

Conditional Love: Teaching and Learning about Race in the Current Moment

Samuel Jaye Tanner¹
University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, USA

Erin Miller
University of North Carolina Charlotte, Charlotte, NC, USA

ABSTRACT

This article considers how the compulsion of whiteness towards conditional acceptance limits the degree to which educational researchers and teachers can bring pedagogies meant to grapple with white supremacy to schools. We rely on of narrative research to share a story about implementing whiteness pedagogies in elementary schools. Our intention is to interpret the ways in which compulsions of whiteness limited our ability to implement our teaching and learning in the current moment.

KEYWORDS: Narrative Inquiry, Critical Whiteness Studies, Anti-racist Pedagogy

Conditional Love

Author, Hong (2020), ended her beautiful book, *Minor Feelings*, by worrying about ways whiteness works on her as an Asian American. She wrote conscription into whiteness is “every day and unconscious” and “we live under a softer panopticon, so subtle that it’s internalized” which characterizes “our conditional existence” and causes us “to monitor ourselves” (p. 202). Hong argued “if the Asian American consciousness must be emancipated, we must free ourselves of our conditional existence” (p. 202).

We are two white educational researchers and have worked together over the last ten years to design and study anti-racist whiteness pedagogies (Tanner & Miller, 2024). We want to be careful not to appropriate Hong’s (2020) brilliant theorizing of Asian Americanness, but we are moved by her writing as we consider inviting people into considerations of whiteness and white supremacy through teaching and learning in the current moment. Hong’s (2020) claims about the conditional existence produced by white supremacy resonate with our efforts to create improvisational pedagogies. In addition to Hong, we are inspired by Lensmire (2022) who turned to Black scholars such as Du Bois, Baldwin, and The Reverend Thandeka to understand why antiracist efforts have been ineffective in education. Drawing from these thinkers, Lensmire (2022) asked “what if our antiracist efforts have been so ineffective, in part, because we have ignored what is going on among white people?” (p. 1). The stories we tell and interpret in this article are, in a large part, about the things that happened between white people (and white systems) that limited our capacity to engage in anti-racist teaching and learning. We have spent the last twenty years

¹ Corresponding Author; an associate Professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the University of Iowa. 240 S Madison St., Iowa City, IA, 52242. E-mail; samuel-tanner@uiowa.edu

working as teachers and researchers to build and study anti-racist pedagogies rooted in practices and theories of improvisation that intend to disrupt racism through critical considerations of whiteness. In our recent book, we offer an exhaustive telling of our work to build transformative critical whiteness pedagogies that invite people, especially white people, into the urgent work of resisting the ongoing production and affirmation of white supremacy (Tanner & Miller, 2024). Ultimately, white supremacy continues to create death devastation for Black and Brown people (and students) and our work suggests that critical considerations of whiteness, especially with white people, serves to disrupt the ongoing violence of racism.

While there is an impressive body of work in critical whiteness studies by contemporary scholars (see Allen, 2019; Cabrera, 2022; Carter & Jocson, 2022; Edwards & Shahjahan, 2022; Matias, 2022; Matias, 2023; Stewart, 2022; Yancey, 2023), our work in this article is guided by the foundational work of two Black scholars: Thandeka (1999) and Morrison (1992). We rely on their powerful psychoanalytic thinking about how people are made white in the current moment to make visible what whiteness is and how it works. In white supremacist societies such as the United States, people are accepted to the degree by which they conform to whiteness and, for us, improvisational pedagogy can invite people to practice resisting everyday compulsions of whiteness. By compulsions of whiteness, we mean the unconscious forces that work on white people to urge them to conform to white supremacy. Thandeka (1999) and Morrison's (1992) work suggests three characteristics of whiteness. We see these traits of whiteness as impulses, compulsions, and desires of whiteness. Drawing from Thandeka and Morrison, we characterize whiteness as the need to control and be controlled, conditional inclusion in communities, and as repression.

In this article, we ask, "How do compulsions of whiteness limit the degree to which educational researchers and educators can resist white supremacy and must be accounted for in teaching and learning about race?" Recent emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion seems to us to have been mostly ineffective. Perhaps as one consequence of its ineffectiveness, legislation is being introduced and passed in the United States and across the world to limit the degree to which teachers are allowed to talk about race in schools (Kelly & Taylor, 2024; Lehrer-Small, 2023; Najarro, 2024; Sachs & Young, 2023; Woo et al., 2023).

We proceed with a theoretical introduction to whiteness, white supremacy, and the compulsion towards conditional acceptance. Specifically, we turn to the field of critical whiteness studies to guide our understanding of these concepts. Next, we offer a description of the narrative methods in this article. We then tell a story about bringing pedagogies to 4th grade classrooms that would grapple with whiteness to elementary schools. Our intention is not to explain that pedagogy in detail—we've written at length about that in other places. Instead, we interpret the ways in which compulsions of whiteness limited our ability to implement our teaching and learning in the current moment. Ultimately, we argue that, in the ongoing work of resisting white supremacy, educational researchers and teachers begin to think seriously about how the compulsions of whiteness undergird the institution we work in, the theories we accept, and the pedagogies we devise to disrupt whiteness.

Whiteness and White Supremacy

Critical whiteness studies attempt to make whiteness and white supremacy visible. Jupp & Badenhorst (2021) named two waves of this field. They described the first wave, commonly associated with McIntosh's (1988) popular notion of white privilege, as noting "whiteness as hegemonic normativity" and revealing "white social structurings and identities of phenotypically white individuals within and beyond the social science research" (p. 599). The second wave defined and grappled with white supremacy by turning to hundreds of years of Black thought about

whiteness (Hübinette et al., 2022; Jupp et al., 2016; Lensmire 2017). Jupp et al. (2016) wrote this second-wave of critical whiteness understands whiteness as “hegemonic racial structurings” that “perpetuate racialized inequalities and injustices” (p. 5). In other words, whiteness is a discourse that perpetuates the social reality of white supremacy.

White supremacy is a construct that emerged over centuries to favor what Echevarria (2019) described as the social phenomenon of whiteness that arises out of Northern European, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant traditions. Still, as Badenhorst (2018) argued, white supremacy is “not only an explicit system of hierarchical categorization of difference,” but it also “runs backward through” Western and colonial thought (p. 14). Put differently, historical realities of white supremacy promote and sustain an ongoing and thriving whiteness that proves adept at disguising and transforming itself. Lally (2022) traced these transformations across centuries and claimed, “the dynamics of whiteness” in different historical moments “continue to work” to sustain white supremacy and contribute to “what it means to be white today” (p. 41).

Compulsion of Whiteness: Whiteness as Conditional Acceptance

We turn to Thandeka’s (1999) and Morrison’s (1992) powerful thinking about how people are made white to conceptualize teaching and learning that would resist whiteness. Yes, this work is from over twenty years ago. Still, as Lensmire argued in the excerpt above, it has been mostly ignored in antiracist efforts in education. Tanner and McCloskey (2022) has previously drawn three compulsions of whiteness from Thandeka and Morrison’s work: 1) the need to control and be controlled, 2) conditional love or acceptance, and 3) repression. We look at conditional acceptance and the need to control and be controlled in this article to understand forces that limit teaching and learning that makes whiteness visible to resist its everyday and unconscious compulsions.

Thandeka’s (1999) study of whiteness offered a “primer of psychological concepts” that examined “the structure of a Euro-American’s white racial identity as an impaired sense of a core self” (p. 26). This damage, for Thandeka (1999), expresses itself as “an inability to relate to others with self-integrity” that results from “episodes in which a person’s difference from a white ideal was attacked by her or his own caretaker(s)” (p. 26). Put differently, in white supremacist societies, children are made white when white teachers, parents, or adults punish them for not behave according to an unspoken white ideal. Thandeka worried this “whitening” impaired the child’s capacity to relate to others and came about because of the lack of unconditional acceptance in a community—a lack of unconditional love. According to Thandeka (1999), white people spend the rest of their lives working hard to avoid encountering what she described as the “white self-image that emerges from” inductions into whiteness and carries with it “the emotional fallout from the self-annihilating process that created it: the breakup of one’s own sense of coherence, efficacy, and agency as a personal center of activity” (p. 26). Ultimately, white children learn extremely early on that their inclusion in a community is conditioned on how they behave according to an unspoken and always present white ideal. white people try to control others (and themselves) to fit into that ideal. Pedagogy that would resist whiteness would invite students into giving up the need to control or be controlled by others as well as understanding and practicing alternatives to conditional love.

We offer a description of narrative research before turning to a story that illustrates how the compulsion towards conditional acceptance limits educational researchers and teachers who implement teaching and learning that resist whiteness.

Narrative Research

Narrative research is a qualitative methodology in which stories are shared and interpreted to make sense of experience (Barone, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Turvey, 2012). Turvey (2012) argued that narrative scholarship renders visible “the messy and wonderfully productive complexity of classrooms” (p. 57). This article extends Turvey’s claim and uses storytelling and story interpretation to make sense of what happened when we attempted to implement teaching and learning about whiteness in elementary schools. Turvey’s argument complements Johnson’s (2017) call for racial storytelling that makes visible what has been silenced in educational and public spaces—histories and the ongoing production of white supremacy. We do not use narrative to pretend at some objective representation of reality but, instead, to invite the reader into our ongoing work to design and make sense of teaching and learning about whiteness. We offer interpretation and theorization after telling our story about attempting to design and implement transformative, critical whiteness pedagogies. Still, we are guided by Barone’s (2000) claim “some stories deserve their own space” and that we “do not always need, within the same textual breath, to deconstruct in another style and format the epiphanies they foster” seriously (p. 259). Further, Barone’s (2000) argument that, in storying our experience, sometimes “the conversation between writer, reader, and character should be allowed to wane before additional voices inject themselves into the dialogue” (p. 259) is central to how we have constructed this article.

In using narrative inquiry as a methodological approach, we assume that policies and practices in education should be rooted in the social contexts that shape the ways people compose their lives (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). This is why attention to the stories we tell as humans is so important. Stories shape our lives; stories illuminate our lives. This particular story was chosen because it takes up Lensmire’s (2022) suggestion that it is possible antiracist efforts have been ineffective because educators and researchers have ignored the complexities of the inner psyches of white people. Moreover, the story we construct sheds light on our research question about the ways that compulsions of whiteness work to *limit* work on race and racism in schools. To build trust in our telling of the story that follows, we relied on detailed descriptions collected in our researcher journals, multiple data construction meetings to member check each other’s recollections, and ample cross checking via emails, analytic memos, and field notes to construct a reliable audit trail.

While we have mapped our social identities (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019) at length in our other work, we understand our reflexivity is paramount in narrative research. We acknowledge our identities are complex, fluid, and yet, shaped by a pedagogical ethos rooted in relationality, humility, and respect. In other words, we came to our work in antiracist pedagogy because we do not know how not to. As educators for multiple decades, we have supported, led, or worked as allies in myriad anti-oppressive, activist projects. Moreover, we are committed to the affective dimensions of antiracist work, including the discomfort it brings. As Zemblyas (2023), suggests, it is important to channel discomfort in “critical and productive ways” (p. 311). However humble, this is what we offer to do here.

We now share a story about trying to implement teaching that grapples with whiteness pedagogy in elementary classrooms. The story below is not intended as an argument or theorization of our experience though, turning to Barone (2000), we understand those things are always present in the stories we tell. We spend time making sense of the story we share below in relationship to the compulsions of whiteness produced by white supremacy after sharing the following vignette.

Grappling with Whiteness in Schools

In the spring of 2019, Sam and Erin received a small grant to devise, implement, and explore teaching and learning about whiteness in elementary schools. Our proposal argued that, given Thandeka's argument about how white children learn whiteness, there is need for teaching and learning that explicitly confronts whiteness in schools, especially at the elementary levels. We suggested our improvisational pedagogy, referenced in introduction we shared at the outset, offered promise. We argued participatory, arts-based teaching rooted in disciplined practices and understandings of improvisation, translated into anti-racist pedagogy, might expand the capacity of a group to think, feel, and learn about race with empathy. We spent the Spring and Summer of 2019 planning to implement this study in schools in the 2019-2020 academic year. We were thorough in building materials such as schedules, timelines, contact lists, workshop agendas, and research protocols to support this work.

In the end, we were not able to get into schools in the ways we imagined, and that is what the following story and subsequent discussion is about. Given so many school districts we contacted had explicit commitments to *diversity*—and given our long-standing relationships with those school districts—we did not expect the stonewalling that occurred. We did not expect the long wait for district IRB approval. We did not expect to see our plans laid to waste in the spring of 2020 due to Covid-19. Nor did we expect how the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent political and legislative backlash to Black Lives Matter protests that followed would limit the work in antiracism we were up to. But there was something else that interfered with our ability to execute our project—the same conditional inclusion of whiteness that has been working to keep people from openly and explicitly talking or thinking about whiteness or white supremacy for hundreds of years in the United States were alive and well as we tried to bring our work to schools. Below, we story how our work interfaced with Thandeka's notion of compulsions of whiteness.

Compulsions of Whiteness

Erin had many contacts with teachers and administrators from her years of teaching, coaching, and working with pre-service and in-service teachers in a local school district. Her three children attended schools in the district. Moreover, Erin taught literacy methods courses on-site for years at a school in the district. Erin reached out to a gifted, experienced fourth grade teacher at an elementary school in the district. This teacher was excited and eager to work with us. We began to share the necessary details with the school principal (a letter explaining the research project, consent forms to be signed by all students and parents who wanted to participate, and workshop details—including an outline of how grade level academic standards would be addressed).

Excitement buzzed. The principal and teacher seemed to understand the novelty of a project that would address issues of racial justice in interactive, arts-based ways. Many people we talked with shared their enthusiasm for teaching that would be engaging for the children as well as cover central academic themes. We identified dates in the Fall 2019 to implement the workshop, no small feat given the number of conflicts. There was one final step of approval—we needed district clearance.

Erin found the appropriate gatekeeper and shared the necessary details in a research application to the district. In approximately six weeks, Erin received word from the district that they would not permit the research project to occur. The rejection letter read:

Unfortunately, the [district level] Research Committee has determined that while your research has value current projects for the 2019-2020 school year are being conducted which conflict with the implementation of your

external research. Therefore, we cannot extend the school and teacher time and effort to participate in this research project. As a result, we must deny your research request (Email communication, July 15th, 2019).

With no opportunity to gather more details about the decision or to appeal the decision, we moved on.

Erin contacted another district she had partnered with in her work as a teacher education professor. Erin reached out to a 5th grade teacher who had an explicit anti-racist focus to her teaching. They met for coffee to talk about the project. The teacher felt the improvisation workshop would offer her more pedagogical tools with which to use in her classroom. The teacher was excited to participate in the project, and assured Erin her principal would be and, as was the case with the first district, this was true.

After finding dates, Erin shared relevant materials with the school district and learned that, as was the case with the previous school, the final step was to gain permission by applying to the district IRB office. Erin secured a letter of support from a district-level administrator and was cleared to submit the IRB application to the district. Erin wrote this to the classroom teacher after submitting the materials:

Hi (Teacher), I received a commitment today that a district level admin will support the project, so now we are just going to await approval from the whole committee. Not having the letter was the hold-up before so I'm hoping things will start moving now and we can soon plan for the workshop. I'll keep you posted (Email communication, August 21st, 2019).

The application to the district IRB was submitted, along with the required \$50.00 application fee, on August 21st, 2019. There was little to do except wait for the committee's next hearing which was scheduled to be held on September 16th, 2019. On September 19th, we received word our application was denied. The rejection letter outlined the following concerns:

- Study does not meet guideline. "Data should be collected from a minimum of three [district] schools to maximize the value and generalizability of the study."
- Lack of clarity regarding number of schools in [district] vs. PA.
- Student assent form not included.
- Consent for could be confusing for respondents (each element should have own yes/no checkboxes).
- Teacher seems to have been pre-selected. Instead, all eligible teachers need to be contacted to participate. School or district employees cannot recommend participants. A site-based administrator is not permitted to perform these duties (Email communication, September 17th, 2019).

The positivist lens used to evaluate the proposal frustrated us because it was inconsistent with our research methodology. Also, the issues could be easily clarified. Erin persisted with the district:

Thank you, [district administrator]. This is unfortunate news as we were excited about sharing our grant funding with [district] schools. Quick question - is there an appeal process for the decision. The concerns/points the reviewer shared can be easily addressed by a few amendments on our application (Email communication, September 17th, 2019).

Erin received a prompt response:

There is no formal appeal process; however, you can submit a document that outlines the changes you could make to address the panel's concerns. If the panel changes its decision to approve your study, someone from our

team will be in touch with you (Email communication, September 17th, 2019).

We accommodated the district's requests and included revised documents in this follow up email:

Thank you for reviewing our proposal, "Anti-racist improvisational pedagogy in elementary school settings: challenges and possibilities."

Per the review of the committee, we would be willing to make the following changes to this study:

- Extend the study to work with three (district) schools. This would mean we would work with three schools in (district), in addition to one school in (district).
- Simplify the consent forms with yes/no box (revision attached)
- Include the assent form (attached)
- Recruit by sending an email to all administrators of elementary schools in (district) to forward to 4th and 5th grade teachers so that *all* interested teachers have an opportunity to participate. We will select three teachers who would be the best fit for the project (revision attached).

It is worthwhile to note that we view this work as a service to children and teachers, providing expert professional development and instruction around issues of race. We are former K-12 teachers with over 20 years of teaching experience, as well as leading researchers in our field. Through our grant, we are able to provide this workshop to three (district) schools at no charge.

It is also important to note that we are responding directly to the 2019 report "E(race)ing Inequities: The State of Racial Equity in (State) Public Schools" (The report author) and his colleagues point to the need for K-12 schools to meaningfully address racial disparities. Noted in the report, "In the absence of purposeful reform that flows from a full understanding of racial inequities, business-as-usual approaches to public education serve to further the accumulation of educational disadvantage among children and youth of color in the state." Our work directly responds to this call by providing a model of reform by way of demonstrating research-based teaching methods for teachers who are also concerned about racial inequities in schools.

We thank the committee in advance for reconsidering our proposal.

Sincerely,

Erin

(Email communication, September 19^h, 2019).

On October 17th, the committee wrote back with additional questions:

Why all 4th and 5th grade teachers recruited? How will teachers be recruited? Is this a grade- or course-specific project? How will you determine which schools have a drama program and/or which of these teachers incorporate drama in the classroom? How would you determine which teachers (from the group that responds) are the 'best fit'? How do you expect the program will be sustainable based on the existing literature and their knowledge of social justice and drama education. Site-based administrator issue not addressed – site-based administrator may not perform duties described in application (Email communication, October 17th, 2019).

We responded to each of the questions in a letter sent to the committee a few days later. We later received word that our application was not approved and despite months of correspondence and effort, we were not allowed to pursue our research. By this point, it was clear our project could not begin in the Fall of 2019, so we set our sights on another local district that Erin had contacts in. We adjusted our timeframe so that we would conduct the work in the Spring of 2020.

Erin reached out to the principal of another elementary schools who has a reputation for being an equity leader in the district, state, and nation. This principal was a friend of Erin's. The principal's shared their excitement about the project as well as their concern about scheduling:

It looks as if we could possibly do it after testing in May the week of Memorial Day- 5/26-5/28 w/ 5th graders. 4th graders are still taking [state assessment]. Would those three days work? If so, I will clear with my team - wanted to check with you to make sure those dates work, first (Email communication, October 25th, 2019).

Once more we moved to gain district approval. The principal felt confident the proposal would be approved. They wrote this to Erin:

I think if it's written in a way that lets them know that it occurs after testing and that your interactions/improv would be held during their related arts time that would be good. I wouldn't think it would have any issues passing our process. Since our school is a CRP school what you're proposing fits into our work (Email communication, November 1st, 2019).

The district level administrator was responsive to Erin's inquiry about conducting research and directed her to the district application. He did warn that:

We are currently limiting surveys of teachers and administrators as well as research that occurs during instructional time. The committee will consider research designs that require the use of surveys or occur during instructional time but will only approve those aligned to the district's mission (Email communication, November 2nd, 2019).

The waiting game began (again) after our application was submitted. The district administrator wrote the following to Erin in an email to let her know that it may take several weeks to get a response. In a few weeks, the principal called Erin to share that the committee were concerned about materials from the knotted line curriculum we mentioned in our application. We mentioned briefly the relationship between this curriculum that was used in local schools and our work. This curriculum depicted images of lynching that the committee felt were inappropriate for elementary school students. It is important to note that we did not plan to use those images—or include lynching as a topic in the workshop—but nonetheless, these images alarmed the committee and our work was questioned. Fortunately, with the opportunity to clarify the materials, we received clearance to conduct the study in May of 2020. Ultimately, the research was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As we stated earlier, we were not able to proceed with our work as we imagined despite an obvious need to address race in education. In deeply considering the story of our inability to proceed with our work, we turned to compulsions of whiteness, as outlined above, to make sense of our story.

Theorizing Conditional Acceptance as a Compulsion of Whiteness

There are many ways to interpret the story above. It might be true that we did not do a good enough job describing or designing our study, though we have hundreds of pages of material in our shared Google Drive that illustrates our efforts to do so. It might also be true that our pedagogy was not valued because of its arts-based focus, though our experience and empirical research in countless classrooms named at the outset provides evidence that students both enjoyed and found meaning in the improvisational pedagogies meant to engage them in considerations of race. Some might claim our material was inappropriate for elementary school because it addressed race, though we are convinced of the urgent need for children and adults in the United States to reckon with the ongoing forces of whiteness and white supremacy, and we are not sure how that can happen if

children are compelled to not talk about those things in public. In this article, however, we are interested in how compulsions of whiteness that seek to control, repress, and accept with condition were present in our story. Specifically, we are concerned with the idea of conditional acceptance. Put differently, it might be true that districts could only accept our work to grapple with whiteness conditionally. Their acceptance in their school communities necessitates that they accept us only if we teach about particular things in particular ways, despite enthusiasm from individuals such as teachers and principals about the improvisational nature of our pedagogy. Despite ostensible commitments to racial justice.

Consider Thandeka's (1999) theorizing mentioned earlier. If white people learn to behave according to unspoken white ideals, it follows that institutions rooted in histories of white supremacy would behave similarly. Indeed, if white children learn their inclusion in a community is conditional, it follows that people seeking to secure their place in white institutions would be compelled to act according to those ideals. Work that does not confirm an always present and unspoken white ideal would not be welcome in such a space, even if the people rejecting such work were not aware of why they were doing so. Recall Cathy Park Hong's words at the beginning of this article—conscription into whiteness, even for a Person of Color such as herself, is every day and unconscious. We wonder how the soft panopticon Hong describes in her book was at work as we attempted to bring pedagogy that would grapple with whiteness to schools that expressed interest in dealing with issues of racial equity.

Consider the response from the first district Erin reached out to. We were told that, while our research has value, it conflicted with other work in the district that year. What we were offering conflicted with the values of school community and, therefore, our work to name and challenge compulsions of whiteness was not welcomed. Might it be the word "values" was synonymous with Thandeka's white ideal? The second school we contacted created a list of problems they had and, after we addressed those issues, created a different, contradictory list of concerns that was almost incomprehensible to us, as they questioned why we had done things they themselves requested we do and asked about details that were clearly spelled out clearly in our application, ultimately warning us that "the site based administrator may not perform duties described in application." Of course, we were not privy to their discussions, but it was clear our work was not welcome in their community, even though the justifications of their denial made little sense to us. It might be the real reason for their rejection remained unnamed, the same way that Thandeka argued that the white ideal to accept with condition is often unspoken.

We briefly turn to an example of the need to control and be controlled to highlight how compulsions of whiteness were alive in the story we shared. For Thandeka (1999), it is important to make a "distinction between a person's core sense of self before and after its identity is defined as white" (p. 85). Thandeka offered that, "before the white identity is established, this core sense of self is not white" (p. 85). According to Thandeka, a white person is not white until "the socialization process" that is "undertaken by its white community of caretakers, legislators, and police force" begins (p. 85). Put differently, white children learn both explicitly and implicitly that love from their community requires them to act or behave in a certain way—Thandeka describes this as a socialization process. White children are taught to follow unspoken rules and, in turn, impose those rules on others as they grow older, likely without realizing they are controlling and being controlled by invisible compulsions of white supremacy. Ultimately, following Thandeka, people socialized into whiteness are constantly looking for cues as to how to behave and project those same controlling tendencies onto others.

Consider the ways in which the district review teams continued to change the criteria by which they were measuring the appropriateness of our study. It was almost as if they were compelled to control what we were trying to accomplish, even when our proposal ostensibly

conformed to the guidelines we were provided during our review. The degree to which the review teams were trying to control our research might be best explainable by considering the unconscious ways in which they were compelled to manage our project. The need to control and be controlled is, according to Thandeka (1999), a crucial aspect of how white supremacy continues to protect itself.

In 1984, Baldwin wrote that the crisis of leadership in the white community was remarkable and terrifying because, in fact, there is no white community (Baldwin, 1984). Baldwin explained the socio-historical conditions that gave rise to a society in which European people decided to be white as a way to opt for safety rather than life. The data we report on in this article gives us evidence that the conditions Baldwin surfaced in his writing have not changed much. People in the schools described above still opt for conditional safety rather than unconditional life, for lies rather than transformation. People in the schools we tried to work with decided on what Baldwin described as the lie of whiteness.

A Final Thought

Twenty years before Baldwin wrote about the lie of whiteness, he suggested that “if we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world” (Baldwin, 1962). We offer this article in affirmation of Baldwin’s call for the end of the racial nightmare in the United States and across the world.

We believe people growing up in countries still operating on white supremacist foundations are always learning white supremacy. White supremacy creates ongoing violence towards Black and Brown people. Whether or not people perceive whiteness, it is all around us, provoking us to learn its scripts. Improvisational and unconditional dialogue is needed if we are to grapple with white supremacy and, in so doing, affirm the worth and value of Black and Brown people (and students).

Our intention in this article was not to describe our approach to teaching and learning about whiteness to resist white supremacy in detail, nor was it to share our lengthy histories of working to get smarter about how white people might engage anti-racism meaningfully. Instead, we offered a story intended to highlight how the compulsions of whiteness such as conditional acceptance or the need to control and be controlled limit our capacities as educational researchers and teachers to create pedagogy that would invite people to grapple with whiteness and resist white supremacy. Indeed, it would take schools and pedagogies rooted in unconditional acceptance and the practice of unconditional love to resist the compulsions named and explored in this article. We suggest that, in the ongoing work of resisting white supremacy, educational researchers and teachers begin to:

- Think seriously about how the compulsions of whiteness inform the institution we work in, the theories we accept, and the pedagogies we devise.
- Consider how to resist the lie of whiteness that stifles connection and transformation in our relationships with people in schools.
- Be open and honest with each other in discussions about histories of race, whiteness, and how those things influence our schools and society.

We are cautioned by Hong (2020) as we end this short article—we must free ourselves of our conditional existence if we are to free ourselves of the ongoing devastation of white supremacy.

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Notes on Contributors

Dr. Samuel Jaye Tanner is an Associate Professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the University of Iowa. His research concerns anti-racism and improvisation in education.

Dr. Erin T. Miller is a Professor in the department of Reading and Elementary Education at the University of North Carolina Charlotte. Her research concerns anti-racism and literacy education.

ORCID

Samuel Jaye Tanner, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4998-5424>

Erin T. Miller, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0449-2770>