd say literally ... I don't necessarily believe in allyship, I believe in accomplices and if you're actually going to ride with me for the issues that are impacting me and people alike, you're gonna be right by my side fighting with me instead of just waving a flag saying, "I'm an ally." That doesn't work all the time. Those are all fair weathered friends. One day they're for you, one day they're kind of like ... take a break.

Marcus: Her and some other black women, young black girls, and the school would love to just come and support the GSA and all the other intersectional queer people in there. Even some of the teachers would come in there. Some of our teachers are queer and they would come just to visit and just being in that GSA was such a safe hub for kids like us to just talk and have fun and just get away from this hetero patriarchy and racism and all this other bullshit that we have to deal with on a daily basis, and just come to GSA and just like fight.

Rebecca Muniz: Were you involved in any other leadership capacities at the school?

Marcus: We did so much.

Rebecca Muniz: Other programs or activities?

Marcus: Me, Michelle, and a couple of our other friends, we led that march. What was the march's name? Was it one love? The one love march. It was in response to the president whose name who won't be mentioned, 'cause I don't have time for him. We marched in solidarity with the people who felt like their power or energy was just being thrown away and their voices weren't being heard, so this march was just to amplify those voices and make sure that ... We were gonna speak out about how we felt, and it was student led, but thankfully to the help of YAC and some of the YAC staff

and even the school staff. We pulled off a very successful student walkout and it was so huge.

Rebecca Muniz: Can you say more about the success of it?

Marcus: Yeah. I mean, do you remember-

Rebecca Muniz: How many students walked out?

Marcus: There were videos of ... I think it was three quarters of the school walked out. This is all led by intersectional black folks. A couple black women, an immigrant black man and me, a queer gay man, a queer black man. [inaudible 00:15:13], he was doing photography stuff. We don't need to include him. So, I mean, it was just really ... It was amazing. I'm so thankful that we were able to pull that off. It kind of gave me a confident boost to be ... I could really do this movement and it's not even I, 'cause that's not what this is about. It's about us.

Marcus: We can do this movement and we don't need all these white investors or sponsors and all that other liberalist crap with shit, we can organize and run the shit from our own grassroots and make sure that it's on and properly run. I think that definitely set the tone and foundation for who we are now, 'cause I can be a little shy here and there, most def I'm not gonna hold my tongue for nobody. No man. So, I think it's so important that also our narratives are being heard, 'cause I think we're talking about the march of our lives earlier. The thing about that is even they're cool, they're all benefiting from white privilege and even Emma González is Latina. I'm not sure if she's-

Rebecca Muniz: Yeah, she's-

Marcus: White Latina.

Rebecca Muniz: She's Cuban American. So, her dad is a Cuban immigrant.

Marcus: So, and still, even though it's fair to say that she is very intersectional, but on top of that, a lot of them are from Parkland, Florida, which is a very affluent neighborhood in Florida and we're not ... We're the polar opposite of that group. None of us have this spoonfed lifestyle that they have. It just seemed like everything was spoonfed for them, but the majority of them are white and from this abundant community with so many resources. We don't have anything like that.

Rebecca Muniz: Yeah, and there will be another question about the role and issues of race and equity and how that-

Marcus: Okay, I'm gonna bite my tongue.

Rebecca Muniz: No, no. Don't bite your tongue, but I just want to make sure that Michelle gets a chance to speak to her experience.

Marcus: Yes, go, go.

Rebecca Muniz: Let's go.

Speaker 4: Is it appropriate if I join?

Rebecca Muniz: Yeah, you can sit in and listen. If you have some comments, make some comments, but more of a listening role will be important, if that's okay? Okay, thanks. All right, Michelle, so your turn. Tell us a little bit about any programs or activities that made a difference to your experience at the school.

Michelle: Programs and activities. I will say-

Rebecca Muniz: Or classes.

Michelle: Oh, classes?

Rebecca Muniz: Programs and activities, too.

Michelle: Okay. Classes?

Rebecca Muniz: Programs or activities.

Michelle: What's really interesting is I haven't really connected to as much classes. I feel like the way I connect with the classes maybe ... What we're learning about as far as the curriculum, so of course, art, I was really into ceramics for a good three years and then I got tired of it and then I stopped doing it. What else? I feel like this year, I'm in this class that's called IB 20th Century World History, and I feel like I'm learning a lot about countries and how they work, especially with the U.S.

Michelle: So, before, I didn't ... Of course, I knew that America was made and based off of people of color and they've taken credit after, during, the oppression, but from my history class, he's teaching us a lot about these countries-

Rebecca Muniz: Who is this?

Michelle: It's Mr. Reed, Curtis Reed, who teaches 20th Century World History, and even though he's white, I feel like he has a very good understanding of just countries and ... I don't know. You know how there's a lot of countries in America that the U.S. just had to involve themselves in, and I feel like whether it was a good or bad ending, I feel like he does a really good job at explaining that to me. I'm actually interested in his class. I haven't really been interested in history like that, like the African resistance thing was, I was interested, but I'd already had knew that we resisted, also 'cause my dad is West African. He's from the village. My dad is from Gambia [inaudible 00:20:20]. He's from West Africa, so I kind of had an idea of resistance already, so even though I didn't know so much about it, I still had this idea.

Michelle: Of course, I was interested, but it wasn't the best thing of my life. But I haven't really found that course yet, but I will say they're more than a program, YAC changed my life. That's family now. They're not even more coworkers anymore, they're like my family. I met Emily when I was ... Actually, before I was a freshman, 'cause I used to live at the Preston Points, and she used to be one of the adults who used to be in this late night program. I'd seen her around, but we never really spoke like that up until freshman year, and we were talking about ... 'Cause I told her, I guess it slipped out that I lived in Skyway for a good two years and then she was like, "Did you ever go to late night?" I was like, "Yeah." She was like, "I think that's why I remember you."

Michelle: So we was talking about that, but I feel like when I met her, that's when I actually realized that I wanted to become an activist. Also when I was a scholar-

Rebecca Muniz: When you met ...

Michelle: Emily. Sorry, yes, I did. I said you changed my life. Yeah, that's what I said.

Emily: I'm really impressed that I heard my name, actually.

Rebecca Muniz: [inaudible 00:21:47].

Michelle: I also think something that really affected me was when I was a scholar at Freedom Schools, and I like the curriculum that we were learning, 'cause it's the polar opposite of public schooling. Freedom Schools give a curriculum of black and brown kids or black and brown students/scholars, and the books and everything that we're reading were black people of color.

Michelle: I was really enjoying that. I liked my classroom and I liked how we were being taught about people who looked like us. We were being taught about our history. We were reading about people of color and we were reading about their experiences and I like to read books about people who are similar to me, so I really appreciate YAC, I really appreciate Freedom Schools. Issac is another example, another person who changed my life in terms of being an activist and fighting for stuff.

Michelle: I met him when I was a scholar at Freedom Schools and even though we connected, we didn't really, really connect until I started VAC, so the same year that I started Freedom Schools was the same year I started VAC, so it was two, I would say, activist, non-profit, sort of thing, but yeah, I started working for Villa Action Coalition, which is a non-arrest, non-crime prevention organization, and we go out into the neighborhood of Villa and we reach out to the residents and the community members and talk about what's coming up and things of that nature, but I had met him when I first started and we connected and then he started working here, and then I told him to his face, "You're my mentor, whether you like it or not, you're my mentor." He's hella cool. Yeah. He's tight.

Rebecca Muniz: Why do you think he had such a ... Why he made such a difference, and Emily, why do you think they made such a big difference?

Michelle: I mean, because even with Freedom Schools and even with Villa, you don't really meet a lot of staff members who were born and raised in the same places that you were born and raised in. I'm from the South end, Issac's from the South end, so we reminisce on Aki Kurose, Speed E Market, Catfish Corner, we stay talking about these places that we remember as youth. And Issac also knows that I really loved Aki when I went there and he went there, and it's like when you have something in common with someone because you came from a similar background, it's amazing, so that's another reason why we connected and he also understands where I be coming from, also, 'cause I was born and raised here.

Michelle: I also feel like our relationship dynamic is really good, because we understand each other. I talk to him a lot about Islam and the way that our religion is set up and the way it works. Yeah, he is hella understanding. He's really cool and we're also kind of similar, 'cause he's blunt and he speaks his mind and no matter what race you are, whoever you are, he's still gonna tell you how he feels, especially if you're saying something that is offensive or saying something that's not right. I'm kind of like that, so I don't know. We connect on a lot of different things, but that's an adult

that's really helped me frame myself, in a sense, and he's really supportive in everything, so that's big bro, for real.

Michelle: Yeah, but YAC and Freedom Schools, that's where my activism was really kicking in. That's during, I'd say summer '15, that was the summer of me really, really finding myself and through me finding myself through my sophomore year, I took a break from friendships, I was by myself, and I literally had like two friends.

Rebecca Muniz: Wow.

Michelle: Yeah, I had two friends, 'cause I wasn't messing with people. I was growing up and I was realizing that these people ain't for me and I realized that these people don't deserve to be my friends. If you're my friend, you actually have to be about something, but yeah, so I took this long break throughout sophomore year and I stopped being friends with a lot of people, and I took a break and I was only focusing on myself. And then junior year, I met these amazing people, my group of friends, and I started getting more involved in things, but yeah, I will probably say-

Rebecca Muniz: What were your roles in those programs and activities in the school?

Michelle: So, Freedom Schools, I was a scholar, and then two years after Freedom Schools, I was a junior servant leader intern, so I was co-teaching with a servant leader interns in the classrooms teaching the curriculum, reading the books with the students, doing the reading activities with the students, serving lunch to them, eating lunch with them, going on the field trips with them. So, in a sense, SLI and the acronym was Servant Leader Intern/Educator, so basically they're the facilitator.

Michelle: We don't really call them teachers, because we try to change the language, we try to frame the language a little bit different from the systemic schooling to the school that we actually need and deserve, so we were calling them facilitators and then we were calling the youth students and scholars. We weren't referring to them as kids, so we tried to change ... We try to change our language, Freedom Schools is national, very popular in California. It's in the south, so it's nothing new, but Freedom Schools, we were the first high school site in Seattle. I actually believe in all of Washington, to have a high school site and to actually have the servant leader intern and the junior servant leader intern dynamic work.

Michelle: We were kind of trying to reinforce that for the inner generational leadership kind of thing, and that played off 'cause we being a JSLI kind of shaped me into who I am today and right now. With Villa Action Coalition, I went through a lot of different roles and it's because I stayed

and I guess they were really recognizing my work and they were really appreciative. Freedom Schools and VAC 'cause they've really been the only two jobs that I've been working consistently and the first two jobs that I ever had, so with VAC, first I was a youth engagement worker and then I turned into a youth outreach worker, and then I turned into our outreach worker one and now I'm a Villa fiver, so yeah, it's a lot of different roles.

Michelle: The role I am now was more of an adult role and working more hours and doing more things and shadowing staff members. Yeah. And more income, I guess you could say that. Yeah.

Rebecca Muniz: What about any leadership capacities at the school?

Michelle: Leadership capacity-

Rebecca Muniz: Or were those ... Those are separate right? Not quite at the school?

Michelle: Well, I mean, the Villa site, I mean, Freedom Schools is actually at Villa during the summer time, so we meet incoming freshman and incoming sophomores and we build relationships with them, so of course I don't have a role here, 'cause I'm still a student, but I still know all of my scholars. I still talk to them, I still say hi. Little bros and little sis's, but I probably say leadership ...

Michelle: I don't really have an exact role in the things that I'm involved with as far as school, because I've been focusing a lot on YAC stuff, because I'm ... I plan on connecting with them in the future more than what I've been doing, but I have been participating in GSA, but that's as support. I have been participating in BSU. I wish I was the president of BSU, but maybe that will change. I don't really know, but yeah. Maybe that'll change, I don't really know, but it's more support also, because I don't really have the capacity to do a lot of the things I was doing junior year, 'cause I was applying to schools, I got into schools. As you see, I got paperwork and stuff to fill out. Yeah, so I didn't have the capacity to be like, "Oh, well this is gonna be my role," 'cause I didn't want to disappoint and I didn't want to take on too much, so I decided to take a step back, but I'm still heavily involved.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay. All right, so I'll go onto the next question then, since [inaudible 00:31:01] one of the probes. So I'm also interested in understanding the Youth Undoing Institutional Racism training. Can you describe the goals of the training for me?

Michelle: You want to go first?

Marcus: Yeah, I could go first.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay, we'll switch back.

Marcus: I'd say ... It's the goals, you said?

Rebecca Muniz: Mm-hmm (affirmative), the goals, the goals of the training.

Marcus: The goals is number one to obviously, sort of try to dismantle some of these oppressive systems that are happening within our school and its curriculum and with the teachers, because Michelle had mentioned earlier, we have this huge population of kids that are from low income and POC backgrounds, and because of our budget cut last year, a lot of the influx of new teachers over here are so white, they're so white. Oh my god, like ... A tsunami of whiteness came to our school.

Marcus: On top of that, we had to do something about it, and there has also been issues going on, and I don't even go here no more, but because I'm friends with a lot of the staff members and YAC, I'm friends with a lot of the YAC folks, and she's my homie. I heard some tea-

Rebecca Muniz: Some what? Sorry, is that-

Marcus: Tea, it's like-

Rebecca Muniz: Is that a slang word?

Marcus: It's a slang word for gossip.

Rebecca Muniz: Oh, okay.

Marcus: I ear hustled, aka tea, aka gossip, I heard some gossip about the white ... one of the white lady teachers had told a student that she was scared of them?

Michelle: Yeah.

Marcus: Was the student black or brown?

Michelle: I'm pretty sure she was black.

Marcus: Black? Was it a black girl?

Michelle: Yeah, it was a black girl.

Marcus: Black girl.

Rebecca Muniz: How recent was that incident?

Michelle: I'd probably say about a month ago.

Marcus: About a month ago. And we definitely know where that comes from-

Michelle: And it was a white middle teacher that told a black female student that.

Marcus: Are we gonna speak on that?

Michelle: I don't know about the incident. That's all I know.

Marcus: 'Cause I don't know, either, but what I do know is that is such an issue, because our POC teachers, they're not scared of no students, at all. But I feel that all just comes from the system's whiteness, white supremacy and racism, period. It's like I as a teacher can walk into a classroom and be fearful of students who are paying attention in my class, partaking in my curriculum, and that I can be fearful of them? It's like, where does that come from?

Marcus: It also goes back to what Michelle was saying about the perception of our neighborhood and a lot of people from outside of RB will say, "Oh, Villa is ghetto, it's hood, it's ratchet. It's full of violence." It's like "Seattle's most dangerous corner," in quotations, Seattle's most dangerous corner right around the block. Is that Henderson?

Michelle: Yeah, Villa and Henderson.

Marcus: And Henderson's not even dangerous.

Michelle: People fabricate.

Marcus: Yes, so-

Rebecca Muniz: Can you speak to more of the fabrication part and how does that fear impact students of color like you?

Marcus: You want to go?

Michelle: Yeah. This also does go back to Villa Action Coalition-

Marcus: Yes, it does.

Michelle: ... 'cause they're labeled as hotspots and that's because they were labeled as that.

Rebecca Muniz: The neighborhood?

Michelle: Yeah, the neighborhood, so there's different areas within Villa neighborhood that are called hotspots and those, the hotspots, have been recorded to have the highest crime rate. I probably say a couple years ago, I'd probably say maybe 2014 was when we really want to take the initiative to start corner greeting, but George Mason, the university, does the research for Villa neighborhood, and of course there's flaws within that and we're trying to see what all that looks like, but George Mason does do the ... What do they do? The research for Villa neighborhood and the crime and all that. I guess they get the information from Seattle Police Department, and even though we partner with them, corner greeter, it's corner greeter, we don't really work with the police like that, we kind of do our own thing, so we just get the research and we take it from there.

Michelle: With Villa Action Coalition, when I had first started, I was on the pilot, so it was our very first year and Mr. Greg had told us that this is a non-profit and a non-crime prevention, but also non-arrest crime prevention organization. So, we tried to ... What is the word? We tried to dismantle, so we try to dismantle things, but more in the positive light, so a lot of people, especially people who don't live here, act scary. They will be so afraid to go to Safeway at 8 p.m., but we be out there and we don't have issues like that.

Michelle: Of course, you're gonna run into people who are high on drugs, you're gonna run into people who are drunk, but the thing is, if you're trained and even if you're not trained, if you know how to handle something without having so much fear within you, then it's not gonna be a big issue. So even though we have adults, we've had youth try to push, I'd probably say situations that weren't the best away, so what we do is instead of living with this, "Oh, Villa is bad," " Villa is this," we try to change that and-

Speaker 6: [crosstalk 00:37:37], your cab is waiting for you by the track [inaudible 00:37:41]. Your cab is waiting for you by the track.

Michelle: ... Villa and Henderson, actually has this history of being violent and gangs and this that and the third. One thing is, there's every single state has neighborhoods that have what south Seattle have, but Villa... So, our hotspots for Villa Action Coalition is Villa and Henderson, Rose Street Rail Station, Lake Washington, and Safeway, so every other week, we

have a corner greeter at one of those locations and we just interact with the neighborhood.

Michelle: We brainstorm activity that we have to connect with the residents and stuff, so we plan these events accordingly and we go out and we do these, because they're trying to change this perspective that people who don't even live here have. The crime has actually dropped since 2014, since we've been out in these corners, corner greeting, so I feel like if you don't live here, if you don't go to school here, I feel like there's not much that you can say. Even as-

Rebecca Muniz: So is the fear coming from outside looking in?

Michelle: Absolutely.

Marcus: Absolutely.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay, so they just see ... I don't know, they-

Michelle: They probably watch the news-

Marcus: Absolutely.

Michelle: They watch the news and the news does a terrible job-

Marcus: Absolutely.

Michelle: ... at storytelling. They try to demonize and criminalize our whole entire neighborhood. We've never had the news ever show anything positive of Villa like that. KIRO-7 or King 5, I don't even know the channels 'cause I don't watch them, 'cause they're awful, some BS, but I don't know the channels or whatever, but I haven't seen KIRO-7 out here filming something positive. They come out here to film car accidents and crime scenes and people robbing places. That's the only time they want to come out here, even though they're supposed to be out here doing news and stuff, but I mean, I also don't really know what the news really is, 'cause they only report negative things. I don't know, and I don't really care.

Rebecca Muniz: Can you speak a little bit more about how this impacts you as students of color, the fear that teachers have? How does that impact you?

Michelle: Oh. Okay.

Rebecca Muniz: Go ahead, you have the stage.

Michelle: I feel like it impacts me in more of a ... I'll probably say, what's the word when you hear something, but then it drives you to do something greater? So, even though-

Rebecca Muniz: Inspire?

Michelle: Yeah, it inspires me to make change and to change the systems that are in place and to change the language and the vocabulary that is spoken about Villa. It's driven me to be a part of Freedom Schools, it's driven me to be a part of VAC. When I really got into VAC, 'cause when I realized the terrible perception of Villa and I can really take accountability before I came to Villa, I was, "Oh my god is this school really that ghetto? It's probably super hood," and this, this, and that. Villa is hood, but what schools do you see have hella school shootings? It's not black and brown schools, its white schools.

Michelle: We've never had an incident of a student shooting up the school or a student bringing a gun to school, what have you, now that was an adult, but that was a completely different narrative and storyline, but that we've never gone on lockdown or shelter in place. Yeah, for a student who's had a weapon or who tried to shot up the school. We don't really run into things like that. But I felt like it's impacted me because it's inspired me to be a part of these game changers and be a part of these creative organizations that are for black and brown people, because the system doesn't really care for black and brown people, even though they make millions and millions of dollars off of us, whether it's cultural appropriation or putting us in prison, so my thing is, America likes to take all the credit, even though they make tons and tons of money off of us, but the way it impacts me is to just speak out about it.

Michelle: If I see something that I don't really like, I'm gonna do an interview and speak on it or I'm going to probably make an activity out of it for Villa Action Coalition and present it to the neighborhood, so I try to do ... I try to put action, 'cause action speak louder than words. Marching and being a part of these non-profit organizations has really helped me do that.

Rebecca Muniz: I can see that. So, what about you, Marcu?

Marcus: Can you repeat the question?

Rebecca Muniz: The question was, how does that fear and the negative perceptions that white teachers have impact you as a student of color?

Marcus: Oh. She went in already on that, so let's go in a little bit.

Rebecca Muniz: In a little bit, okay.

Marcus: I'd have to say it creates this tension between the student and the teacher and it makes that connection almost impossible to forage or make happen. Me and Michelle, we're both a part of Freedom Schools and are gonna continue to do it, but it's like being a person that was in this teaching position, while also simultaneously being a student, I'm still a student. I'm in college. It's like I can understand both. It's this dichotomy, it's really so simple to make this connection, but essentially, both parties had to be willing to ... or able and willing, they had to be able to make that connection together, but usually both party has to step forward and make sure that they want to get that connection across.

Marcus: So as teachers ... or as junior servant leader interns, when we were in that position, we had to, most of the time, go out of our way to connect with our students, 'cause sometimes students can be a little standoffish and whatever, but over time, students really do vibe and get to know teachers and meet some of the interns and others alike. So when we connect this back to the white teachers who are so fearful and scary, it's they already in their minds kind of make up their mind that they don't want to establish that connection, because the fear is so prevalent that it kind of erases or just burns down that whole bridge without even meeting any of these children.

Marcus: Excuse me, not children, but youth. I feel like our kids, like she had said earlier, excuse me, our students, they deserve so much better, but kind of going back to ... or just going on a tangent about the school, RBHS ... The Seattle public school system in general, kind of does this hiring process that not a lot of students or teachers are aware of, and also students and teachers, I think, along with parents even, can attend meetings and be a part, be vocal in the process of the hiring and stuff, I believe, but at large, there is officials within SPS that have to make this process happen, so that often leads us into this blind spot to where we don't know who's gonna get hired, but we can obviously tell what's gonna happen.

Marcus: There's obviously flaws within university's master's programs for teaching and who can actually get this certain education and actually take a year or two break to get a master's degree and master's degrees are so rigorous and hard to obtain. You have to take a pause and actually work, work, work, work, to even get that. I know, 'cause Ms. Emily and Ms. Daren have told us about that.

Rebecca Muniz: Do you mind if we move on?

Marcus: Yes.

Rebecca Muniz: Great. So, for the sake of time, we're gonna need to make our responses more brief. We still have a couple more questions. So, for the training, what was the message you wanted to convey and what do you hope the audience receive from this training, and how did you choose the topics that you presented on and how did you decide these topics were important to share with people and why?

Marcus: The message that we definitely wanted to convey was that we want to make sure that RBHS is a safe hub for the students that attend here. We want to be able to serve our students and that's just coming from our foundation as people who are part of Freedom Schools and that's kind of our whole deal is we serve our students. We serve our community. We do a lot of work here. We want also the teachers and the staff body to be a reflection of the student body.

Marcus: So, I know for sure one of the message that's prevalent in our ... that was really in our training was definitely humanization was one of them, making sure that you're not being this cold and barren person to our students and not wanting to interact or just closing that bridge way before you even come into this school, because you have these preconceived notions in your head already, and also making sure that you're not making these students to be animals and savage.

Michelle: [inaudible 00:48:48] them?

Rebecca Muniz: Demonizing them?

Michelle: Demonizing them?

Marcus: Right, not making them out to be these culprits or stealers and these, all these horrible things that they want to associate RBHS with, just making sure that they're coming in with an open mind, but also we're not tolerating your racist bullshit no more, we're not tolerating any of that no more. And Issac made that very clear that white nonsense is not gonna be tolerated in these spaces anymore, that we are going to be here as black and brown people, even as youth, as friends, other oppressed identities, that we're here to educate you all who need the education to get it together, but also a space for you to ... We don't have to educate you all the time, you can obviously educate yourself, i.e., Mrs. Black and her curriculum.

Marcus: Just also making sure that these white teachers are also taking the initiative to do things on their own and that we don't also have to tell them all the

time, "Oh, you should think about not putting racist ass shit in your curriculum." You don't have to do that, you can make your own curriculums, so yeah.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay, and how did you choose the topics you were presenting on? How did you decide-

Marcus: We-

Rebecca Muniz: ... those were what you were going to share with them?

Marcus: It came from a lot of brainstorming that we had planned on. I know for sure that came from a lot of our personal experiences as students here. Making sure that, not trauma, but our pain and those experiences that we learned from here were gonna be amplified and that also our perspectives as students were gonna be heard or [inaudible 00:50:52] ... Can you repeat the question? Am I saying it right?

Rebecca Muniz: Yeah. It's just how did you choose what you wanted to talk about?

Marcus: Yeah.

Rebecca Muniz: Michelle, did you want to speak to any of those? If not, we can move onto the next one.

Michelle: Yeah, we can move on.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay. Cool.

Michelle: I think he touched on it.

Rebecca Muniz: All right, perfect. So, I'm also interested in understanding the role of students of color conducting this training. So, how did you get involved with this work, can you describe your role during this training?

Michelle: Yeah. I think they started meeting, I think they started about two, three meetings and then I kind of was able to be plugged in. They were just asking for my input and I was only giving input and then the day of, I only wanted to be in there to support, but then they asked me, they were like, "Do you want to do the-"

Rebecca Muniz: So you didn't want to-

Michelle: "... undoing racism training?" I mean, I was okay with it if I wasn't, but I was just throughout the meetings, I would just plugin and that was it.

Rebecca Muniz: Like your opinion?

Michelle: Yeah. They would ask me, "What do you think about this? What do you think we should do?" And then I think the day of, Maya and Marcus asked me, "Do you want to help us?" And I guess, Issac was like, "Go ahead. Introduce the cooperation contract." I was, "All right, cool." I'm sorry, what's your question?

Rebecca Muniz: Can you describe your role during the training and how you got involved with this work?

Michelle: Yeah. I'd probably say my role was just kind of putting the emphasis on Freedom Schools and how the Freedom School's model, kind of what the Freedom School's model is and why we do it. When we did our breakout groups and we split up the teachers-

Speaker 8: Spring break! Yeah, yeah!

Michelle: ... and ... Gosh.

Marcus: [inaudible 00:53:01]. Shit.

Michelle: And then we split the teachers and I think, what was there? Four different table groups, and me and Marcus were facilitating one table and they were asking us questions, we were answering them, so we were kind of doing a Q&A, but we were also asking them, "What does your classroom look like?" "How did you handle students that you have more of a hard time dealing with during a class?" "What is your method of-

Rebecca Muniz: Oh, I did not know these were-

Michelle: Yeah, "What is your method with dealing with students who behave different than other students?" 'Cause teachers love to put the label on students and say that they have bad behavior or they have behavioral problems, and I had to tell them, "You have to change your language, because when you put bad or negative on a student's name, they kind of don't want to deal with you anymore." We were asking questions like, "How do you connect with your students?" We asked them, "What is your curriculum look like?"

Michelle: More of them asking us questions. Instead of them asking us questions, we asked them questions to where they would explain and if it was something that should be changed, then me and Marcus would let them know about how the Freedom School model is and how, especially me being a current

student, I let them know, "For future students, you should do this, this, that, X, Y, and Z. It would help them, it would benefit them. It affirms them and makes them feel-"

Rebecca Muniz: Yeah, can you speak more to what you told them to do instead and what the Freedom School model is?

Michelle: A lot of teachers tend to kick students out of the class. I'd say, "When you continue to kick students out of the class, they end up building ... they end up having ..." What's the word? Like, it's tension, but then it's also not good feelings towards you. They don't like you when they come into the classroom, there's negative energy. "Oh, he kicked me out last time. I don't even want to look at him. I don't even want to talk to him." So when you continue to kick students out, they have that mindset.

Michelle: Also, when you continue to have negative language, especially if they're cutting up in the classroom, that's the slang for acting out, they'll ... There was even one teacher, and he said, "You're acting like an idiot."

Marcus: What?

Michelle: And I stopped him and I was like, "You cannot call students out of their name."

Marcus: Wow.

Rebecca Muniz: Was this during the training?

Michelle: No, this was an incident that I had seen, and I was talking direct ... I was looking at him to make sure he was listening to me throughout the training, but he called a student an idiot and I was like, "You can't talk to students like that." This student is a youth.

Rebecca Muniz: Was he in your small group?

Michelle: Yeah, he was in my small group, so this student-

Marcus: [inaudible 00:55:57].

Michelle: ... this student was a youth. Compared to you, the student is ... even though we don't like to label them as kids, but the student's a minor, the student is a kid. You're an adult, you went to college, you got your degree, you should have-

Marcus: And you're a white male.

Michelle: ... you should have the two cents ... And he is a white male, and when I called him out, he kind of said, "I appreciate you calling me out. And I appreciate you holding me accountable." I said, "I'm glad that you appreciate it, but I also want you to remember that you can't keep doing that. It has to stop. You can't use that language no more." So, me being a student and it kind of helped me, because I'm in these classrooms, so I was letting them know what I've experienced, of what I've seen, and I kid of just let them know, "This is what you shouldn't do and this is what you should do. I know it's coming from a current student, but I'd be teaching during the summer, too." I'd be facilitating and I'd be supporting the students ten times greater than what you all be doing, and only 25% of seniors who graduate who end up leaving are college ready, and that's not even based on the curriculum, it's also based on the teachers.

Michelle: Now, and a lot of the excuses that teachers like to use is, "You're going to meet a lot of professors in schools that you don't like." Really? Of course you're going to meet people you don't like, but are these professors going to cuss you out and call you at your name and kick you out of class? Professors don't do that. Professors usually don't say nothing, even if they're giving their opinion on something you can argue, they're not gonna tell you to get out of the class. You're paying for the class, why would they kick you out? The frame is a little bit different for university. Also for university, you know why you're there and you know what it took for you to get there.

Michelle: Public school, it's free. A lot of students are disengaged, a lot of students are discouraged, but another reason why is because of the system and who the staff members are, so yeah. That's that.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay, and how would you racially or ethnically identify yourself as?

Michelle: Did you get mine? He'll be in the theater. Yeah, that was my point.

Rebecca Muniz: Sorry, no. How would you racially or ethnically identify yourself as?

Michelle: So, my dad is African. My dad is from Gambia. I don't know why people call it The Gambia. I asked my dad, but my dad ... No, I asked my dad that the other day, I said, "Why do they put 'the'?" And he said it was the Americans, so that was his answer and I was like, we were definitely colonized. We were-

Marcus: [inaudible 00:58:30].

Michelle: Yeah, my dad doesn't like this country. He doesn't like Seattle. He actually went to the Bronx before he came here, but yeah, so I would identify myself as Soninke, 'cause that's our tribe, and my mom, she's African-American, so ... African? American? The legit, 'cause really, I'm actually African American, but yeah.

Marcus: I call her my "blafrican." I'm a black American. I'm black as fuck. Blackity, black, black, black.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay. And do you want to speak to any of the questions that she answered?

Marcus: She nailed it right on the head.

Rebecca Muniz: She nailed it? Okay.

Marcus: She did that.

Rebecca Muniz: All right.

Marcus: She did. I don't have to say nothing.

Rebecca Muniz: Who else has been involved or what are some ways you guys organized yourselves?

Marcus: Within the training?

Rebecca Muniz: Yeah.

Michelle: Stacy Gonzalez.

Marcus: You want to speak on that?

Rebecca Muniz: Stacy Gonzalez? Okay.

Michelle: Okay. Mrs. Stacy, she's the school social worker. She also is the junior servant leader intern coordinator within the summer. I met her my freshman year and she's super, duper, uber supportive. She knows her privilege. And just like Marcus said, I wouldn't call her an ally, I would call her an accomplice. She actually is about the work. It's more than to say, "I support you." It's another thing to actually organize with us and create this change that we're trying to make and make this impact that we're making, so she was a part of all the meetings, too.

Michelle: She was taking the notes, also she works at the school, so she has a little bit more on the inside of how we were able to schedule, how we were able to get more staff members to-

Rebecca Muniz: To show up?

Michelle: ... show up, 'cause she did say that training had the most people thus far.

Marcus: Wow.

Michelle: 'Cause she said all the trainings, maybe half of the staff that were there attended, and we actually had a large majority of the teachers come to where there was no seats, so it was really cool. She was kind of our connect with that administration and that sort of thing, 'cause even though we talk to them, I'm not best friends with Mr. Brooks or Mr. Smith, their administration. I'm a student-

Rebecca Muniz: Was Mr. Brooks or Mr. Smith there?

Marcus: Yeah.

Michelle: Mr. Brooks was there and he-

Marcus: Yes, he was.

Michelle: ... actually stayed ... He stayed the whole time, he did.

Marcus: Mrs. Thomas, too.

Michelle: Yeah, Mrs. Thomas was there, too.

Rebecca Muniz: Who's that?

Michelle: She's not administrator, she's the activities' coordinator. Administrator's like the principal, vice principal.

Marcus: Is she not? Oh, wow.

Michelle: No.

Marcus: I thought she got promoted.

Rebecca Muniz: So, Stacy was involved? I remember seeing Issac.

Michelle: Yeah, Stacy was really involved, Issac was really involved, 'cause he's the connect with YAC, but also a lot of the teachers and students know him, so he was just a good pin point person, also 'cause he talks a lot about racial inequity in the school a lot. He has talked to Mr. Smith and some teachers about how they treat students and the language that they use, so I would probably say-

Rebecca Muniz: So, Issac, Stacy, Emily.

Michelle: Oh yeah, Emily was involved, but Emily was-

Marcus: It was light.

Michelle: Yeah, it was a little bit, it was light, 'cause she was introducing the ... what was it? What was the date? Block party.

Rebecca Muniz: Block party, yeah.

Michelle: So, she was connecting that. You said Maya?

Rebecca Muniz: Yeah, Maya, right?

Michelle: You could probably speak on that.

Marcus: Yeah, Maya ... The reason why we found out about the training was ... Months ago, Stacy had talked about she wanted this training to happen and that it was so necessary and then hence the incident where the white teacher had disrespected the-

Michelle: The youth.

Marcus: ... young black lady, young black woman, that's a student here, saying that she was scared of her. So, at that point, it kind of became mandatory to be like, "Okay, this has to happen." But she came to me and Maya, to come and be like the youth perspectives and also, Stacy is also very big on equity and she was able to provide me and Maya even with some pay for the training that we came up with. Also, Issac, he was very instrumental in the planning with me and Maya.

Marcus: We actually did most of it, so a lot of that PowerPoint and knowledge was honestly very influenced and came actually from Issac and Maya, actually. I'm kind of more blasé-faire, kind of go with the flow and that's why I [inaudible 01:04:04], I kind of free styled with Michelle and it turned out to be very great, it was wonderful.

Rebecca Muniz: Were you at the same tables?

Marcus: Yeah.

Rebecca Muniz: Oh okay, I thought you were at different tables.

Marcus: But yeah, that's about it.

Rebecca Muniz: Cool. I'll go onto the next question real quick. How are we doing on time? Okay, we're almost out of time. All right. Let's see. Let me look at the questions so I can ... Do you think youth can be leaders at your school, and if so, why? I feel like you've been identified as a leader at your school, what does that mean to you?

Marcus: Well, firstly, youth can definitely be leaders here. I feel like there's such a stigma behind youth wanting to take on big topics such as certain things with activism, things like that, because we're young and the whole thing with we don't know what we're doing, we're not educated, we're dumb and stupid kids. But I feel like this erases who this person is and you never know who you're really talking to with a ... I know for myself and for, I can't speak for Michelle, but I know she's been through a lot of similar things.

Marcus: We've been in Freedom Schools, we've been in YAC, which is a non-profit organization which does non-arrest crime prevention for-

Michelle: You said YAC.

Marcus: Oh, excuse me, VAC. Excuse me. We do a lot of coworking and we do work for YAC, with Freedom Schools. We openly have dialogue and a lot of long and fun conversations about race and gender and different topics. We often talk about hip hop and how hip hop could be better, what's good, what's wrong, what could be fixed. So I mean, just based off of us to ... we're very multifaceted and we have a lot history with this sort of work, so that's a discredit for them to be like, "Oh, you're just a dumb kid." It doesn't really help anything.

Marcus: Also, being a young person and being able to be a part of certain movements and actually lead them, it's more engaging, because as youth, as younger people, we are able to connect with other younger people, rather than this adult talking to a whole bunch of kids and get their attention or whatever, we can actually get that attention without having to do so much, because we are a part of the same community, 'cause we are the same age and-

Rebecca Muniz: You can tap into the youth?

Marcus: Absolutely.

Rebecca Muniz: Because you have similar-

Marcus: Absolutely.

Rebecca Muniz: ... experiences, right?

Marcus: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. But, what was the question?

Rebecca Muniz: You've been identified as a leader at your school or work, what does that mean to you?

Marcus: This means to me that there's obviously a responsibility at hand that needs to be taken care of.

Rebecca Muniz: That you have, is that what you said?

Marcus: That we as young leaders have to kind of take on. 'Cause I know there's so much ... there's so much stuff that the high school goes through, and it was just every day, there was something going on with the school or we were being ignored by the state or the school system or ... everything was happening at RBHS. Something was always an issue to be tackling or addressing head on, and it seemed like, not that there wasn't anyone doing it, but I felt like there needed to be some more voices that needed to be added and I was just one of the people who wanted to tag along and try.

Marcus: I didn't know it would turn out to be such, so I think what it means to me is it's a very humbling experience to do this work and be only 18 years old, 'cause I mean, we've done a lot of stuff-

Rebecca Muniz: You're only 18 years old?

Marcus: Yeah. Oh my god, oh my god. No. But also, I don't do this work for accolades or hand claps or applause. This is solely because I want to and I owe everything to Ms. Emily. Yes, I do. I owe everything to her and Stacy and all the other YAC staff and Michelle, my friends, especially her, so I mean, even my parents. Where I got this leadership from, so I'm eternally grateful for that foundation. I would be nothing without that.

Rebecca Muniz: Do you think youth leadership is important in your school?

Marcus: Yes, because adults think that they know what kids are going through. Excuse me, youth are going through, and it's like, they kind of try to make it seem as if they know what's best for us, but we can easily communicate what we know is best for us. Making sure that we're eliminating adultism and making sure that hierarchy is at more of a balance or just dismantle it completely, we can do that, too. Making sure that our voices are heard, because if it was just adults running the school, my voice would not be heard.

Marcus: We probably wouldn't have that gender inclusive or gender bathroom here, that queer training by queerness and queer issues wouldn't have happened, the GSA wouldn't have happened, the march wouldn't have happened. All these youth led events wouldn't have happened, things that actually were very radical in the history of the school, if you want to even call it that.

Rebecca Muniz: Can you speak more to what youth leadership can provide to a school?

Marcus: Yeah. Youth leadership community students provide liberation. I know speaking from my personal experience with the GSA, I know when I came into that space, it was so liberating because even though we are at a very ... this is like 96% POC school. Was it 96 last time?

Michelle: Yeah.

Marcus: 96% person of color school, very majority low income. Even we do share a lot of similar experiences because of that, there is a lot of cis hetero patriarchy in the school, so when I was able to come into GSA and just lead and hold circles and listen to other students and hear what they had to say about what their day was, hear about what they were going through as bisexual people, as queer people, as trans people, as allies, even as far as just talking about gossip, whatever was going on in the school, what was going on in their homes, our daily lives or even as far as just to watch queer movies together and have dialogue about pop culture and what was going on with Caitlyn Jenner at the time, 'cause she was such a huge topic with the trans community.

Marcus: Also, we were able to have such a wonderful resource. The Northwest Network, which is ... I think I have their card, so I can give you a direct quote, give that verbatim to you.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay.

Marcus: I don't have it. Dang. Kind of mad. But it's somewhere, I know it's somewhere, but they are-

Rebecca Muniz: What about this organization?

Marcus: They're like a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, and plus, community plus, inclusive organization that's focused on a lot of domestic violence and other issues that impact us. A lot of mental health stuff. We have our resident person from the Northwest Network, her name is Laney, she's an amazing black trans woman who I've learned so much from. Also, I'm very grateful to her for her leadership and her teaching meso much about LGBT issues, especially trans issues and how for her life, how she's had to navigate as a person who looks naturally more male presenting, but is a trans woman. How that impacts her daily life, and etc.

Marcus: But, just being able to, for myself, build my own peace and liberation was transformative in the whole school. I don't want to sound boastful or anything like that-

Rebecca Muniz: It transformed the school?

Marcus: ... but it did transform the school, just with the club.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay, and what role do you think issues of race or equity have in this leadership context?

Marcus: What roles?

Rebecca Muniz: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What role does the issue of race and equity have?

Marcus: Within the context of GSA?

Rebecca Muniz: Of leadership.

Marcus: Of leadership. Would you like to answer that, 'cause I've been talking for a minute.

Michelle: I'm sorry, can you re-ask it?

Rebecca Muniz: Yeah, so I was asking him, what role does he think issues of race or equity have in this leadership context?

Michelle: Can you reword it?

Rebecca Muniz: Sure. So, in the context of the Youth Undoing Institutional Racism training, what role do you think the issue of race and equity has in that space? Did that make more sense?

Michelle: Kind of.

Marcus: Sorry, my dad texted me. I was like, "Huh?" One more time, one more time.

Rebecca Muniz: One more time. So, in the context of Youth Undoing Institutional Racism training, what role does race and equity have?

Marcus: Oh.

Michelle: That's very important.

Marcus: Right.

Rebecca Muniz: Right, so what role does the issues around that ... Sorry, I didn't realize it was so awkwardly ...

Marcus: [inaudible 01:15:59].

Michelle: I mean, can you tell me ... I really don't know what ... the question, what are you really asking? What's the issues of why we had to do the training? Or ...

Rebecca Muniz: So, could white students have given that training?

Michelle: No.

Rebecca Muniz: Could this training not have occurred? So, what the issue of race and bringing equality, what role does that have in the context of this training?

Michelle: I mean-

Rebecca Muniz: Does that make more sense?

Michelle: Yeah. I mean, the people who facilitated it were people of color, past students, current students, staff members. We had to kind of intersect all of that so it would make more sense. I feel like it was, I'd say, more beneficial because it was a lot of intersection, so Issac works here, but he's also a part of YAC, so he is a facilitator in Freedom Schools, so he knows ... He went to the national training for Freedom Schools, he went to Tennessee, so he learnt a lot in order to be in the role he's in and he also supports a lot of the teachers, so it made sense, 'cause he's a staff member. He works with YAC.

Michelle: Maya is a past student who graduated with a IB diploma. Marcus is a past student. Didn't you get the diploma, too? Oh, well, he took a [inaudible 01:17:51] IB classes and it's just important also being a former student, as a black man, with me being a current student, I'm able to point out the things now that we could be able to change and that we should change and I feel like a white person would not be able to deliver it, just because it would make the staff ... It would make staff way more comfortable, because they're already too comfortable, because they're able to disrespect students and they're able to disrespect staff members who are of color and who are women, so if a white person was to give the training all by themselves, it would put this in this place of being comfortable, it would put them in this place of not really taking the initiative and not really listening.

Michelle: I feel like it wouldn't really make sense. You can't be a white person talking about inequity at a school if the students are of color. It could be different if over half of our student population was white, but that's not the case here. It has to be intersectional. It just made better sense to have people of color leading the training. Definitely, there's white folks who know exactly what they're talking about, but they know that that's not their place, because in a sense, another reason why we did the training was for white teachers, male and female, to check their privilege and to try to change with them, themselves, to do better at what they're doing and to positively affect the students and engage with them and try to encourage them to be in their class, and to help them to get their education. It's better to have people of color doing this training.

Rebecca Muniz: Marcus, do you want to speak to ...

Marcus: Yeah.

Rebecca Muniz: That's the last question, so.

Marcus: I mean, just to kind of piggyback off of what she was saying, it's like some shit is for us and for this training, it was for people of color, most of us of intersections, to speak on these issues to educate and to pass the knowledge along to those who wanted to listen. A lot of the people that were there to listen were white folks and that was their role, and our role was to educate and spread the word and also have them recognize their privilege and make sure that when they're in these spaces of teaching amongst a large amount of black and brown youth that are engaging their curriculums, that everything that they're in taking is a reflection of the curriculum and who you are.

Marcus: So, simply, I think we also wanted to make sure that we just kind of make it clear that, like I said earlier, we're not gonna tolerate white nonsense and Michelle mentioned earlier, we don't want to make it so palatable where it's like they could go to a training and feel so comfortable and safe and involved. Just typical white liberalism. We're not about that.

Rebecca Muniz: Can you speak more to why having you as a student of color brought more, maybe, discomfort?

Marcus: Yeah, I mean, when's the last time a middle aged white man who's teaching black students was able to listen to a queer black student talk? And actually educate them? I don't know. I can't answer for that person, for that white man, but I know I can, and I just did one. So, for me, I know that even just being in a space where I'm one of the only queer people, just being able to disrupt that space of cis hetero patriarchy or just hetero patriarchy, a general, how can I tackle talks of masculinity and all these other types of phobias. Like, femme phobia, transphobia, homophobia, all these other things and make sure that this is progressing into something better. Something as simple as that. I think for my role as a student of color ... Thank you.

Speaker 7: It's a heart.

Marcus: Love her.

Rebecca Muniz: I did that to her when she was there.

Marcus: From my role as a student who is educating, in terms of in making them uncomfortable, we as students of color had to deal with that all the time, discomfort and not feeling easy and safe in your own environment. Not to say this space wasn't safe, but that sense of discomfort, it's like an everyday thing for us. Like when I'm at [inaudible 01:23:22] and I'm surrounded by all this elitism and white liberalism, I'm not safe or feeling welcomed all the time. But as a person of color, I have to hustle and deal with that every day. So, I can't just become a white man and just engage in all that privilege. I can't do that, nor do I even want to.

Rebecca Muniz: There you go.

Marcus: I think what I'm trying to say is I feel like that kind of gives them a taste of their own medicine, to be like this space is for us to educate you, you will listen. This is my space that I created, that we created, and that you will listen, you will engage in this participatory activity and if you don't, then you are not welcome here. As simple as that.

Rebecca Muniz: Do you think the training included a lot of youth culture?

Michelle: Yeah, there was a lot of ... there were a few youth person actually ... A couple of Freedom School scholars were there. I feel like it was good, because they were in the background and-

Rebecca Muniz: Yeah, I remember seeing them.

Michelle: Yeah, and staff members were able to look at them and also when youth are present, they're able to hold you accountable, so if you say or do something that ain't right, you're able to say, "Well, we just did an Undoing Racism training that you participated in and we seen that you participated in that." So, it's another way to hold them accountable. I feel like it was good to have that presence there. Yeah.

Marcus: She said it best, she did.

Rebecca Muniz: Awesome. Do you have any other comments you want to make about what youth leadership means to you or why you think youth leadership is important at your school? Michelle?

Michelle: I feel like youth leadership is important because as you get older, the youth become more of a priority. I mean, the whole purpose of Freedom School, the whole purpose of VAC is intergenerational leadership and it's not even passing down something, but it's just passing down knowledge for other people to have. So then, I wouldn't say easier, but it's easier to understand and go through the things that are in our country when you know about it.

Michelle: So when you're educated about it and you have so much wisdom and knowledge, especially when you get it from someone else, I wouldn't say it puts you in an easier position, but it's an easier mindset. If I wouldn't have known what racism is or how it affects black people, how do you think I'm able to go to school and deal with these white teachers? But being a part of Freedom School's VAC and learning about that, I realized that these are the systems that are in place that need to be broken, and these are the systems that are in place that systemically, racially discriminate black people or people of color, whatever the case may be.

Michelle: So I feel like the more you know, the better it is for you, because you're able to understand why. Sometimes if you're not ... Sometimes if you don't know, you don't know the reason why, then you don't know what to do, but when you know about certain things, you know why it's happening and you know what you could be able to do to change that dynamic.

Rebecca Muniz: Okay. Is there anything else I didn't ask that you think is important to know about your role during this training and your leadership preparation?

Michelle: I don't think so.

Marcus: I'd say this is rather a comment. We had this activity where Issac [inaudible 01:27:46] by himself, but he presented us the information. Essentially, he brought us these questions that teachers asked to us, to see what they were feeling about this training. He asked them a couple questions and he asked them to write them down on these white flashcards anonymously, I suppose, or [inaudible 01:28:14]. And some of the answers that we got back, or questions that we received, were just so honestly, ridiculous.

Marcus: We had this one question that we had gotten back, essentially he's kind of saying, as a teacher at this high school, do they have responsibility to, I think it was to engage with students that care about their communities, something like that.

Rebecca Muniz: Yeah, engage with the issues that the students have?

Marcus: Right.

Rebecca Muniz: I remember the question.

Marcus: I was like, "What white man wrote this?" Not surprisingly, but surprisingly enough, it was a white man that wrote that question, but-

Michelle: Who?

Marcus: I don't know, I wasn't aware of that, 'cause it was anonymous. But it just kind of blows my mind that a teacher who's not even from this community has the audacity and the nerve to come to our community and dare to say, "Do I have any sort of responsibility to-"

Rebecca Muniz: To that community?

Marcus: Right.

Rebecca Muniz: Yes.

Marcus: You don't have to be here. You chose yourself to be here, but you if you are gonna be working here, participating here with all of the intersection that is here at Villa or simply is Villa, then you're gonna have to engage

somehow with that. We do have several examples of white teachers who have been interacting with that. We have ... What's the older white teacher that we like? He's always at protests. He's on the bike all the time.

Rebecca Muniz: I don't think she's listening.

Marcus: Oh. Did you hear that?

Michelle: No.

Marcus: Who's the older white teacher who is always on the bike and always at the black lives matter protests?

Michelle: Mr. Epstein.

Marcus: Mr. Epstein, he's always in these streets out here-

Michelle: He's out here.

Marcus: ... really protesting for black lives and black rights and immigrant rights, so much stuff. We have Mr. Buffet who's a super champion at addressing black lives matter issues as a white man and creating that space as a white man to-

Michelle: [inaudible 01:30:56].

Marcus: And to engage with other white people to dismantle that, 'cause he can't come into my space and talk about some shit that I'm living through, he can't do that, but he can go into other white spaces and dismantle it from that, and he's so great at that-

Michelle: I had him as a teacher. We talked about a lot of stuff.

Marcus: We have Mrs. Black whose whole curriculum is based on combating colonialism and white supremacy. Ms. Emily, Ms. Stacy, even Ms. Jen. These white women who are so instrumental and very important in the school's transformation of radical justice, but they're also providing platforms for us to speak, while simultaneously, we're also being able as people of color, students of color, to lead things and have them listen to us regardless, even Mr. Pierce who holds so many conversations in his class. They've acknowledged to make sure that although there are so many lessons and things that need to be communicated within the curriculum, that he's taken time out of the day to make sure that if there's any trauma or stuff that we're going through that we're healing through, for example,

we have a big Filipino population here and their country is going through a lot with their president.

Marcus: We have a substantial Cambodian population, too. They just went through a genocide not that long ago, and the effects are still rampant. Black students, you already know that deal, 'cause I'm talking, immigrants, Somalians over here who are ... their war-torn country, so he's also a great example of setting a platform within the classroom to have discussions about the trauma and healing that we need to go through.

Rebecca Muniz: Totally.

Marcus: Yeah.

Rebecca Muniz: All right. Well, is there anything else at this point?

Michelle: No.

Rebecca Muniz: 'Cause those are all [inaudible 01:33:23].

Michelle: In the sake of time for your meeting. You have a meeting.

Rebecca Muniz: But I just want to make sure that I get everything. That's it?

Michelle: I feel like I've said ...

Rebecca Muniz: All right, cool. All right then, I'm gonna stop recording at this point, okay?

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