Cultivating Pedagogical Resistance through Critical Inquiry:

Developing Teacher Leadership for Critical Inclusion

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Abstract

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Without critical professional development opportunities, teacher leaders, such as coaches, can sustain the exclusion and marginalization of disabled and multiply marginalized students of color. This is exemplified through the persistence of segregated special education classrooms and the ongoing disproportionate assignment of students of color to these settings. Inclusive education reform often focuses narrowly on the physical inclusion of disabled students and therefore lacks the necessary intersectional justice-oriented lens needed to disrupt this long-standing harm. Critical professional development, however, can support coaches working in such reform contexts to cultivate the collective power and practices needed to both recognize

and disrupt these historical patterns of intersectional educational injustice. This year-long participatory multiple case study explored how one group of inclusive education coaches engaged in critical inquiry to work towards more just and inclusive schools in their district. Through a conceptual framing of pedagogical resistance grounded in Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), the findings of this study suggest that such critical professional development for inclusive education can support teacher leaders' engagement in pedagogical resistance, including (1) problematizing and deconstructing inclusive education; (2) exploring teacher leader roles, identities, and agency; and (3) practicing pedagogical resistance through the co-creation and use of collaborative pedagogical structures and tools.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to David and Josie. Moving together through this world is a gift.

David, thank you for your partnership, love, and unwavering commitment to care and justice.

Josie, thank you for being the fierce pursuer of creativity and community that you are.

I love you both.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Mia Mingus, disability justice activist, writes, *"I need you to not only say that you are in solidarity with disabled people or that you value disability justice; I need you to practice it"* (2022, para. 22). This participatory multiple case study is centered on this idea of practice through critical professional development for inclusive education (Kohli et al., 2015). Professional development for inclusive education often lacks the necessary intersectional lens and justice-driven approaches needed to disrupt the racist and ableist ideologies that shape educator roles and notions of who belongs at school (Hamraie, 2016). Educators' unexamined beliefs and investment in exclusionary practices specifically target and harm multiply marginalized disabled students of color, while upholding whiteness, smartness, and goodness as property of those students who are enabled through dominant constructions of normalcy (Annamma, 2015; Artiles, 2013; Broderick & Leonardo, 2016; Harris, 1995; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011).

Without critical pedagogical opportunities to interrogate oppressive schooling contexts, explore identities and agency within those systems, and envision and enact collective action towards transforming them, educators may maintain education ecologies that devalue and exclude multiply marginalized students with disabilities (Annamma et al., 2013; Annamma & Morrison, 2018a/b)**.** Coaches, the role held by the participants in this study, are teacher leaders who hold formal teacher leadership positions and are implicated within unjust education ecologies given how they are enlisted to fix students constructed as deficient or deviant. However, coaches work across many boundaries in schools and are therefore well positioned to

develop and enact transformative justice-driven leadership through opportunities for critical professional development (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013a). This study explores the affordances of critical leadership development for coaches as they pursue inclusive education in their school district.

This participatory multiple case study (Reilly, 2010) took place in a mid-size school district near a large coastal city engaged in district-wide inclusive education reform. The four participants in the study were special education teacher leaders hired as inclusive education specialists, or coaches, to support seven schools that were the initial focus of this work. Multiple data generation methods, including critical inquiry group sessions, phenomenological interviews, and participant observations, as well as within and cross case analysis, were used to explore three research questions: (1) *In what ways did coaches participating in a critical inquiry group make sense of inclusive education within their school and district contexts? (2) How did coaches conceptualize their roles, identities, and agency within the contested and ambiguous spaces of their school sites and district-level work? (3) How did coaches practice pedagogical resistance in the context of district-wide inclusive education reform?* Pedagogical resistance[1], which includes critical inquiry, learning, and transformative action, was prioritized through the study's participatory pedagogical design and theoretical grounding in Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) (Annamma et al., 2013), as participants engaged in collective critical inclusive praxis towards more just schools.

[1] Pedagogical resistance, as conceptualized in this study, will be defined further in Chapter 3. The conceptual framework of pedagogical resistance includes: (1) Problematizing and deconstructing the oppressive realities within schooling contexts (Gourd, 2018), (2) engaging in praxis to uncover how educators are individually and collectively implicated in upholding these realities and also collectively responsible for finding pathways to disrupt them (Beneke et al., 2022a), and (3) cultivating pedagogical practice, structures, and tools to prepare for, engage in, and reflect on action aimed at transforming educational injustice (Souto-Manning, 2010).

In the sections that follow, I first explore how ableism operates through historically situated schooling contexts to produce intersectional educational injustice. I then highlight how professional development for inclusive education contributes to this harm. Finally, I offer a reimagining of teacher leadership development for critical inclusive education through the lens of pedagogical resistance.

Ableism at School

Within schools, ideologies operate as a form of common sense across micro-level dynamics and biased beliefs and macro-level structures and institutions (Gramsci, 1999; Love & Beneke, 2021; Mendoza et al., 2016). Educators enact ideology in ways that oppress and advantage students differentially depending on the ways their identities intersect with systems of power and oppression (Picower, 2021). For example, some students' bodies and minds are constructed as normal and good, while others are pathologized and punished. However, drawing on TL Lewis' intersectional definition of ableism, ableist ideology is reflective of multiple systems of oppression operating in mutually constitutive ways, including "eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism" to assign "value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness" (2022, Working Definition of Ableism section). In other words, ableism, racism, and other intersecting systems of oppression are deeply woven into the ideological foundation of schooling through which dominant constructions of normalcy shape how power and value are assigned (or withheld) at school.

TL Lewis' (2022) framing of ableism not only brings attention to the harmful material impacts of intersectional systems of oppression on multiply marginalized students, but also

allows for a critical examination of how these systems are reproduced through the fields of special and inclusive education. For example, the dominant medical model of disability is widely accepted and built into schooling practices, discourse, and policies. This model conceptualizes disability as a deficit located within individuals and prioritizes curing or confining disability (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017; Oliver, 1983). Black, Brown, and Indigenous students are disproportionately identified to receive special education services and assignment to more restrictive segregated classroom settings compared to their white peers (Artiles, 2013; Annamma, 2015; Blanchett, 2006; Blanchett et al., 2009, Ferri & Connor, 2005b). The segregated settings to which disabled students of color are disproportionately assigned are characterized by carceral logics[2] that not only normalize hyper-pathologization, hyper-surveillance, and hyper-punishment, but deem such practices as necessary (Annamma, 2018; Beneke, 2022b; Ben-Moshe, 2020; Shalaby, 2021). As feminist, queer, crip scholar Allison Kafer (2013) argues, "the futures we imagine reveal the biases of the present" (p. 28). This is particularly concerning given the context of the school-to-prison nexus (Meiners, 2007) through which disability status not only increases the likelihood of segregation for students of color at school, but also the likelihood of incarceration (Annamma, 2015; Erevelles, 2014).

A critical and intersectional historical understanding of ableism is necessary for not only recognizing these patterns, but for disrupting them. Such a lens brings into focus the ways that inclusion has both been withheld and weaponized throughout history. For example, the U.S.

[2] Carla Shalaby (2021) defines carceral logics as "normalized and seemingly commonsense ideas, practice, behaviors, and ways of being and thinking that have been shaped- often unconsciously or invisibly- by a commitment to punishment, imprisonment, exclusion, and disposability. These logics uphold the carceral state by explicitly and implicitly driving the kinds of actions and beliefs required to justify the existence of police and prison" (p. 110).

government engaged in the forcible removal of indigenous children from their families to boarding schools from 1890 to 1978 where they faced violent and dehumanizing treatment (Margolis, 2004). These institutions prioritized practices aimed at cultural erasure and assimilation justified through pathologizing stereotypes that characterized indigenous children as deficient (Cowing, 2020; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). A critical analysis of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 also reflects how notions of inclusion perpetuated educational injustice. Following *Brown*, many Black students went from attending Black schools and learning from highly trained Black teachers to attending predominantly white schools in which they were met with racist hostility and bias (Ferri & Connor, 2005a; Guinier, 2004; Siddle Walker, 2001). Segregated special education assignments and the implementation of ability tracking became common strategies for resegregating Black students within these schools (Ferri & Connor, 2005a).

A third example of this historical pattern is the passing of *Public Law 94.142* (*Education for All Handicapped Children Act*) in 1975 (reauthorized as *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA*, in 1997 and amended as *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act*, *or IDEIA*, in 2004). Prior to this law, students with disabilities were denied access to public education and with the passing of *PL 94.142,* more students with disabilities began attending public schools. However, their presence in schools disrupted ableist conceptions of how classrooms should look and function. As a result, labeling practices proliferated and were used to justify the assignment of students with disabilities to segregated special education classrooms (Baglieri et al., 2011; Ferri & Connor, 2005a/b). Although these practices led to the emergence of organized advocacy for inclusive education in the 1980s, these efforts maintained

a single-axis lens focused exclusively on disability and largely emphasized the physical inclusion of students with disabilities within general education classrooms (Danforth & Naraian, 2015). Furthermore, access to general education for students with disabilities was primarily fought for through the legal system; since such rights-based frameworks typically center "people who can achieve status, power and access" through such systems, it was primarily white families that ultimately benefited (Sins Invalid, 2019). This exemplifies how inclusion has operated as a form of property, acquired through access to whiteness and therefore maintaining ableist and racist notions of ability and experiences of belonging at school.

Implicating Professional Development for Inclusive Education

Professional development is one mechanism through which dominant conceptualizations of inclusive education have been generated and reproduced (Annamma et al., 2013; Berne, 2015; Danforth & Naraian, 2015; Kulkarni et al., 2021; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). Through professional development for inclusive education, educators are positioned as technical practitioners of best practices whose purpose is to get students ready to fit into general education classrooms, as well as to determine if this readiness has been reached (Ben-Moshe, 2020; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Tefera & Fischman, 2020; Schlessinger & Oyler, 2015; Thorius, 2019). Since inclusive education is often conceptualized as a special education reform, professional development for inclusive education is typically grounded in a special education knowledge base and is focused on implementing special education practices within the general education environment (Danforth & Naraian, 2015). Such practices include instructional and behavioral strategies aimed at remediating perceived student deficits and reflect what Kafer (2013) describes as a "a *curative imaginary*," or "an understanding of

disability that not only *expects* and *assumes* intervention but also cannot imagine or comprehend anything other than intervention" (p. 27). This "*curative imaginary"* operates as a form of ableist common-sense that positions a desirable future as one in which disability (and anything or anyone outside of the norm) has been removed or assimilated. Such ableist approaches to professional development neglect to surface, interrogate, and disrupt oppressive ideologies and histories of exclusion.

As teacher leaders and professional development providers, coaches are implicated in perpetuating ableist ideology and working within the curative imaginary. For example, coaches, particularly those who have a background in special education, tend to prioritize making "students less intrusive rather than to make schools more inclusive" (Erevelles, 2011). However, when coaches do seek to challenge ableist ideology and systemic barriers to inclusive education, their responsive context-based professional development has been found to support and sustain teacher commitment to inclusive education (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Leko & Brownell, 2009; McCLeskey & Waldron 2002; Nishimura, 2014; Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004; Wlodarczyk et al., 2015). Furthermore, as special education teacher leaders often have skills as advocates and facilitators of professional learning and collaboration, they have the potential to create impactful change for their students within and beyond classroom settings (Bagley & Tang, 2018).

However, coaches can become the target of educators' fears, frustrations, and ableist reactions or assumptions when engaged in such work (Wlodarczyk et al., 2015). Professional learning communities, and other forms of professional support, have been identified as essential for supporting coaches through the collective processing of such tensions and

complexities. Unfortunately, there is very limited scholarship in this area (Bagley & Tang, 2018; Wlodarczyk et al., 2015). There are even fewer studies that prioritize supporting teacher leaders to recognize, disrupt, and transform the ableist assumptions and approaches that have traditionally driven their roles (Fair, 2023). There is therefore a need for research that specifically attends to teacher leadership development for critical inclusion. Critical inclusion can be defined as "a social justice project to transform educational systems through a continuous cycle of analyzing, disrupting, and restructuring social processes that produce inequity" (Siuty, 2019b, p. 1033). Critical inclusion teacher leadership development thus can support teacher leaders to understand their role and agency for engaging in this social justice project through pedagogical resistance.

Reimagining Teacher Leadership Development for Critical Inclusive Education

Justice has been conceptualized in many ways in educational research and practice. In the context of this study, I am guided by Tuck and Yang's (2018) understanding of justice as an imperative. There is no fixed set of linear steps to achieving justice and there is no definitive point of arrival. Rather, justice is a process and practice of engagement in praxis, or ongoing cycles of critical reflection and action towards imagining and enacting those futures deemed inconceivable (Tuck & Yang, 2018). Engaging teacher leaders in this work as critical actors presents one pathway towards orienting inclusive education efforts towards intersectional educational justice. Teacher leadership development for critical inclusive education should prioritize praxis by supporting teacher leaders such as coaches to collectively pursue new possibilities and "futures otherwise" (Kafer, 2013, p. 3). This includes engaging in critical inquiry and pedagogical resistance practices that are reflective of "a commitment to enact, iterate, and

re-iterate our answer to the questions of who belongs, where, and how" (Hamraie, 2016, p. 265). Teacher leaders committed to inclusive education can cultivate such commitments through critical professional development experiences that focus on recognizing, resisting, and transforming the curative imaginary of schooling.

This study was centered on a critical inquiry collective of one group of inclusive education coaches situated within a school district undergoing district-wide inclusive education reform. Throughout this year-long project, I explored how the coaches (1) made sense of inclusive education within the contexts of their district and school sites; (2) how they conceptualized their own identities, roles, and agency within the contested and ambiguous spaces of their schools; and (3) how they practiced pedagogical resistance through their work. To ground this study within the literature, the following chapter will review critical education scholarship focused on educator agency, teacher leadership as resistance, and the landscape and possibility of critical professional development for teacher leaders working towards critical inclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Critical education scholars have called upon those in the field of education to commit to justice as an imperative (Annamma et al., 2013; Ashby, 2012; Love & Beneke, 2021; Oyler, 2011; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Souto-Manning & Winn, 2019). This requires facilitating learning opportunities that support educators to cultivate a practice of meaningful and sustained pedagogical resistance to disrupt intersectional educational injustice (Annamma & Handy, 2019; Beneke et al., 2022a; Freire, 1970). In the context of inclusive education reform, pedagogical resistance includes educators exploring agency and resistance within contested school-based contexts and engaging in individual and collective praxis to transform them (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a/b; Danforth & Naraian, 2015). Critical professional development can support inclusive educators to develop a practice of pedagogical resistance as critical teacher leaders working towards educational justice within their contexts (Danforth & Naraian, 2015; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013).

In order to better understand the landscape of critical teacher leadership development and pedagogical resistance towards inclusive education, this chapter will review literature across the fields of critical special and inclusive education, teacher leadership, and critical professional development scholarship to answer three questions *(1) How is educator agency conceptualized in the context of inclusive education? (2) How does teacher leadership reflect a resistance practice to intersectional injustice?* and *(3) How is critical professional development conceptualized and how can it contribute to critical teacher leadership development towards justice-driven inclusive education?*

Agency in the Context of Inclusive Education

"Agency is the action we take or do not take, the action/nonaction that results in oppression or the perpetuation of the status quo, and the action that resists the grain, that seeks to reconstitute the meaning of school. Teaching is agency."

(Gourd, 2018, p. 11)

In order to examine the role of agency in the context of inclusive education and educator praxis, it is first important to define it. Gourd (2018) argues that agency is enacted by all educators through the choices that they make across each day. These choices are made "daily and mundanely" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 5) and can reproduce, disrupt, or transform inequities. In other words, agency is enacted constantly by educators through their actions (and inaction) that they take within (not despite) particular contexts. Gourd (2018) cautions education researchers from representing agency as something that only special or exceptional educators have or do, as this evades the power of the everyday reality of teacher agency. It also erases the critical examination of the pathways for agency that specific contexts afford. Similarly, Naraian and Schlessinger (2018) critique conceptualizations of agency that frame it as a "stable internal property that can be transported easily across contexts" (p. 181), as this ignores how each person is enabled and constrained differentially across their experiences, identities, and the contexts in which they participate. In other words, agency "remains inseparable from social context" (Naraian & Schlessinger, 2018, p. 181).

Danforth and Naraian (2015) utilize the concept of situated agency to illuminate how the "historically specific material contexts" of schools shape educator agency (p. 80). In the context of inclusive education, special educators' roles often remain rooted in the medical

model of disability and ableist approaches to teaching, learning, and collaboration. For those educators who identify or were trained as inclusive educators, they may enter the field with a particular set of skills or commitments to justice, however, their enactments of agency may vary, shift, and even feel contradictory to their beliefs given the often oppressive and constraining contexts in which they teach. For example, special educators often position themselves, or are positioned by others, as protectors of their students with disabilities. This protector role positions educators as "good, patient, and special, and as magicians, diagnosers, and fixers," and their disabled students as in need of their protection, their magic, and their fixing (Thorius, 2019, p. 325). This deficit-oriented and paternalistic view of disabled students hides the inherent ableism that operates as a "cloak of benevolence," normalizing educators' power to decide who should or should not be included (Thorius, 2019, p. 324).

Such subjective and conditional approaches to inclusion place value on dominant conceptions of normalcy and put the responsibility on disabled students to prove their readiness for general education classroom settings that aren't necessarily designed for them to begin with (Siuty, 2019a). When students labeled with disabilities are learning within their general education classrooms, special educators are often enlisted into surveillance or disciplinarian roles, particularly for their multiply marginalized students, who may not perform according to the normative expectations of school (Siuty, 2019b). This can include special educators being expected to enforce degrees of compliance to classroom and school-wide expectations that nondisabled students are not held to, and enforcing those expectations through threat of removal, either temporary or permanent, from the general education setting. These enactments of educator agency contribute to maintaining general education classrooms

as property for those students who can conform to ableist and racist expectations of normalcy (Annamma, 2015).

Ultimately, enacting agency towards justice-driven inclusive education requires a differential or oppositional consciousness that consists of both recognizing power and oppression within a context and finding a range of strategies to disrupt or transform inequities across the school day (Danforth & Naraian, 2015). For example, Stark & Koslouski (2021) found that special educators had to navigate general education colleagues' emotional reactions to the presence of students that challenge them in their classrooms, including "working to influence the mindsets of colleagues who [do] not support or value their [disabled] students" and "having to constantly advocate to administrators for their students' access to opportunities" (p. 69). In addition to this ongoing emotional labor, Mathews et al. (2017) identified that special educators also have to directly confront their colleagues' deficit views of both disability and inclusive education. Such enactments of agency can produce vulnerability, discomfort, and uncertainty, given the contested context of schools shifting towards inclusive education and the ways that educators' own identities intersect with systems of power and oppression. This has particularly negative impacts on special education teachers of color who frequently experience racial and disability fatigue not only from advocating for their multiply marginalized students, but also from the impacts of racism and ableism on other aspects of their work and their overall well-being (Cormier et al., 2022, Kulkarni et al., 2022; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Siuty & Atwood, 2022).

Enacting agency in such contexts can also present unique possibilities for educators "to transform the space of ambiguity into creative action" (Danforth & Naraian, 2015, p. 81). Such

creative enactments of agency in the context of a school or district moving towards inclusive education does not happen through the action of individuals alone. In fact, dominant constructions of the "independent agent" (Campano et al., 2020, p. 224) or "leader hero" (Angelides, et al., 2012, p. 77) are deeply rooted in racist and ableist conceptions of leadership (Pham, 2021). Rather, agency is necessarily relational and collective. It requires collaborative navigation across boundaries (e.g., professional roles, teaching spaces, collaborative team structures, etc.), while also seeking to dismantle and transform such boundaries through collective action (Pantić & Florian, 2015; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013a).

As teacher leaders who work across many boundaries in schools, coaches play an essential role in such critical and collaborative work, yet there is limited scholarship that highlights their insights, experiences, and agency (Leko & Brownell, 2009). In the context of inclusive education, coaches provide context-based responsive professional development that aims to meet the needs of both educators and students. When approached collaboratively, coaching has been found to grow teachers' commitments to inclusive education (McLeskey & Waldron 2002) and to foster teacher advocacy for collaboration as necessary to this work (Postholm, 2008). However, such advocacy does not necessarily extend to justice-oriented advocacy for multiply marginalized students. Given the narrow scope of research on inclusive education coaching, there is a call for research to specifically highlight how coaches identify and remove barriers to just and inclusive schools (Wlodarczyk et al., 2015).

In order to address this gap, the next section expands beyond inclusive education coaching literature to understand broader conceptualizations of teacher leadership and teacher leader resistance.

Teacher Leadership as Resistance

"Resistance is not only organized action, but also occurs by students and teachers acting in ways when faced with domination that 'resist, challenge and subvert the process at various junctures' (Mohanty, 1989, p. 345)." (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a, p. 73)

Within schools, educators engage in many forms of agency to resist intersectional education injustice (Pantić, 2017). These practices include rejecting deficit-based perceptions of multiply marginalized students, confronting bias, learning about intersectional systems of oppression, honoring multiply marginalized students' resistance strategies, and engaging as advocates for and with students (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a; Bradley-Levine, 2018). Resistance strategies can be aimed simultaneously at micro-interactional tensions and macro-socio-political struggles and can contribute to broader efforts towards inclusive education and intersectional educational justice (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a). Engaging in resistance practices can be interpreted as a form of teacher leadership as educators seek to transform their oppressive school contexts and engage their colleagues in this collective justice-driven work, as well. Since this study is focused on special education teacher leaders who were hired as coaches, it is important to outline the landscape of teacher leadership scholarship to better understand the resistance practices of teacher leaders working towards inclusive education.

With well over twenty years of research on teacher leadership, there has yet to be an agreed upon definition of what teacher leadership is (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Most often, teacher leadership is defined through the lens of instructional leadership, or a "process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of

increased student learning and achievement" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 287-288). Teacher leaders are considered central to school change processes, as they contribute to the cultural shifts necessary for implementing instructional improvement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Within school change processes for inclusive education framed through a more traditional lens, it is often special educators that take on leadership roles, both informally and formally, as they work most closely with students with disabilities and have traditional special education instructional expertise (Angelides et al., 2012; York-Barr et al., 2005).

Teacher leadership scholarship, however, rarely draws upon critical intersectional theory to address how schooling practices, including school change processes such as inclusive education reform, can perpetuate the oppression of disabled and multiply marginalized students (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Mundorf et al., 2019; Pham, 2021; Rojas). Additionally, studies in the field of teacher leadership often fail to acknowledge educators' justice-oriented practices and their resistance as leadership. Mundorf and colleagues (2019) point to a distinction between school change and social justice processes to explain this. They argue that while teacher leadership is often framed as a necessary part of school change processes, school change "is not inherently change for equity and justice" (p. 68). Thus, scholars working within these dominant frameworks often "neglect to include social justice as a worthy analysis in their conceptions of change and leadership" (p. 68). Similarly, Bradley-Levine (2018) calls for conceptualizing teacher advocacy as a critical leadership practice, a framing of leadership that is only just beginning to gain recognition among critical teacher leadership scholars.

Although the field of teacher leadership research has overall neglected to center intersectional educational justice as a priority and imperative, it is clear that teacher leaders

engage in justice-driven resistance in solidarity with their students on a daily basis (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Catone et al., 2017; Mundorf et al., 2019; Rojas, 2019). Theoharis (2007) recognizes this as social justice leadership. In the context of inclusive education, this includes disrupting the segregation of disabled and multiply marginalized students and connecting this work to broader issues of intersectional structural oppression (Morrissey, 2021). The frameworks of critical teacher leadership (Bradley-Levine, 2018), transformative leadership (Shields, 2018), and leadership-in-action (Pham, 2021) bring a much-needed critical lens to this literature base and necessarily highlight the resistance practices of teacher leaders as the work to recognize and transform these systems both within and beyond their contexts.

Bradley-Levine (2018) defines critical teacher leadership as engaging in critical pedagogical practices and collaborative and ethical leadership. Shields (2018) describes transformative leadership as a practice that centers “relationship building, morality, and justice” (Rojas, 2019, p. 30). This framework is comprised of eight tenets of transformative leadership that include: (1) commitment to equitable change; (2) recognizing dominant mindsets frameworks and engaging with new knowledge frameworks; (3) centering democracy, emancipation, and equity; (4) challenging power inequities; (5) acting with moral courage; (6) attending to the individual and collective good; (7) engaging in critique with the promise of justice; and (8) prioritizing interdependence and interconnectedness through leadership (Shields, 2018). Both of these frameworks position teacher leaders as advocates who can purposefully disrupt “dominant ideology, structures, and practices'' through their work (Catone et al., 2017, p. 4).

Pham's (2021) conceptualization of leadership-in-action pushes on dominant constructions of leaders and leadership and "unveils and expands teacher leadership practices" that are typically not perceived as such (p. 3). Recognizing that dominant conceptualizations of teacher leaders are rooted within racist systems of power and oppression, Pham (2021) argues for the importance of "amplifying in-the-moment leadership practices" as significant and intentional acts towards educational justice (p. 4). This is a useful lens when examining the daily resistance practices of coaches working towards inclusive education. For example, Wlodarczyk et al. (2015) found that the coaches entered their work with dominant conceptions of what successful inclusive education leadership looked like. However, as they worked within very constraining and challenging contexts, they came to learn to celebrate their "baby steps," or those everyday actions that might seem small but that contributed to their goals of just and inclusive school change (p. 64).

Leadership Development for Inclusive Education

Grounded in these critical frameworks for teacher leadership, it is important to recognize that teacher leadership is emergent and continuously developing over time within educators' particular contexts (Bradley-Levine & Bender, 2023; Morrissey, 2021; Woods & Roberts, 2018). Despite this, there is little attention paid to teacher leadership development in both scholarship and practice, including professional development for teacher leaders who may be entering coaching roles related to inclusive education (Bagley & Tang, 2018; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Thus, exploring the literature on teacher leadership development is essential to both surfacing dominant understandings in the field and identifying potential pathways for

cultivating more critical and transformative approaches to inclusive teacher leadership development.

In their review of teacher leadership development literature, York-Barr and Duke (2004) argued for greater scholarly attention on the formal and informal processes of leadership development. They defined three key critical areas of focus for leadership development, including:

> Continuing to learn about and demonstrate advanced curricular, instructional, and assessment practices; understanding the school culture and how to initiate and support change in schools; and developing the knowledge and skills necessary to support the development of colleagues in individual, small group, and large group interactions. (p. 277)

Through their examination of the literature, they also recognized that not only were opportunities for leadership development a precondition for fostering teacher leadership, but that fostering professional learning communities as spaces for teacher leadership development were essential (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The literature on professional learning communities for inclusive education highlights how teams, with the support of teacher leaders such as coaches, engage in collective inquiry and reflection related to instruction (Berry, 2011); learn to collaborate utilizing the various forms of expertise represented on the team (Cook et al., 2021); and develop collaborative management strategies to support students' diverse learning and behavioral needs (Wlodarczyk et al., 2015).

Traditional approaches to professional development for inclusive education teacher leadership, however, tend to frame inclusive education as a set of technical practices aimed at remediating student deficits. Such approaches reinforce the logic of the medical model of disability and frame students with disabilities and multiply marginalized students as the

problem in need of fixing (Danforth & Naraian, 2015). While professional development content related to instruction and collaboration are certainly necessary components of developing inclusive teacher leadership, a narrow and uncritical focus to professional development does not expose and unsettle the lineage of intersectional injustice perpetuated through schooling (Kohli et al., 2015). Additionally, it does not lift up or further cultivate the advocacy skills and commitments that teacher leaders might already have (Bagley & Tang, 2018; Bradley-Levine, 2018). Not only can the content of professional development limit its transformative potential, but the traditional forms utilized can as well. Through traditional professional development, educators are positioned as technical practitioners and passive recipients of knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Parkhouse, 2023; Schlessinger & Oyler, 2015). In other words, educators are viewed as objects to be changed rather than agents of change themselves (Kohli et al., 2015; LaGuardia et al., 2002).

These findings highlight the need for critical, justice-driven, teacher leadership development and they map onto calls from critical teacher leadership scholarship for justice-oriented teacher learning and collective action. For example, collaborative teacher leader networks and justice-driven professional learning communities for teacher leaders have been found to be effective for bringing teacher leaders together to support one another and grow collective practices of resistance and shared advocacy within and beyond school contexts (Catone et al., 2017; Fair, 2023; Wlodarczyk et al., 2015). Critical professional development offers a potential pedagogical structure to support and sustain teacher leaders in such work (Danforth & Naraian, 2015; Kohli et al., 2015).

Critical Professional Development for Inclusive Teacher Leadership

Professional development literature suggests that the most effective professional development is inquiry-based, collaborative, and prioritizes ongoing support within schools (Bull & Buechler, 1997; Desimone, 2009; Nishimura, 2014). Critical inquiry-based approaches, in particular, are designed to engage developing teacher leaders in learning and systems change rooted within their own local contexts. Within these learning contexts, educators are positioned as "thinking, creative, intellectual problem solvers" (Schlessinger & Oyler, 2015, p. 43). Such inquiry-based professional development prioritizes supporting teacher leaders to make connections between and navigate tensions across macro-level issues, such as the disproportionate segregation of disabled students of color, and micro-level questions related to educators' own school communities, classroom practices, and personal identities (Naraian & Oyler, 2014; Schelessinger, 2018; Schlessinger & Oyler, 2015; Thorius, 2019).

Coaching has been identified as a crucial structure for supporting such inquiry-based experiences. Coaches prioritize developing collaborative relationships that support educators to engage in new learning and take risks and this learning is embedded within teachers' own contexts (Cunningham et al 2017; Wlodarczyk et al., 2015). Additionally, inquiry-based approaches have not only been found to be effective for coaches to use with colleagues, but they have been found to be crucial sources of support for their development as coaches, as well (Wlodarczyk et al., 2015; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Despite growing interest in such inquiry-based work, however, it remains rare that professional development studies are reflective of both an inquiry-based format *and* critical content driven by sociopolitical analysis (Parkhouse, 2023; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013; 2016).

Critical professional development (CPD) approaches address this gap by bringing together both inquiry-based methods and critical analysis (Kohli et al., 2015). A subset of critical inclusive education scholars has drawn on the framework of inquiry as a stance to create professional development opportunities that support educators to ask critical questions, explore uncertainties, and generate new practices in service of broader social change towards critical inclusion (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Machado et al., 2023; Schlesinger & Oyler, 2015). Freire's (1970) framework of dialogic action and critical pedagogy have also greatly informed conceptualizations of CPD (Kohli et al., 2015). Across the various approaches, CPD positions educators as transformative knowledge generators and supports them to understand how they are implicated in either reproducing or disrupting educational injustice. To do this, CPD engages educators in learning processes that center dialogic problem-posing and praxis towards social change, which is understood as an inherently political process. Models for CPD vary, as they are deeply responsive to the needs and goals of participants rooted within specific contexts (Freire, 1970; 1998; Kohli et al.,2015). However, Kohli et al. (2015) found that across various models of CDP, they each aligned to the core elements of Freire's (1970) framework of dialogic action, including dialogue, developing shared justice-oriented goals, engaging in shared leadership, and supporting participants' own critical needs. Culture circles are one form of CPD through which participants engage in such work as a critical inquiry collective.

Freire originally implemented culture circles in the 1950's and since then they have taken on many forms in the field of education (Freire 1970; Souto-Manning, 2010). For example, Beneke et al. (2022a) engaged early career early-childhood educators in a critical inquiry collective centered on reading "schooling mechanisms as text to identify intersecting

systems of ableism and racism in their literacy classrooms" (p. 4). Together, collective members critically read images, classroom artifacts, and written texts to understand the ways racism and ableism manifest within dominant literacy practices. They explored how they themselves were implicated in perpetuating such practices in their own classrooms and schools. Additionally, they supported one another to create opportunities for "subversion and refusal" within their own teaching contexts (Beneke et al, 2022a, p. 1). Beltramo et al. (2020) describe a culture circle collective of teacher educators that engaged in dialogic problem posing and problem solving around a racist comment made by a principal. Together the collective members rehearsed the scenario by taking on various roles and trying on different transformative possibilities. Through their practice and dialogue, they were able to reflect on and plan for action related to this particular incident, as well as building courage to enact their justice-driven commitments in such situations in the future. Across each of these examples, collective learning was prioritized as participants worked to create and utilize tools towards transforming their own contexts within unjust systems.

Engaging in such critical learning within oppressive contexts is not without tension, however. Picower (2015) recognizes that often there is not institutional support for critical professional development, given that such approaches seek to critique and transform the oppressive contexts of schools. Furthermore, such approaches to professional development contradict the standardization and compliance-driven trends in professional learning for educators. However, critical scholars emphasize the importance of creating justice-oriented spaces for teacher learning and action both within and outside of school contexts as critical teacher leaders identify and engage in multiple pathways for resistance and transformative

action towards more just and inclusive schools (Catone et al., 2017; Kohli, 2012; 2014; 2019; Kohli et al., 2015; Parkhouse, 2023; Picower, 2012; 2015).

It is important to note the ways that CPD approaches have been taken up to strategically support the critical learning and development of educators within identity-based spaces and affinity groups. Such example of CPD have been facilitated to support educators of color (Caldas, 2021; Kohli 2012; 2014) and white educators (Souto-Manning, 2011), given that teachers are differentially impacted working within systems of power and oppression depending on their identities and thus their needs as developing teacher leaders vary. This is particularly crucial work given the pervasiveness of ableism and white supremacy and the overwhelming presence of whiteness in the K-12 teaching force, teacher education, and professional development environments. For example, critical scholars have used critical pedagogical spaces to support racial affinity groups with teachers of color (Kohli, 2012; 2014; 2019; Kulkarni et al., 2022). Kohli (2012; 2014; 2019) discusses the importance of such critical professional development (Kohli, 2019), rooted in critical pedagogy and critical race theory, to engage teachers of color in cross-racial solidarity building (Kohli, 2012), unpacking internalized racism (Kohli, 2014), developing racial literacy, as well as to supporting and sustaining teachers of color as transformative educators (Kohli, 2019). Alternatively, Souto-Manning (2011) engaged white preservice teachers in Boalian theater games as a tool for revealing and disrupting white privilege and to cultivate teachers' capacity for change. In each of these examples, identity-based critical pedagogical spaces for educators across the span of their careers supported participants to access deeply emotional and embodied learning (and unlearning) that contributed to transformational learning experiences.

In the context of this study, an iterative and participatory CPD approach was designed to support a role-based collective of coaches from one school district to engage in dialogic action and pedagogical resistance. Positioned as co-facilitators, researchers, and learners, the participants engaged in critical inquiry to open the possibility of transformation through critical teacher leadership development in the context of their district's inclusive education reform process. Given the tensions that emerge when working to enact change towards inclusive education within oppressive schooling contexts, this critical inquiry collective offered the coaches a space to navigate tensions, explore problems, rehearse solutions, and enact transformative praxis through their work in schools.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework and Methodology

Background

In qualitative research, case studies are designed to explore and interrogate phenomena in specific contexts and often seek to understand how cultural forces shape behaviors and beliefs (Yin, 2018). An intersectional approach to such methodological design is characterized by the "political and/or intellectual intent to understand how people come to garner collective agency, resilience, and forms of resistance against oppressive institutions, policies, and practices" (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022 p. 7). In other words, an intersectional approach is driven by commitments to justice. Collaborative qualitative research has been recognized as a potential path towards engaging school-based partners in transformative justice-driven understandings and approaches to inclusive education (Ruppar et al, 2018). Ruppar and colleagues (2018) define collaborative research as a "range of participatory design approaches that blur the boundaries between researchers and researched through partnerships on issues impacting local educational contexts" (p. 780). Such methods can disrupt the lineage of deficit-based approaches to special and inclusive education research by attending to a critical intersectional analysis on systems of power and oppression. Thus, this participatory multiple case study (Bhattacharya, 2017; Reilly, 2010) was designed to not only understand how inclusive education coaches make sense of educational injustice and their identities and agency as teacher leaders, but also how they engage in collective praxis and pedagogical resistance to transform their school and district contexts (Freire, 2000).

In the tradition of multiple case study approaches to collaborative qualitative research, this study was bounded within the context of West Mountain School District (WMSD). This

allowed for analysis within and across each case (i.e., the four coach participants) (Miles et al., 2014; Stake, 1995). Multiple data generation methods supported a deep understanding of each case, as well as the patterns across them. Data generation included critical inquiry group sessions (the focus of this study) (Beneke et al., 2022a; Freire, 1970; Souto-Manning, 2010), phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2019), and participant observations (Bhattacharya, 2017; Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Data generation and analysis took place throughout the 2022-2023 school year as the critical inquiry collective engaged in dialogic action and critical professional development characteristic of Freirean culture circles (Freire, 1970; Kohli et al., 2015).

Freirean culture circles are a form of critical pedagogy through which participants collectively problematize injustice in their own contexts and work together to resist and transform them through praxis (Freire, 1970). Applying such approaches to critical inquiry-based professional development disrupts constructions of teaching and learning rooted in ableism, racism, and other intersecting systems of oppression. Instead, culture circles prioritize cultivating a collective approach to learning and resistance that honors participants' experiences and knowledge; centers their dialogue and praxis; and engages them in shared learning with the purpose of transforming injustice in their own context (Beneke et al., 2022a; Freire, 1970; Souto-Manning, 2010). Such a critical professional development approach aligns with critical inclusion's defining purpose of engaging educators in continuous critical inquiry to address intersectional inequities (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007; Roberts et al., 2024; Siuty, 2019b). In this study, the iterative culture circle design was guided by recursive phases of critical inquiry that included collectively identifying generative themes, problem-posing and problem-solving

dialogue, preparing for and taking action, and critical reflection (Souto-Manning, 2010; 2019). Participatory data generation and analysis methods guided this inquiry and reflected a commitment to decentering the damaging hierarchy between researcher and participant (Futch & Fine, 2014). Grounded in a theory of pedagogical resistance framed through Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) (Annamma et al., 2013), this study's design reflects how working towards justice is an ongoing collective practice of solidarity and possibility through praxis.

Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit)

Built around seven key tenets, DisCrit is an intersectional theoretical framework that draws on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Disability Studies (DS) and is situated in the lineage of Black feminists' intersectional scholarship and activism (Collins, 2000; Combahee River Collective, 1977; Crenshaw, 1991). DisCrit builds upon and extends this lineage into educational spaces and recognizes the failure of the fields of special and inclusive education to adopt a critical intersectional justice-driven lens (Artiles, 2011; 2013; Waitoller & Annamma, 2017). DisCrit draws on both Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Disability Studies (DS) to bring attention to how the mutually constitutive and collusive systems of racism and ableism construct race, disability, and notions of normalcy, with particularly harmful consequences for multiply marginalized disabled students of color (Annamma et al. 2013; Tenets 1 and 3). While DisCrit refuses the framing of disability as a deficit, understanding disability as a singular identity erases the ways that multiply marginalized students experience the material impacts of oppression (Tenet 2). Thus, DisCrit centers the voices of marginalized youth, families, and communities to disrupt this erasure (Tenet 4).

DisCrit critically interrogates the ways that educational rights have been denied to multiply marginalized students of color and explicitly rejects the use of segregated special education classrooms (Annamma et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Thorius, 2016; Tenet 5). Furthermore, DisCrit recognizes that whiteness, smartness, and goodness have been deployed as property by white families for the individual benefit or advantage of their children (Annamma, 2015; Broderick & Leonardo, 2016; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011; Tenet 6). DisCrit Tenet 7, the focus of this study, recognizes the need for diverse forms of resistance to transform such unjust education ecologies. For educators, this includes refusing deficit orientations to disabled students of color, understanding and interrogating personal bias and systemic oppression, and valuing the gifts and presence of multiply marginalized students (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a). Thus, DisCrit necessarily implicates educators and teacher leaders to not only question dominant notions of special and inclusive education, but to act on their responsibility and power to disrupt the marginalization of disabled and multiply marginalized students through *pedagogical resistance* (Annamma & Morrison, 2018b; Beneke et al., 2022a).

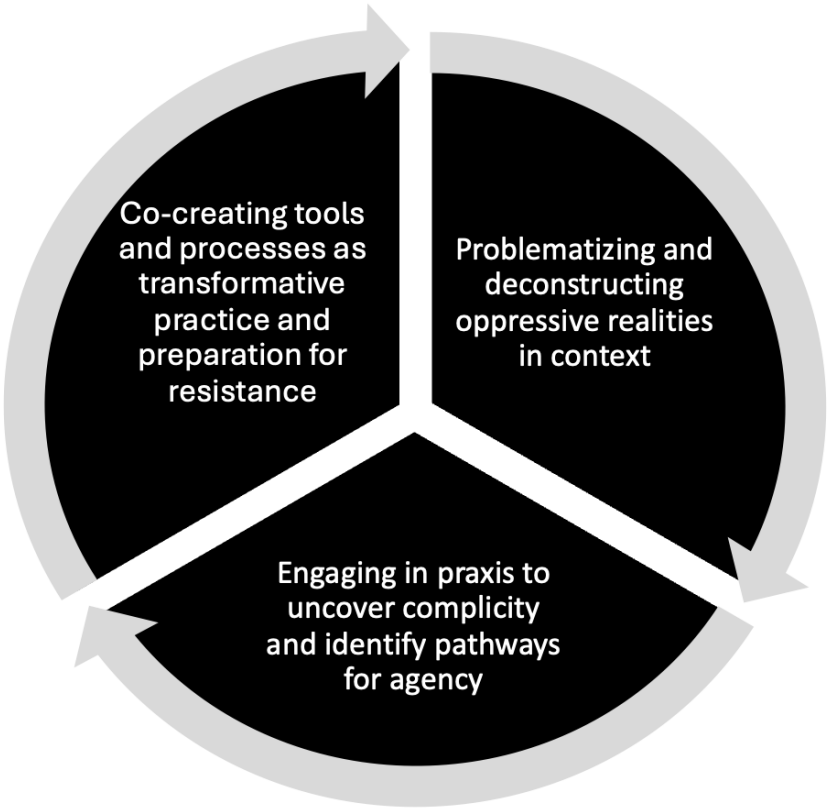
Pedagogical Resistance

While dominant approaches to inclusive education and professional development have failed to reckon with intersectional injustice and the ongoing dangers multiply marginalized students experience in schools, the political and contested nature of inclusive education leaves potential for collective reimagining and transformation (Danforth & Naraian, 2015; Kafer, 2013; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). In response to DisCrit Tenet 7's call resistance, I am conceptualizing pedagogical resistance as a critical praxis-oriented teacher leadership practice that can be

enacted within and across pedagogical spaces towards such transformation (see Figure 1). This leadership stance rejects the notion of educators as solitary actors, fixers, saviors, or heroes. Such constructs of leadership reproduce whiteness and ability as property, sustain systemic oppression, and ultimately dehumanize both educators and students (Beneke et al., 2022a; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011). Rather, pedagogical resistance prioritizes three critical pedagogical elements: (1) problematizing and deconstructing the oppressive realities within schooling contexts (Gourd, 2018); (2) engaging in praxis to uncover how educators are individually and collectively implicated in upholding these realities and also collectively responsible for finding pathways to disrupt them (Beneke et al., 2022a); and (3) co-creating tools and processes as transformative practice and preparation for resistance and reflection aimed at transforming educational injustice (South-Manning, 2010).

Figure 1

Elements of pedagogical resistance



This framing of pedagogical resistance underscores the need to create and engage in critical inquiry-based professional development for developing teacher leaders that aim to recognize, disrupt, and transform harmful and exclusionary beliefs, practices, and structures in schools and districts (Annamma & Morrison, 2018a; Hancock et al., 2021). Such pedagogical environments require that participants learn to reject the ideology and dominant forms of knowledge that have sustained this harm, to unsettle the certainty of traditional notions of leadership and professional expertise, and to accept that there is not one set path forward (Ben-Moshe, 2020). Instead, critical pedagogical spaces can support educators to act otherwise

by facilitating their imagination, practice, and enactments of possibility towards educational justice (Holland et al., 1998, p. 236).

The coaches in this study were uniquely positioned to explore pedagogical resistance given that they inhabited a variety of pedagogical roles (i.e., learner, coach, specialist, co-researcher, etc.) and engaged across multiple pedagogical spaces within which inclusive beliefs, practices, structures, and culture were being negotiated. Through ongoing praxis across these pedagogical spaces, including their own Freirean inquiry collective, the coaches continually found pathways for new and evolving forms of pedagogical resistance. Educational researchers have utilized culture circles in a variety of contexts, however, they have not been implemented with teacher leaders, such as coaches, as a form of critical professional development aimed at cultivating and exploring pedagogical resistance in the context of inclusive education district reform. Thus, this participatory multiple case study was centered on three research questions:

1. *In what ways did coaches participating in a critical inquiry group make sense of inclusive education within their school and district contexts?*
2. *How did coaches conceptualize their roles, identities, and agency within the contested and ambiguous spaces of their school sites and district-level work?*
3. *How did coaches practice pedagogical resistance in the context of district-wide inclusive education reform?*

Context

This study was situated in West Mountain School District, a district in a populated area near a large coastal city in the Pacific Northwest. In this district, there are just over one thousand classroom teachers and two thousand staff members employed at approximately

forty schools. With about eighteen thousand students, WMSD is a very diverse district, including 39.7% Hispanic students, 18.9% white students, 15.3% Black students, 14.9% Asian students, 7.1% multi-racial students, 3.5% Pacific Islander students, and 0.7% American Indian and Alaskan Native students, according to district demographic data at the time of the study. Around one hundred languages are spoken across the community, including English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Amharic, Punjabi, Arabic, and Khmer, and about 15% of students qualify for special education services.

WMSD currently has several segregated special education programs to which students are assigned. Students often must leave their neighborhood schools to attend these programs as not every school offers every type of special education program. These programs include those designated for students labeled with emotional and behavioral disabilities, programs for students identified with needing extensive academic intervention, and those for students with more complex support needs which are typically the most restrictive, or the most removed from the general education setting. The district also offers a resource service delivery model for students identified with learning disabilities, which is a much less restrictive service delivery model than the other three special education programs.

State level data provides insight into how students across racial identities/categories are assigned to settings of varying levels of restrictiveness at disproportionate rates. For example, this data highlights that a disproportionate number of white students labeled with disabilities are assigned to less restrictive classroom environments. More specifically, over 60% of white students in the district spend 80% or more of their school day in general education settings, while about 48% of Black students, 54% of Asian and Hispanic/Latino students, 51% Native

Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students, and 55% American Indian and Alaska Native students who are labeled with disabilities do so. There are also significantly higher rates of Black and Asian students with disabilities assigned to the most restrictive settings in the state, with about 18% of Black students and 21% of Asian students labeled with disabilities assigned to such settings and only 12% of white students receiving such classifications.

In 2020, a collaborative design group of district administrators, education specialists, and university partners was tasked with drafting a six-year inclusive education plan to fully desegregate their special education programs and return all students to their neighborhood schools. A few months into this team's initial convening in the 2021-2022 school year, I was invited to participate through my role as an inclusion specialist with a large-scale reform project that had been supporting this work through a district-university partnership. Through my collaboration with this district team, I was able to cultivate relationships with district staff, offer support, and engage in preliminary thematic investigation. Throughout my participation, I used memoing to reflect on questions such as: (1) *How are design team members constructing disability and race? (2) How are they defining inclusive education? (3) How are they positioning teachers and conceptualizing/supporting teacher learning?* And *(4) In what ways does their work reflect an intersectional justice-driven approach?*

Through my initial exploration of the district context, I found that their reform process was narrowly focused on the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), with the assumption that this approach would lead to more accessible classrooms for all students including those with disabilities (CAST, 2018). However, there was much less attention focused on cultivating justice-driven processes and supports to shift exclusionary and deficit-oriented

beliefs, practices, and structures in the district that were rooted in the intersections of racism and ableism. The district invited schools to opt into this early stage of the reform process in the 2022-2023 school year and the seven schools that did so (see Table 1) were offered the support of one of the district's four newly hired inclusion specialists, referred to as coaches, who were the participants in this study. Each coach was assigned to work with one or two of the schools that had opted into this process with limited clarity around the scope or expectations of their role.

Table 1

Overview of school sites

School	Coach
Crestwood High School	Meg
Miller Elementary School	Amy
Ceder Elementary School	Amy
Glendale Elementary School	Cameron
Bridgeway Elementary School	Cameron
Mountain View Elementary School	Alison
Valley Elementary School	Alison

Note: Both the schools' and participants' names are pseudonyms.

In the Spring of 2022, the school year before the study began, I reached out to the district's special education director to see if facilitating critical professional development for the

newly hired coaches was a possibility. I explained that this would be an inquiry-based approach to engage the coaches in critical dialogue and transformative action in their school sites. I shared that this would be one way to support them in navigating the dilemmas that inevitably arise throughout such a school change process. Additionally, I communicated the importance of their participation being voluntary rather than a requirement and communicated that I would be able to offer some form of compensation. She responded that she was eager to have this project support the coaches in their work. She was already very committed to the idea of inclusive education and the role of the coaches to move the work forward, but she was unsure what exactly this work would look like and how best to support and sustain the coaches. With the special education director's support for the project established, I reached out to each coach via email (Appendix A) to determine if they were interested in participating in a critical inquiry collective focused on exploring how to enact change in their school contexts through an intersectional and justice-driven lens (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). I shared an interest survey with the four coaches (Appendix B) and each coach responded that they would like to participate and provided their consent to do so (Appendix C).

Participants

Meg, Alison, Cameron, and Amy, the four participants in this study (see Table 2), each previously worked as special education teachers in the district prior to being hired as an inclusion coach and were very committed to inclusive education throughout their careers. They viewed this new leadership role as an opportunity to contribute to shifting inequitable structures more broadly across their district. As Alison shared in her participant interest survey, she hoped to "be part of redesigning systems and structures to create a place where every

student is valued." Also reflected in their interest surveys was an immediate anticipation of the "resistance" (Cameron), lack of "investment" (Amy), and "pushback" (Meg) they would witness in this new role. They expressed hope, however, that their inquiry collective would provide a "supportive community" (Alison) for growing into their new role together. In the sections that follow, each participant will be introduced through a glimpse into their background as students and as educators, as well as what brought them into the work of inclusive education and what shapes their lens now as teacher leaders. A portion of each coach's mission and vision statement will also be shared to center how they themselves conceptualize their roles and purpose in their work. The mission and vision statements were created, reflected upon, and revised over the course of the year as one of many critical pedagogical activities that supported our inquiry.

Table 2

Participants

	Alison	**Meg**	**Cameron**	**Amy**
Age	30's	30's	30's	40's
Racial identity	White/ Multiracial	Black	White	White
Gender identity	Female	Female	Female	Female
Ethnicity/ancestry	White & Mestizo Mexican	Unknown ancestry	European	Irish; Welsh; Lebanese
Disability status	Nondisabled	Nondisabled	Nondisabled	Nondisabled
Languages spoken	English; Spanish	English	English	English
Years in education	14	11	8	19
Educator positions	Paraprofessional; Special education teacher; Inclusion specialist	SLPA; SLP; Paraprofessional; Special education teacher; Inclusion specialist	Special education teacher; Inclusion specialist	Special education teacher, Inclusion specialist

Note. Participants chose their own pseudonyms and shared demographic information utilizing words of their choice.

Meg

Prior to working as a special educator, Meg learned many early lessons about the intersections of racism and ableism through her own experiences as a nondisabled Black student. She described, “Because of who I am, it's very hard for me to think about inclusion, exclusion, justice, injustice, racism, or ableism in schools from I guess outside of a personal lens.” For example, upon developing an autoimmune disorder in college, she was too sick to complete her final exams. She felt that her professors “doubted her ability,” reflecting both their ableism and anti-Blackness. When Meg became a special educator, it was Meg’s priority for her disabled students to be known, welcomed, and valued and she connected her work to broader issues of justice. She shared, “I feel like because of my intersectionality, and all my marginalized identities, it makes me want to do this work even more as an advocate and as an ally, because all the people in marginalized communities, we need to work together to tear the system down.” As a special education teacher, however, she was experiencing burnout and “wanted to be passionate about the work again.” In her new role, Meg was focused on prioritizing her students’ voices and desires, questioning, “What do they want? What's meaningful and important to them?” while also seeking to create coaching relationships through which she could invite her colleagues into this essential work as well (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Meg's coaching mission and vision

> ***As a coach, I am someone who*** *wants to guide others in exploring new ideas especially around identities that differ from their own* ***because I believe*** *everyone should be a stakeholder in the work towards full inclusion; we all have different strengths and the only way to change for the better is by encouraging diverse perspectives, hearing from people who have historically been marginalized and making room for new ways of thinking and being.* ***To me coaching is*** *listening, seeing people for who they are and meeting them where they are while gently nudging them to expand their practice (with support), also encouraging them to self reflect and challenge old ways of thinking by being authentic, vulnerable, and transparent myself.* ***I do this so that*** *we can create a relationship built on trust, openness and understanding while moving forward together to tackle the hard stuff. (Meg)*

Cameron

Cameron's experiences as a young nondisabled white student were greatly shaped by her family's fight for her disabled cousin's inclusion at school. She witnessed what her family went through to advocate for her cousin and became an advocate herself along the way. For example, as a high schooler, Cameron spoke out at a school board meeting against the segregation of students with disabilities in her own school district. Although Cameron noticed that it was primarily students of color who were segregated based on disability label, she noted, "in the school setting," race and racism were "never really brought up." In fact, she expressed that her "level of privilege as a white woman" was "never brought to my attention" and she "didn't really dive into that work" until college. As a special education teacher, Cameron continued her advocacy for her disabled students, however she also experienced significant burnout. She shared, "I feel like my passion kind of dwindled, because it was so hard." In considering this new role as a coach, she described: "I knew I was ready for a change. I had been fighting a system instead of a system being created from the start… It felt like a constant battle. I always dreamed of having a position like this." In describing her new position, Cameron

shared that it felt like a “big identity shift for me going from being a classroom teacher to being [in] this coaching role, and especially in this role [because] I'm here to implement change (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Cameron’s coaching mission and vision

> ***As a coach, I am someone who*** *centers my work around my overarching vision and belief that all students deserve access to learning the way that they learn best, alongside their peers. [I am someone that] questions and explores the “why” behind practices* ***because I believe*** *that everyone has something of value to contribute to our community, that our differences are strengths, that our students are ready. We need to include the voices [of those] who have historically been silenced.* ***To me coaching is*** *focusing on staff’s strengths, facilitating them in identifying their own areas of growth, creating space for people to explore outside of their comfort zone. “****I coach so that*** *students in marginalized communities get the quality education that the world needs them to have to create a more just and equitable society” (Aguilar, 2020). (Cameron)*

Alison

The early messages that Alison received about her racial and ability identities as a nondisabled white and Mestizo Mexican student shaped how she viewed her role as an educator. She described that as a young person she “was labeled a good student, smart.” In other words, Alison recognized these qualities as labels, rather than inherent or fixed ability. Also, through her experiences, Alison understood the complexities of such labels. For example, she shared that when she started to struggle in school, she’d internalized the labels of good and smart and thought, “I'm supposed to know how to do this and so I didn't ask for help.” Through these seemingly positive labels, she was taught to hide when her needs were not being met. Alison also shared how to this day she is continuing to explore her racial and cultural identities that she felt she had to hide as a young person. For example, she recalled a family tree assignment from middle school during which she identified herself as Mexican. However, a peer

told her, “You’re white. You can’t say that you're Mexican.” So, she told herself, “I'm just the white girl. I can't talk about [being Mexican]. Alison brought these experiences into her career as a special educator in a bilingual school where she was very passionate about students having access to both expansive linguistic opportunities and their special education services, although she also recognized the ways multilingual students were often mislabeled. Despite her commitments to ensuring language access for her multilingual students, she felt pressure to prioritize their special education services over their multilingual development. As she shared: “I felt that pull of like, I'm the one responsible for [students’] IEP goals and providing the support that they need, and I [thought I] just couldn't do that in the gen ed class. And I think that tied into my behaviors [as a special educator].” However, when her students advocated to spend all their time in their bilingual classrooms, rather than primarily in the segregated special education environment, Alison shared that this “challenged [her] thinking” and developed her commitment to “listen to [students’] guidance.” As a coach, Alison wanted to prioritize that critical reflection that she brought into her own practice as a teacher while also lifting up the voices and experiences of her students. As she shared, “that’s what we want, for our students to be able to self-advocate” (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Alison’s coaching mission and vision

As a coach, *I am someone who listens and takes time to process, is reflective, is action and detail-oriented* ***because I believe in*** *authentic rapport and trust[ing] that all students deserve opportunities to learn with their peers. I value equity, opportunities, inclusion, shared leadership, [and] honesty.* ***To me coaching is*** *elevating strengths, creating goals together, helping others to reflect. (Alison).*

Amy

Amy, a nondisabled white educator, was a long-time resource room teacher prior to becoming a coach. Her career was sparked through her relationship with her cousin who had spina bifida and was educated in segregated settings throughout her entire schooling experience. Additionally, she spent time as a counselor at a camp for students with disabilities. She recognized how working in a place that was truly designed to everyone's diverse access needs was transformative. However, she also understood the contradictions of doing so in a segregated setting. As she reflected, "that really reinforced my idea of separation… unconsciously." As a resource room teacher, Amy provided instruction to students through pull-out sessions from their general education classrooms. She shared that even though she felt that she could successfully partner with students to meet their academic needs, "it still didn't feel good that they were being pulled out." This led to her teaming with colleagues to begin co-teaching and shifting away from this pull-out model. She shared that while "it may not have been the full leap, it open[ed] up even more collaboration." Amy also recognized that it wasn't until "five to seven years [ago] that [she] really started to understand intersectionality" when it became a focus in her district and school professional development. She reflected, "Before that [professional development], I think it didn't even really occur to me that race and ability could be intertwined and that… overrepresentation in special education based on race… I didn't even think about those things." However, she reflected, "If I didn't understand those things, I don't think I'd be in this [coaching] role." Thus, while Amy recognized the importance of her learning in these professional development experiences, she reflected that issues of intersectional injustice are "not the first thing I think about, so I probably don't see it as much as it's probably

happening." This tension between her technical expertise and her developing intersectional lens continued to show up for Amy over the course of the year, as will be explored further in the findings chapters (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Amy's coaching mission and vision

> ***As a coach,*** *I am someone who gathers knowledge and resources, makes connections, supports, leads by example (eg incorporating strategies/tools into my trainings, modeling lessons)* ***because I believe*** *people learn best when they have a vision, understand the rationale [and] research, experience inclusive practices in action, and are supported to try on new things.* ***I coach by*** *asking questions, posing scenarios, giving rationale, developing plans, walking side by side.* ***To me coaching is*** *guiding others to make change, reflect on their own practices, see the bigger picture of how their changes, however small, can have a large impact on students.* ***I do this so that*** *students benefit through a sense of belonging. (Amy)*

Researcher Role and Positionality

Through the various roles I have held as an educator (i.e., special education teacher, general education teacher, coach, inclusion specialist, preservice teacher supervisor, and university instructor), I have undoubtedly been complicit in processes and practices that perpetuate injustice. I have also witnessed and participated in collective action between students, families, teachers, and teacher educators working to resist and transform injustice, including when I worked in an inclusive education coaching role, like that of the four participants in this study. As a coach, teachers and I collaboratively sought to create classrooms in which students felt belonging and engagement. We unearthed, challenged, and shifted our own beliefs and assumptions, and those of colleagues, students, families, and administrators. Along the way, we processed barriers, tensions, and conflicts and we witnessed students thrive, struggle, resist, and grow. Through this work, I learned how this work is deeply collective, inevitably messy, and always unfinished.

These professional experiences not only shaped this study's design, but also my role as a facilitator in the inquiry collective. The role of a facilitator in critical professional development such as culture circles is conceptualized differently than it is in traditional forms of professional development. Rather than being positioned as an expert, the role of the facilitator in Freirean critical inquiry groups reflects that of a "worthy witness" (Paris & Winn, 2013), one who asks questions, listen deeply, and facilitates dialogue that pushes participants "beyond what *is* to what *could be"* (Souto-Manning, 2010, p. 129). Additionally, this role includes participating with humility, being open about uncertainty, modeling and inviting reflexivity, and remaining focused on envisioning and enacting alternatives. These various aspects of my role, as well as a commitment to cultivating trust and accountable relationships in our group, supported the coaches' ongoing praxis, pedagogical resistance, and their development as co-facilitators of the collective.

Although the participants and I shared a similar professional history, I had to remain accountable to the impacts of my identities on participants, especially given the ways our racial identities aligned and differed in the group (Beneke, 2020). As a white nondisabled facilitator of a multi-racial group of nondisabled participants, I worked to notice and shift power dynamics within our group. I also aimed to recognize and disrupt race-evasive dialogue (Annamma, 2015), to recognize participants' and my own investment in the geographies of exclusion that normalize racial and ability hierarchies (Beneke et al., 2022c), and to bring the participants into this work as well. This was particularly important given that traditional special education professional development spaces rarely prioritize such practices. I also continually reflected on how participants were or were not bringing an intersectional or critical lens to their dilemmas,

why this might be given their identities and experiences, and how our dialogue protocols and activities might better support this shared work. Furthermore, it was necessary for me to deeply attend to the balance between the much-needed time to reflect and engage in critical dialogue, while always moving our group towards action, as professional development that values only reflection without action sanctions and perpetuates the lineage of harm that multiply marginalized students have faced at school (Annamma, 2015; Beneke et al., 2022c).

Throughout the study, I also needed to disrupt being viewed by district administrators and principals as the expert of the collective, given my history as a specialist with the district and my identities as a white nondisabled doctoral candidate. Throughout the year I worked to make it clear that I did not have all the answers, nor was that my role as a facilitator. This was not always comfortable and at times made me wonder if this critical repositioning would lead others to question the credibility of our collective's work and the study's pedagogical design. However, I made space to work through the various emotions that arose in this process and engaged with critical friends, mentors, and through reflexive memoing to continually practice disrupting whiteness and ability as property as they showed up in my own role.

Data Generation

As is characteristic of Freirean culture circles, as well as many forms of collaborative qualitative research, the phases of this participatory multiple case study were recursive and responsive to what occurred throughout the collective inquiry process. I utilized several data generation methods throughout the cycle of this study, including: (a) ten critical inquiry group sessions (about two hours each); (b) a three-part phenomenological interview series with participants, comprised of two ninety-minute, in-depth, individual interviews with each

participant and one group interview; and (c) three participant observations with each participant and five participant observations of the group (see Table 3). This data generation process not only supported data triangulation, but also allowed me to prioritize the pedagogical needs of the participants and the depth and criticality of the group's collective inquiry throughout the year.

Table 3

Data generation activities (2022-2023 school year)

Month	Data Generation Activities
September	Interview 1; Inquiry group 1; Observation 1
October	Inquiry groups 2-3; Observation 2
November	Group observation 1; Inquiry group 4
December	Interview 2; Inquiry group 5; Observation 3
January	Group observations 2-3; Inquiry group 6
February	Group observation 4; Inquiry groups 7-8
March	Inquiry group 9
April	Inquiry group 10
May	Group observation 5-6
June	Interview 3

Note. Cameron, one of the study's participants, was on parental leave January-May.

Critical Inquiry Group Sessions

Based on the participants' interest and availability, the ten culture circle sessions took place monthly across the 2022-2023 school year (see Table 4). Each session was approximately

two hours long and both audio-recorded and transcribed. The sessions took place either on zoom, at the district office, or at one of coaches' school sites. With the support of the coaches' principal and special education directors, we were able to schedule the inquiry group sessions during the coaches' workday. For the first half of the year, I took on the role of the primary facilitator for the group. This included drafting the session agendas based on the themes surfacing in the group, sending the agenda out for feedback and revisions one or two days prior to our gathering, as well as facilitating the session itself (Appendix D). Given this critical professional development approach, the coaches took on greater responsibility for the session design and facilitation towards the second half of the year. Following each session, I engaged in analytic memoing to gather thoughts, questions, and interpretations of what arose. This process also helped to inform pedagogical considerations for future sessions.

Table 4

Critical inquiry collective session overview

Session	Focus	Format
Session 1	*Starting with ourselves*	In-person
Session 2	*Surfacing what is to imagine what could be*	In-person
Session 3	*Exploring tools for critical problem posing and problem solving*	In-person
Session 4	*Reflecting on our agency and action*	In-person
Session 5	*Preparing and Practicing*	Zoom
Session 6	*Planning next steps for collective action*	In-person
Session 7	*Planning next steps for collective action*	In-person
Session 8	*Planning next steps for collective action*	In-person
Session 9	*Reflecting back/moving forward*	In-person
Session 10	*Reflecting back/moving forward*	In-person

Note. See Appendix E for an extended version of this overview.

As a critical inquiry collective, we utilized a variety of tools to continually move our dialogue through the phases of inquiry with praxis always in mind (Appendix F). This included coaches generating themes from their contexts, collectively problem posing and problem solving,

preparing for and taking action, as well as reflecting on the various types of action that they took. Some of the tools we used to support our collective praxis and pedagogical resistance included journey maps (Annamma, 2015; Beneke, 2020); dialogue and inquiry protocols (Gant et al, 2009; *School Reform Initiative,* 2021), action planning processes (O'Brien et al., 2010); and embodied rehearsal for action (Boal, 1979; Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010). Each of these tools were intentionally designed to align with the priorities of critical pedagogy.

Participant Observations

Over the course of the year, I engaged in three participant observations with each participant and six participant observations with the group, each of which ranged from one to three hours (see Table 5 for an overview of observations; see Appendix G for expanded version). The purpose of the observations was to support the participants' ongoing praxis and pedagogical resistance and thus these observations were deeply aligned with our shared work within the inquiry group sessions themselves. Participants continually brought themes, questions, and dilemmas that surfaced from our observations to the group inquiry sessions, as well as drawing on themes from the sessions to determine the focus of our next observation. Based on this shared inquiry, the participants and I collaboratively determined the specific activity for each observation.

At the start of the year, the observations were focused on collectively surfacing the realities of the coaches' contexts. The initial individual participant observations offered the chance for the participants and I to develop a collaborative relationship rooted in developing trust, openness, support, and criticality. For our second individual observation, we shifted into planning for action as a focus. The coaches each asked for support related to a professional

development experience or tool they were developing for colleagues at their school sites. Through these observations, we were able to engage in critical dialogue related to their work regarding how to remain oriented to educational justice even as barriers were emerging in their contexts. Ultimately, we moved towards engaging in and reflecting on pedagogical resistance as the group's collective focus, confidence, and leadership developed. Observation activities included things such as observing classrooms together, planning and facilitating professional development as a group, planning for and attending contentious meetings with district leaders together, and facilitating a special education parent-teacher association (PTA) event. During these observations, I took photos when appropriate, gathered documents that were used, jotted field notes about people, events, space, and other details, including noting generative themes and my own "hunches, emotions, and impressions" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 144). However, as reciprocity was a core value of this study's design, my role during observations shifted depending on the context and desires of the participants.

Table 5

Overview of participant observations

Observation	Date	Focus	Participants
Observation 1	9/26; 9/27	Surfacing Current Realities	Alison
Observation 1	9/26; 9/29	Surfacing Current Realities	Amy
Observation 1	9/28	Surfacing Current Realities	Cameron
Observation 1	9/29	Surfacing Current Realities	Meg
Observation 2	10/31	Planning for action	Alison
Observation 2	10/31	Planning for action	Amy
Observation 2	11/4; 11/10	Planning for action	Cameron
Observation 2	11/9	Planning for action	Meg
Group Observation 1	11/15	Meeting with special education administrators	Alison, Amy, Cameron, Meg
Observation 3	12/8	Inclusive demonstration school site visit	Meg
Observation 3	12/9	Inclusive demonstration school site visit	Cameron

Observation	Date	Focus	Participants
Observation 3	1/13	Inclusive demonstration school site visit	Alison
Observation 3	1/13	Inclusive demonstration school site visit	Amy
Group Observation 2	1/9; 1/11	Preparing for/meeting with special education administrators	Alison, Amy, Cameron, Meg
Group Observation 3	1/23; 1/30; 2/7	District presentation preparation	Alison, Amy, Meg
Group Observation 4	2/7	District presentation	Alison, Amy, Meg
Group Observation 5	5/3; 5/10; 5/16	Special Education PTA session preparation & presentation	Alison, Amy, Meg
Group Observation 6	5/9	District inclusive education team retreat	Alison, Amy, Meg

Phenomenological Interviews

Each participant took part in a set of three, in-depth phenomenological interviews across the school year that provided greater context for their meaning making, praxis, and

pedagogical resistance (Seidman, 2019). The interviews were ninety minutes each and primarily took place in person. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Participants selected where we met for the interviews based on what location was convenient and comfortable for them. Open-ended questions and probes for clarity and detail were prepared in advance and utilized to initiate the interview and then as needed to maintain focus on the research questions and interview purpose (see Table 6 for an overview of interviews; see Appendix H for sample protocols). Additionally, some questions were purposefully designed to follow up on threads of dialogue from our inquiry group sessions and participant observations, which also served as a form of data triangulation.

The first interview (a focused life history) explored the participants' identities and experiences in education as students themselves and as special education teachers, as well as their sense-making around educational injustice and inclusive education. The second interview (details of lived experience) focused on their experiences and critical reflections on their current contexts as coaches and as members of our collective. The third and final interview was a group interview that prioritized shared reflection on the group's pedagogical resistance and the implications for their ongoing work. Like the participant observations, the interviews had pedagogical implications, as well. The interview questions invited personal critical reflection on their own experiences and identities, as well as modeling for coaches the types of questions they might bring into coaching conversations with their colleagues. The interviews also provided participants with the opportunity to elaborate on, clarify, or continue exploring topics that came up in our inquiry group sessions.

Table 6

Sample interview questions

Interview	Sample Questions
Interview 1	● *Share an example of a time when you were a teacher that shaped your understanding of educational injustice (related to racism and ableism).* ● *What are your hopes for your current role as a coach and our collective?*
Interview 2	● *Describe a time when you felt like you were enacting your commitments as a coach.* ● *Describe a time when you felt unsure or challenged as a coach.* ● *How do you feel like your own identities shape the ways you experience/navigate your contexts?*
Interview 3	● *Given what we've been discussing related to pursuing a more intersectional equity-based approach in the district and pushing on the ways the district operates in siloed ways, how might you revise your mission/vision to address this?* ● *How might this group take shape (expand, shift, etc.) to support you in this work next year?*

Data Analysis

As is the tradition of qualitative research, data analysis for this study was an iterative and comparative process with recursive cycles of data generation and analysis (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data analysis process was deeply informed by the theoretical framing of pedagogical resistance and consisted of both inductive and deductive analysis across multiple phases, including participatory data analysis throughout the year and three cycles of coding that I engaged in independently, as this went beyond the scope of our collective inquiry (Bhattacharya, 2017; Saldaña, 2021). These multiple phases supported data triangulation and the clarification of codes, patterns, and broader themes across the data.

Participatory Data Analysis

Participatory data analysis that took place throughout the year. Participatory processes were built into the pedagogical design of the study to support this without overextending participants beyond the scope of their commitment to our shared work (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Such processes also reflected the study's commitment to humanizing research (Paris & Winn, 2013) and a response to Souto-Manning's call for critical research to center the perspectives, priorities, and experiences of participants (2013). Our inquiry group activities, for example, were designed to engage participants in thematic investigation and critical analysis to identify both their individual next steps and collective priorities for resistance (Beneke et al., 2022a). Sessions were designed based on the themes the group surfaced through such analysis. Agendas were then created that explicitly reflected these themes and were made available to participants at least two days in advance of each session for their review and revision. When participants took over creating the agendas, they engaged in similar analytic planning processes

and provided their agendas to the group in advance, as well. Additionally, descriptive summaries were shared with participants for review after every interview and inquiry group session (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Participants were invited to add or clarify anything that was shared in these summaries.

Coding Cycles

The first, second, and third cycles of coding allowed for making sense of the study's research questions across multiple data generation activities, across the coaches' experiences as a collective and each of the participants individually, as well as making sense of the data over time. These three cycles were by explained further in the sections that follow.

First Cycle of Coding

In the first cycle of coding (Saldaña, 2021), I utilized elemental coding methods, including descriptive, in vivo, and process coding (see Table 7 for sample first cycle codes; see Appendix I for extended version). Throughout this cycle, I engaged in line-by-line coding, staying close to the data to determine these initial categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also used section-by-section coding when line by line coding would result in less meaningful excerpts. To begin, I coded the first round of interview transcripts and our collective's first inquiry group session transcript. I utilized these initial codes as a coding scheme to which I added and refined codes throughout the cycle. For example, after coding the first four inquiry group sessions and the first interview, which reflected the first half of the study, I drafted initial definitions of each code. This allowed me to further clarify each code, including combining codes that had a similar meaning. I engaged in similar clarification processes after coding our fourth inquiry group

session and after coding the final interview. Initial coding helped me to determine tentative patterns that were continually revised as analysis continued (Saldaña, 2021).

Table 7

First cycle code examples

Code	Coding Method	Sample Excerpt
"Why is she here?"	In vivo	*"When I'm interacting with the sped team, I feel like they're just gonna [be] like, why are you here? Interacting with gen ed teachers, I feel the same way."* -Meg
Collaborating	Process	*"I liked the problem of practice protocol and want to keep digging into that a little deeper. And I think we've identified across the buildings, some next steps and, on a more structural level, thinking ahead about student placements in the fall."* -Alison
School leadership	Descriptive	*"She has her own agenda."* -Cameron

Second Cycle of Coding

In order to transition between the first and second coding cycles, I first tentatively categorized the initial codes across the study's three research questions. This supported my sense making, organization, and focus on the research questions, while remaining open to how these categories would shift given further analysis. I then moved into the second coding cycle

during which I identified patterns across the codes within each research question-based category, including patterns that allowed me to further clarify subcodes (Saldaña, 2021). Next, I created a data matrix to explore patterns over time and across each case to analyze the ways codes shifted, evolved, or persisted throughout the scope of the study (Miles et al. 2020) (see Table 8 for sample second cycle codes; see Appendix I for extended version).

Table 8

Second cycle pattern coding example

	Fall				***Winter***			
	Cameron	***Alison***	***Amy***	***Meg***	***Cameron***	***Alison***	***Amy***	***Meg***
Role and Identity	***x12***	***x6***	***x9***	***x13***	***x19***	***x8***	***x20***	***x17***
"Feeling pigeon-holed"	*x5*	*x1*		*x3*	*x2*	*x2*		*x4*
"Why are you here?"		*x2*	*x4*	*x6*	*x3*	*x1*	*x7*	*x3*

Note. See Appendix I for an extended version of this matrix.

Third Cycle of Coding

In the third cycle of coding, I first revisited the study's theoretical framework and conceptual framing of pedagogical resistance. I then engaged in deductive coding with close attention to these frameworks and the study's three research questions. Through this deductive process, I identified and clarified themes across the data that included: (1) problematizing inclusive education within their ambiguous and contested contexts; (2) exploring roles, identities, and agency through praxis; and (3) practicing pedagogical resistance. I then generated tentative findings by elaborating on these themes through analytic memoing.

Ultimately, the findings illuminated the study's framework for pedagogical resistance through the experiences of the four coaches, as will be discussed in depth in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The iterative design, data generation, and data analysis processes described throughout this chapter enriched the study's trustworthiness and credibility through multiple avenues (Trainor & Graue, 2013). These practices were prioritized not as isolated items on a checklist, but rather to ensure meaningful enactments of data triangulation, member checking, and researcher reflexivity (Brantlinger et al., 2005). For example, the descriptive memos that were shared with participants after every critical inquiry group session and interview, not only summarized what was discussed, but offered thematic interpretations for the participants to review and further clarify or revise as a form of member-checking. Their interpretations, therefore, along with the study's conceptual framework and grounding in the extant literature, guided the in-depth analysis that I engaged in over the course of the year. Additionally, our co-designed format for agendas offered another form of member-checking as it was intentionally structured to highlight themes we'd collectively identified as necessary and relevant to explore based on the previous session's dialogue, the coaches' various forms of action, and the ongoing challenges they were facing across their contexts. The coaches revised these agendas prior to each session to clarify themes and ensure that the pedagogical activities associated with the themes were aligned to their needs and interests. At times, this meant that we prioritized topics that may have been different than what I interpreted as a clear next step. However, this reflected my commitment to engaging in a participatory process that centered the coaches' sense-making, critical inquiry, and pedagogical resistance. Memoing was central to my own

sense-making and was a tool for sustaining my own reflexivity. This process supported me to attend closely to the study's theoretical framework and my justice-oriented commitments while also remaining deeply aware of the everyday realities of the coaches that they were so gracious in sharing with me and with one another.

Chapter 4: Problematizing Inclusive Education in Ambiguous and Contested Spaces

Context and Pedagogical Resistance

The context of inclusive education reform is often characterized by competing and unclear visions for inclusive education, as was the case in WMSD. Gourd's (2018) framework for ambiguous and contested spaces offers a useful lens on the potential dangers and opportunities of such contexts. Drawing on this framework, ambiguous reform contexts can be interpreted as those that lack clarity in terms of the process or goals for the work. Contested spaces are those in which oppressive beliefs, practices, and structures are more explicitly confronted, thus surfacing the ideological tensions and power dynamics within a context. Both ambiguous and contested spaces present educators with opportunities for engaging in transformative action, however they are also spaces within which racism, ableism, and other intersecting systems of oppression, as well as dominant notions of normalcy, can be reinscribed and thus remain the status quo.

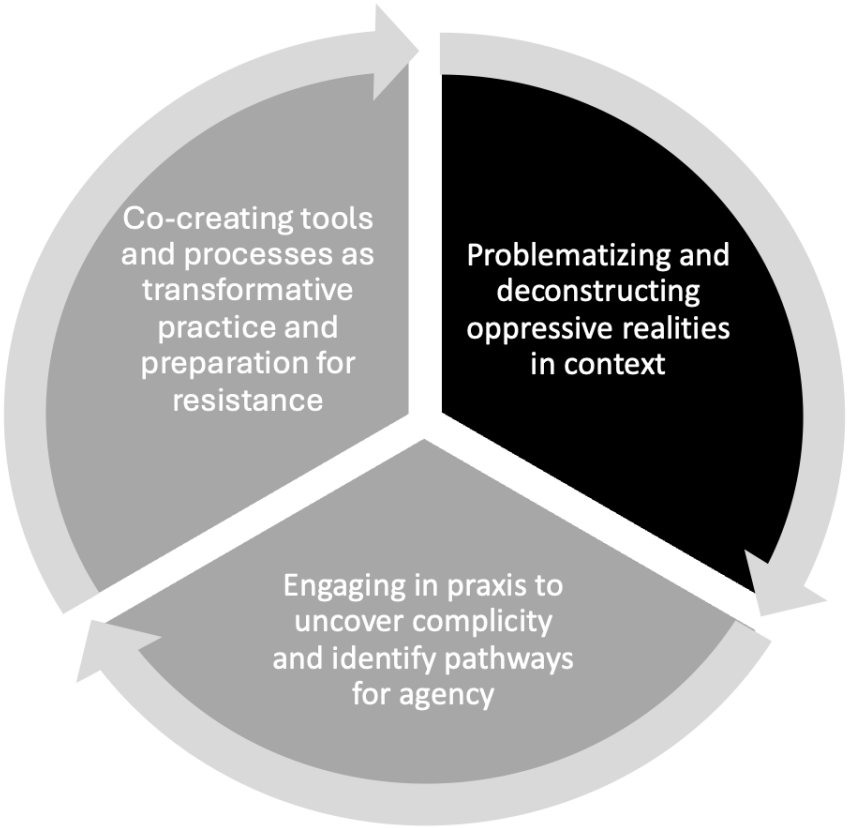
Our critical inquiry collective offered the coaches a critical professional development space to surface these dynamics and to cultivate a deep and critical understanding of their school and district contexts, with particular attention to the ways these contexts were contributing to the marginalization and exclusion of disabled and multiply marginalized students. Together the coaches engaged in research, critical analysis, and theorizing of their contexts, including the oppressive beliefs, practices, and structures operating within them. Such critical analysis included questioning, for example, "Who benefits from inclusion? Where are these students included? What are the consequences of who benefits and where inclusion is

enacted?" (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007, p. 358). These questions invited the coaches to develop and apply a critical and intersectional analysis to the inclusive education reform process taking place within their own contexts. Such an analytic lens was more familiar for some of the coaches and newer for others. Supporting them to apply this lens more consistently as a group required intentional session design and facilitation, time to practice together, and the ongoing development of trust between the participants, as well as with me. Through their inquiry, they identified generative themes, or common experiences across their contexts, that they then "problematized and deconstructed" through their dialogue (Souto-Manning, 2010, p. 36). These generative themes served as dialogic "starting points to problem posing," not only around their specific context and personal experiences, but also broader issues of intersectional educational injustice (Souto-Manning, 2010, p. 9). Although they did not always name these systems directly, the inquiry process offered them the tools and collective support to grow the critical lens, confidence, and shared trust with one another as they moved through cycles of action and reflection over the course of the school year. Research question one brings this into focus by asking: *In what ways do coaches participating in a critical inquiry group make sense of inclusive education within their school and district contexts?*

Guided by the inquiry stance of the iterative and participatory study design, our collective utilized a variety of critical pedagogical tools and inquiry-based activities (Appendix F) to engage in the first element of pedagogical resistance, problematizing and deconstructing the oppressive realities of their contexts, in this case, the ambiguous and contested spaces within their district and schools (Figure 6).

Figure 6

The first element of pedagogical resistance

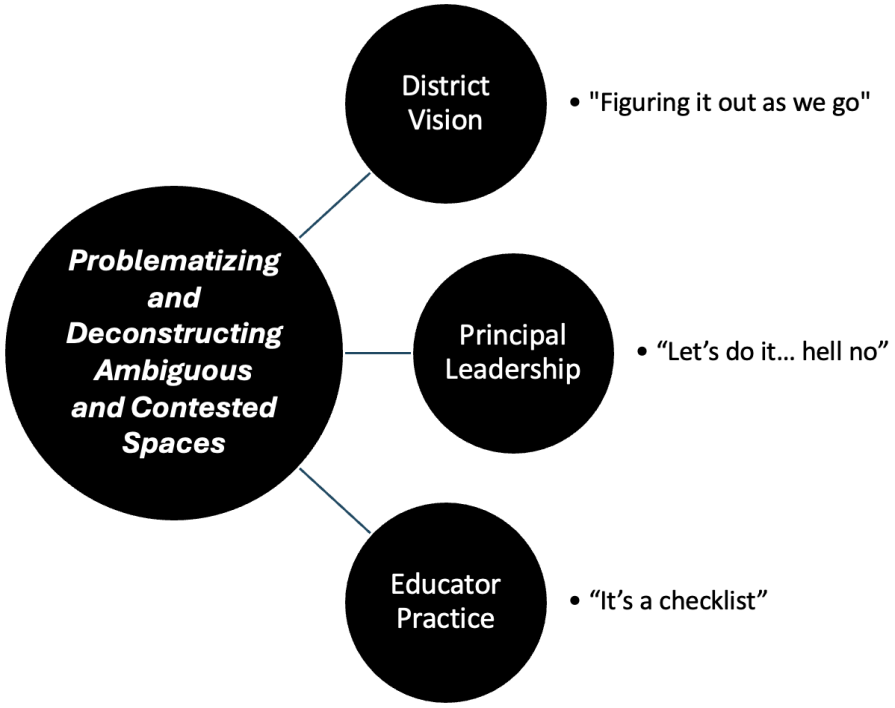


This first element of critical inquiry was particularly important for this group of coaches, each of whom were taking on formal teacher leadership roles for the first time within challenging and shifting contexts. Although they were taking on these new roles in "a district that was seeking [them] out and in schools that volunteer[ed] to be a part of it," and seemed "willing to do the work" (Cameron), Meg, Amy, Alison, and Cameron identified several ambiguous and contested spaces that were contributing to students' experiences of marginalization. They recognized that just because these schools had opted into the district's inclusive education reform process did not mean that the impacts of ableism and racism on multiply marginalized were being contended with. Our collective came to recognize these sites

as persistent and interconnected “hot spots'' through which patterns of exclusion for disabled and multiply marginalized students had been normalized (Annamma, 2018). These patterns spanned multiple levels of systemic intersectional oppressions, including ideological, institutional, and interpersonal interactions. Three of these spaces included (1) the district’s vision for inclusive education, (2) principal leadership, and (3) educator practice (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Problematizing and deconstructing ambiguous and contested spaces



District Vision: “Figuring it out as we go”

WMSD’s vision for inclusive education was centered on the idea of fully desegregating their special education programs and supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities in their neighborhood schools. This vision was articulated within a six-year plan and corresponding vision statement that had not yet been widely shared in the district at the time this study

began. The vision statement and plan were created by a small group of principals and district administrators and thus not many people from the broader school and local community knew about it or had contributed to it. The statement represented the district's intent to desegregate special education classrooms. It called out that this move was in response to the ways students have been both historically and currently assigned to segregated programs as a result of the labels they'd received through disciplinary action, language, and disability (paraphrased from vision statement document to protect anonymity). The statement highlighted the district's desire to eliminate bias and discrimination and all barriers to participation and achievement. However, the statement did not name the ways racism and ableism show up and intersect within beliefs, practices, and structures to create unjust and exclusionary schooling contexts for multiply marginalized students or how these systems construct dominant (i.e., ableist and racist) notions of participation and achievement. The plan also emphasized the need to meet all students' individualized needs as a priority, thus signaling this work as remaining situated within more traditional understandings of special education, rather than broader systemic change.

The coaches reviewed the six-year plan and statement closely and felt especially concerned with the lack of clarity around the district's meaning of inclusive education. This lack of clarity was characterized by the narrow and vague framing of inclusion and failure to address intersecting systems of oppression more directly. Meg offered in one of our group discussions early in the year, "if we can't look in the past to see why these things happen in the first place, it's bound to happen again… Maybe in terms of disability we can get there, but I think with the intersections of all marginalized identities, it's gonna be a while." Here Meg expressed her

doubt that a more intersectional framing of inclusion was even possible. She theorized that maybe they would eventually be successful in desegregating special education classrooms and that students with disabilities would be physically included; however, she recognized that disrupting the ways both racism and ableism operate together to marginalize disabled students of color would be a much greater and prolonged struggle given how the district, and society more broadly, has failed to authentically commit to addressing and uprooting systemic racism in schools. Without a historically grounded critical lens on inclusive education, only pursuing the physical inclusion of students with disabilities would not be enough to disrupt the ways ableism normalizes racism and disabled multiply marginalized students' experiences of educational injustice and exclusion at school.

It was also unclear to the coaches how the district plan was going to be communicated and whose responsibility it was to do so, which raised questions for the coaches as to just how the district would be able to pull off the significant structural shift of desegregating their special education programs in a meaningful way. Cameron, for example, shared that Sarah, one of WMSD's special education directors described the district's less defined approach as intentional because inclusive education can and should "look different in every place." This director expressed feeling hesitant about inadvertently representing inclusive education as a one-size-fits-all special education initiative if she were to provide schools with specific constraints for their inclusive education development. Outwardly this flexible approach could appear to honor an expansive, rather than fixed, understanding of inclusive education. However, the director's hesitance reflected a lack of accountability to addressing the inequities referred to vaguely in their vision statement, as well as reflecting her concern that putting too much pressure on

principals would scare them off from opting into this contested work. Here Meg questioned the district's lack of direct communication: "Isn't the idea to break down the most restrictive placements? Nobody's really been told that." Both Meg and Cameron's examples highlight their skepticism of the district's commitment to even a narrow interpretation of inclusive education.

As the district had not defined what opting into this early stage of the reform process meant for the schools whose principals chose to do so, it appeared that all it meant at this point was that these schools would receive support from one of the four coaches. Reflecting on this, Cameron shared, "I assumed that by opting in, the district had certain expectations [about what it means to be an inclusive school in the district] and I'm finding that that's not true." Cameron had expected the district leadership to communicate expectations to the principals and hold them accountable to these in some way. However, it was clear that rather than prioritizing disrupting the exclusion and marginalization of disabled and multiply marginalized students, district leaders were instead protecting the comfort of school principals in the roll-out of the district vision. Protecting the comfort of the principals (those with the most structural power in schools), revealed the district's intent to leave the deeply rooted issues of racism and ableism unaddressed, or at least called into question that it would be a priority to hold them accountable to such work. Cameron concluded, therefore, that the district's plan "felt kind of pointless," like they're "kind of figuring it out as we go." The coaches thus questioned, "who is responsible'' for pushing this work forward (Cameron), wondering how they themselves would be responsible for this vision in the process. As Meg expressed, this "figuring it out as we go'' approach positioned the coaches as "guinea pigs," especially given the newness of the shift to inclusive education in the district and the newness of their roles. It remained an ongoing

concern for the coaches what shape their roles would take within this ambiguous vision and the lack of accountability to the work among district leaders.

It is also important to note how although the coaches were very critical of the district's approach, their problematizing looked different depending on the lens that they'd entered our collective work with. For example, although Amy was much aligned with the other coaches in her concern about the "figuring it out as we go" approach, she also identified with Sarah's hesitance to take a clearly critical and intersectional stance on the purpose of and process for inclusive education in the district. During one of our individual participant observations, Amy expressed to me that "diving into [inclusive education and ableism] in the way the district asked us to dive into work around racism would be too much." Here Amy was reflecting on how when the district began providing professional development around race, identity, and equity, there was significant backlash and opposition from educators and principals. However, rather than critiquing this as racist backlash, she identified this approach as having been "too much" to ask of educators and principals. Amy's inclination to justify the district's approach to inclusive education through this parallel reflected her own hesitance to confront racism and ableism as an inclusive education coach. Thus, the "figuring it out as we go" approach, offered Amy a pathway to avoid exploring her own hesitance further. However, given the support and commitments of our shared inquiry process, this was an area that we worked to explore, rather than avoid, through our collective work, which will be explored further in Chapter 5.

Principal Leadership: "Let's do it… hell no"

The district's ambiguous approach to inclusive education meant that it was left up to the principals to define this work in their school sites. However, as was discussed in the previous

section, such ambiguity contributed to a lack of accountability to disrupting the exclusion and marginalization of disabled and multiply marginalized students. Through their inquiry, the coaches surfaced a wide range of beliefs, approaches, and commitments among the principals related to inclusive education and they questioned if each principal really was invested in or ready to move the work of inclusive education forward. Meg shared, for example, how when given the opportunity to participate in the district's inclusive education process, her principal's response implied "yes, everyone is ready, let's do it." However, through her own critical inquiry she recognized that it was in fact not the case that "everyone is ready." Here Meg describes her analysis of this school context: "Once my feet are on the ground, and I'm in it, [teachers] are like, hell no. So, [the principal's] really disconnected." This principal's disconnect from how educators were responding to the district's inclusive education work highlighted his unwillingness to directly examine and confront the ways ableism and racism were circulating in his school and the specific processes through which students were experiencing exclusion.

Cameron similarly questioned the authenticity and reality of the "let's do it" enthusiasm from school leaders whom she worked with. She described working with principals who communicated, "I'm all in for inclusion, and I'm going to commit to this and then they do nothing." Here Cameron is describing how principals she'd worked with had expressed a performative form of support for inclusion, rather than an authentic commitment to desegregating special education programs. Such lack of commitment not only communicated that this work was not a priority, but also reflected a failure to attend to the deeply racist and ableist processes that normalize such segregated special education environments to begin with.

The coaches theorized possible explanations for the disconnect and lack of follow through, including that “not all our principals have the inclusive mindset” (Cameron). Through their inquiry, they surfaced several examples of this and worked together to identify how the lack of an “inclusive mindset” among principals contributed to processes of exclusion and marginalization for disabled and multiply marginalized students, in particular. For example, the coaches noticed that several principals whom they worked with were continuing to sanction, and even encourage in some cases, the assignment of students labeled with disabilities to disability-based special education programs outside of students’ neighborhood schools, even though they had opted into leading the charge for the inclusive shift in the district. Amy highlighted how this reflected the challenge of working within “a system where we're [still] sending kids to other schools to be in these programs, because we don't have the system yet at every school where they would be included in their neighborhood school.” Here Amy recognized the extremely consequential and contradictory logic of working to create inclusive schools within schools that are actively assigning students with disabilities to segregated classrooms. It also highlighted the complexity of coaching within schools that were still operating within the logic that such exclusionary practices were justified and necessary.

Calling into question principals’ “inclusive mindsets” led the coaches to problematize the ways that multilingual students in particular were impacted by the ongoing normalization of segregating students perceived as different, deficient or deviant. Cameron offered an example to highlight just how normalized ableist and racist orientations to multilingual students were in one of her schools. Cameron had attended a leadership team meeting with the school’s

principal and other specialists to discuss the case of a multilingual kindergartener of color who was new to their school. She shared:

> [The student has] been here for two or three weeks and the very first suggestion that was put on the table was pushing them into [a segregated special education program] to receive small group support there. [The student hasn't] been evaluated, doesn't have an IEP. But that was the first instinct [of the team]. And I'm like, we don't even know why what we're seeing is happening. There's so clearly so many factors happening here… Right now, the instinct is just to seclude and segregate even more without really thinking about what's going on with this individual student. What [does the student] really need?

In Cameron's anecdote, the leadership team was drawing on the ableist logic of dominant special education approaches to justify their racist assumptions about this young student's needs and abilities. As Cameron, reflected, rather than taking the time to get to know this student, their priority was to remove him. Given that this was happening in one of the schools that had opted into becoming more inclusive, Cameron expressed concern about the leadership of the principals across each of the coaches' school sites. She reflected, if it was going to be these principals that were "the ones deciding what [our coaching] role looks like [then] they might not be the best people to do that." In other words, as it became clear to the coaches how principals were contributing to processes of exclusion for disabled and multiply marginalized students, they were concerned as to how their new roles might implicate them in upholding the very practices and processes they thought they were there to disrupt and transform.

Alison similarly recognized the persistence of exclusionary and marginalizing processes across the school sites, and she called on our collective to think "really intentionally about who are the students that are not here because they're in other placements." In other words, she wanted to ensure that our inquiry into their school contexts not only attended to students who were present, but those who had already been removed, even erased, from their community.

Alison held our group accountable here to surfacing the processes that were so deeply entrenched they'd become normalized and therefore required our vigilant attention. For example, in Alison's dual language school site, autistic students and those with more complex needs were being sent to other schools that had more restrictive disability-based programs. Alison shared that a "[new] student in first grade, who is a native Spanish speaker [was] doing really well in the Spanish program." However, when this student attended his English class during the other half of the day, he frequently left without permission to return to his Spanish teacher's classroom. Additionally, the school had recently received his IEP from his previous school and it implied that the student should be in a more restrictive setting. Because of this, Alison's principal intended to argue for him to attend another school that had more restrictive options, presenting his action as an unavoidable and natural outcome based on the child's behavior. Not only did this argument for assignment to a more restrictive setting place blame on the student for his school's failure to meet his access needs, but it also reflected how ableist logic was used to justify withholding access to this child's primary language, Spanish. Through her inquiry, Alison, along with the other coaches, recognized this pattern of exclusion as a contested site, one that surfaced tension but also the possibility for disruption and change, as will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

The coaches also found that some principals operated as if inclusive education was extra work from which educators needed to be protected, just as the district appeared to be protecting the principals. They did this by asserting a vague or narrow vision for the work or, as Meg described, trying to "push this out in a way that's palatable." This palatable version of inclusive education seemed focused on shifting instructional practices or providing classroom

supports for students with disabilities. While these topics are certainly not unimportant, Meg identified them as "palatable" because they did not require educators to engage in critical reflection or action around the intersections of ableism, racism, and other forms of oppression. For example, one of Amy's principals prioritized professional development on creating universally designed learning targets as the focus of their inclusive education work. He did not appear open to engaging with deeper systemic issues or working towards desegregating their special education programs. The principal Meg worked with also constructed a narrow and contained vision of inclusive education as he prioritized the creation of one "inclusive" physical education (PE) class as the focus of their school's work. This class was formerly a segregated adaptive PE class for students with complex support needs. As a designated "inclusive" class, nondisabled students were invited to register as well. Meg shared with the group, "Naomi was like, so like, what does your principal think inclusion is and I was like, this PE class. That's it." Not only was this framing of inclusive education exceedingly narrow, but it also maintained dominant notions of normalcy within and beyond the class and left all other processes of exclusion intact.

The narrow vision promoted by some principals further contributed to the ambiguity of the overall process towards inclusive education in the district and led to questions around "[principals'] vision of what we're supposed to be doing in this role" (Meg). As Meg asked, "What do they want from this?" When introducing staff to the work of inclusive education at a staff meeting, one of the principals that Amy worked with communicated that they were "still figuring out her role" and that they were "still tiptoeing in[to]" the work. Cameron shared that her principal told her not to ask teachers how they would apply their learning following an

inclusive education professional development session “because she doesn't want to add more to the teachers’ plate.” Both of these comments from principals suggested a lack of commitment to taking action towards meaningful enactments of inclusive education under the guise of protecting their educators. Given the implications for the role of educators here, the coaches’ inquiry also attended to a critical understanding of educator practice across the district.

Educator Practice: “It’s a checklist”

Recognizing the “Pockets” of Inclusive Practices

At every school, the coaches recognized “pockets'' in which inclusive practices were happening (Cameron). Some of the inclusive practices that the coaches observed included co-teaching, use of visuals, opportunities for choice, call and response, different student groupings, representing the students’ diverse identities in the classroom materials, dual language programs, and strategies for guided language acquisition and translanguaging. However, on multiple occasions, the coaches referred to these practices as happening in isolation, rather than reflecting intentional efforts to uproot ableism and racism in the classroom. Alison described these isolated practices as, “there's something there just because it's [on] a checklist” (Alison). Amy noticed, for example, that some classrooms in the schools that she worked with had visuals depicting the classroom expectation of sitting in crisscross-applesauce. While there were visuals present that might support students to follow this classroom expectation, Amy questioned, “but are there other ways kids can be seated?” In other words, the visual support only facilitated the reinforcement of the ableist and racist expectation that all students should be sitting in the same way for learning to occur.

Similarly, Cameron noticed the use of a visual schedule in one of her classrooms which she identified as a useful support, however, “it was on a whiteboard that was on the opposite side of the room from the class meeting area, and it was behind the teacher's desk.” Here Cameron questioned the intentionality and authenticity of this support, given that it was not physically or visually accessible to students. Meg noticed that in some classrooms, students were learning in groups, a positive strategy for supporting student-centered collaboration, however the students with IEPs were often grouped at one table, and in one case, “in the back by the door.” This positioning prioritized the students with disabilities being able to leave the classroom over attending to how they could be supported as valued and essential members of the community. It also reflected ableist assumptions about their needs and their potential to contribute to the classroom’s collective learning processes. These observations highlighted for the coaches how employing “inclusive” practices without also engaging in critical inquiry to question the deeper “meaning for why I have this and then, exploring it more” (Cameron), left deficit assumptions intact and experiences of exclusion and dis-belonging status quo.

The coaches worked together to not only notice these practices but to also make sense of them collectively as part of their own learning process. They recognized that while some of these practices held promise for the inclusive potential of their schools, they were not necessarily disrupting systemic processes of marginalization and ableist and racist notions of normalcy in the classroom, and through their shared inquiry they explored their questions and the implications for their own developing practice. For example, the coaches surfaced a recurring issue of general education teachers ignoring students with disabilities in their classrooms and they engaged in critical inquiry to better understand what was really

happening. In one session, Amy described observing a white teacher ignoring two disabled boys of color. She questioned, “Is it intentional? Is it because the teacher just doesn't know what to do?” However, she also wondered if “maybe you [the teacher] don't want to understand'' what to do. In this statement, Amy questioned this educator’s complicity in choosing not to critically examine the impact of her practice on students. Amy wondered if this educator’s practice was reflective of a skill gap or reflective of a more intentional refusal to reckon with her own racist and ableist beliefs and practices. Regarding a similar situation, Alison questioned if a teacher’s ableist beliefs about students with disabilities and inclusive education were driving her actions, as well as naming her concern about the impact of the teacher’s actions on students. She shared,

> I’m wondering, what are [this teacher’s] real thoughts about inclusion, about students with disabilities, about students with IEPs, being in her classroom? How does she really view them? How, on a day-to-day basis, when there’s not somebody else in the classroom, how are [the students] treated? How are they navigating the day? How are they accessing their education?

Alison understood that as coaches, simply observing educator practices at a surface level was not enough to understand what was really happening in their schools. Engaging in critical questioning and reflection, however, supported the coaches to more deeply and critically theorize why these things might be happening.

Identifying the “Yea, but…” Narratives Behind Educator Practices

Through their critical analysis of teacher practice and their deepening understanding of their district and school contexts, the coaches identified several thematic narratives circulating across their school sites that they referred to as “yea, buts…,” or narratives that expressed, “yea, this all sounds good on paper, but in an actual classroom, that could never work”

(Cameron). For example, coaches identified three "yea, but" narratives around the constraints of teachers' work, including (1) narratives of scarcity ("I don't have the time"), (2) narratives of conditional inclusion ("We need more skilled bodies"), and (3) narratives of concern ("What I do already works"). While these narratives presented genuine concerns about workload, training, and supporting students, they were deeply fraught with unexamined racist and ableist assumptions about disabled students and notions of who is deserving of belonging.

Narratives of inclusion and scarcity: "I don't have the time"

Cameron, for example, shared her reflection on the narrative of "I don't have the time" through which inclusion was framed as a scarce resource. As she explained, some teachers argued: "[If] [the teachers] have to support students with higher needs, the students who actually need to be included, aren't able to [be]." Within the collective's dialogue, Cameron questioned,

> And so, who are the students who should be or can be included versus those who can't? And a lot of times it ends up being the students who present closer to quote unquote normal are the ones who can be included and the students who use wheelchairs or use communication devices or have sensory needs are the students who need to be segregated.

Here Cameron is explaining how this scarcity framing of inclusion is defined through who teachers feel they have the time to teach, and who would take up too much of their time. Time in this sense reflects a fixed understanding of who, what, and how teachers teach and this distinction between who does or does not get included is determined by how closely students appear to fit dominant notions of normalcy. Thus, within this ableist narrative, it is considered more just to distribute the scarce resource of teachers' time across the most students possible, while implying that students with more complex needs take too much of teachers' time away

from the rest of the (normative) student body. Furthermore, within this narrative the ableist logic that disabled students take teachers' time away from others serves as justification for racist assumptions about who is and is not deserving of that time, as evidenced by Alison and Cameron's examples of schools intending to segregate multilingual students and Amy's example of a white teacher ignoring students of color, as described in the previous section.

Narratives of conditional inclusion: "We need more skilled bodies"

In addition to this notion of scarcity, the "yea but" of "we need more skilled bodies" set an additional condition for inclusive education. Amy, for example, interpreted educators' concerns around not having certain skills as "I don't have the skills to deal with *that* kid… So, I need to make sure that there's another human there to work with that student, and then I will feel comfortable." In her analysis, Amy recognized that behind these conditions of needing more skilled adults was resistance to including students with disabilities due to deficit beliefs but also fear, as reflected through this need to feel comfortable. Both Meg and Cameron identified fear as "one of the biggest barriers to inclusion." Cameron characterized this fear as the "fear of engaging with students who may be perceived as different." Meg reflected on the fear of general educators specifically, stating that they seemed to be "scared of working with students that they don't know. They're scared of working with students that might have limited verbal capabilities. They're scared of students that might have behavioral challenges." This fear of difference appeared to set the condition for the shape inclusion would take in many of the coaches' schools.

Cameron, however, in an effort not to assume the worst of all educators, recognized that in her more inclusive schools, while these narratives of conditional inclusion persisted, it

was possible that they did not always reflect fear of or deficit orientations towards students with disabilities. As she theorized, for some educators, "they have that foundational belief [in inclusive education], and they just [need] the tools to do it." In other words, Cameron recognized that for some educators their desire to gain more skills to better support students was not a move to set conditions for inclusive education to occur, but rather reflected an authentic commitment to growing this work. Thus, this narrative held multiple meanings and complexities across the coaches' various contexts.

Narratives of concern: "What I do already works"

Another of those complex narratives was that of "what I do already works." This was especially common for the special educators that the coaches worked with who expressed concerns about their students with disabilities joining general education classrooms. For example, Meg discussed a conversation she had with a special educator in which the teacher stated, "Can you imagine [students with complex support needs] in a gen ed class… They're not gonna get much out of that." Here the teacher was expressing her concern that the general education environment was not designed with them in mind, however this simultaneously expressed her failure to presume her students' competence and to take responsibility for meeting their access needs through her own practice. Amy added on another layer to this narrative describing how teachers felt they were protecting disabled students by maintaining their segregation:

> Well, my [disabled] students, you know, they feel comfortable in their classroom. They feel comfortable because they're around their peers who they know and they trust and they care about. They know what to expect from me. They know my structures.

Meg identified that although this narrative was often expressed through a desire to protect disabled students' best interests, the assumptions driving it were reflective of "ableism, the deficit mindset… doubting their ability," Thus the coaches recognized that this notion of protection actually contributed to students' experiences of exclusion.

Problematizing and deconstructing educator practices in connection with the principal and district tensions the coaches surfaced supported them in their developing pedagogical resistance as critical teacher leaders. This was not about finding or placing blame on others, but rather about creating the space to practice asking questions and reckoning with feelings of uncertainty as to their own agency. Amy reflected, for example, "Am I on the right track? Am I looking for the right things? When I see something am I really getting the right view of it?" As a collective, they worked to engage in ongoing critical inquiry that shifted these questions towards critical sense making and building their own theories. For example, as Meg offered in one of our sessions, "So why is this happening? Well, I have some theories: The old school teaching, thinking that the kids need to change, and then white supremacy culture." These shared pedagogical processes supported the group to move beyond the first element of pedagogical resistance, problematizing and deconstructing their contexts, towards the second element, engaging in praxis to uncover complicity and identify pathways for agency. Ultimately, the themes and theories the coaches generated lay the groundwork for problem posing around role, identity, agency, as will be discussed further in the next chapter.

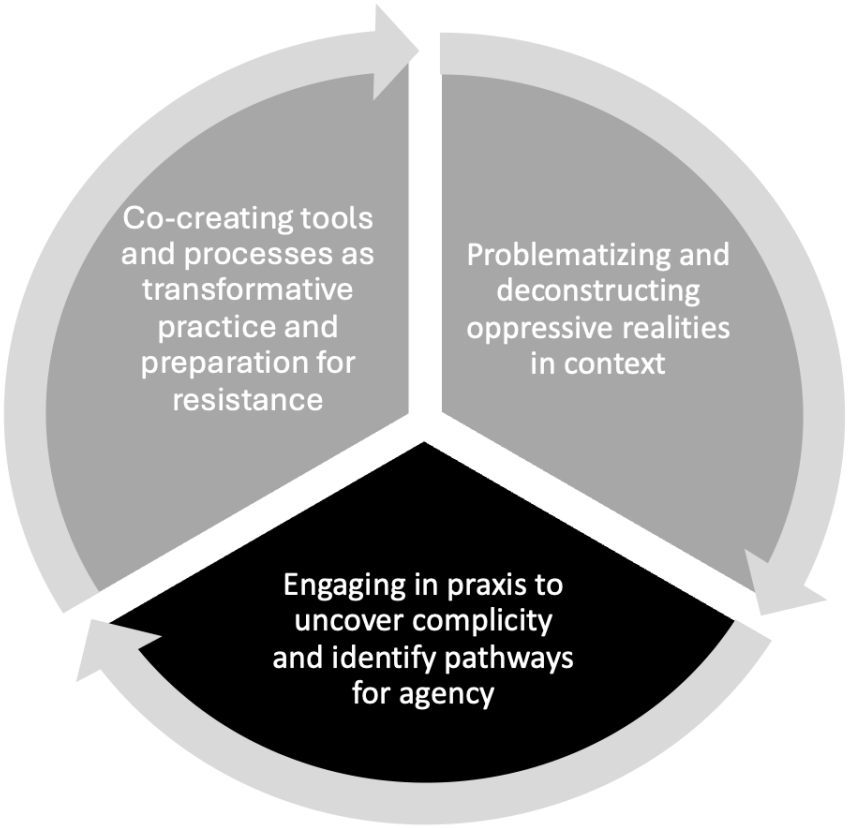
Chapter 5: Exploring Role, Identity, and Agency Through Praxis

Praxis and Pedagogical Resistance

Gourd (2018) argues that context and agency are deeply interconnected, as educators are continuously enacting their agency within (not despite) schooling contexts. Contested and ambiguous spaces, such as those that the coaches identified through their own thematic investigation, theoretically present teacher leaders with more expansive opportunities for expressing their agency (Gourd, 2018). While agency in such contexts includes educators engaging in complicit action that normalizes and legitimizes the racist and ableist status quo of educational injustice, it can also mean teacher leaders engaging in pedagogical resistance to transform educational injustice in their contexts. Artiles and Kozleski (2007) argue that this requires "discourse spaces in which processes and outcomes are critically examined on an ongoing basis" (p. 361). Discourse spaces, such as critical professional development, can support teacher leaders to not only recognize but disrupt patterns of marginalization and exclusion. Such inclusive praxis is prioritized in the second element of this study's pedagogical resistance framework, engaging in praxis to both uncover complicity and identity pathways for agency towards inclusive education and educational justice (Figure 8).

Figure 8

The second element of pedagogical resistance

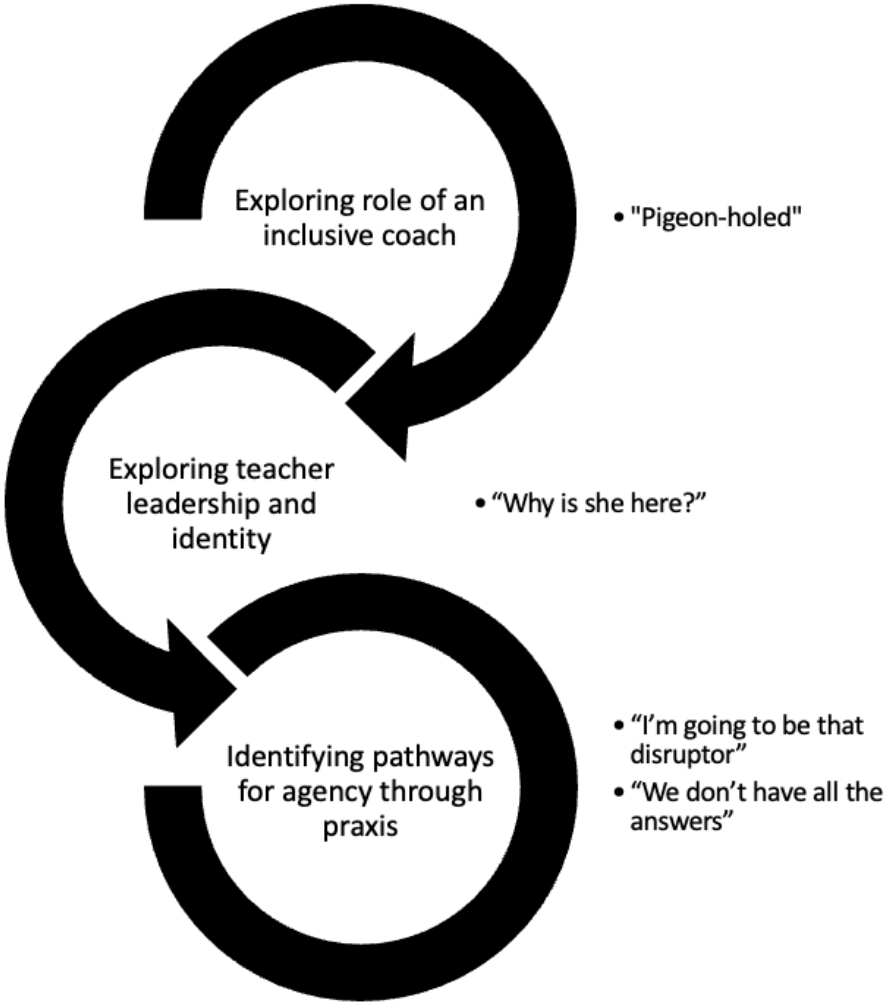


Throughout the coaches' inquiry, possibilities for how they chose to enact their agency emerged. Together they explored their new roles and identities as teacher leaders within deeply contested contexts and supported one another to identify and pursue pathways for agency through their praxis. Reflecting this, research question two asked: *How did coaches conceptualize their roles, identities, and agency within the contested and ambiguous spaces of their school sites and district-level work?* Over the course of the school year, Meg, Amy, Alison, and Cameron drew upon the themes they generated within their contexts to engage in problem posing around their roles, identities, and agency towards a more transformative leadership stance. The sections that follow will highlight how the coaches (2) contended with feeling

pigeon-holed as special educators, (2) explored their personal identities in relation to their developing teacher leader identity, and (3) identified multiple pathways for agency through shared praxis (Figure 9).

Figure 9

Exploring role, identity, and agency through praxis



Exploring the Role of an Inclusive Coach: *"Pigeon-holed"*

Each coach entered their new role following a career as a special educator in WMSD. While each coach was very committed to inclusive education throughout their careers, they had each also witnessed and participated in the racist and ableist schooling processes that characterize this work. Reflecting on their time as special educators, the coaches explored their complicity in these processes, particularly the tension of being aware of inequities but unsure what to do about them. Alison, for example, reflected on those "cringe moments" early in her career when she may have "had that awareness [of systemic oppression] then, but didn't know what to do about it." Cameron similarly described how, "even though I knew what was happening wasn't right, as a single person, in a school of 40 adults, I was just one voice." Both Cameron and Alison's reflections here emphasize how even with some critical awareness of the ways special education contributes to multiple forms of marginalization for disabled students of color, special educators can perpetuate this harm through the maintenance of the status quo.

Now as inclusive coaches, they were eager to shift out of those roles and to push for change in their district. Meg shared, "As a [special education] teacher and seeing how inequitable and othered our students were treated, I want to bridge that gap." Cameron described this position as "a position of advocacy that I always wish I had as a teacher." Alison was looking forward to being a "part of meaningful change and that ripple effect that hopefully will expand throughout the rest of the district." However, they realized quickly that their role as coaches was much more complex and ambiguous than they'd anticipated. Meg described their role as: "We can kind of do whatever. We have no constraints because then we're not boxed in to what is our job versus what isn't our job. But… I'm building this plane while flying it while also

creating the manual." In this excerpt, Meg is describing both the affordances and constraints of such an ambiguous role. On the one hand, this ambiguity meant the flexibility to enact their commitments to inclusive education as they'd hoped to do upon accepting their positions as coaches. On the other hand, this lack of clarity meant that their roles were left open to the problematic interpretations of others.

One key example of this was how colleagues and school leaders conflated the coaches' position with the traditional special educator role, that of being there to get students with disabilities ready to fit or assimilate into general education classrooms and when they don't fit, to remove them. This assumption about their role reflected deficit orientations to students with disabilities, an ableist framing of the purpose of inclusive education, and a failure to reckon with the ways racist beliefs and practices are reinscribed within inclusive education processes that fail to address them directly. This contributed to what Cameron described as being "pigeon-holed" as special educators. Being pigeon-holed in this way was concerning not only because traditional conceptualizations of the work of special educators are rooted in ableist and racist assumptions about students with disabilities, but also because they are reflective of commitments to dominant notions of normalcy that sustain disabled and multiply marginalized students' experiences of exclusion and dis-belonging at school.

Meg, Alison, and Cameron, in particular, experienced feeling pigeon-holed as special educators and they attributed this to their career experiences teaching students with more complex needs who they recognized as "the most removed and the most segregated in the district" (Cameron). Fewer teachers seemed to view teaching and including students with complex needs as their responsibility and as Cameron shared, "the mindset is [as a coach] I am

the [special education] support." Thus, this ableist mindset rationalized that Cameron, Meg, and Alison, along with the other special educators were the only ones who *should* and *could* work with *those* kids. This was particularly true with regards to being pigeon-holed as behavioral support for students with disabilities. Alison shared, "I feel like most of my first three months have been spent as a behavior interventionist." Similarly, Meg described often being put in that "awkward position where people just want another adult for behavior support." For example, she described how one of her white special education colleagues called her for help because, as the teacher reported, one of the Black disabled students in her class "yells all the time." Meg questioned this complaint as it appeared rooted in both racist and ableist narratives about this student. Meg wondered, "Is he screaming? Or is he just expressing himself?" Given this reality of the coaches' school contexts, it was important for them to explore how both being pigeon-holed and the overall ambiguity in their role presented the opportunity to identify and pursue alternative pathways for their roles. Within our shared inquiry space, the coaches reckoned with how some possible pathways were characterized by complicity, while others were reflective of transformative resistance. They also explored how their enactments of agency could bring a more defined shape to both their ambiguous roles and the ambiguous and contested contexts of their schools' shift towards inclusive education.

Our collective engaged in critical inquiry activities to dig deeper into the comforts and risks associated with different agentive pathways related to their roles. For example, although they recognized the racist and ableist assumptions at the core of being pigeon-holed as special educators, they also identified this more traditional special educator role as familiar and therefore a source of comfort amidst all the stress that the lack of clarity in their roles caused

them. Alison described her experience of comfort and sense of ease when being tasked with traditional special education activities such as “data and making [intervention] plans.” Meg similarly expressed comfort when her work was focused on “anything IEP related, or data related” and she recognized that sometimes these activities felt safer to her than working in less familiar general education content areas. As she shared, “I feel more comfortable working with those students [one on one] than going to algebra two and figuring out how to modify it.” The coaches’ sources of comfort, therefore, were steeped in the harmful logic of special education.

While the coaches may have found these roles comfortable, their dialogue and critical reflection supported them to recognize that upholding such status quo special education approaches did not bring them closer towards inclusive education or “creat[ing] a more just and equitable society” (Cameron, quoting our shared text, *Coaching for Equity* by Elena Aguilar) In fact, we explored how shifting into roles that felt more risky were more likely the pathways that could lead to transformative change in their schools and district. Cameron, for example, tried to shift out of this positioning of the special education support, as she recognized that she had been “mostly putting out fires rather than doing proactive work.” To resolve this, she worked to find “a balance between what my role is and what my old role was.” She explained, “I’ve been trying to reach out to teachers to be like, I can support you in other ways too, and show them who else I can support and how else, and just keep reiterating that I’m here for everyone.” Here Cameron is expressing that she is not just there for students with disabilities or just for special educators, but rather for everyone *and* that it is everyone’s responsibility to support students with disabilities. This was also a way for her to model that inclusive education

was “not just about special education” (Cameron). Meg reiterated this when describing her efforts to “link the inclusion work to anti-racist work.” As Meg shared, however, “that’s a little risky, trying to get people on board,” with this shift and so the coaches supported one another to explore the implications not only for their role, but also for their developing identities as inclusive coaches and leaders.

Exploring Teacher Leadership and Identity: *“Why is she here?”*

Towards the second half of the school year, the coaches began to envision and pursue riskier and more transformative enactments of their agency. Alison expressed, however, that this was not easy to do. When discussing her efforts to shift away from feeling pigeon-holed, she shared, “I’m trying to shift to a different kind of focus. [This] is just making me feel a little bit of anxiety.” One source of anxiety that the coaches experienced was their fears and frustrations around colleagues and principals questioning their competence in their role. These were feelings that arose for the coaches particularly as they worked to move away from the more comfortable (and ableist) special education-oriented aspects of their work. Meg offered, “I'm nervous about how I'm going to be perceived. And then also, is the work that I'm doing going to be valued and accepted, or is it just kind of like, well, why is she here?” In other words, Meg wondered if their pursuit of more just and inclusive schools would be welcomed if their efforts did not reflect traditional understandings of special education and, furthermore, how they themselves would be positioned if not.

Amy connected their collective concerns to broader issues she’d noticed in the field of education. She reflected,

> In this profession, there's this weird dichotomy between you are supposed to have your shit together, you're supposed to know exactly what you're doing. But

> everyone's always telling you, oh, there's grace and there's, you know, you're learning and you're new... But on the other hand, if you don't show me that you know what you're doing, I'm going to judge you as a professional.

Here Amy explored how even when educators are new in their roles, there is an expectation in the field that they perform to an unfair degree of competence to justify their position. Amy's critique surfaces how ableism constructs unrealistic expectations for educators' performance. However, her critique does not address how such ableist standards for educators are compounded when educators are pushing for justice and inclusion for disabled and multiply marginalized students. Cameron addressed this through her critical reflection on the coaches' professional evaluation process, as they were being formally evaluated by their principals, most of whom were very resistant to, or at least unfamiliar with, the work of inclusive education. She shared:

> I feel like I'm in this strange role where I have to push [my principals] because my job is to create an inclusive environment and [some principals are] not aligning with that. So, I have to find ways to support [their] growth... but then also being really conscious that [one principal will be] my evaluator. It [feels] very strange to have to push someone who's then evaluating you.

Here Cameron recognized that the coaches' competence would not only be constructed via ableist beliefs about students and inclusive education more broadly, but also through the ableism of formal processes like professional evaluations.

Feeling as though colleagues and school leaders questioned the purpose of their role also contributed to the coaches questioning their own competence. Cameron, for example, reflected on how one principal's resistance to inclusive education shaped how she viewed her own competence. She said, "When I work with [this principal], sometimes I doubt myself because I get shut down and then it's like, okay, am I pushing in the right direction? Are my

ideas valid or useful?" Alison similarly reflected, "Am I competent enough to do this work?" Amy wondered, "Do I really know what I am doing?" The question of "why is she here?" was not only concerning because it caused them to question their value and competence as inclusive teacher leaders, but also because it reflected the resistance to inclusive education that the coaches were met with at most of their schools. This put a great deal of pressure on them to have all the answers, to embody and project that expert identity, for fear that being viewed otherwise would compromise their ability to push for inclusive education. As Meg shared, she was really concerned about "not being able to answer questions when asked about inclusion… [but] not because of an ego thing. If I don't know the answer, that's fine. But I feel like people will lose faith in the vision if the person who was supposed to be the specialist doesn't even know." Here Meg is recognizing that as coaches, they were viewed as representatives of inclusive education and she worried that perceptions of their abilities could shape how committed and engaged their schools were in moving towards inclusive education.

The coaches recognized that their experiences of feeling competent and how others perceived their competence were intertwined with their various identities and the ways those identities intersected with systems of power and oppression. For example, Alison, who identifies as white and Mestizo Mexican, recognized that she "walk[ed] through life with white privilege, the color of my skin… [Other] teachers assumed competence" because of that. Cameron, who identifies as white, recognized her nondisabled identity also held power. As she stated, "even in this room, we're speaking for people who have disabilities." Even as colleagues questioned their roles and value as coaches, Alison and Cameron still recognized that together

their proximity to whiteness and their nondisabled identities contributed to the ways they were enabled by racist and ableist presumptions of competence.

Amy questioned whether her identity as a woman was contributing to her challenges at one of her schools. She shared,

> There are not a lot of men in either school but at Ceder, [a] very vocal teacher is a man… and then the principal is male. Between the two of them, sometimes there is a little bit of feeling inadequate because of being a female, even though behind it, I have way more experience… I still feel like sometimes they are very dominant and that I am not as valued… I wonder, is it because it's a female kind of a thing? Or is it because I'm new to the role and so I'm not trusted yet?

Although Amy recognized how her identity as a woman shaped her experiences of power and value in her role, her analysis did not extend to the ways that she was simultaneously enabled by her white racial identity. This was an area that Amy and I explored further in her individual participant observations and interviews. In her second participant observation, for example, Amy reflected on how after reading *Coaching for Equity* (Aguilar, 2020), a shared text we engaged with as a collective, she realized that as a white nondisabled woman educator she'd never *had* to put herself in the position of disrupting the status quo. While Amy was a highly skilled practitioner of UDL and a deeply collaborative teacher leader with a significant amount of experience, approaching teacher leadership through the lens of pedagogical resistance was newer to her. Examining her own past approaches as a special educator through this lens and identifying her own areas of growth and commitments as a developing critical teacher leader reflected this new learning. In her new role as a coach, she expressed wanting to "find the courage" to take on that disruptor stance, while also recognizing that choosing to put herself in such a position caused an unfamiliar sense of discomfort and uncertainty. Amy's critical reflection here highlights how agency is connected to choice, rather than something we have or

don’t have. In Amy’s case, engaging in inquiry around her role, identity, and agency included starting to recognize that her agency was shaped by her daily choices to avoid and therefore sustain intersectional injustice, or to seek pathways for learning to disrupt it.

Meg also reflected on her identities in relation to her role and agency through her critical inquiry. For example, after witnessing the racist behavior of her white colleagues towards a Black anti-racist professional development provider. Meg shared,

> It just made me feel like, wow, so, if anything that I'm going to bring to the staff, are they going to be receptive? Because not only am I a Black woman, I'm fat and, also, I'm talking about these radical ideas of inclusion. Do y'all want to hear that? Or no?

Here Meg questioned how her leadership would be received in the racist and ableist context of her school, particularly given her awareness that her multiple marginalized identities and teacher leader role would be perceived in relation to her stance on inclusive education. For example, Meg experienced working with a white colleague who she described as not expecting her to be competent. She shared how this colleague, an older white man, expressed, “Well, how long have you been doing this? You're really good at [this], like, shocked that I'm good at my job. It just feels a little bit like this weird old white man/younger Black woman dynamic.” In other words, Meg interpreted her colleague’s surprise as rooted in racist and sexist assumptions about her competence as a Black woman, but also his ableist assumptions that her ideas around inclusive education would not actually work.

Meg reflected on how such racist interactions shaped the course of action she pursued. She shared that sometimes she felt that she should “just say nothing [in these situations] because I want to have good relationships with people so that I can further the inclusion work. But then it's also like, god, at what cost?” Here Meg is critiquing that pull to protect her

colleagues' comfort for fear that alienating people would constrain her ability to move the work of inclusive education forward. However, she also recognized the cost of protecting colleagues' comfort. Doing so not only put their well-being over that of her own but over the well-being of her multiply marginalized and disabled students, as well. Her strategy for navigating such complexities, she reflected, was to prioritize creating "micro ripples across places that I feel safe and feel like will be well received." As a Black woman educator with many years of experience, Meg understood that her agency was necessarily shaped by protecting her own right to safety at work while also balancing and remaining grounded in her commitment to her students. Thus Meg's "micro-ripples" reflected those deep and complex connections across role, identity, and agency for teacher leaders working towards inclusive and just schools. Furthermore, engaging in critical inquiry cross role, identity, and agency reveals how dominant constructions of teacher leadership erase these complexities and the agentive ways educators navigate them, including engaging in disruption, even without having all the answers, as will be explored in the section that follows.

Identifying Pathways for Agency Through Praxis: "I'm going to be that disruptor" ⟷ "We don't have all the answers"

Engaging in critical inquiry around their roles and identities was an important aspect of the coaches' shared work because it provided them with the space to examine and affirm their experiences as developing teacher leaders in contexts that questioned their work and the broader work of inclusive education. Through their shared inquiry, they became "a community of support," which as Cameron described, was "very, very needed in this work because our roles are challenging roles." Alison reflected on their community and shared, "I feel like it's a

trusting, warm, welcome place for us to honestly talk and share our struggles and successes and both support and celebrate each other." As a "community of support," the coaches were able to explore and engage in praxis, or continuous cycles of action and reflection. This helped them to shift from problem posing around their roles and identities towards taking action grounded in their commitments to students and the critical support that they provided one another. They did this by collectively exploring pathways for agency aimed at disrupting and transforming the legacies of exclusion and marginalization in their schools, district, and the educational system at large, even when they felt they did not have all the answers they needed to do so. As Meg shared, "Throughout our day… we have to be leaders… And so [our group] is a chance for us to breathe, be like, we don't have all the answers." Thus, by having the space to acknowledge when they didn't have the answers, they were able to explore possible answers with the support of their collective. For example, Alison reflected, "when we do have these kinds of experiences, or people not wanting to take that next step for whatever reason, what is our next step?" Moving towards praxis through "next steps" was an important shift in the focus of our group as this supported them to explore their agency as developing teacher leaders. As Cameron reflected, "I'm going to be that disruptor and push things." Similarly, Meg shared, "that's what I'm here for, to be a disruptor." Over the course of the year, each coach found various pathways for enacting this stance both individually and as a collective.

On one occasion, for example, Alison joined our group session late and was visibly upset having just come from a very challenging IEP meeting at one of her school sites. We stopped what we were doing and opened the space for Alison to share. Alison explained that in the meeting, a Black family expressed their refusal to have their child subjected to the isolation

practices typically utilized by the special education teachers. The family's reasoning, Alison shared, was that these isolation practices, such as forcing their child into an isolation room when their behavior was perceived as unsafe by his teachers, was "symbolic of a jail cell." Alison named that she had "not seen it that way before," and she felt that it is an educator's job to "adjust our practice when a racist practice is called out." The family's advocacy and perspective resonated with Alison, and she responded by immediately saying this practice is "off the table" and affirming, "yes that is a racist practice." She also recognized that the teachers' combative and stubborn reactions to the family's refusal was rooted in what she described as "white defensiveness'' rather than prioritizing "understanding a Black man's lived experiences and what they want for their child." Alison shared that following this meeting, the teachers had been unwilling to talk or work with her. She reflected, "I'm not in a place where I'm going to be coaching [them] but also, I [wouldn't] know how to." Alison's example highlights how authentic vulnerability within our collective was an important element of the coaches' developing praxis. Alison not only shared with us that she recognized the gap in her own critical awareness, but also that she felt uncertain about what to do next as a coach.

In this example, Alison chose to disrupt a harmful status-quo practice in solidarity with her student and their family, even though this act put distance between her and her special education colleagues and made her uncertain as to how to proceed with her coaching relationship with them. Our collective did not provide answers or suggest solutions in this session, as Alison let us know that she just needed space to "process" through critical reflection. Our group, she later reflected, was able to "meet me where I was" which "felt so supportive and I really needed that at that time." During our following session, Alison was

excited to update us that “the parents have been super involved in the IEP process, which I love, and it’s making [our school team] rethink how involved parents *should* be in collaborating on IEPs and [on] everything,” because of the creative alternatives that are realized through such collaborations.

These moments of uncertainty became powerful drivers for the coaches' pedagogical resistance as they drew upon the support, experience, and power of their collective to determine their “next steps” as disruptors. One of Meg’s “next steps,” for example, was enacting strategies for centering her students’ voices. This included creating and completing an accessibility survey alongside a diverse group of high school students to better recognize and transform access barriers in their school. She also created and implemented a student-led IEP process through which she said she really “felt like a coach.” Alison’s “next steps” included putting pressure on one of her principals to “slow down” the process of reassigning students to more restrictive settings in other schools, as in the case of the multilingual autistic student described in Chapter 4. Alison also worked to create and implement a professional development session that brought together anti-racism, culturally responsive teaching, and inclusive education. She did so even when her principal told her explicitly to *just* “do an inclusion PD,” implying that Alison should not disrupt dominant conceptualizations of inclusive education by bringing a critical and intersectional lens. Cameron similarly focused on implementing more critical professional development that supported teachers to dig into their beliefs, by “supporting some unlearning,” and “pushing [educators] to question… why things have always been this way.” Amy’s “next steps” included asking our collective for support preparing for a meeting in which she would be leading a challenging team to envision and plan

for desegregating their special education programs. This was a meeting that earlier in the year she had not felt she had the courage to lead. She asked the group to help her think through, “How do you have those difficult conversations?” and invited the other coaches to share their own insights from past challenging conversations: “What did you say? What did you walk away and think, I wish I had said that? Or how did you follow up?” Here Amy’s request for support not only provided her with ideas for action, but also supported the other coaches to engage in critical reflection around their own action.

The coaches also identified next steps for their collective action. For example, they had the opportunity to preview a survey created by district leadership designed to gain more insight into how things were going for teachers in this early phase of the reform process. The coaches recognized that the questions were worded in a way that reinforced negative associations with inclusive education and deficit assumptions about disabled students. In fact, the survey itself was called the “Inclusion Challenges” survey. As they critically examined the survey, Meg noticed this right away. **“**First thing I don't like: That it’s called [the] inclusion challenges survey. I get what they're trying to get at, but it already has that negative connotation” (Meg). The coaches went through the survey question by question, revising the questions to ensure an authentic reflection of educators’ experiences while also working to disrupt the pervasive ableism throughout the document. The coaches then shared their suggested revisions with the district, explained their critiques, and their suggestions guided the revision of the survey. This example reflected a critical moment in the coaches’ developing pedagogical resistance. Not only did they collectively use their critical lens to critique this survey, but they determined a collective pathway for critiquing those with more institutional power than them and they

continued to do so several times over the course of the year. This included bringing a critical inquiry lens to the district's inclusive education professional development offerings, problematizing and transforming the district's exclusionary approach to transitioning preschoolers with disabilities into restrictive kindergarten placements, and meeting with families of students with disabilities in the district to build collaborative relationships which had not yet been a priority in the district's reform process.

Ultimately, the coaches worked together to explore various pathways for disruption and transformative action through their praxis, even when they felt that they didn't have all the answers or institutional support. Through their inquiry, they recognized the importance of collectively preparing for and reflecting on action within their shared space and thus our collective worked to move through phases of critical inquiry, including problem posing, problem solving, practicing, and taking action to address specific dilemmas that arose throughout the year, as will be discussed more in depth in the next chapter.

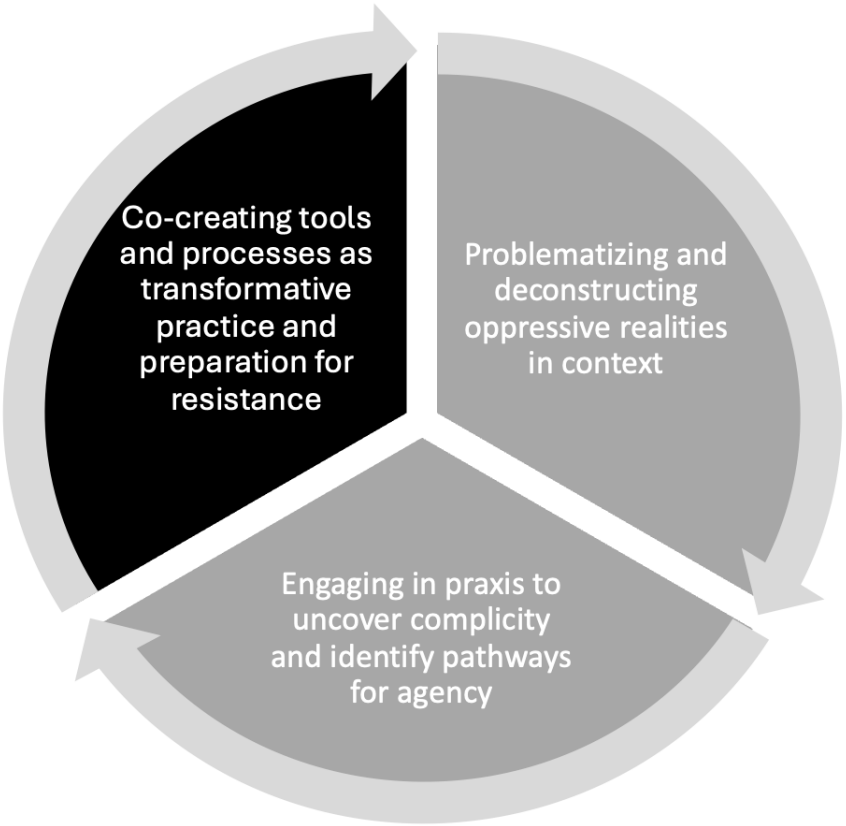
Chapter 6: Practicing Pedagogical Resistance

Collective Preparation and Pedagogical Resistance

Gloria Anzaldua (1990) writes that "nothing happens in the 'real world' unless it first happens in the images in our heads;" this underscores the importance of opportunities to practice pedagogical resistance towards critical inclusion and educational justice (p. 385). Critical professional development conceptualized through this lens is an embodied practice, "an invitation for the body to join the mind" in order to imagine, prepare for, and enact possibility (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010, p. 22). To bring closer attention to the intentional learning and practice that such resistance requires, research question three posed: *How did coaches practice pedagogical resistance in the context of district-wide inclusive education reform?* As a supportive and critical collective, we engaged in the third element of pedagogical resistance, co-creating tools and processes to prepare for resistance towards critical inclusion (Figure 10; See Appendix I for sample tools and protocols).

Figure 10

The third element of pedagogical resistance

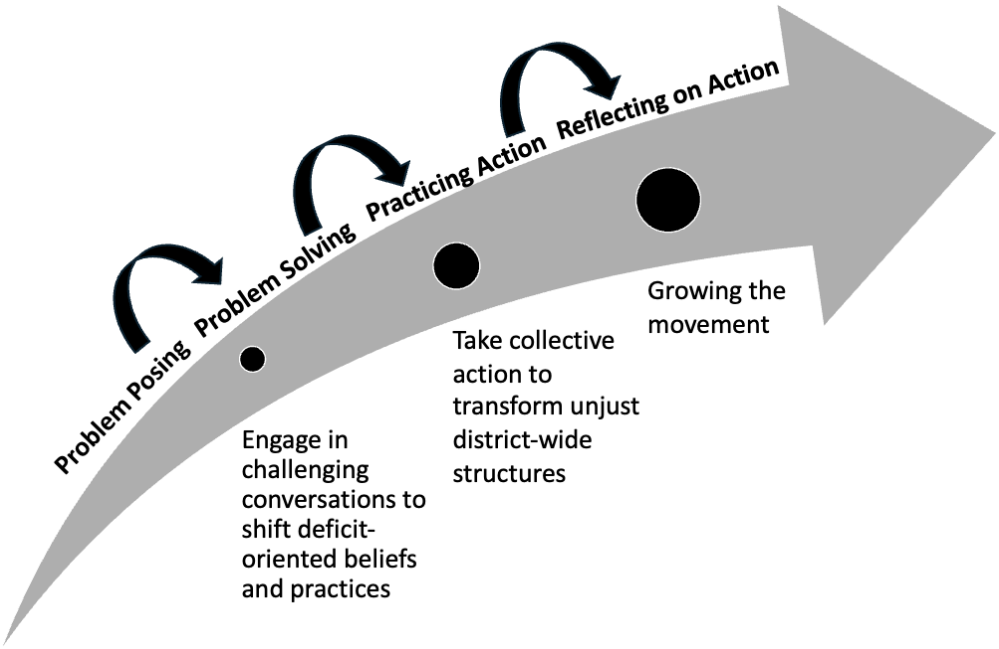


As discussed in the previous chapter, the coaches desired opportunities for practice to support them in taking more disruptive action as teacher leaders in their contexts. Thus, building upon the themes they'd generated from their contexts and the problems they'd posed around their roles, identities, and agency, we cycled through recursive phases of critically inquiry and dialogic action that included: (1) Problem posing: Using protocols for critical reflection to frame dilemmas within their schools and broader social contexts, rather than within children themselves; (2) Problem solving: Working together to dig deeper into dilemmas through clarifying and probing questions that generate pathways for agency; (3) Practicing action: Recognizing that taking action is sometimes risky and practicing can grow imaginative

solutions and build courage; and (4) Reflecting on action: Exploring how dilemmas evolve and planning ways to develop and sustain practices of solidarity with youth and each other (Figure 11).

Figure 11

Phases of critical inquiry



Through their inquiry and dialogue, they not only became each other's supporters, but also each other's coaches and collaborators. As Alison shared, "I was nervous going into this role, like, who's going to be coaching me? And I just feel like I know I can lean on all of you." Throughout the year, they leaned on one another to (1) prepare for and engage in challenging conversations to shift deficit-oriented beliefs and practices, (2) plan and take collective action to transform unjust district-wide structures, and (3) grow their movement and base of support for this work throughout the district.

Preparing for and Engaging in Challenging Conversations to Shift Deficit-oriented Beliefs and Practices: *"A teacher called security"*

Meg shared a dilemma she was having around working with a white teacher at her school site, given her own identities and positionality as a Black coach (see Figure 12). She first engaged in problem posing with the other coaches and shared,

> Today, a student had an outburst… and then the teacher called security on them. They are a Black female, plus sized student, so a lot of common identifiers with me. And I really want to talk to the teacher about how damaging that can be… I am afraid of having to comfort her through that…

Digging deeper into the problem she'd posed, Meg continued:

> It was a power struggle over putting the cell phone away. And [the teacher] was like, I get we're not supposed to get into these power struggles… but [the student] just has to give me some power. And I thought about that, and I was like, why do you want power from her? She's already at the bottom of the power structure. She's fat. She's Black. She's disabled.

Here Meg is framing her dilemma in a way that recognizes the multiple systems of oppression that are not only contributing to this student's experience of marginalization and the teacher's treatment of her, but also how she herself is experiencing her position as a coach given her own identities.

As part of the problem-solving process, Alison pushed the group to think beyond the ableist conceptualizations of a coach framed through the lens of special education that they often felt pigeon-holed into. She recognized that this more traditional approach to their role harms both students and educators, including the dynamic that Meg was concerned about: As a Black coach, having to confront and then comfort a white teacher through reflecting on her racism. Alison instead invited the group to consider calling others in as collaborators in this necessary work. She offered,

> [The teacher] needs to process how she perpetuated racism in that situation. Is there somebody else that you could say, "If you want to process this more, this person would be a good person to talk to." Is there a white person that you know might be a good person?

In this example, Alison demonstrated listening to Meg's concerns and imagining solutions that did not require Meg to erase or ignore how she herself was impacted by this situation.

Through our dialogue, Meg recognized that she wanted to try talking with the teacher. She shared, "I wasn't going to say anything and one of those tools [we explored] said, "Silence is not helping the problem…" So together the coaches practiced various scenarios, preparing for possible reactions. Meg began with, "Pretend to be Marin. I'm going to come into your office… And then I'm gonna say, hey, how did the rest of the day go with [the student]?" After the group explored some ways Meg might bring up her concerns with the teacher, Amy imagined what the teacher might say, for example "I would have done that for anyone." This contribution reflected Amy's understanding as a white woman of how white women often respond defensively when confronted about racist behavior. This supported the group to not only explore how racism and ableism were showing up in the initial incident, but in the context of Meg's future action, as well.

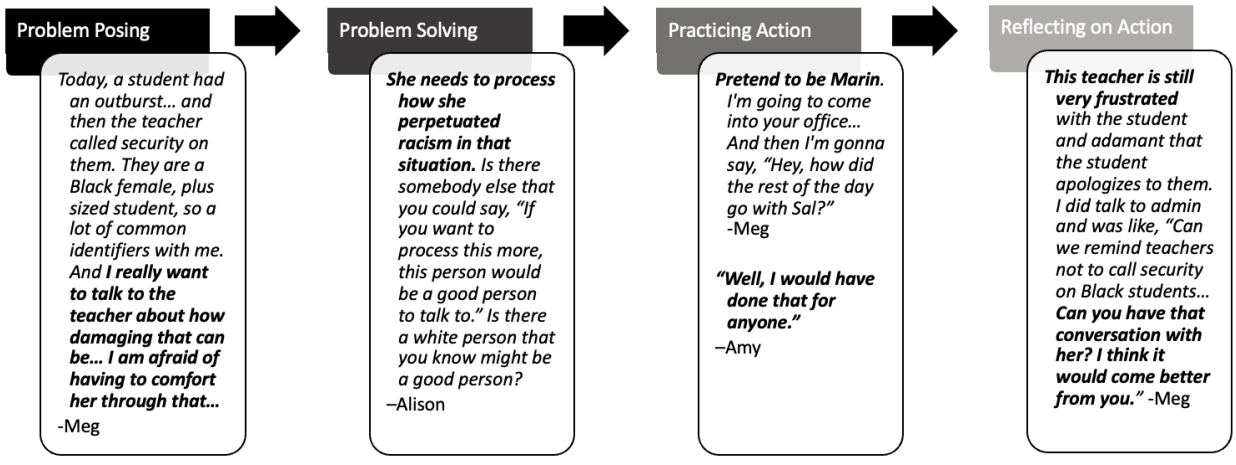
The inquiry space provided Meg with the support to later reflect on the action that she ultimately took. First, she tried talking with the teacher. She explained, "So she had a conversation with me and I tried to give her some perspective…She wasn't really ready to receive that." She shared that she then asked the administrators at her school to call out racist and ableist discipline practices across the school to take a more direct approach with this particular teacher themselves. She shared,

> This teacher is still very frustrated with the student and adamant that the student apologizes to them. I did talk to admin and was like, can we remind teachers not to call security on Black students… Can you have that conversation with her? I think it would come better from you.

Meg reflected on the multiple pathways she took to engage in transformative praxis and pedagogical resistance. She stepped out of her comfort zone to work with this teacher but also recognized that calling in administrators, who had more institutional power than she did, was necessary to protect this student, and other multiply marginalized students who were similarly impacted by teachers' commitments to racist and ableist discipline practices. Meg also shared with us that "I told the student she can come to my office anytime she is feeling overwhelmed or unheard." Meg knew that although she'd taken different approaches to stopping these discipline practices, she wanted to ensure that she prioritized care for and solidarity with this student.

Figure 12

"A teacher called security"



Planning and Taking Collective Action to Transform Injustice District-Wide: "Could we craft an email together?"

The coaches also engaged in dialogic inquiry to navigate their participation on a district committee that was tasked with supporting the inclusive education shifts in the district (see Figure 13). This committee was composed of union representatives, administrators, and teacher leaders. Of the four coaches, only Meg and Alison were able to attend the committee meetings, but all four coaches worked together within their inquiry group space to problem solve dilemmas related to the committee's work. One of the primary dilemmas related to their participation in this committee was that a great deal of ableist and racist assumptions about students and the shift to inclusive approaches were very apparent among many members of this team, teacher leaders and administrators alike.

At one of our inquiry group sessions, for example, Alison and Meg recounted their experience of the committee's first meeting which Meg characterized as a "shit-fest." At this meeting, a special education teacher expressed concerns about the district's growing emphasis on inclusive education because she felt that so many students of color were actually thriving in segregated special education classrooms. Another colleague, who Meg and Alison identified as a leader in the district's race and identity professional development work, clapped in support of the special educator's comment (summarized based on Alison and Meg's account).
Alison described this sentiment, that "the least restrictive setting is a [segregated] classroom," and that these classrooms were specifically benefitting students of color labeled with disabilities, as reflective of a "huge gap that's missing because [racism and ableism], they're intertwined." In other words, Alison recognized how the assumptions about what students

needed that were surfacing in this committee meeting reflected a lack of awareness around how racism and ableism simultaneously construct both understandings of disability and the educational system's response to these meanings. Our collective engaged further in problem posing, with Alison reflecting on feeling rage at this comment, the affirmative response to the comment, and to the unexpected level of opposition to inclusive education that was expressed overall throughout the meeting. This led to her staying "quiet in that [zoom] meeting, like having the camera off." Meg was similarly frustrated and left the committee meeting feeling like it had been a "coordinated attack" on the district's inclusive education work.

Cameron offered some insight that supported our collective to shift the dialogue towards problem solving. She suggested that there was a need for a common definition within this district group around what inclusion even means. Cameron reflected, "Sounds like they need to start at a common definition [of inclusion]." This shift in focus supported the collective to begin preparing for and practicing action and they were able to then discuss how they wanted to move forward as participants in this group. A key turning point in their dialogue, although seemingly small, was when Alison posed, "Could we craft an email together and send it together?" Alison came up with the idea of crafting an email together and sending it together so that they could use their collective power to make suggestions as to how this group's leaders could address rising tensions on the team. Their email began as follows:

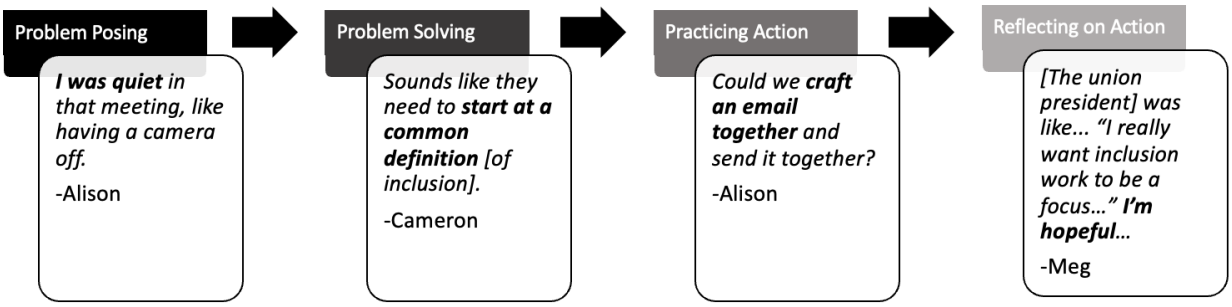
> We are writing to express our thoughts and feelings about last week's meeting... The first meeting was uncomfortable and felt like we had to defend not only inclusion but also our job roles. There were times during the meeting where it felt less like an open dialogue, and more defensive [and against] expanding inclusive practices, including some direct comments about students continuing to belong in self-contained classrooms.

In addition to addressing their concerns, they offered suggestions such as “revisiting norms and more clearly defining them” and collectively “analyzing contract language” to explore more flexible and inclusive roles for collaboration and educator roles.

The email they sent held this district team accountable by sharing with the district leaders the impact and implications of their facilitation and this contributed to changes that the facilitators made as the group continued to meet. Furthermore, by taking action to shape the culture of the group, the coaches gained confidence in their collective ability to create change within these district processes. Alison reflected how when they first joined this team, she thought, “What are we even doing here?” In other words, it felt so unproductive and negative with regards to inclusive education she questioned even being on the team. However, together their collective committed to “figuring out what are the next steps to make progress happen.” Ultimately, in reflecting on this team throughout the year, Meg shared her feelings of hope when she said, “[The union president] was like... ‘I really want inclusion work to be a focus…’ I’m hopeful…” The coaches’ continued advocacy and collective action supported the creation and adoption of a letter of agreement between the district and the union that drastically redefined the roles of the district’s special educators, away from the practice of assigning both students and teachers to segregated special education classrooms based on disability label towards a collaborative and flexible person-centered approach. The letter of agreement, adopted initially by six out of the seven school sites the coaches worked with, is now informing the union’s priorities in collective bargaining in the 2023-2024 school year.

Figure 13

"Could we craft an email together?"



Growing the Movement: *"Find your people"*

The coaches understood their work as "not just about special education" (Cameron), but rather about moving their schools towards justice. However, to shift their district away from the assumption that inclusive education is "just about special education," they knew they had to grow their base of support and expand their community of collaborators. As Amy reflected, "if we can do enough to get 60% and get the mass moving, the rest might follow." This notion of mobilizing allies and growing a broad base of those committed to engaging in critical inclusion across the district became a shared goal for the coaches. For example, Meg offered, "this is a movement. This is a worldwide thing. You're doing it because it is the right thing to do." Here both Meg and Amy are critiquing approaches to coaching that prioritize trying to convince people that this work matters, that disabled students matter. Rather, as Meg's comment highlights, their work is reflective of broader justice movements even beyond education.

The coaches were continuously thinking about who to recruit to join the district team described in the previous section. Alison, for example, brought in a 5th grade Spanish teacher

from one of her schools. She was also excited to lift up a developing teacher leader at her other school site. At the end of one of our sessions, she shared:

> I'm meeting with a new teacher after this. I'm really excited she's coming to Valley [Elementary]... I'm excited for her partnership and leadership experience… She has been a big part of the union and she's been on the bargaining team, and I know she's very pro-inclusion.

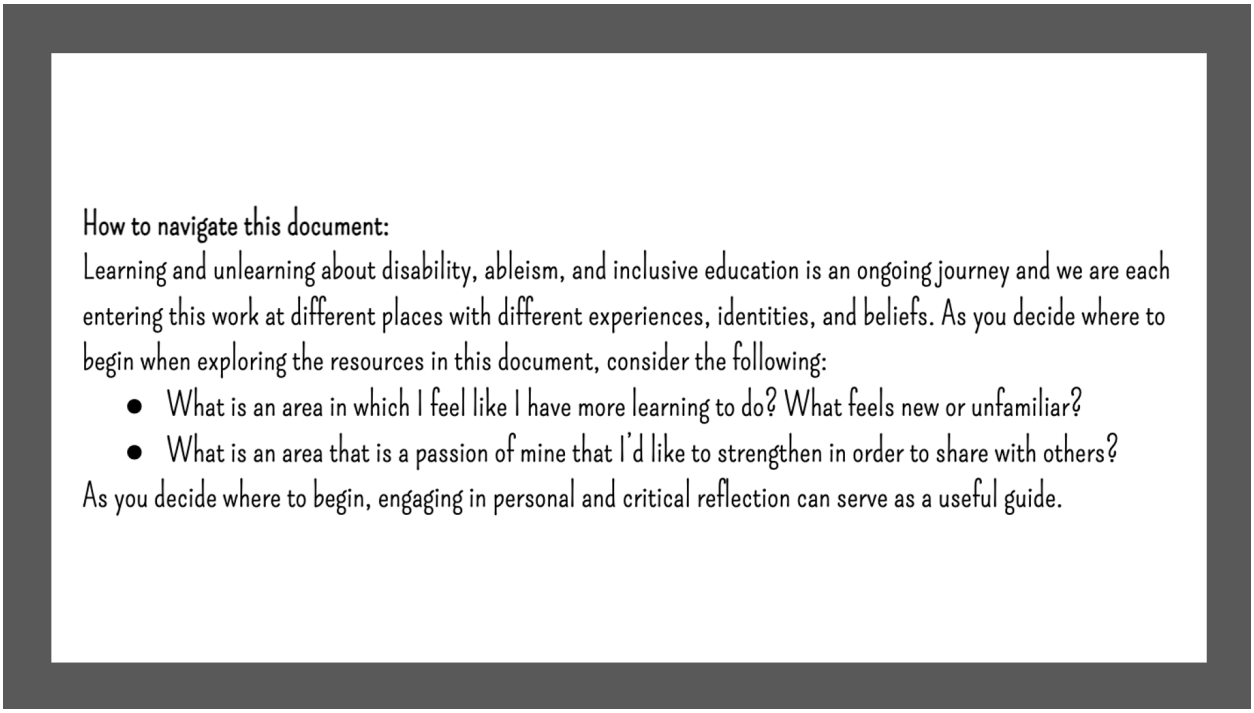
Alison was eager to grow their base of "pro-inclusion" teacher leaders throughout the district and prioritized growing her relationship with a colleague who she'd identified as such a leader. She even envisioned how supporting other developing teachers would shift her role. She reflected how she and other coaches "could be similar to your [Naomi's] role." Similarly, Cameron strategized exactly how to enlist the district's instructional coaches to work with them more closely. She envisioned, "We can literally walk over to their desks [in the district office and say] work with us!" Cameron's excerpt here highlights how practicing exactly what they'd say or do to bring others into their work was an important part of the coaches' shared praxis and preparation for action.

It was also clear to the coaches that their influence and base of support was growing when they received an email from a general education teacher, Celia, asking for help after she had attended a district professional development that the coaches had led. In her email she described "a very negative experience with other staff being very anti-inclusion" (Alison). Celia emailed the coaches because she was wondering if they could support her in having "those tough conversations with people who are anywhere from 'I don't want to have anything to do with this' to 'I think I'm kind of on board, but I don't really know…" (Amy). They decided to create a resource document (see Figure 14) "stemming from Celia's reach out" to address

conversation topics such as “Why inclusion?;” “Ableism, what is it?;” and “What do we mean by disability *and* ableism?,” among many other topics.

Figure 14

Inclusive education resource document excerpt


How to navigate this document:

Learning and unlearning about disability, ableism, and inclusive education is an ongoing journey and we are each entering this work at different places with different experiences, identities, and beliefs. As you decide where to begin when exploring the resources in this document, consider the following:

- What is an area in which I feel like I have more learning to do? What feels new or unfamiliar?
- What is an area that is a passion of mine that I'd like to strengthen in order to share with others?

As you decide where to begin, engaging in personal and critical reflection can serve as a useful guide.

The coaches used this opportunity to encourage their district colleagues to not only commit to ongoing learning (and unlearning) but to also engage in critical reflection as a crucial component of that work.

In addition to creating the resource document, the coaches also worked together to reply to Celia’s email. Alison started the drafting process with, “I'm very sorry you had to experience that. We met today [and] I wanted to share the following resources... What else do we want to share?” Meg offered the idea, “Maybe say something about ‘find your people.’ Don't feel like you have to take it on by yourself and find people who are with you.” Here the coaches encouraged Celia to join in the effort to mobilize support for this work. They also did so

in a way that honored the support we all need in order to sustain ourselves collectively when engaging in pedagogical resistance.

The creation of this resource guide was beneficial both because it became a shared tool for the coaches to support other developing inclusive teacher leaders in the district, but also because as they were creating the tool the coaches engaged in their own reflective dialogue through the process. For example, Amy reflected on how she felt at one point during the year, prior to creating this document:

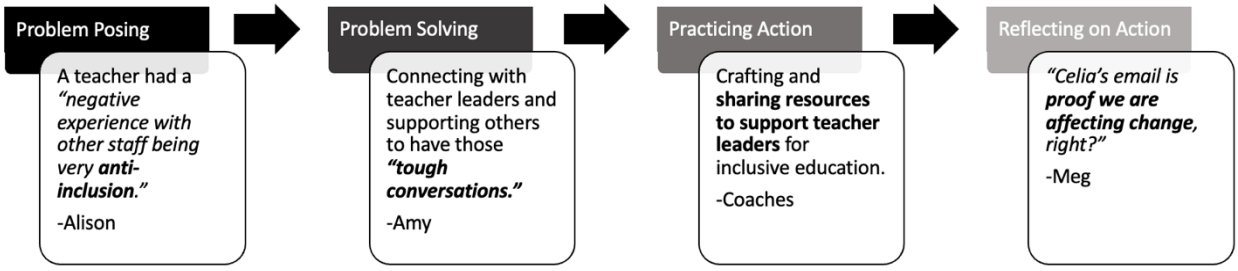
> I got on this kick of I'm gonna put together all this stuff about ableism and punch them in the face with it. Then I was talking to a coworker, she's like, don't punch them in the face. That's not how you're gonna get the best bang for your buck.

Taking her colleague's advice in this particular case, Amy had opted not to address ableism directly with her school sites for fear of doing it the wrong way, specifically fear of doing so in a way that it would scare people off or make them defensive. Reflecting on this question approach, Meg stated, sometimes there is "a line in the sand," in other words it must be addressed given the focus of their work, the lens they bring to it, and their commitments. This document reflects their effort to begin addressing ableism more directly and they ultimately found various ways to incorporate it into their professional development offerings. Meg asked the group to consider how "[Celia's] email is proof that we are affecting change, right?" She reflected, "Is it measurable? Not really, like it's not quantitative, but we are doing shit," and they planned to continue doing shit as they looked ahead to the next school year. For example, in our final session of the year, they worked together to apply to present a workshop on the intersections of racism and ableism as it relates to inclusive education at their district's equity-based professional development series, and they identified the shared goal of centering the

voices and leadership of disabled students as they considered the shape their roles might take in the upcoming school year. These priorities reflected their commitment to engaging in pedagogical resistance as a central feature of their developing inclusive teacher leader practice (see Figure 15).

Figure 15

"Find your people"



In reflecting on their critical inquiry, leadership practice, collaboration, and pedagogical resistance over the course of the year, Meg reflected on their developing leadership towards critical inclusion. She shared "the reason they hired each of us is because we all have that tenacity in one way or another and even more so now. They've created a monster." Amy similarly reflected, "I've developed more confidence in being able to say, well, if you're not on the bus, then too bad… and if you're even interested in the bus, I will help you get out on the bus." Here both coaches are reflecting on their growing confidence in their ability to further the work of inclusive education as a movement. Becoming a "monster" reflected their individual confidence but also their developing power and purpose as a collective

Chapter 7: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

Discussion

Critical inclusion calls for educators to learn to recognize intersectional systems of oppression and to continually work to disrupt and transform them through praxis and practice towards "futures otherwise" (Kafer, 2013, p. 3). This study understands such inclusive praxis as a form of critical teacher leadership that requires growing collective power to uncover and shift the status quo of educational injustice. When working within the context of a school district undergoing inclusive education reform, as in the case of WMSD, the coaches' developing critical teacher leadership stance revealed and pushed against the boundaries of what those in power had deemed would be the right amount change in for the district. Their collective work also surfaced a lack of comfort and willingness to examine and address not only the ways racism and ableism collude to construct educational injustice but also the harm of dominant understandings of inclusive education. Developing critical teacher leadership to counteract this requires opportunities for professional development that supports educators' engagement in pedagogical resistance with the support from a collective to envision, pursue, and practice enacting those "futures otherwise" within but in resistance to the oppressive context of schooling. This understanding of pedagogical resistance was the guiding framework of this participatory multiple case study that explored: *(1) In what ways did coaches participating in a critical inquiry group make sense of inclusive education within their school and district contexts? (2) How did coaches conceptualize their roles, identities, and agency within the contested and ambiguous spaces of their school sites and district-level work?* And *(3) How did coaches practice pedagogical resistance in the context of district-wide inclusive education reform?*

The findings of this study highlighted how the coaches engaged collectively as (1) critical and agentive researchers of their own contexts; (2) leaders who contended with the ways their identities and previous roles as special educators were intertwined with their current experiences as coaches; and (3) a community that supported each other through critical cycles of resistance and reflection as a critical inclusion praxis. These outcomes reflect how pedagogical resistance, as a process and practice, can support educators to learn to lead through critical inquiry aimed towards intersectional educational justice. Thus, this study puts forth a pedagogical resistance framework for critical teacher leadership development that includes: (1) problematizing and deconstructing oppressive realities in school contexts, (2) engaging in praxis to uncover complicity and identify pathways for agency, and (3) co-creating tools and processes as resistance towards critical inclusion. Each of these findings have several implications for both research and practice focused on pedagogical resistance in the context of critical inclusion, teacher leadership, and professional development, as will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Problematizing and Deconstructing Oppressive Realities in School Contexts

Throughout their participation in the inquiry collective, Meg, Amy, Cameron, and Alison collaboratively identified patterns of exclusion experienced by disabled and multiply marginalized students. Positioning the coaches in this way, as co-researchers of their own contexts, was an intentional disruption of the typical ways special and inclusive education teacher leaders are positioned. Most often, coaches and teacher leaders that have a special education background are expected use their role to fix perceived student deficits and provide support to colleagues who are not presumed responsible for disabled students (Wlodarczyk et

al., 2015). Furthermore, this framing of the role of coaches often coincides with district and school leaders both implicitly and explicitly discouraging the application of a critical and intersectional lens to the work of inclusive education, as was the case in WMSD. This positioning of teacher leaders is rooted in ableist and racist logic that justifies and upholds deficit orientations and the exclusion of disabled and multiply marginalized students of color.

Through the inquiry-based tools and protocols our collective utilized, the coaches worked to more deeply understand these dynamics within their school and district contexts. They connected their observations to broader issues in their district and issues of systemic oppression and through their critical dialogue they generated themes that would shape their inquiry and action for the remainder of the school year. These generative themes, highlighted in Chapter 4, included the ambiguity of the district vision, the lack of principal leadership for inclusive education, and the isolated and seemingly superficial approaches to inclusive classroom practices. Through their critical analysis, the coaches recognized these as key areas to focus their inquiry and action given how they were contributing to disabled and multiply marginalized students' experiences of exclusion and inequity in their schools.

Engaging in Praxis to Uncover Complicity and Identify Pathways for Agency

As they gained more confidence and trust in one another, the coaches also engaged as co-facilitators of our inquiry group, supporting one another to identify patterns of injustice, to understand them deeply, and to engage in resistance across multiple spaces to address them. As co-facilitators of their collective, the "community of support" they nurtured over the course of the year was truly their space, designed iteratively and intentionally to authentically cultivate and sustain their inquiry and their praxis. Engaging in critical participatory inquiry not only

supported the coaches' disruption of the patterns of exclusion that they identified, but also of the constraining ways they themselves were positioned in this work as coaches. As former special educators, they worked together to recognize their own complicity and that of others in upholding racist and ableist practices and to shift away from the field's lineage of deficit-orientations to disabled and multiply marginalized students. This shift can be challenging for educators when there are consequences for not complying or conforming to these more traditional roles. Furthermore, traditional notions of special education expertise operate as a form of ability property through which special educators are enabled and valued (Annamma, 2015). For Amy, Meg, Cameron, and Alison shifting away from that role meant working to give up this property and reckoning with what it meant to not lean on it as the source of their competence and power. This also meant growing the tools and trust to explore how shifting their roles held different concerns and consequences depending on each of their multidimensional identities. They ultimately came to lean on one another and worked together to chart alternative and more just pathways as teacher leaders, grounded in their growing collective power and in their solidarity with disabled and multiply marginalized students.

Co-creating Pedagogical Tools and Processes as Resistance Towards Critical Inclusion

Our collective utilized a variety of tools and processes throughout the year to support our shared learning, praxis, and resistance. These tools not only supported their own critical inquiry and dialogue, but also provided them with support structure for working with colleagues and planning action based on their experiences. All the tools we utilized were grounded in critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). This means that the tools were designed to guide the coaches in continually asking deeper questions of their contexts, themselves, and each

other, engaging in action, and always returning to critical reflection to move them towards their next steps. More specifically, our critical pedagogical tools provided a structure for moving our collective through iterative phases of inquiry and dialogic action, including problem posing, problem solving, practicing action, and reflecting on action. Rather than this action being focused on the remediation of disabled children, as special education as traditionally been centered on, our work was focused on changing systems within the coaches' sphere of influence. As it can be difficult to imagine alternatives within the constraints of schooling contexts, the tools we utilized opened the possibility of imagining those alternatives. The tools, in other words, were an invitation to imagine and practice those "futures otherwise," as Kafer (2013), Mingus (2022), Anzaldua (1990), and others have called upon us in the field of education to do.

Implications

Cultivating Pedagogical Resistance through Participatory Research

In their review of the extant literature related to collaborative research on inclusive education, Ruppar et al. (2018) identified the promise of participatory methods for moving schools and the field of inclusive education scholarship towards more critical and transformative conceptualizations. However, they found that most participatory studies related to inclusive education focused on shifting instructional practices and special education service delivery models in participants' contexts, while none of the studies focused on critical or transformative understandings of coaching or teacher leadership. This narrow technical focus within participatory research for inclusive education has not directly addressed intersectional

educational injustice and educators' complicity and responsibilities when working within these systems (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007; Love & Beneke, 2021; Ryndak et al., 2014).

Alternatively, participatory studies outside of the field of inclusive education research that have focused on critical teacher leadership and critical professional development have attended deeply to issues of power and oppression. However there remains limited scholarship in these fields that take up intersectional understandings of both racism and ableism, disabled students' experiences of multiple forms of marginalization, and how educators collectively resist intersectional injustice in their own contexts (see Beneke et al., 2022a and Kulkarni et al., 2022 for exceptions). Thus, there is a continued need for critical participatory scholarship to address "systemic patterns of exclusion'' (Ruppar et al., 2018, p. 791). More specifically, there is a need for participatory research that supports teacher leaders to collectively identify and disrupt intersectional patterns of educational injustice that harm disabled and multiply marginalized students within teacher leaders' own contexts.

With DisCrit Tenet 7's call for diverse forms of resistance as a guide, this study's participatory approach responds to the need for critical intersectional scholarship in the area of inclusive education. The findings illuminate the political nature of teacher leaders' work and offer insight into the pedagogical resistance of teacher leaders working within the context of inclusive education reform (Gourd, 2018; Pine, 2009; Siuty, 2019 a/b). This study's participatory methods positioned the four coaches as agents within rather than objects of reform (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Pine, 2009; Stapleton, 2018). By creating the space for participants to engage collaboratively through the study's participatory design and analysis processes, they pursued pathways for change together that were divergent from the narrowly defined and

normative notions of both inclusive education and the roles of teacher leaders like themselves (Beneke et al., 2022). By explicitly centering their critical inquiry and pedagogical resistance, the study's findings extend the literature on teacher leadership and professional development and offer new insights into how participatory methods can cultivate understandings and enactments of teacher leadership and pedagogical resistance for critical inclusion.

Expanding Approaches to Teacher Leadership Development for Critical Inclusion

The literature on professional development for inclusive education highlights how coaching can provide meaningful, effective, context-driven professional learning experiences for educators (Leko & Brownell, 2009; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Though even when coaching is prioritized for professional learning for inclusive education, dominant understandings of inclusive education can reproduce ableist and racist notions of educators' roles (Beneke et al., 2022a; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011). As Meg, Alison, Amy, and Cameron surfaced through their inquiry, this has implications for how the roles of teacher leaders such as coaches are conceptualized. Although coaches' roles are often ambiguous and undefined within institutions, dominant conceptualizations of their work persist and often position them as fixers of student deficits and enforcers of normalcy. The ambiguity of coaches' roles, particularly within contexts undergoing inclusive education reform, however, can also present opportunities to resist dominant conceptualizations of teacher leaders and to instead pursue more critical enactments of teacher leadership.

Despite the significant role coaches play in the context of inclusive education reform processes, critical scholarship rarely attends to the experiences of coaches themselves, and those of teacher leaders more broadly (Wlodarczyk et al., 2015). This study sought to expand

this literature base through a framework of pedagogical resistance towards critical inclusion. As this study's findings highlighted, critical pedagogical approaches to teacher leadership development for critical inclusion can offer participants relevant professional learning experiences grounded in commitments to educational justice within their own context (Souto-Manning, 2010). Such professional development approaches can prioritize both cultivating and sustaining pedagogical resistance through the critical and ongoing support from the collective. Sustained pedagogical resistance can result in shifting oppressive beliefs and practices and can also generate structural change, given the boundaries across which teacher leaders operate and engage in resistance (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013a).

Souto-Manning (2010) describes the power of such collective and critical inquiry-based professional development spaces. She writes, "By engaging in this process, taking vulnerable positions, a stronger community of learners is formed. [Participants] feel confident in their abilities to promote change in their own lives" (p. 43). Meg, Alison, Amy, and Cameron demonstrated such vulnerability and engaged as a critical and supportive collective committed to moving towards justice while also navigating the impacts of working within ambiguous and contested contexts. Their orientation to vulnerability supported their professional learning and ultimately reflected their resistance to ableist and racist conceptualizations of teacher leadership.

Applying a Pedagogical Resistance Framework to Other Critical Teacher Learning Spaces

While this study was centered on the experiences of new coaches with several years of special education teaching experience, the findings undoubtedly have implications for educators across various stages of their careers. For example, Amy, Meg, Cameron, and Alison

often reflected on how they'd felt alone in their commitments to inclusive education as special educators and how they very much related to the teachers they worked with who felt similarly. This sentiment is reflected in the literature on critical teacher education for inclusive education that highlights how when new teachers enter the field after completing justice-oriented inclusive teacher education programs, they can struggle to apply the critical lens from their programs within traditional schooling contexts (Naraian & Schlesinger, 2017). When new teachers do engage in acts of resistance, it can be difficult for them to sustain "disruption of dominant ideologies" related to race and disability in their schools without sufficient support (Siuty, 2019a, p. 48). Thus, critical professional development spaces grounded in pedagogical resistance can provide the collective support necessary for new teachers to explore, expand, and sustain collective resistance across their careers.

Critical inquiry spaces at any stage of an educator's professional development can reframe ableist conceptualizations of professional learning, practice, and resistance as individualized or isolated acts and instead prioritize pedagogical resistance as a collective and interdependent practice (Annamma & Handy, 2019; Beneke & Love, 2022; Beneke et al., 2022a). In other words, such spaces can support educators to collectively problematize intersectional systems of oppression within specific contexts and the broader educational landscape and to explore their own roles, identities, and agency through pedagogical resistance and critical leadership development. Engaging in such inquiry and resistance collectively offers alternatives to the well-documented experiences of burnout that critical, justice-driven, and inclusive-oriented educators experience, particularly disabled educators, educators of color, and multiply marginalized educators who experience the compounding impacts of racism and

ableism within and beyond their workplaces (Kulkarni, et al., 2022; Scott, et al., 2021; Siuty & Beneke, 2020; Stark & Koslouski, 2021). Critical professional learning spaces do not replace the need for identity-based affinity groups that prioritize marginalized educators supporting and sustaining one another (Kohli, 2014; Kohli et al., 2015; Kulkarni et al., 2022). However, critical inquiry spaces can offer critical and collective learning, support, and solidarity to sustain resistance to intersectional oppression in schools and develop new conceptualizations of teacher leadership for inclusive education.

Conclusion

Limitations

Although this study's findings highlight the promise of participatory research and critical professional development approaches, the pervasiveness of racism and ableism remain constant. Creating the conditions for critical inquiry and a collective justice-driven orientation to teacher leadership does not necessarily mean that all educators engaged in such learning will consistently act in line with their commitments to students, inclusive education, and educational justice. Additionally, such professional development approaches won't eliminate systems of oppression, or individuals' investment in upholding these systems. However, such learning spaces can generate pathways for educators of diverse identities to develop ongoing critical inclusive praxis and pedagogical resistance as they seek recognize complicity and to transform their contexts. This is always unfinished work that is aimed at disrupting not only racist and ableist schooling conditions but racist and ableist notions of teacher leadership that are constantly being negotiated, navigated, and, with collective support, disrupted, and transformed.

This specific study was focused only on four coaches who were each very new to their formal teacher leadership roles. Thus, their critical inquiry was very much characterized by the experience of inhabiting unfamiliar ambiguous and contested roles. While this study lasted throughout their first year, their development as leaders has since continued beyond the study's scope. This leaves open questions as to their ongoing pedagogical resistance and support for one another as a collective. For example, what does sustained pedagogical resistance look like for this collective over a longer period of time as the district continues on in this inclusive education work? In what ways does their pedagogical resistance shape the experiences of disabled and multiply marginalized students as they continue on in their schooling journeys? These questions reflect opportunities for future research to continue exploring such topics within this case, as well as that of others.

Future Research

Drawing on the findings and implications of this study, future research should attend to the various ways critical professional development can support the sustained pedagogical resistance and collective leadership of teachers working towards justice and critical inclusion in their own contexts, particularly those districts that have established some intent to address issues of injustice in their schools and to move towards inclusive education. While these contexts, as in the case of WMSD, might express a desire to enact justice-oriented change in their districts, they often engage in reform processes that leave patterns of intersectional injustice firmly intact. At the same time, however, the ambiguous and contested nature of change processes within districts like WMSD can actually open the possibility for developing

research-practice partnerships through which support for critical professional development can be fostered.

Research-practice partnerships for critical leadership development that supports coaches and other teacher leaders offers one path forward for such work (Parkhouse, 2023). Coaches are boundary crossers whose resistance can disrupt patterns of exclusion across the various spaces in which they participate and have influence (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013a). Through participatory research, they can strengthen their critical analysis of these contexts, grow their collective power, and reposition themselves as action researchers with the tools and support to engage in sustained pedagogical resistance (Beneke et al., 2022a; Fair, 2023; Naraian & Oyler, 2014; Nishimura, 2014; Schlessinger & Oyler, 2015; Wlodarczyk et al., 2023). Although there are risks of "watering down critical approaches" when they are enacted within institutional spaces, Parkhouse (2023) argues that critical research-practice partnerships can provide participants with the support and tools necessary for taking courageous and transformative action in their contexts (p. 736).

Future collaborative scholarship should build upon this study's developing framework of pedagogical resistance to explore how coaches and other teacher leaders expand their pedagogical resistance across the many collaborative spaces in which they work. Action research, design-based research, and other critical participatory methods could offer great potential for sustaining and expanding critical leadership development for inclusive education (Ruppar et al., 2018). For example, how might cultivating a broader network of critical inclusive teacher leaders through critical professional development cohorts or critical inquiry groups support expansive and sustained pedagogical resistance for critical across multiple

communities? How might engaging in such collaborative work within union or community-based contexts contribute to mobilizing a broader network of resistance?

Finally, both the coaches in this study and scholars in the field of collaborative research for inclusive education have identified the urgent need for centering not only the voices but the leadership of disabled and multiply marginalized youth in participatory research. As Ruppar and colleagues (2018) have invited critical educational scholars to consider, "Who understands the nature of school inclusion (and exclusion) better than youth?" (p. 792). Engaging in collaborative research to understand how teacher leaders engage youth in authentic justice-driven and student-led partnerships and supporting these educators in their critical learning to do so through research-practice partnerships, offers a compelling vision for justice-driven critical professional development towards inclusive education.

Ultimately, it is my hope that this study has laid the groundwork for cultivating pedagogical resistance through critical leadership development as a collective practice and commitment to critical inclusion. The findings should serve as much needed insight into teacher leadership and teacher leadership development as critical components of moving towards intersectional educational justice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment email

Hello ____! My name is Naomi Fair and I am a doctoral candidate in the special education department at University of Washington! I am writing to invite you to participate in an inquiry collective to support your work as an inclusive coach and the broader work around inclusive education in your district!

First a bit about me! Before entering the program at UW, I taught in New York and then in the Pacific Northwest for a total of 10 years, taking on a variety of roles (special education teacher, general education teacher, co-teacher, and inclusion coach!). I have been a coach with the UW special education teacher education program and an inclusion specialist with the UW Haring Center demonstration sites project for inclusionary practices for the past 3 years, as well as an instructor for the undergraduates and masters students in the College of Education and Disability Studies department. I am very passionate about inclusion and supporting teachers to do this crucial work!

The focus of my studies at UW has been on creating inquiry/problem of practice spaces for educators to engage collaboratively around inclusive education, the intersections of racism and ableism in schools, and how we can work to transform these inequities through our roles as educators. I have designed a collaborative qualitative research project with supporting your district in mind and I am seeking participants! If you are interested in participating, I estimate your time commitment will be a maximum of about 22.5 hours over the course of the school year and I am able to compensate you $300 for your participation.

I have attached a participant consent form to this email that includes more detailed information about the project and what participation would look like. Please check it out! If after reading the participant consent form you feel that you'd like to participate in the study, please fill out this google form! Only I will see your response. (Filling out this google form does not mean you have committed to participating in the project, but I'll reach out to plan next steps once I hear from you.)

Please email with any questions or concerns. Looking forward to hearing from you!
Naomi Fair

Appendix B: Interest survey

What is your name?

Your answer

What is your email address?

Your answer

What is your role?

Your answer

What are you pronouns?

Your answer

What brings you to the work of inclusive education?

Your answer

What excites you about your role? What do you envision doing? What concerns do you have?

Your answer

How could this collective inquiry group support you in your role?

Your answer

Appendix C: Consent form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Cultivating pedagogical resistance through critical inquiry

Investigator: Naomi Fair

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Carly Roberts

Investigator's Statement

I am asking you to participate in a research project that I am completing as part of my dissertation requirement at the University of Washington. The purpose of this consent form is to give you all the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to engage in critical inquiry that explores how inclusive coaches are thinking about ableism and racism in schools, their own identities and agency as inclusive educators, and to support their school communities and one another as the district shifts towards inclusive education.

PROCEDURES

If you choose to be in this study, I would like you to:

1. Participate in 6-8 monthly inquiry group sessions with all participants, beginning in October, if possible (12 hours over the course of the school year). The number of sessions will depend on availability and interest. Sessions will be 90 minutes each and take place in a location of the group's choosing (public library, district office, school site, Zoom, etc.). Together we will explore resources, discuss problems of practice, and plan for action with school communities. Potential topics might include planning for challenging coaching conversations, exploring questions related racism and ableism, connecting our work to our own educational experiences, processing incidents and planning next steps, planning critical professional development. We will aim to schedule sessions during the workday if possible, or schedule them after school if the group prefers.
2. Participate in 3 interview sessions individually (4.5 hours over the course of the school year). The interviews will last approximately 90 minutes and can take place in a location

of your choosing or over Zoom, if that is preferrable. Each interview will be focused on a particular topic, and I will offer questions or prompts to guide the conversation as needed. The three interviews will include:

a. Interview 1 (September or October): Exploring experiences in education up to current coaching position. Questions might include: *Can you tell me about what led to you becoming an educator? Can you share an example of a time when you were a teacher that shaped your understanding of educational injustice (related to racism and ableism)?*

b. Interview 2 (January): Exploring the current contexts of the inquiry group and coaching role. Questions might include: *Describe your role as a coach. Can you describe a specific time when you felt unsure or challenged as a coach? Can you describe a specific time when you felt like you were enacting your commitments as a coach?*

c. Interview 3 (April): Making meaning of the inquiry group and coaching experience and in what ways participation supported your practice. Questions might include: *Describe your experience in our inquiry group. Describe an example of action you took at work that you feel is connected to your participation in the inquiry group.*

3. Participate in 3-4 observations (6 hours over the course of the school year). Observations will last from 1-3 hours and we will collaboratively determine what to observe and when based on what is meaningful to you. Observations might include coaching sessions, team meetings, professional development sessions, or working with students or families. I will take notes while I am there and there will be no video/audio recording unless we decided otherwise, and no children will be recorded. We will be able to bring questions and topics to the collective based on the observations. Observations 1 and 2 will take place between Interviews 1 and 2 and Observations 3 and 4 will take place in between interviews 2 and 3.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interviews and audio/video record the culture circle sessions using audio/video recording devices and then download the recordings to a password protected drive so that I can have an accurate record of our conversations. I will transcribe these recordings without identifiable information and destroy the recordings after the study is over. If you would like a copy of any transcripts from these conversations, I will gladly provide you with them.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. I have addressed concerns for your privacy in the section below. Some people feel self-conscious

when notes are taken or interviews are recorded. Additionally, talking about topics such as professional practice, race, racism, disability, and ableism in the context of an interview can make some people feel a sense of discomfort or vulnerability.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

You may not directly benefit from taking part in this research study. One benefit of this study is that it will contribute to the ways teachers and coaches can be supported through critical inquiry in their effort to implement inclusive education as a justice practice.

OTHER INFORMATION

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Information about you is confidential. I will invite you to select a pseudonym and I will code the study information. I will keep the link between your name and the pseudonym code in a separate, secured location until the study is complete. Then I will destroy the information linking your information to the pseudonym. If the results of this study are published or presented, I will not use your name, or any other identifying information.

I may want to re-contact you for future related studies. Please indicate below whether you give me permission to re-contact you. Giving me permission to re-contact you does not mean you are obligated in any way.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact Naomi Fair at the number or email listed at the top of this form. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact my doctoral advisor, who is overseeing this project: Carly Roberts (206-221-7894; carober1@uw.edu).

_____

Signature of investigator Printed Name Date

Participant's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later on about the research, I can ask the investigator listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can contact one of the course instructors. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

____ I give permission for this researcher to audio record my interviews.

____ I do NOT give my permission for the researcher to audio record my interviews.

____ I give permission for the researcher to re-contact me to clarify information.

____ I do NOT give permission for the researcher to re-contact me to clarify information.

_____

Signature of participant Printed Name Date

Copies to: Investigators' file

Participant

Appendix D: Inquiry group sample agenda

Session 1: *Starting with ourselves* (9/16/22; 9:30-11)
Location: District computer lab
Notes: Bring journey maps to this session

Time	What?	Why?	How?
25 min (9:30-9:55)	**Opening** ● Check In ● Norm setting	*To connect with one another and ground our work in the importance of emotions and facilitating shared space intentionally*	**Facilitation:** Whole group **Materials:** Slides Links
50 min (9:55-10:40)	**Starting with ourselves** ● Introduction to 3 B's (behaviors, beliefs, ways of being) (Aguilar, 2020) ● *Making meaning* of the 3 b's through storytelling with journey maps	*The work of change in schools is often very outward facing on what we are trying to change. We start with ourselves to engage in deep self-reflection that supports us to imagine and create change towards more just schools*	**Facilitation:** Partnerships/Whole group **Materials:** Journey maps Links
15 min (10:40-10:55)	**Surfacing current realities in context** ● Introduction to 4 phases of transformational (Aguilar, 2020) coaching ● Planning for community exploration	*Understand the importance of surfacing current realities of our contexts in the work of transformational coaching; Select equity-focused tool to explore current context and identify themes to guide our work*	**Facilitation:** Whole group Individual reflection **Materials:** Slides Links
5 min (10:55-11)	**Closing**	*To reflect and appreciate!*	

Appendix E: Inquiry group session overview

Session	Focus	Format	Summary of Activities	Artifacts
Session 1	*Starting with ourselves*	In-person	• 3-2-1 Check-In • Norm Setting • Intro to coaching: The 3 B's and Transformation Coaching Cycle • Community exploration planning	• Session 1 Agenda • Journey Maps
Session 2	*Surfacing what is to imagine what could be*	In-person	• "What is in your 4th box?" Check-In • Surfacing current realities in context: Discussing findings from community exploration • Explore and revise Consultancy Protocol for problem of practice dialogue	• Session 2 Agenda • Surfacing Current Realities Slides • Adapted Consultancy Protocol

Session 3	*Exploring tools for critical problem posing and problem solving*	In-person	• "A picture is worth 1,000 words" Check-In
			• Exploring counter-narratives of multiply marginalized disabled folks
			• Problem of practice dialogue
			  ○ "A jail cell" (Alison)
			  ○ Yours vs. Mine vs. Ours (Cameron)
			• PATH action planning
				• Session 3 Agenda
				• PATH Action Plan (#1)

Session 4	*Reflecting on our agency and action*	In-person	• "Grogu" Check-In • Zones of comfort, risk, and danger protocol • Problem of Practice dialogue ○ Union committee (All) • PATH action planning	• Session 4 Agenda Other documents associated with this session: • Email to union

				committee members
Session 5	*Planning and Practicing Coaching*	Zoom	• Revisiting the 3 B's to create a coaching mission and vision towards inclusive education • Coaching tool exploration • Rehearsing challenging coaching conversations/dialogue • Problem of Practice dialogue ○ "The teacher called security" (Meg)	• Session 5 Agenda • Coaching Mission and Vision • Coaching for equity tools folder
Session 6	*Planning next steps for collective action*	In-person	• Feelings/energy check-in • Planning school journey documentation/sharing • Meeting with district leader about team participation • Planning next steps as an inquiry collective	• Session 6 Agenda

Session 7	*Planning next steps for collective action*	In-person	• "What type of bread would you be?" Check-In
			• Problem of practice dialogue
			  ○ Review/revise district inclusive education survey
			  ○ District Study (All)
			• Planning school journey documentation/sharing
				• Session 7 Agenda
				
				Other documents associated with this session:
				• Start-up survey draft
				• Impact study draft

Session 8	*Planning next steps for collective action*	In-person	• "What's your favorite type of cheese?" check-in • Problem of practice dialogue ○ Supporting colleagues to have challenging conversations with	• Session 8 Agenda • Inclusive Practices Resource Center document

			colleagues who are resistant to inclusive education (All) • Creating resource document for having challenging conversations with colleagues	

Session 9	*Reflecting back/moving forward*	In-person	• "What's your favorite type of cake?" check-in
			• Reflecting on
			  ○ UDL Conference
			  ○ District survey results
			• Problem of practice dialogue
			  ○ Preparing for challenging conversations
			  ▪ "Flexible Service Delivery" conversation (Amy)
			  ▪ "I want to be in control of the narrative" (Alison)
				• Session 9 Agenda
				
				Other documents associated with this session:
				• Flexible case management documents

Session 10	*Reflecting back/moving forward*	In-person	• Checking in on school/district tensions • Planning district presentation for special education colleagues • Brainstorming presentation for PTA families	• *No agenda*
Session 11	*Reflecting back/moving forward*	In-person		• Session 11 Agenda • PATH Action Plan (#2)

	[Group Interview]			• [Revised] Coaching Mission and Vision Other documents associated with this session: • Union documents

Appendix F: Inquiry group protocols and tools

I. Adapted SHOWed Protocol[3]

Step 1: Engage in equity-oriented observation

- Select a form of observation to surface the current reality of your context. Consider tools that center the experiences and voices of multiply marginalized students (i.e. equity-oriented observation tools and learning walk protocols; shadowing a student; interviewing a small group of students; other street data tools).
- Document this observation with notes.
- Take a photo or select an image that is representative of your initial synthesis of the observation.

Step 2: Initial reflection

- Engage in critical reflection related to your observation
- Jot notes using the questions below to make sense of the data you collected and how it connects to broader issues of justice/injustice in education.

Step 3: Engage in dialogue and group synthesis

1. Each person shares their image and reflection **(4 min)**
2. The group asks clarifying questions and offers noticings after each person shares. **(1 min)**

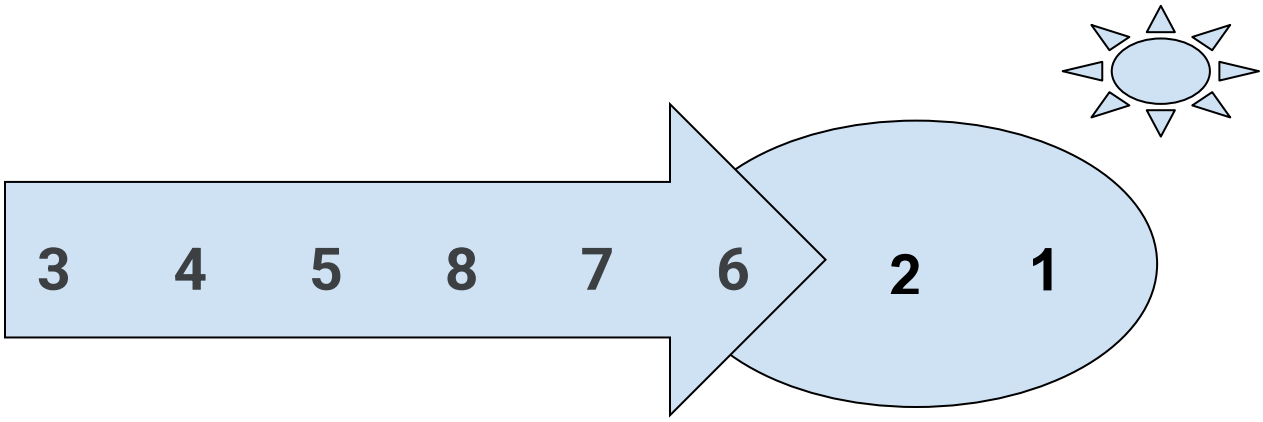
[3] Adapted from photovoice methods (Gant et al., 2009).

3. After each person has shared, discuss themes, connections, divergences across each of the reflections, as well as discussing implications for action. (See guiding questions below) **(10 min)**
    - *What insights does the lens of critical inclusion bring to your work as you consider strengths/areas of growth for yourself/your school?*
    - *What are the "hot spots" for action you've identified? (Think of these hot spots as spaces that reveal the patterns which result in injustice and exclusion)*

Step 4: Engage in action planning based on the themes that you have surfaced collectively.

II. Adapted PATH Action Planning Protocol[4]

Directions: Engage collectively in the process below as you create a visual representation of your PATH towards a more just and inclusive school.



[Add a name to your PATH]

1. North star (What will guide our work? What is our purpose and commitments as inclusive educators? What is the dream? Create image or list)

2. In one year, we did… (Envision a possible future as a team, written in past tense)

3. The now… (Describe spaces/sites/relationships/etc. in which you can imagine enacting your agency towards this north star)

[4] Adapted from PATH action planning, a person-centered planning process (O'Brien et al., 2010).

4. What do we need to move our work towards justice? (Feelings? Supports? Resources? People? Practice? Be concise, connect to the north star!)

5. Who do you identify as members of your team? (Allies in the work of inclusive education at your school sites/district/communities?)

6. Identify next steps (What steps can we take within 6 months as we strive towards our north star?)

7. Organize next month's work (What can we prioritize this next month as we strive towards our north star?)

III. Adapted Consultancy Protocol[5]

I. Purpose

The Consultancy Protocol is designed to support us to think more expansively about a particular, concrete dilemma. The Consultancy protocol has 2 main purposes – to develop our capacity to identify and pose problems that are central to our specific roles and contexts, and to engage each other in dialogue that prioritizes critical reflection, problem solving, and taking action.

II. Framing your dilemma

A problem is a puzzle: an issue that raises questions, an idea that seems to have conceptual gaps, or something about process or product that you just can't figure out. All problems have some sort of identifiable tension in them and often cross over many parts of the educational process. Use the following steps to help you reflect on and frame a problem you'd like to bring to the group.

- **Think about a problem, tension, or dilemma you are facing.**
    - Is it something that is bothering you enough that your thoughts regularly return to it
    - Is it something that is not already on its way to being resolved?
    - Is it something that does not depend on getting other people to change - in other words, can you affect the dilemma by changing *your* practice?
    - Is it something that is important to you, and is it something you are willing to work on?
- **Engage in reflection around this need**

[5] Adapted from the *Consultancy Protocol* (School Reform Initiative, 2021).

- Why is this a dilemma for you? Why is this dilemma important to you?
- What (or where) is the tension in your dilemma?
- If you could take a snapshot of this dilemma, what would you/we see?
- What have you done already to try to remedy or manage the dilemma?
- What have been the results of those attempts?
- Does my dilemma relate to my own beliefs, behaviors, and ways of being (not someone else's!)?
- What do you assume to be true about this dilemma, and how have these assumptions influenced your thinking about the dilemma?

- **Frame a focus question for the group**
  - How would I summarize my problem?
  - What focus question do I want to pose?
  - Why is this question important? How is it connected to our shared work, commitments, vision?

III. The Consultancy Protocol
Roles:

Role	**Description**	**Reflection Prompts**
Presenter	The person who brings the dilemma and focus question to group	● *Am I framing my question in a way that relates to my own beliefs, ways of being, and behaviors (not someone else's!)?* ● *What feelings, biases, or assumptions are arising as I listen to the questions and suggestions of consultants?* ● *What strategies can I utilize to remain open to this process?*

Facilitator	The person who facilitates the process and keeps time, etc.	● *Do I have a strong sense of the protocol structure?* ● *Do I have the materials needed to keep track of time and follow the protocol?* ● *How will I handle when complex dynamics arise and it becomes a challenge to follow the protocol?*
Consultants	The people who ask questions and engage in open suggestions	● *Am I listening in a way that supports my understanding of the dilemma?* ● *How am I recognizing/processing feelings, assumptions, biases, beliefs, past experiences that shape my thinking as I listen to the presenter?* ● *How can I frame questions to both clarify and expand the presenter's thinking?*

Process (30 min.):

1. **Presentation (5 min):** The presenter provides 3-5 key details to provide context for their dilemma. They then share their focus question. If they've brought an artifact, they share it and the group pauses to silently examine it.
2. **Clarifying Questions (5 min.):** Consultants ask the presenter clarifying questions that have brief, factual answers.

   Examples:
   Let me see if I understand…
   I'd be interested in hearing more about…
   It would help me understand if you'd give me an example of…
   So, are you saying/suggesting…?
   Tell me what you mean when you…
   Tell me how that idea is like (or different from)…
   To what extent is…?
   I'm curious to know more about…
3. **Probing Questions (5 min.):** Consultants ask the presenter questions to expand their thinking around the dilemma. This will allow the presenter to do some analysis on their problem and possibly see the dilemma in a new way. Probing questions avoid yes/no

responses, channel inquiry, and stimulate reflective rather than reactive thinking. (See Elena Aguilar's *Coaching Sentence Stems)*

Examples:

Why do you think this is the case?
What would have to change in order for...?
What would it look like if… ?
What do you think would happen if...?
What do you feel is right?
What's another way you might...?
How is...different from (or similar to)...?
What sort of an impact do you think...?
What is your hunch about...?
What do you assume to be true about...?
What is the connection between...and...?
How might your assumptions about...have influenced how you are thinking about...?
What are you most afraid will happen?
How do you feel when...? What might this tell you about...?
What criteria do you use to…?
When have you done something like…before?
What do you think…?
How did you decide…(come to that conclusion?)?
I wonder…

4. **Open Suggestions (5 min.):** The group talks about the dilemma and focus question and works to define the issues thoroughly and objectively. Questions the group might discuss include:

   Examples:

   What did we hear?
   What didn't we hear?
   What assumptions might be operating?
   What questions come up?
   What do we think?
   How does this connect to our collective work and vision?
   What support or practice can we give each other here? What tools might help?
   What implications are there for action?

   After this, consultants will offer actions that might be taken, framed as open suggestions. The presenter listens during this time.

5. **Presenter Reflection (5 min.):** The presenter reflects on what they heard and what they are now thinking. They will also share how the process was for them.
6. **Closing (5 min.):** Facilitator will close with a brief discussion on group observations of the process and summarizing any next steps that have come out of the process.

Appendix G: Participant observation overview

Participant Observation	Date	Focus	Participants	Artifacts
Participant Observation 1	9/26; 9/27	Surfacing Current Realities	Alison	Surfacing Current Realities Slides Memo
Participant Observation 1	9/26; 9/29	Surfacing Current Realities	Amy	Surfacing Current Realities Slides Email to Naomi Memo
Participant Observation 1	9/28	Surfacing Current Realities	Cameron	Surfacing Current Realities Slides Memo
Participant Observation 1	9/29	Surfacing Current Realities	Meg	Surfacing Current Realities Slides Memo
Participant Observation 2	10/31	Planning for action	Alison	Equity and Inclusion Professional Development Slides Memo
Participant Observation 2	10/31	Planning for action	Amy	Email to Naomi Memo
Participant Observation 2	11/4; 11/10	Planning for action	Cameron	UDL and Language Professional Development Slides Memo

Participant Observation 2	11/9	Planning for action	Meg	Accessibility Survey for Staff Memo
Group Observation 1	11/15	Meeting with special education administrators- *Questions about district vision*	Alison, Amy, Cameron, Meg	Agenda Memo
Participant Observation 3	12/8	Inclusive school site visit	Meg	Memo
Participant Observation 3	12/9	Inclusive school site visit	Cameron	Memo
Participant Observation 3	1/13	Inclusive school site visit	Alison	Memo
Participant Observation 3	1/13	Inclusive school site visit	Amy	Memo
Group Observation 2	1/9; 1/11	Preparing for/Meeting with special education administrators- *Discussion preschool transition process*	Alison, Amy, Cameron, Meg	Preschool Transition Notes Memo
Group Observation 3	1/23; 1/30; 2/7	District Presentation Preparation	Alison, Amy, Meg	School Journey PD Memo
Group Observation 4	2/7	District Presentation	Alison, Amy, Meg	School Journey PD Memo
Group Observation 5	5/3; 5/10; 5/16	Special Education PTA Session Preparation & Presentation	Alison, Amy, Meg	School Journey PD Memo
Group Observation 6	5/9	District Inclusive Education Team Retreat	Alison, Amy, Meg	District Team Retreat Journey Map Memo

Appendix H: Sample interview protocols

Sample interview 1: Focused life history

Exploring experiences in education up to current coaching position

Focal Research Question 1: *How do coaches participating in a critical inquiry group make sense of the intersections of ableism and racism within schooling contexts?*

Preamble: *The purpose of this interview is to explore your experiences in education, including as a student, up through your current coaching position that have shaped how you make sense of educational injustice (ableism, racism, and other intersecting oppressions), inclusive education, and your own identity as an educator. I will ask questions along the way to learn more, make connections, dig deeper, and to ask for clarification.*

Questions:

- How would you describe yourself as a student during your time in K-12 education?
- How would you describe your experience as a student from K-12?
    - What messages did you receive about your own abilities/disabilities and race throughout your experience?
    - What messages did you receive about the abilities/disabilities and racial identities of others throughout your time in K-12 schools?
    - How did these messages shape how you viewed yourself as a student and experienced your time in school?
- Can you share an example of an experience from when you were a student that shaped your understanding of educational injustice (related to racism and ableism)?
    - What happened?
    - Who was involved?
    - What did you do?
    - How did you feel?
    - How was this moment significant?
    - How do you feel your identities shaped your experience?
    - What questions did this moment leave you with?
- Can you share an example of an experience from when you were a student that shaped how you understand inclusive education?
    - What happened?
    - Who was involved?
    - What did you do?
    - How did you feel?

    - How was this moment significant?
    - How do you feel your identities shaped your experience?
    - What questions did this moment leave you with?
- Can you tell me about what led to you becoming an educator?
- Can you describe yourself as a teacher?
    - What did you do?
    - How did you feel?
    - What did you value?
- Can you share an example of a time when you were a teacher that shaped your understanding of educational injustice (related to racism and ableism)?
    - What happened?
    - Who was involved?
    - What did you do?
    - How did you feel?
    - How was this moment significant?
    - How do you feel your identities shaped your experience?
    - What questions did this moment leave you with?
- Can you share an example of a time when you were a teacher that shaped how you understand inclusive education?
    - What happened?
    - Who was involved?
    - What did you do?
    - How did you feel?
    - How was this moment significant?
    - How do you feel your identities shaped your experience?
    - What questions did this moment leave you with?
- How did your experiences as a student shape and/or compare with your experiences as an educator (in terms of experiences of injustice, examples that represent inclusive education, etc.)?
- What led up to you seeking out your current position?
- What are your hopes for this current role and our group?
- What questions do you have entering this role and inquiry group experience?

Additional probing questions

- What was that experience like for you?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- How did that make you feel?
- How did that impact the way you…?

How did that impact your understanding…?

Sample interview 2: Details of lived experience

Exploring the current contexts of the inquiry group and coaching role

Focal Research Question 2: *In what ways do coaches conceptualize their own identities and agency within the contested spaces of their school sites?*

Preamble: It has been so powerful to witness your amazing work so far this year and how you've been exploring and enacting your commitments to inclusive education. It has already been quite a journey as a coach at _____ this year and as a member in our collective. The purpose of this interview is to explore your current context as a coach and member of our group. Today, we are going to dig in more to how you are thinking about your own identity and agency within your sites and in your role. I will ask questions along the way to learn more, make connections, dig deeper, and to ask for clarification.

Questions:

- Describe the school sites that you work with.
    - What does their culture as an inclusive school look like as of now (For example: Instruction? Collaboration? School culture? Relationships with students and families? Values and commitments? etc.)
    - Can you describe a specific example or recent interaction where you have seen this inclusive school culture in action?
- Now walk me through a typical day for you as a coach in the past month.
    - What are you doing/saying/feeling/seeing?
    - Who are you interacting with and what are those relationships/interactions like?
    - What is energizing you?
    - What is challenging you?
    - What commitments/values and priorities feel most important to you?
- Describe a time when you felt like you were enacting your commitments as a coach.
    - What happened?
    - Who was involved?
    - How did you feel?
    - What did you wonder?
    - What did you do/say?
    - How did you determine what to do/say?
    - What did it feel like to do this?

    - What was significant about this moment?
    - How did your own identities shape/impact the ways you experienced this?
    - In what ways did the specific context contribute to or enable this experience?
    - In what ways did racism and ableism show up in this moment?
    - In what ways were racism/ableism disrupted in this moment?
- Describe a time when you felt unsure or challenged as a coach.
    - What happened?
    - Who was involved?
    - How did you feel?
    - What did you wonder?
    - What did you do/say?
    - How did you determine what to do/say?
    - What did it feel like to do this?
    - What was significant about this moment?
    - How did your own identities shape/impact the ways you experienced this?
    - In what ways did the specific context contribute to this feeling of uncertainty and being challenged?
    - In what ways did racism and ableism show up in this moment?
    - In what ways were racism/ableism disrupted in this moment?
        - If it wasn't (maybe because you felt unsure about what to do, what might you learn from this moment about how to disrupt similar interactions in the future?
        - How can our group work together to support you in planning for such future moments?
- As we've been discussing throughout our time together, there is not a lot of clarity on what it means to be engaging in this inclusive education work as a start up school which creates both opportunities to push for change but also tensions and even sometimes protecting the status quo way of doing things.
    - In what ways are your school sites contested or ambiguous spaces as inclusive start up schools (Resistance? Structural issues? Leadership? Vision?)?
    - How has this created opportunities for change?
    - How has this limited opportunities for change?
- We've also been exploring how your own identities shape the work you do. And of course we experience spaces and agency in them differentially depending on our identities and how those intersect with systems of oppression.
    - How do you feel like your own identities shape/impact the ways you experience/navigate this contested space, especially in relation to your work as

an inclusion specialist (Feel confidence; Push back; Feel frustration, fear, or uncertainty; Hold back from saying or doing things, etc.)?
    - How has your identity as a coach and the action you take been evolving during your time there? What has contributed to that?
- Describe a specific time when you experienced, noticed, or witnessed racism (including microaggressions) showing up (either at the time or after) (For example: In the school? In your coaching? During instruction/teaching you've observed as a coach? During meetings?)
    - What happened?
    - Who was involved?
    - How did you feel?
    - What did you wonder?
    - What did you do/say?
    - How did you determine what to do/say?
    - What did it feel like to do this?
    - What was significant about this moment?
    - How did ableism also show up in this moment?
- Describe a specific time when you experienced, noticed, or witnessed ableism (including microaggressions) showing up (either at the time or after) (For example: In the school? In your coaching? During instruction/teaching you've observed as a coach? During meetings?)
    - What happened?
    - Who was involved?
    - How did you feel?
    - What did you wonder?
    - What did you do/say?
    - How did you determine what to do/say?
    - What did it feel like to do this?
    - What was significant about this moment?
    - How did racism also show up in this moment?
- We are going to shift into some questions around your experience in the inquiry group so far.
    - Describe your experience in our group.
        - All answers are welcome, especially as this will help us to continue working towards the group being a supportive space for each of you.
    - Describe something that we've been surfacing or exploring that has felt important to you and why it has been important. How has that impacted your own identity? The action you take? Your own commitments/values?

- What activities or discussions have been most impactful? How so? How has that impacted your own identity? The action you take? Your own
- commitments/values?
- What questions/feelings have been coming up for you either during the group or as you reflect on it?
- How does this connect to previous experiences you've had and your own identities, values, commitments?
- One problem/dilemma I've noticed you bringing up from your own context is…
    - What does this make you think about your role?
    - What action have you taken or could you take related to this problem? What feelings, questions, or concerns come up for you as you think about taking action?
    - What has come up in our group that has shaped or pushed your thinking related to this problem and the action you've taken/are thinking of taking?
    - How has and/or could our group support you with this?

Additional group related questions

- What has been working well for you in the inquiry group?
- What would you like to do differently?
- What might you like to explore next?
- As we think about the future of our group, what do you imagine it looks like in the next month? 3 months?

Additional probing questions

- What was that experience like for you?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- How did that make you feel?
- How did that impact the way you…?
  How did that impact your understanding…?

Sample interview 3: Reflection

Making meaning of the inquiry group and coaching experiences

Focal Research Question 3: *How do coaches enact pedagogical resistance in the context of district-wide inclusive education reform?*

Preamble: *The purpose of this interview is to collectively reflect on your coaching experience this year and your participation in our group. Through this interview, I hope we can better understand the moves you made as a coach across different spaces, what this means for your mission and vision as an inclusive coach, and how it might shape your work moving forward.*

Questions:

Let's reflect on your coaching mission/visions.

- How might you revise your coaching mission/vision?
- What has shaped these revisions?
- How might you revise it further to directly name what inclusive education and coaching for inclusive education means to you?
- Given what we've been discussing related to pursuing a more intersectional equity-based approach in the district (addressing ableism, racism, linguicism through the work of inclusive ed, connecting with families, etc.!) and pushing on the ways the district operates in siloed ways, how might you revise your mission/vision further to directly address this in your commitments?
- What ongoing learning or support feels important for you as you continue to grow and pursue this vision?
    - As you pursue bringing that intersectional lens to the work?
    - Develop practices to recognize and address racism/ableism/linguicism through the work?

Let's reflect on the different spaces across which you work.

- What were these different spaces?
    - School sites (Classrooms, teacher groups, leadership teams, admin, etc.)? District? Union? Families?
- What are examples of tensions, barriers, and/or opportunities that came up in each space and across them? What beliefs, behaviors, ways of being might be behind these?
    - What beliefs, behaviors, ways of being might be behind these tensions/barriers/opportunities?
    - What is a specific example that highlights this?
        - Who was involved?
        - How did you feel?
        - What did you do?
            - Why?
            - How might this action be rooted in your own identity? Beliefs? Experiences? Ways of being?
        - What was the result?

- What paths for agency have you found or specific moves have you made to enact your vision of inclusive education and what it means to you to be a coach in/across these spaces?
    - What paths for agency have you found specifically to recognize/address ableism and racism? Exclusion of multiply marginalized students specifically?
    - ***Remember, agency can mean choosing to take action or not!***
- In what ways did your coaches group impact your reflection on and action in these spaces this year?
- What is the current reality in this moment within and across these spaces?
- What might enacting your vision in the various spaces we discussed look and sound like next year based on how things are now?
- What support do you need from each other to do so? From others?
- How might this group take shape (expand, shift, etc.) to support you in this work next year?
    - How might the group expand?
    - What new work might you prioritize as a group?
    - How does this support your commitments/vision?

Let's explore the implications of this reflection on your work next year.

- Create new PATH plan

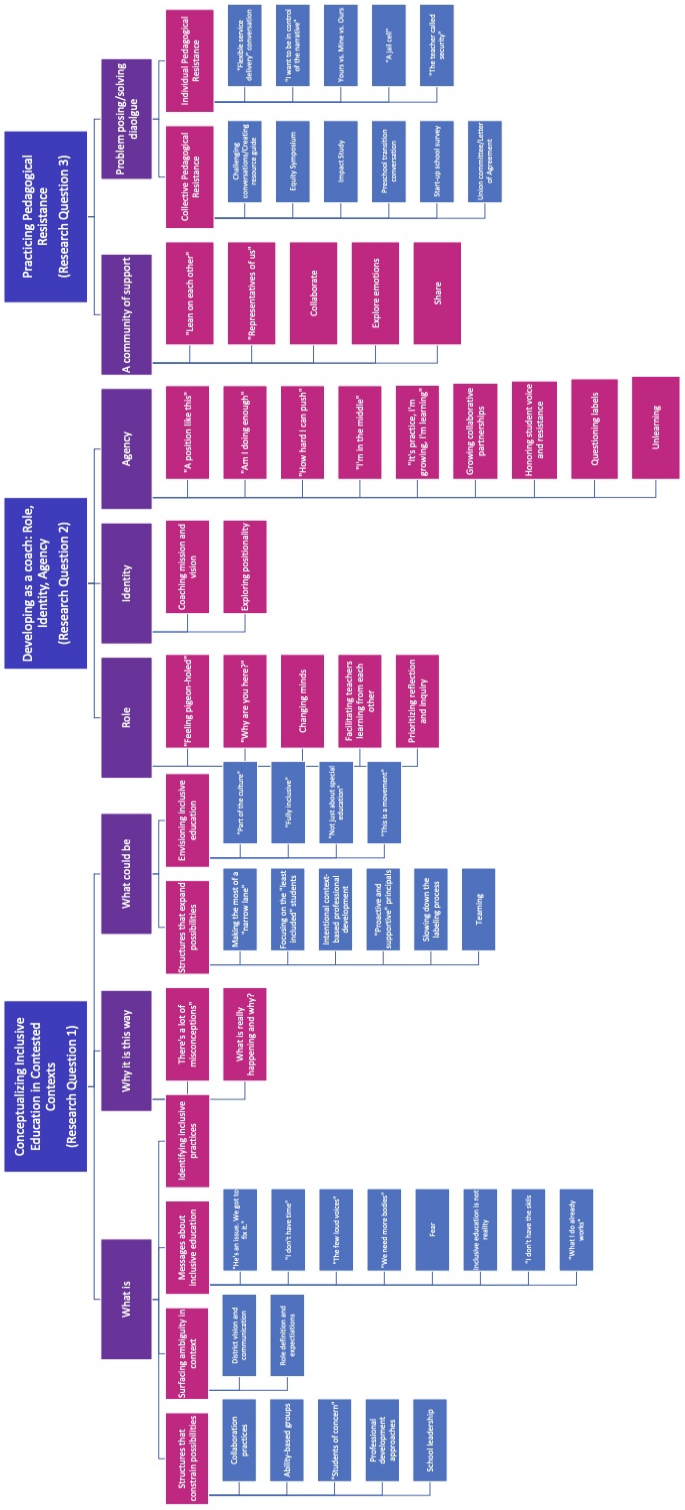
Appendix I: Sample coding matrices and data visualizations

I. First Cycle Coding Matrix

Elemental Coding Methods (Saldaña, 2021)	Codes
Descriptive	(Special ed) inclusion specialist
Concept	Readiness: Students
In vivo	“I don’t know if y'all are ready for that”
Descriptive	Coaching Risk zone
Process	Questioning
Descriptive	Being pigeon-holed
In vivo	“No vision of inclusion”
Concept	Significance of place
In vivo	“How I saw myself as a learner”
Descriptive	Messages about belonging/inclusion
Process	Collaborating
Process	Problem solving with suggestions
In vivo	“I didn’t feel like I had the power”
Descriptive	Union
Process	Envisioning inclusive ed
Descriptive	Messages about racial identity
Process	Facilitating teachers learning from each other
Process	Exploring positionality
Descriptive	Early teaching
In vivo	“They didn’t belong”
Process	Problem posing
In vivo	“A position like this”
Descriptive	A community of support
Descriptive	Role clarity
Process	Reflecting on action
Process	Critical reflection
Process	Surfacing current context
Descriptive	Misunderstandings about inclusive ed
Descriptive	Messages about disability/ability
Process	Centering students and family voice and agency
Process	Problem solving by planning next steps

Process	Problem solving by sharing resources
In vivo	“I didn’t know where they had disappeared”
Descriptive	Lack of intersectional lens
In vivo	“I’m here to be a disruptor”
In vivo	“Our students approach”
In vivo	“Why is she here?”
Descriptive	Coaching comfort zone
In vivo	“I’m in the middle”
In vivo	“How hard I can push”
Process	Recognizing processes of injustice
In vivo	“Am I doing enough?”
Descriptive	School leadreship
Descriptive	Coaching danger zone
Descriptive	District communication
Descriptive	Data
Process	Unlearning
Descriptive	Teacher beliefs/attitudes
Process	Developing as a coach
Concept	Readiness: Staff
Descriptive	Advocate
Process	Considering complicity
Descriptive	Teacher pushback
Descriptive	Feelings about change
Process	Centering communities of belonging
In vivo	“How can I help them take a step back?”

II. Second-Third Cycle Coding Tree



III. Second-Third Cycle Coding Matrix

Pattern Codes	FALL (Interview 1; Sessions 1-4)				WINTER (Interview 2; Sessions 5-7)				SPRING (Interview 3; Sessions 8-10)			
	Cameron	Alison	Amy	Meg	Cameron	Alison	Amy	Meg	Cameron	Alison	Amy	Meg
What is…												
Structures that constrain possibilities	x12	x4	x5	x1	x14	x3	x5	x1				
"Students of Concern"	x2		x1									
Ability-based grouping					x1							
Collaboration practices	x1				x1							
Professional development approaches	X1	x2	x1		x1	x1	x2	x1				
School leadership	x8	x2	x3	x1	x11	x2	x3					
Ambiguity in context	x11	x6	x2	x3	x10	x4	x7	x9				
Leadership vision and communication	x3	X3		x1	x5	X2	x2	x4				
Role definition and expectations	x8	x3	X2	x2	x5	x2	x5	x5				
Messages about inclusive education	x4		x3	x3	x8	x2	x20	x6			x4	x1
"He's an issue. We got to fix it."	x1							x4				
"I don't have time"			x1	x1	x1		x1					
"The few loud voices"	x1			x1	x3	x1	x1					
"We need more bodies"	x1				x1		x4				x1	
Fear			x1		x1						x1	x1
Inclusive ed is not reality	x1				x1		x1	x1				
"I don't have the skills"					x1		x5					
"What I do already works"			x1	x1		x1	x8	x1			x2	
Inclusive practices in action	x1	x3	x1	x2	x8	x2	x1	x2				
Why it is…												
"There's a lot of misconceptions"	x9	x1	x2	x2	x7		x5	x2				
What is really happening and why	x1	x2	x1	x4	x2	x7	x4	x6			x1	
What could be…												
Pathways for expanding possibilities	x5	x1	x2	x2	x7	x11	x1	x7	x3	x1	x3	x1
Making the most of a "narrow lane"				x2				x5				
Focusing on the "least included" students	x1	x1						x1				
Intentional context-based professional develo	x2		x1		x4	x5			x2	x1		x1
"Proactive and supportive" principals	x1				x2	x1					x1	
Slowing down the labeling process						x2						
Teaming	x1		x1		x1	x3	x1	x1	x1		x2	
Visions for inclusive education	x4	x2	x2	x4	x4	x2		x2	x4		x2	x4
"Not just about special education"					x2	x2			x2		x1	x1
"Fully inclusive"	x2		x2	x1	x2			x1				
"Part of the culture"	x2	x2		x1				x1	x1			x1
"This is a movement"				x2					x1		x1	x2

Pattern Codes	FALL (Interview 1; Sessions 1-4)				WINTER (Interview 2; Sessions 5-7)				SPRING (Interview 3; Sessions 8-10)			
	Cameron	Alison	Amy	Meg	Cameron	Alison	Amy	Meg	Cameron	Alison	Amy	Meg
Role and Identity	x12	x6	x9	x13	x19	x8	x20	x17	x1		x1	x2
"Feeling pigeon-holed"	x5	x1		x3	x2	x2		x4				
"Why is she here?"		x2	x4	x6	x3	x1	x7	x3				
Changing minds	x4	x1	x3	x1	x8	x1		x4				
Facilitating teachers learning from each other	x1	x1	x1	x1	x6	x2	x6					x2
Prioritizing reflection and inquiry	x3					x1	x6				x1	
Exploring positionality	x3	x1	x1	x2		x1	x1	x6	x1			
Agency	x26	x12	x13	x23	x26	x26	x23	x42	x6	x3	x2	x6
"A position like this"	x5	x3	x1	x7								
"Am I doing enough?"	x1	x2	x3	x4	x3		x2	x9				
"How hard I can push"	x8	x4	x3	x2	x11	x8	x6	x9			x1	x1
"I'm in the middle"	x3		x1	x1	x3	x3	x1	x7				
"It's practice, I'm growing, I'm learning"					x7	x8	x12	x3	x4	x1	x1	x1
Growing collaborative partnerships						x1	x2	x2	x1	x1		x1
Honoring student voice and resistance	x2	x1		x2	x2	x4		x11	x1	x1		x3
Questioning labels	x5	x1	x2	x5								
Unlearning	x2	x1	x3	x2		x2		x1				

Pattern Codes	FALL (Interview 1; Sessions 1-4)				WINTER (Interview 2; Sessions 5-7)				SPRING (Interview 3; Sessions 8-10)			
	Cameron	Alison	Amy	Meg	Cameron	Alison	Amy	Meg	Cameron	Alison	Amy	Meg
A community of support	x4	x3	x2	x1	x6	x6	x4	x5	x3	x3	x3	x3
"Leaning on each other"	x2	x3	x2		x4	x1	x1	x4				
Collaborating					x1	x2	x1	x1				
Sharing	x2			x1	x1	x3	x2					
Valuing each other									x3	x3	x3	x3
Problem posing/problem solving dialogue	x12	x12		x12	x2	x15	x8	x17	x3	x8	x1	x10
Collective pedagogical resistance												
Challenging conversations/Creating resource guide										x6	x1	x3
Equity symposium												x2
Impact study					x1	x4	x1	x5				
Preschool transition conversation						x2						
Start-up school survey						x8	x6	x7		x1		x1
Union committee/Letter of agreement	x12	x12		x12	x1	x1	x1	x5	x3	x1		x4
Individual pedagogical resistance	x10	x7	x2	x3	x8	x8	x2	x22		x3	x2	x3
"Flexible service delivery" conversation										x1	x1	x1
"I want to be in control of the narrative"										x2	x1	x2
Your vs. mine vs. ours	x10	x1	x2	x3								
"A jail cell"		x6				x4						
"A teacher called security"					x8	x4	x2	x22				